

News story: Royal Air Force playing major role in world's premier air combat exercise

Based at Nellis Air Force Base, Exercise Red Flag pits 'Blue' coalition forces against hostile 'Red Force' aggressors, mirroring real-life threats in air-to-air, air-to-ground, space and cyber warfare.

Red Flag's live element takes place over the US Air Force's premier military training area in Nevada; over 15,000 square miles of airspace and 2.9 million acres of land – an impossible scale to achieve in Europe.

Speaking about the Exercise, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The RAF is playing a major role alongside our greatest ally in the world's leading aerial combat training exercise.

Britain's pilots and aircrews will receive unparalleled training and an opportunity to sharpen the combat skills they are demonstrating every day in the fight against Daesh.

Training alongside our US partners and other nations shows how the UK is stepping up internationally, ensuring maximum interoperability with our allies, and in doing so helping keep Britain safer and more secure.

Typhoon jets, from 6 Squadron, RAF Lossiemouth, are operating in a swing-role capacity, fighting their way into hostile airspace, launching precision strikes on ground targets and fighting their way out again.

Typhoons taking on fuel from a RAF Voyager tanker during Exercise Red Flag.

Working with the US Air Force (USAF) F-35A Lightning II for the first time, and with USAF F-22 Raptors; the exercise has been a hugely rewarding exposure to 5th Generation aircraft for RAF crews ahead of the F-35B's introduction into the RAF's combat inventory in 2018.

US Air Force aircraft on take off at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada USA during Exercise RED FLAG, 2017.

This is also the first time the RAF's Voyager is taking part in the exercise. The Voyager is providing key air-to-air refuelling capability during the exercise, while a Sentinel and Rivet Joint are gathering intelligence and other mission-critical information.

Speaking from the exercise, Group Captain Graham Pemberton, RAF Detachment Commander said:

Red Flag replicates truly challenging, high-end warfare, from realistic aerial combat to emerging cyber and space threats. It's as close as we can get to the real thing.

Testing ourselves against highly capable enemy aggressors is hugely beneficial and improves and readies our personnel, from pilots to those in crucial support roles, for real world operations.

It's a privilege for us to work with our US Air Force and Royal Australian Air Force counterparts and to cement our relationships with them at an exercise of this scale.

The exercise will run until early February and marks the start of three months of RAF Typhoon activity in the USA.

Press release: Planned roadworks in Central Southern England: weekly summary for Monday 30 January to Sunday 5 February 2017

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of 27 January but could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

M3 junctions 2 (M25) to 4a Farnborough, Hampshire: Smart motorway improvement

Work to reduce congestion and improve journey times continues this week with narrow lanes a 50mph speed limit in place on both carriageways between junctions 2 and 4a, with a free recovery service operating 24 hours a day.

The southbound carriageway between junctions 2 and 4 including the M25 clockwise slip road and anti-clockwise link road to the M3 southbound, junctions 3 entry slip and junctions 3 and 4 exit slips will be closed overnight between 8pm and 5.30am, on Monday 30 January for four nights and between 8pm and 7am on Friday 3 February and Saturday 4 February.

A clearly signed diversion will be in place via:

- M3 southbound junction 2 to M25 junction 13 via A30 to A331 to M3 junction 4
- M25 clockwise junction 13 via A30 to A331 to M3 junction 4
- M25 anti clockwise junction 13 via A30 to A331 to M3 junction 4

The northbound carriageway between junction 4 and 2 including junction 4 and 3 entry slips, junction 3 exit slip and junction 2 northbound clockwise link road and anti-clockwise slip road will be closed overnight between 8pm and 5.30am, on Monday 30 January for four nights and between 8pm and 7am on Friday 3 February and Saturday 4 February. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via: M3 junction 4 to A331 to A30 to M25 junction 13 to M3 junction 2 northbound.

For further details, [visit the scheme website.](#)

M3 junctions 6 to 7 Basingstoke, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the southbound carriageway takes place this week. The M3 southbound will be closed from junction 6 to junction 7 overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Tuesday 31 January. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via Basingstoke.

M3 junction 8 Popham, Hampshire: bridge strengthening

Work to maintain journeys by undertaking bridge bearing and support replacement continues this week. Narrow lanes and a 50mph speed restriction are in place on the link from the M3 southbound to the A303 westbound 24 hours a day until May.

M3 junction 11 Winchester, Hampshire: safety barrier

Work to improve safety by carrying out repairs to the barrier along the southbound slip road continues this week. Lane closures will be in place on the southbound carriageway overnight, between 10pm and 6am, until Friday 24 February (Monday to Friday only).

M4 junction 6 Windsor, Berkshire: drainage

Work to ensure road user safety by maintaining the drainage asset at the junction takes continues this week. Lane closures will be in place on the east and westbound approaches to the junction overnight, between 9pm and 6am, until Monday 6 February (Monday to Friday only).

In addition, the westbound exit and entry slip roads at the junction will be

closed overnight, between 9pm and 6am, from Thursday 2 February for 3 nights (Monday to Friday only). Clearly signed diversions will be in place via the adjacent junctions.

M4 junction 10 Wokingham, Berkshire: bridge reconstruction

Work to refurbish the bridge which carries the link roads over the M4 continues this week. Narrow lanes and a 40mph speed limit are in place on the slip roads and a 50mph speed limit is in place on the M4 carriageway until November 2017.

The slip road from the M4 eastbound carriageway to the A329(M) Wokingham bound carriageway will be closed overnight, between 9pm and 5am, on Monday 31 and Tuesday 31 January. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via junction 8/9 and return.

M4 junction 11 Reading, Berkshire: surveys

Work to improve journeys by carrying out surveys in preparation for converting the M4 into a Smart Motorway continues this week. Lane closures will be in place on the eastbound exit slip road at the junction overnight, between 9pm and 6am, from Monday 30 January for 5 nights.

M4 junctions 11 to 12 Reading, Berkshire: resurfacing, surveys and bridge joint

Work to improve journeys by replacing a bridge joint and resurfacing a section of the M4 westbound carriageway between Moto services and junction 12 starts this week. The westbound carriageway will be fully closed overnight, between 10pm and 6am, from Wednesday 1 February for 9 nights (Monday to Friday only). A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the A33 and A4.

Work to improve journeys by carrying out surveys in preparation for converting the M4 into a Smart Motorway continues this week. The eastbound exit and entry slip roads for Moto Reading Service Area will be closed overnight, between 10pm and 6am, on Thursday 2 February.

M4 junctions 13 Chieveley to 12 Reading, Berkshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the M4 eastbound carriageway starts this week. The eastbound carriageway will be closed overnight, between 10pm and 6am, from Tuesday 31 January for 5 nights (Monday to Friday only). A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the A4.

M4 junction 15 Swindon, Wiltshire: surveys

Work to improve journeys by carrying out surveys around junction 15 takes place this week. Lane closures will be in place on all approaches to the junction overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Friday 3 February.

M27 junction 1 Cadnam, Hampshire: drainage

Work to ensure road user safety by maintaining the drainage asset at the junction takes place this week. Lane closures will be in place on the east and westbound approaches to the junction overnight, between 9pm and 6am, from Monday 30 January for 5 nights.

M27 junctions 7 Hedge End, Hampshire: surveys

Work to improve journeys by carrying out carriageway surveys at junction 7 takes place this week. Lane closures will be in place on the westbound approach to the junction and on the roundabout overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Thursday 2 February.

M27 junctions 7 Hedge End to 8 Bursledon, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the M27 eastbound carriageway finishes this week. The M27 eastbound carriageway will be closed from junction 7 to junction 8 overnight, between 10pm and 6am, until Tuesday 31 January. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via Charles Watts Way, Kanes Hill (A27) and A3024.

M27 junctions 9 Whiteley to 8 Bursledon, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing the M27 between Bursledon and Whiteley continues this week. The M27 westbound carriageway will be closed from junction 9 to junction 8 overnight, between 10pm and 6am, until Wednesday 22 February (Monday to Friday only). A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the A3051 Botley Road, Curdridge, A334 through Botley and Hedge End, re-joining the M27 at junction 7.

M27 junctions 11 to 12 Portsmouth, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the M27 eastbound carriageway near Port Solent continues week. The M27 eastbound carriageway from junction 11 to the A27 Eastern Road junction, and the M275 northbound link to the A27 eastbound carriageway will be closed overnight, between 10pm and 6am, until Friday 16 February (Monday to Friday only). Clearly signed diversions will be in place via the A27 for M27 traffic and the A3 Northern

Parade for M275 traffic.

A3(M) junction 2 Horndean to Charlton, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the northbound carriageway takes place this week. The A3(M) northbound carriageway will be closed from junction 2 to Charlton overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Friday 3 February. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the old A3.

A3 Shackleford, Surrey: drainage surveys

Work to improve journeys by carrying out drainage surveys at the junction takes place this week. The northbound entry slip road will be closed overnight, between 9pm and 6am, from Monday 31 January for 2 nights. The southbound entry slip road will be closed overnight, between 9pm and 6am, from Wednesday 1 February for 3 nights. Clearly signed diversions will be in place via adjacent junctions.

A3 Hindhead Tunnel, Surrey: maintenance

Work to maintain journeys by carrying out tunnel maintenance takes place this week. The northbound tunnel will be closed overnight, between 9pm and 6am, from Monday 30 January for 4 nights. Traffic will be diverted through the southbound tunnel in contraflow under a 40mph speed limit.

A27 Hilsea to Bedhampton, Hampshire: safety barrier

Work to improve safety by carrying out repairs to the barrier along the A27 central reserve continues this week. Lane closures will be in place on the east and westbound carriageways overnight, between 9pm and 6am, until Friday 10 February (Monday to Friday only).

A34 Three Maids Hill (Winchester), Hampshire: surveys

Work to improve journeys by carrying out surveys of the A34 southbound carriageway takes place this week. The southbound exit and entry slip roads at the A272 Three Maids Hill junction will be closed overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Monday 30 January. Clearly signed diversions will be in place via adjacent junctions.

A34 Bullington Cross to Sutton Scotney, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve road user's journeys by resurfacing a section of the A34 southbound carriageway continues this week. The A34 southbound carriageway will be closed from the A303 (Bullington Cross) to the A272 (Three Maids

Hill) overnight, between 10pm and 6am, from Friday 3 February for 5 nights (Monday to Friday only). A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the A303 eastbound carriageway, then south on the A33 Basingstoke Road.

A34 Speen, West Berkshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the northbound carriageway takes place this week. A lane closure will be in place overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Monday 30 January.

A34 Didcot to Abingdon, Oxfordshire: surveys

Work to improve journeys by carrying out surveys of the A34 southbound carriageway takes place this week. Lane closures will be in place on both carriageways between the Marcham Interchange and Chilton junction overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Tuesday 31 January and Wednesday 1 February.

A34 Oxford, Oxfordshire: resurfacing

Work to improve road user's journeys by resurfacing the A34 northbound carriageway around Oxford continues this week. The A34 northbound carriageway will be closed from the Hinksey Hill Interchange to the Botley Interchange overnight, between 10pm and 6am, until Friday 10 February (Monday to Friday only). A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the Oxford ring-road (A4142 Eastern-by-Pass, A40 Northern-by-Pass and A44).

A34 Weston-on-the-Green, Oxfordshire: resurfacing

Work to improve road user's journeys by resurfacing a damaged section of the A34 southbound carriageway takes place this week. The A34 southbound carriageway will be closed from the M40 junction 9 roundabout to Islip overnight, between 10pm and 6am, on Monday 30 January.

Clearly signed diversions will be in place via M40 junction 8a and the A40 (for motorway permitted vehicles) and via the A4095 and A44 between Bicester and Peartree (for non-motorway vehicles).

A303 Bullington, Hampshire: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys by resurfacing a section of the westbound carriageway takes place this week. The A303 westbound carriageway will be closed between the slip roads overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Thursday 2 February. A clearly signed diversion will be in place.

A404(M) junction 9a Maidenhead, Berkshire: vegetation

Work to improve journeys by cutting back overgrown vegetation takes place this week. The southbound entry slip road at the junction will be closed

overnight, between 9pm and 6am, on Friday 3 February. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via junction 9b.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

News story: Armed Forces Minister confirms increase in support to Afghanistan

Speaking on his first visit to Afghanistan the Minister reaffirmed the UK's enduring commitment to the country.

Britain stepped up its support to Afghanistan this year, increasing by 50 the number of personnel in the country. They join personnel in country who are helping to train Afghan officers, advising the fledgling Afghan Air Force and working as advisors in the Afghan Security Ministries.

While UK and NATO combat operations drew to a close in 2014, Britain continues to support Afghanistan by training, advising and assisting the Afghan defence and security forces, as they continue to fight with increasing skill and capability. This year's increase in support brings the total number of the personnel committed to the operation to 500; Britain's second biggest overseas commitment after the campaign against Daesh.

During his visit, the Minister met with Afghan Cadet Behzad Hiedari, who won Sandhurst's Overseas Sword of Honour. The prestigious honour is awarded to the best overseas cadet in each year's class at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. The award highlights the talent in Afghanistan's security forces, which are being developed by the UK and our NATO Allies and partners.

One way in which British personnel are helping to develop Afghanistan's security forces is through the Afghan National Officer Academy (ANAOA). Minister Penning visited the site during the visit and met with the UK personnel helping to 'mentor the mentors'. Just as Afghan forces are in the lead for the security of their country, so are their UK-mentored officers, who are helping to train their country's next generation of leaders.

Mike Penning meets with a British adviser to female Afghan instructors for female cadets at ANA0A

Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning said:

Britain has an enduring commitment to Afghanistan. This year we're stepping up our support to the country, and have deployed 50 extra personnel, some of whom I visited at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, where the next generation of Afghan army leaders are being trained. The UK, along with our NATO Allies, is committed for the long term to developing the ever more capable Afghan National Security and Defence Forces to ensure Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists.

Lunch with UK personnel who mentor Afghan trainers at the Academy

Since 2014, UK mentoring assistance has helped the ANA0A train over 1500 high quality officers.

The Government committed last year to provide £210 million to the Afghan security forces, until 2020, giving around £70 million a year.

[Press release: UK's rarest freshwater fish caught on film for the first time](#)

The film was shot on a remote controlled yellow submarine while assessing how much sediment is building up on the bottom of Derwentwater in Cumbria. [Watch it here](#)

Vendace (*coregonus albula*) is the UK's rarest freshwater fish and a relic of the ice age. Its UK habitat is in Derwentwater and like lamprey, Arctic charr, spined loach, allis shad, twaite shad and smelt, it is an international conservation priority.

The Environment Agency carries out regular surveys of water quality around the country and over the past five years has worked with farmers, businesses and water companies to improve and protect over 15,000km of rivers, lakes, coastal waters and bathing waters. England's rivers are the healthiest they've been for 20 years and salmon, sea trout and other wildlife have returned to many rivers for the first time since the industrial revolution.

Andy Gowans, Environment Agency fisheries specialist, said:

It was a unique moment to capture this iconic fish live on film.

Seeing the vendace is a good indication of the health of the lake's water. Derwentwater is the only place these fish inhabit in the UK, so maintaining the quality of the water is vital for their survival.

Dr Ian Winfield, from the [Centre for Ecology & Hydrology](#), who leads the survey on Derwentwater and operated the remote-controlled yellow submarine, said:

As the day closed, I decided I would go out to the deepest part of the lake which is about 20 metres and drop the submarine in. I'm able to view the images from the submarine's filming live and was keen to see what fish showed up.

Although, the vendace came and went within in a matter of seconds, I knew it was a vendace. This was an amazing moment for a scientist, I was not expecting to see one, never mind film one. I knew I had captured for the first time on film the elusive vendace species.

The Environment Agency and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology plan to do further surveying later in the year using more advanced filming technology.

News story: One Public Estate expands to help councils deliver 44,000 jobs and 25,000 homes

One Public Estate expands to help almost three quarters of councils to deliver 44,000 jobs and 25,000 homes through property.

The Cabinet Office and Local Government Association have today announced that a further 79 councils will join the One Public Estate (OPE) programme, bringing the total number of councils participating in OPE to 255 – almost three quarters of all councils in England.

£3.6 million has been allocated to councils across new and existing partnerships on the programme.

The latest funding round means that by 2019 to 20 the partnerships on OPE expect to:

- create 44,000 jobs
- release land for 25,000 homes

- raise £415 million in capital receipts from land and property sales
- cut running costs by £98 million

The funding will support public sector partnerships to work collaboratively on land and property initiatives, generating new jobs and homes, creating more joined up public services to local communities, and delivering savings for the taxpayer.

OPE remains firmly on track to achieve the ambition of 95% of councils on the programme by 2018, with 72% of councils across England now delivering through OPE.

Ben Gummer, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, said:

One Public Estate is not just about creating savings and collecting land receipts, it also enables the delivery of houses and jobs.

Through this groundbreaking programme, local councils can transform services, unlock significant local growth and crucial efficiency savings through smarter use of property and land.

Lord Porter, Chairman of the Local Government Association, said:

In the drive to get Britain building again it is encouraging to see that over 70% of Councils have now joined the OPE Programme. These councils will strive to collaborate with government and wider public sector bodies to deliver much needed Housing and services at a local level.

Background

One Public Estate is a national programme initially launched in 2013. It is jointly delivered by the Government Property Unit within the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association. It supports joint working across central and local government to use land and property to boost economic growth, unlock regeneration, and create more integrated public services. It encourages public sector partners to share buildings, transform services, reduce running costs, and release surplus and under-used land for development.

Partnerships joining the programme will receive funding and both practical and technical support from our team to help solve issues and deliver ambitious transformational projects.

Launched in 2013, One Public Estate has grown from the original pilot scheme of 12 councils to 264, all delivering ambitious projects to meet local needs.

Following on from the successful pilot stages, it was announced in the Autumn Statement 2015 that One Public Estate would receive £31 million to further

expand the programme.

A further application window for councils wishing to join One Public Estate will be open in April 2017. To find out more about the programme, email onepublicestate@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.