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[News story: Afghan security and stability remains top of UK agenda](#)

The security, development and governance of Afghanistan remains crucial to reducing the terrorist threat to the UK, the Defence Secretary reaffirmed in his first visit to Afghanistan.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

A secure Afghanistan will help keep the streets of Britain safe. Building the security services that will be the foundation of stability and peace in Afghanistan remains top of our agenda and I have seen first-hand the crucial role our brave Armed Forces are playing in realising that vision.

In his meeting with Minister of Defence Bahrami, the Defence Secretary reaffirmed the UK commitment to Afghanistan, citing the continued funding for the Afghanistan National Security Forces, our support for the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA) and the recent uplift of UK troops to around 650.

Mr Williamson also met with UK personnel who are based at ANAOA in Qargha, on the western outskirts of Kabul. They are helping to train the next generation of Afghanistan’s military leaders through mentoring training staff and instilling the Sandhurst ethos at the academy.

More than 3,000 officers have passed out of the academy since 2013, and, this year, ANAOA has nearly as many female cadets in training as have graduated in total since the academy opened.

The Defence Secretary also met UK troops who lead the Kabul Security Force (KSF), which provides force protection for NATO staff in Kabul. In last five weeks alone, the KSF have undertaken over 2,800 protection journeys and Mr Williamson experienced first-hand the vital role they play, travelling with

UK personnel in a Foxhound armoured vehicle.

He also commended their efforts in responding to some of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul, in which the KSF supported Afghan Security Forces by evacuating guests to safety extracted of guests following the Intercontinental Hotel terrorist attack and provided first aid to Afghan soldiers following an attack on an Afghan Army compound in January.

The UK has played an important role in supporting Afghanistan over the last 16 years and is committed to continuing this in the future. Through the NATO Resolute Support Mission, the support the UK provides on issues such as security, development and governance is crucial to building a stable state and reducing the terrorist threat to the UK.

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[News story: African leaders meet in Botswana for summit on wildlife crime](#)

UK Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin addressed African leaders and attendees at an illegal wildlife trade summit in Botswana last week (16-17 March).

The Giants Club Summit 2018 brought together countries in Africa with large elephant populations with the aim to find ways to improve cooperation on conservation and law enforcement to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. Representatives from Botswana, Gabon, Uganda and Kenya attended the two-day conference, along with delegations from the UK, China, the European Union and the UN.

The only minister to attend from a non-African country, Minister Baldwin met with Botswana's President Ian Khama to discuss the pressing need to end the illegal wildlife trade and tackle the corruption which enables it to operate.

The summit hosted a range of talks from African leaders and key conservationists alongside live demonstrations of ground breaking new technology which is being deployed in African countries to catch poachers.

Minister Baldwin said:

The UK is taking a leading role in ending the illegal wildlife trade globally and we will continue to push for action at every opportunity.

The illegal wildlife trade is taking a devastating toll on the populations of endangered animals across the world. We will only stamp out this terrible crime by taking global action and building consensus.

The Giants Club Summit is a vital opportunity for Africa-led initiatives and conservation techniques to be shared and discussed, bringing key African countries together to work for a shared approach to conserving their precious wildlife. Botswana is an excellent example of conservation bringing sustainable development to the people. Tourism is a thriving industry here and it pays dividends to the country and local communities.

Minister Baldwin reflects on her visit to Botswana

[Giants Club](#)

In October 2018, the UK will host the fourth international conference on the illegal wildlife trade, bringing global leaders to London to tackle the strategic challenges of the crime.

The UK recently consulted on proposals to ban UK domestic ivory sales. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs received over 70,000 responses, and will publish its response to this consultation shortly.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Harriett Baldwin on Twitter [@hbaldwin](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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Press release: UK joins world-leading research programme to help develop medicines of the future

- UK signs agreement to work with other countries to create new medical treatments using a powerful laser
- super-strength laser acts like a microscope to help understand deadly viruses
- the UK joins existing member countries including, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland

The UK will be at the forefront of the fight against life-threatening diseases after confirming that it has signed the European X-Ray Free-Electron Laser (XFEL) convention in Berlin, Germany today (19 March). The XFEL programme uses a super-strength laser to help understand life-threatening viruses.

The UK's membership of XFEL reinforces the government's modern [Industrial Strategy](#), and through the [Ageing Society Grand Challenge](#), the government is committed to harnessing the power of innovation to create the treatments of the future and maintain our position of being a world-leader in science, research and innovation.

The XFEL, one of the most powerful X-ray machines ever built, acts like a huge microscope, using intensely bright and short duration X-ray flashes which will enable scientists to map the atomic details of viruses. The laser also allows scientists to look in greater detail to the composition of cells, take 3D images of atoms and molecules and study processes such as those occurring deep inside planets.

Science Minister Sam Gyimah said:

The incredible XFEL will help us better understand life threatening diseases by using one of the world's most powerful X-ray machines. Working with our international partners, the super-strength laser will help develop new medical treatments and therapies, potentially saving thousands of lives across the world.

Through our modern Industrial Strategy we are investing an extra £4.7 billion into research and development. I am determined that we continue to secure our position as being a world-leader in science, research and innovation and I can't wait to see the results that come from our participation in this extraordinary project.



STFC designed and built LPD detector. Credit: European XFEL

British engineers from the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) have already built the advanced camera for XFEL, called the Large Pixel Detector (LPD). The camera operates at a frame rate of 4.5MHz – 4.5 million pictures per second.

The UK has been involved with XFEL since 2008, contributing £30 million towards the construction of the facility, and every following year we will contribute £2.5 million towards operations costs.

STFC have also contributed a number of UK researchers who are currently working at the facility. The UK has also developed a training facility at the Diamond Light Source on the Harwell campus in Oxfordshire for British scientists. The UK XFEL life sciences hub will enable users to fully prepare for their experiments with XFELs.