

News story: RAF's legendary Dambusters squadron reforms to fly F-35 jets

Gavin Williamson announced the new 617 Squadron after an event in Washington DC to mark the centenary of the RAF, which was attended by Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier.

The naming of the new 617 Squadron follows the 75th anniversary of the original formation of the squadron, commonly referred to as the 'Dambusters'. Originally set up for the highly-specialised mission to knock out dams and disrupt industrial production in the Ruhr Valley of Germany, the new 617 Squadron will be the first to fly the UK's brand new, state-of-the-art F-35 fighter jets – the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in the RAF's 100-year history.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The 617 Squadron name was made famous by 'The Dambusters', who played such a vital role in the Second World War. So it is fitting that by flying the world's most advanced fighter jets, our new squadron will be ensuring that the legend of world-leading air power lives on.

The F-35B Lightning will defend our nation and ensure that Britain remains a pioneer in innovation, with a unique ability to adapt to this increasingly dangerous world.

The UK is currently flying the F-35B Lightning, a multi-role fighter jet capable of a wide range of operations. It is the world's first jet to combine radar evading stealth technology with supersonic speeds and short take-off and landing capability.

Lightning Force Commander Air Commodore David Bradshaw said:

This is a most momentous day for the UK Lightning Force as we celebrate the reformation of 617 Squadron. Manned by highly capable Royal Air Force and Royal Navy personnel and equipped with the truly remarkable F-35B Lightning, 617 Squadron will once again provide potent, flexible Air Power for the nation.

In a simple yet highly significant ceremony held in the heart of Washington DC amongst friends and colleagues as part of celebrations for RAF100, the famous Dambusters marked the start of another exciting chapter in their Squadron's proud history. I very much look forward to welcoming 617 Squadron home to RAF Marham this summer as they prepare for operational service from land and sea.

The Dambusters

Wing Commander Guy Gibson hand-picked his bomber crews for the original 617-squadron, who then went on to deploy the iconic 'bouncing bomb' which had to be dropped above the water at an exact height of 60 feet and a speed of 220mph. The crews successfully managed to breach the Mohne and Eder dams.

Today's 617 Squadron

Today's 617 Squadron, currently training with the UK's 15 F-35B Lightning jets in America, will move to the UK with a number of aircraft to their new home at RAF Marham this Summer. Like their predecessors they will be operating at the forefront of aircraft technology.

The aircraft will be jointly operated by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy and have the ability to operate from land and sea, forming an integral part of Carrier Strike operating from the Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers.

Commission proposes new “e-Evidence” rules

On 17 October 2018, the European Commission proposed new rules to make it quicker and easier for police and judicial authorities to obtain digital evidence, such as e-mails or documents located on the cloud, that they need to investigate, prosecute and convict criminals and terrorists.

Today, almost two thirds of crimes where electronic evidence is held in another country cannot be properly investigated or prosecuted, mainly due to the time it takes to gather such evidence or due to fragmentation of the legal framework. By making the process of obtaining electronic evidence quicker and more efficient, the proposals will help close this loophole.

Watch this video and discover more on the new rules proposed.

Video: [e-Evidence](#)

Report by President Donald Tusk to the

European Parliament on March European Council meetings

Press contacts

Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson
+32 2 281 51 50
+32 476 85 05 43

Introductory remarks

Let me brief you on the outcome of the March European Council, where leaders tackled a number of issues, ranging from Russia and Turkey to trade, taxation and, of course, Brexit.

The European Council agreed with the UK Government's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible for the nerve agent attack in Salisbury. We expressed full solidarity with the United Kingdom by condemning this attack and as a response many leaders decided to expel Russian diplomats. The EU ambassador to Moscow was recalled for consultations.

Speaking about Russia, I should mention last weekend's targeted airstrikes by France, the United Kingdom and the United States against Syrian chemical weapons facilities. The use of chemical weapons, anywhere in the world, must not become normalised. Nor can it be without consequences. The airstrikes were necessary and proportionate to deter further use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime to kill its own people. It is urgent that all parties in Syria engage in the UN-led political process to end this tragedy. Above all, Russia and Iran should stop playing games and seriously engage in finding a responsible and peaceful solution.

The European Council discussed trade and called for a permanent EU exemption from the US tariffs on steel and aluminium. We strongly supported the steps taken by the European Commission to ensure that the interests of the Union are fully protected. In case there is no permanent exemption for the EU, we will have no choice but to react. We wish to avoid this route, which is why I called for a dialogue that will bring more trade between the US and the EU, not less. Free and fair trade is one of the most powerful engines for growth and jobs, and we should make full use of it. It is simply in everyone's interest.

Leaders also discussed the digital economy, which is a great opportunity, but also a challenge for tax systems. There was a clear understanding that we need to make our tax systems fit for the digital era. A global tax regime would certainly be most welcome, but many felt that it would take too much time to prepare. The discussion confirmed the leaders' desire to work towards

an effective and fair solution among EU Member States.

In the context of the digital economy, we also discussed recent revelations related to Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. The European Council called on social networks and digital platforms to guarantee transparent practices and full protection of citizens' privacy and personal data. EU and national legislation must be respected and enforced. This important matter, together with other issues relating to Digital Europe, will be discussed by the leaders at the informal meeting in Sofia in May.

During the Euro Summit, leaders exchanged views on long term challenges ahead of the EMU. The EU economy is back to pre-crisis growth rates, which makes this a very good time to reflect strategically on our ambitions. Many of the themes we discussed – like a fiscal capacity for the euro area – are difficult, but I see avenues to be explored. As we agreed in December, the most urgent political priority remains strengthening the Banking Union and further developing the ESM. This remains my goal, even though I am not a blind optimist. In June we will aim to take a first set of decisions and provide additional guidance on the way forward.

On Brexit. The EU27 adopted guidelines for the future EU-UK relationship and welcomed the progress made on the Withdrawal Agreement. We want to use the positive momentum in these negotiations to finally settle outstanding issues such as the solution to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The UK's decision on Brexit has caused the problem, and the UK will have to help solve it. Without a solution, there will be no withdrawal agreement and no transition. Leaders will assess the negotiations in June. In parallel, we will start our first talks about the future EU-UK relationship.

Finally, on Turkey. Despite many controversies, we agreed that the EU-Turkey meeting should go ahead. I met President Erdoan in Varna, together with Jean-Claude (Juncker) and Prime Minister Borissov. We took stock of where things now stand in our relationship and set out some parameters for the future. We expressed clearly different views on democratic standards, Turkey's involvement in Syria and its illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the Aegean Sea. However, we decided to keep the lines of communication open. We will also continue to work closely together on issues such as migration and terrorism.

Before concluding let me say a few words about the Western Balkans, where I will travel next week to prepare EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May. The message to our friends is clear: the European Union is and will continue to be the most reliable partner for the entire region. As the biggest investor, the biggest donor, the biggest trading market and the best promise for a better future for citizens. Our summit should reaffirm the European perspective of the region. And more importantly, it should improve, in concrete terms, connections with and within the region. Thank you.

Closing remarks

First, the European Commission is in dialogue with the Polish government, as you know, and everybody is hoping, at least I am hoping for positive changes

in Poland and Polish legislation. This is why I don't foresee for now a discussion at the European Council on this issue in June. I trust the Commission here.

I feel shocked but, for the first time, I must agree with Mr. Farage. You are right, Mr. Farage, Brexit will not bring any good to anyone.

Mr. Kamall has said that free trade with Japan and Singapore is one of the priorities and that we should treat in the same way free trade with the UK, I mean our future free trade agreement with the UK. The only problem is that we are strengthening and easing trade and other relations with Japan and Singapore, while Brexit is by nature, by definition, about weakening and worsening trade and everything else. This is why I think it's difficult to compare these two different issues.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)

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Video: [e-Evidence](#)

News story: Sports industry can be top of the league in reducing plastic

pollution

Environment Secretary Michael Gove will today call on sports leaders from across the Commonwealth to join the fight against plastic pollution in the world's oceans.

As part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting taking place in London this week, the Environment Secretary will host leaders from across the sports sector on board the HMS Belfast in London to drive forward innovation and agree actions to tackle the global scourge of plastic.

With mass sporting events often generating up to 750,000 plastic bottles and seven tonnes of waste, the Environment Secretary and representatives from Premier League football, swimming and ocean sailing will look at how the sector can use its influence to tackle this blight and bring about global change.

This will build on the work already underway by industry – with this year's Commonwealth Games banning the use of plastic balloons and rolling out water refills to reduce plastic, and Twickenham Stadium introducing a deposit return scheme for 'fan cups', where fans pay an extra £1 for their cup and get the money back when they return it to the bar. Tottenham Hotspur has also announced its commitment to phasing out single-use plastics across all Club operations.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time and we all have a role to play to tackle the threats our oceans face.

There are few groups which have the global reach and power the sports sector does to inspire change and mobilise action. The industry is already making great strides, and I look forward to seeing how they can build on this progress to be true ambassadors for global change.

Bill Bush, Executive Director of the Premier League, will also attend the roundtable. He said:

The Premier League is well aware of the importance of taking action against plastic pollution, it affects us all and our fans expect us to do what we can to tackle this threat. We are here today to learn from others as we develop our plans to reduce plastic use throughout our operations.

We also want to use our reach to fans here and across the world to spread the word that each and every one of us can make a difference

by choosing to use less plastic.

Jointly co-hosted with United Nations Environment, attendees at the roundtable will also be encouraged to join the UN's '[Clean Seas](#)' campaign – a global initiative to reduce plastic pollution in the oceans.

Endurance swimmer Lewis Pugh will attend in his role as the UN's Patron of the Oceans. He said:

I've been swimming for 30 years and can be under no illusion life in our oceans is under threat like never before. Beaches across the world are littered with bags, bottles and straws, and plastic has made its way to some of the most remote corners of the ocean.

Single-use plastics have no place in the modern world and I will be urging sportsmen and women, especially those involved with ocean sports, to help us share this important message and be voices for the protection of our oceans.

This year's World Environment Day on June 5 will focus on the issue of plastic pollution – with UN Environment working with sports organisations across the world to take action to address their plastic footprint.

The roundtable comes as just this week the Prime Minister [announced](#) the UK and Vanuatu-led Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance – an agreement between member states to join forces in the fight against plastic.

Britain, together with joint chair Vanuatu, will call on other countries to pledge action on plastics, be this by a ban on microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single use plastic bags, or other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Ghana have already joined.

To drive this forward, the Prime Minister also announced a £61.4 million package of funding to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.