

News story: UK troops deploy to South Sudan to support peacekeeping mission

Touching down in country today, an additional 35 UK military personnel will join the current UK presence providing support to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

This latest addition to the British contingent will provide engineering support to the UN mission, undertaking projects such as the construction of a jetty on the River Nile, helicopter landing sites and other infrastructure improvements, and will be based mainly in Malakal.

In particular, the Royal Engineers will support the construction of a temporary field hospital in Bentiu. On completion of this, a permanent hospital facility, which will support over 1,800 UN peacekeepers and UN staff, will be constructed. These hospitals will be staffed by medical personnel drawn from all three services.

This latest arrival means around 240 British personnel are now based in South Sudan, primarily split between Malakal and Bentiu in support of UNMISS.

The latest deployment of British troops has arrived in South Sudan. Picture: UNMISS.

Along with a small number of staff officers in the UNMISS headquarters in Juba, the total number of UK military deployed will rise to nearly 400 over the coming months, making it one of the UK's largest operational deployments across the world.

Speech: "The Syrian Regime are using starve or surrender tactics. That is abhorrent and a clear breach of International Humanitarian Law."

Thank you Madam President and thank you also to you, Stephen, for your important briefing today and indeed for all your sterling work.

I want to begin as you did Stephen by wholeheartedly condemning the terrorist attack on desperate civilians as they were being evacuated as part of the Four Towns agreement. It is utterly tragic that over 120 people, including a very high number of children, were brutally killed. The United Kingdom

condemns this terrible attack. We will work to ensure that whoever is responsible is held to account. I wish also to salute the unity and bravery of the humanitarian response including the response of the White Helmets.

Despite a ceasefire being in place since the end of 2016, we continue to witness terrible ongoing violence. In April alone, we know that the Regime or its allies have carried out aerial attacks on at least six hospitals and three schools in Syria. Six hospitals. Three schools. This is utterly deplorable. I hope others will join me in condemning all such incidents. All of us need to do everything in our power to bring the suffering to an end. And so I ask my Russian colleague, what is Russia doing with its leverage to ensure the Regime stops attacking schools and hospitals?

These attacks once again bring into laser focus the urgent and desperate humanitarian needs of 13 million people in Syria. I am especially concerned by the difficulty in reaching the 1.5 million people who live under siege-like conditions and a further 3.2 million in other hard to reach areas in Syria. All of them urgently require food, water, and medicine.

Roughly 5 million Syrians live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, but the only regime-besieged area to be reached in 2017 was Khan al Shieh, where 6,000 people were reached with aid. The other besieged areas reached are Deir Ez Zour, besieged by Daesh, where the UN carries out air drops; and the Four Towns, besieged by the Iranian-backed Hizballah and armed opposition groups. This is a tiny proportion of aid reaching those people who are in most need of it.

Let me be clear. The Syrian Regime are using starve or surrender tactics. That is abhorrent and a clear breach of International Humanitarian Law.

I am especially concerned about the 420,000 innocent civilians in the besieged part of Eastern Ghouta, where supplies are rapidly running out. There are urgent medical needs, shortages of basic food items, and no water or power supplies.

I fully support Stephen's call for a pause in fighting to allow the UN and its humanitarian partners to safely enter Eastern Ghouta.

At the International Syria Support Group meeting in Geneva on 20 April, Russia committed to press the Regime to allow the UN and its humanitarian partners to access Douma, one part of Eastern Ghouta. What is the situation one week later? The Regime has not acted. There is still no convoy. We owe it to the people of Douma to do everything we can to improve this situation.

The UN has received the requisite assurances from the relevant armed opposition groups to allow them to deliver assistance to Douma, and it has identified a safe route to enter. The only things now lacking are for the Assad regime to issue a facilitation letter and to pause its aerial bombardment of the area for long enough for the UN and its humanitarian partners to enter.

If Russia is unable to ensure that the regime allows access, we call on the

Security Council to act to ensure the UN is able to deliver urgent supplies to Douma in the first instance.

Madam President, I will reiterate now what I have said many times before, there can be no sustainable peace until there is a political transition. The Asad regime bears overwhelming responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people. I implore the whole of the Security Council to work in unity to end the conflict for the sake of the Syrian people.

Thank you.

[News story: Rare Meissen figure at risk of leaving the UK](#)

The Commedia dell'arte figure is at risk of being exported from the UK unless a buyer can be found to match the asking price of £270,000.

Meissen is renowned across Europe as being the first true hard-paste porcelain factory in 18th century Europe. The rare, fragile and translucent porcelain imported from China and Japan was a source of wonder to kings, princes and aristocrats across Europe at the time, with many attempting to replicate these efforts. The production of hard-paste porcelain was preceded by the creation of a very fine high-fired earthenware.

This stoneware figure is an outstanding example, which demonstrates the cutting-edge technology of the time. It is one of an extremely rare group of models after the Italian Commedia dell'arte theatre, for which the factory at Meissen subsequently became famous.

The item was formerly owned by Emma Budge, a prominent Jewish art collector whose collection was sold at the Graupe Auction House in Berlin in 1937 following her death. The Nazis replaced the executors of her will with their own and the proceeds from the sale were paid into a blocked account. Emma's heirs never received any of the money. The figure was eventually acquired by a prominent member of the Jewish community who escaped Nazi Germany in April 1938.

The decision to defer the export licence follows a recommendation by the [Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest](#) (RCEWA), administered by The Arts Council England.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds of the figure's aesthetic importance and for its outstanding significance to the study of Meissen porcelain and 18th century sculpture.

The decision on the export licence application for the figure will be

deferred until 1 October. This may be extended until 1 January 2018 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £270,000 (plus VAT of £4,500).

Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the figure should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.

An image of the figure can be downloaded from our [flickr site](#).

ENDS

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Notes to editors

1. Details of the figure are as follows: A Meissen Böttger stoneware figure from the Commedia dell'arte, partly polished and with original colouring. 16.4cm high, 85.cm wide, 8.2cm deep. Circa 1710-13. Some surface wear to the colours, slight crack in upper right arm.
2. Details of provenance: Emma Budge Collection. Sold in the Emma Budge Sale, Paul Graupe, Berlin, 27 to 29 September 1937, Lot 779.
3. The [Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest](#) is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council England, which advises the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.

[News story: Travel advice on EXPO 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan](#)

Expo 2017 is an International Exposition scheduled to take place between 10 June and 10 September 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Dates:

Advice for visitors travelling to Kazakhstan for the Expo 2017 International Exposition in Astana from 10 June to 10 September 10, 2017

Venue:

EXPO 2017 Pavilion in Astana is located between main streets of Astana: Kabanbai batyr avenue, Orynbor street, Hussein bin Talal and Turar Ryskulov streets. * during the exhibition, seven new shuttle-BUS routes will be launched, which will have 250 buses, running from all major points of the city – shopping centres, railway stations and the airport to the territory of the EXPO with a minimum number of stops it can take around 30 minutes to get to the exhibition centre from the city centre * the pavilion is about 3 km from Baiterek City Center, 11 km from the central railway station, 8 km from Astana International airport

Astana, Kazakhstan – Expo 2017 site map can be found [here](#) As well as this advice, check out our [travel advice for Kazakhstan](#)

Visas and Passports

- until 31 December 2017 you can travel to Kazakhstan without a visa, provided your stay does not exceed 30 days (the day you arrive counts as day 1, regardless of arrival time).
- if you wish to stay longer than 30 days, you'll need a visa. You should contact your nearest [Embassy of Kazakhstan](#) for further information.
- your passport should be valid for a minimum period of 6 months from the date of your request for a visa. Your passport should also have at least 1 blank page for your visa
- your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay
- if you violate the conditions of your visa, you could face a short term of imprisonment and/or a ban on entry to Kazakhstan for up to 5 years
- you should carry your passport with you for identification purposes
- always take care of your passport, as getting a replacement is costly and time-consuming. Keep a photocopy separately from the original document, this will help speed up the replacement process if needed
- if you lose your passport, you'll need to get an Emergency Travel Document from the [British Embassy, Astana](#). The service is available within the Embassy working hours

Registration

- for most visits, British passport holders don't need to register with the local authorities
- when entering Kazakhstan, travellers receive a white registration card. You must fill in and retain this card throughout your stay in Kazakhstan.
- if you don't need to register with the local OVIR office (the Department for Visas and Registration under the Ministry of Internal Affairs), you must keep your white immigration card stamped by Kazakh Immigration throughout your journey and present it on departure.
- if you intend to enter through a land or sea border point check with the [Kazakhstan Embassy](#) to see whether registration is required.

Insurance

- take out appropriate [travel insurance](#), even if you're only going for one night; it could save you a lot of money if you get into difficulties. Note there is no reciprocal healthcare agreement between the UK and Kazakhstan.

Local Information

Personal Security:

- be prepared for increased controls and security checks
- most trips are trouble free, however, mugging and theft occur in cities and rural areas foreigners can be targeted.
- although homosexuality isn't prohibited by law, public attitudes are less tolerant than in the UK and public displays of affection may attract negative attention. There's no provision under Kazakhstan legislation guaranteeing freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation
- look after your personal belongings, in particular your passport and your money
- smoking and drinking alcohol is prohibited in public places; this includes airport and its areas, transport, bus stops, underground crossings, cultural, sports and governmental establishments, playgrounds and parks
- don't get involved with drugs – the penalties are severe

Transportation

- get information on how to get to the [Astana International Airport](#) and [Railway Station](#) to the city centre
- use official taxis which display the name and telephone number of the taxi company. agree a price with the taxi driver for your journey in advance
- buses are the only public transport; price for one way route is 90 KZT but can be overcrowded at peak times

Disabled Travellers

- we've been advised that [Astana EXPO Pavilions](#) will have facilities / access for disabled travellers
- the rest of Astana has very limited facilities for the disabled traveller – the pavements, even on the main roads can be difficult to negotiate for those with disabilities
- access to public transport is also difficult

####Currency:

- the official currency in Kazakhstan is Tenge (KZT). US dollars and Euros are the easiest currency to exchange in Kazakhstan. Sterling may also be exchanged at a more limited number of sites. Scottish and Northern Irish notes aren't accepted. Use only official exchange booths.
- ATMs are available and credit cards are widely used in Astana

- the government of Kazakhstan imposes limits on how much foreign currency can be imported or exported, and certain goods are subject to custom regulations. For further information please visit the website of the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#)

Climate and Time

- the average temperature in summer is around 20°C – 25°C during the day. Mostly very windy and dry. You can find information on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/1526273>
- Astana is plus 5 hours BST

Language

- the main language is Kazakh. Russian is also widely spoken
- younger generation usually has a good knowledge of English

Religion

- Kazakhstan has predominantly Muslim (70%) population although there are Orthodox Christians (23%) and Catholics (7%)
- respect local traditions, customs, laws and religions at all times and be aware of your actions to ensure they do not offend other cultures or religious beliefs

Consular Assistance

If there's a genuine emergency during your visit to Astana (e.g. one involving accident, injury or loss/theft of your passport) call +7 7172 556 200 and follow the instructions to be put through to a consular officer.

Lost or stolen passports

If your passport is lost or stolen report the loss to the local police as soon as possible and get a copy of the police report. You can't travel back to the UK without a valid travel document. You'll need to apply to the Consular Section of the British Embassy Astana for an Emergency Travel Document (ETD). Please see our [ETD web page](#) for more information.

For more information visit the [British Embassy, Astana](#) Contact the British Embassy Astana 62 Kosmanavtov st, Chubary district Renco Building, 6th floor Telephone: +7 7172 55 62 00 (including out of hours assistance) Email: astana.consular@fco.gov.uk Office hours: Monday-Thursday 9am to 5pm On Friday 9am to 4pm

Emergency services numbers

101 – Fire 102 – Police 103 – Ambulance

Further information

- EXPO 2017 official website: <https://expo2017astana.com/>

News story: Journée de souvenir dédiée à toutes les victimes de la guerre chimique

Chaque année, la communauté internationale s'interrompt le 29 avril pour se souvenir des victimes des guerres chimiques. L'ONU promeut une prise de conscience internationale et appelle à agir contre ces armes horribles qui frappent insidieusement et sans discrimination, causant la mort et des blessures terribles à des gens qui n'ont aucun moyen de se défendre.

Cette année sera d'autant plus poignante car les images de l'attaque chimique de Khan Sheikhoun en Syrie sont encore dans nos mémoires. Malheureusement, nous avons déjà vécu cela et ces attaques ne font que souligner la souffrance que le peuple syrien endure depuis trop longtemps.

Mise en œuvre le 29 Avril 1997, la Convention sur les Armes Chimiques a aujourd'hui 20 ans. Cette convention rend illégal la production, le stockage et l'usage d'armes chimiques. Depuis 2005, les Nations Unies ont choisi cette date pour donner l'occasion aux peuples, à travers le monde, de rendre hommage aux victimes de la guerre chimique et de pouvoir exprimer leur soutien à l'Organisation pour l'Interdiction des Armes Chimiques (OIAC). C'est aussi l'occasion pour le monde de s'unir afin de condamner l'usage des armes chimiques n'importe quand, n'importe où et par n'importe qui.

L'OIAC a commencé, à juste titre, le processus visant à lancer une enquête indépendante autour des événements de Khan Sheikhoun. Le Directeur Général a déjà souligné dans un rapport que les premiers résultats de leurs analyses indiquent bien une exposition au gaz sarin ou à une substance similaire.

Ces résultats sont cohérents avec l'évaluation publiée par la France le 26 avril, ainsi qu'avec notre propre étude d'échantillons des victimes et de l'environnement immédiat par des scientifiques britanniques. En effet, les États-Unis, le Royaume-Uni, la France et la Turquie ont tous testé leurs propres échantillons indépendamment et ont conclu que le gaz sarin avait bien été utilisé.

Comme l'a déclaré le Ministre des Affaires étrangères Boris Johnson, « de part la présence de fragments d'obus dans le cratère, nous savons que, non seulement du gaz sarin a été utilisé, mais que ce gaz porte la signature des armes chimiques utilisées par le régime d'Assad. L'étude des échantillons prélevés sur les victimes démontre qu'elles ont indéniablement été exposées au gaz sarin. Il n'y a donc qu'une conclusion à tirer : le régime d'Assad a utilisé des armes chimiques de manière quasiment certaine contre son propre peuple, en violation du droit international et des règles de la guerre. »

Le peuple syrien devrait être protégé par son gouvernement ; les enfants

syriens devraient grandir en sécurité et en bonne santé. Au lieu de cela, ce sont les victimes innocentes d'un conflit qui entraîné des souffrances indicibles, la mort et des déplacements de populations forcés.

Nous sommes clairs sur le fait qu'une solution politique – plutôt qu'une solution militaire – est nécessaire pour mettre fin à cette guerre. Le Royaume-Uni continue de soutenir le processus politique mené par les Nations Unies et la transition vers un nouveau gouvernement syrien qui apportera paix et stabilité de manière durable. Nous travaillons également à soulager la souffrance du peuple syrien. A ce titre, le gouvernement britannique a engagé 2,46 milliards de livres sterling depuis 2012, ce qui constitue l'aide la plus importante jamais apportée par notre pays à une crise humanitaire, et qui fait de nous le second plus large donateur bilatéral en matière humanitaire en ce qui concerne la crise syrienne.

Ainsi, en cette 'Journée du souvenir dédiée à toutes les victimes des guerres chimiques' organisée par les Nations Unies, rendons hommage au peuple de Khan Sheikhoun, ainsi qu'à tous les hommes, les femmes et les enfants innocents qui ont perdu la vie au cours des six dernières années dans ce conflit terrible en Syrie. La communauté internationale doit rappeler fermement que l'usage d'armes chimiques est inacceptable. Le Royaume-Uni et la France sont à l'avant-garde de cet effort. C'est uniquement en travaillant ensemble à ce que les responsables subissent les conséquences de leurs actes que la communauté internationale parviendra à empêcher que ces atrocités se reproduisent.