

News story: Defence Secretary welcomes US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to the UK for the first time

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon welcomed Secretary Jim Mattis to London today for his first visit to the UK as US Defense Secretary. They reviewed a number of defence and security issues, including the need for NATO modernisation and increased defence spending by all members, progress in the fight against extremism, including Daesh in Iraq and Syria, and joint equipment and defence trade programmes.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We have no closer friend than the United States and across the globe our nations are standing side by side in defending our values. Together we're showing leadership on the world stage – tackling extremism, standing up to Russian aggression and modernising NATO, making it fitter, faster and more agile.

Sir Michael outlined at today's meeting how Britain is playing a leading role in European and global defence and security, and wants a deep and special economic and security partnership with the EU after the UK leaves. The Defence Secretary confirmed that as of next week, all 800 British troops would be deployed in Estonia as part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), alongside over 300 British Army vehicles. And continuing UK and US forces' long history of joint operations, the UK is supporting the US-led eFP in Poland, contributing hundreds of troops and more than 50 vehicles. British armour transporters will be helping to move US tanks across Poland, underlining the depth of UK/US cooperation.

Sir Michael and Secretary Mattis also agreed steps for NATO modernisation, including simpler command structures, and reviewed the pressing need for NATO members to meet their 2% defence spending commitments. The Defence Secretary called on NATO members not meeting the 2% spending commitment to increase their defence budget annually in real terms, in order to demonstrate greater burden sharing.

Both the Defence Secretary and Secretary Mattis reviewed progress in the fight against Daesh and agreed to keep up the campaign momentum, with Iraqi forces liberating more territory from Daesh's tyranny in western Mosul and planning the campaign to isolate and then liberate Raqqa in Syria. Britain and the US are leading the Coalition effort to defeat Daesh in Iraq and Syria, striking extremist positions from the air and training the Iraqi security forces on the ground.

Visiting the UK for the first time in his new role, US Defense Secretary Jim

Mattis said:

I thank Minister Fallon for the very warm welcome to the UK on my first visit as Secretary of Defense. The special relationship is a source of strength for our two nations, standing together in defense of our freedoms. It is demonstrated daily in our military-to-military interactions across a host of domains, and our relationship grows in strength with the mutual respect and friendship we share.

During a press conference at Lancaster House, Sir Michael announced a £90 million investment to support the UK's new F-35 Lightning aircraft. The F-35 programme is a joint undertaking with the US that will deliver cutting-edge aircraft to British and American Armed Forces. This multi-million pound contract, providing maintenance, training and logistic services at RAF Marham in Norfolk – the future home of the jets' squadrons – will sustain hundreds of highly skilled British jobs.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Nothing demonstrates the strength of our relationship better than our joint work on the most advanced combat aircraft in the world – the F-35. The UK is proud to be the future repair hub for all the European jets. This additional investment at RAF Marham will ensure that we have a formidable fighting force that, at a time of growing danger, will help us work with our US partners to promote international peace and security.

In testament to the British skill base, the UK has been chosen by the US F-35 Program Office to be a global repair hub, providing maintenance, overhaul and upgrade services for European F-35s. The deal builds on the strong foundations of Britain's pre-eminent and enduring defence partnership with the US, and will help create hundreds of high-end jobs, safeguard thousands more and be a substantial boost to UK exports.

This new £90 million contract, placed through the F-35 Joint Program Office with Lockheed Martin, in partnership with BAE Systems, will support services being operated out of RAF Marham. The new support services contract comes as the UK gets ready to receive its ninth F-35 aircraft, which will be based at US Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. A further £167 million investment was announced last year for the construction of three new state-of-the-art buildings at the Norfolk base and construction of these facilities is well under way. In March the F-35 also successfully conducted first firing trials using MBDA's Advanced Short Range Air to Air Missile (ASRAAM), marking the first time a British-designed missile has been fired from the F-35.

News story: Bravery of 3 World War 2 soldiers shot for escaping from a POW camp finally recognised after nearly 75 years

A rededication service for Private (Pte) Lionel Brown, 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment and Ptes Daniel Hollingsworth and Thomas White, 1st Battalion The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) has taken place almost 75 years after they were shot near Ponte Del Diavolo, Italy after escaping from a prisoner of war (POW) camp.

They were given a dignified service on Tuesday 28 March 2017 at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Ancona War Cemetery in Italy. The service, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services was conducted by The Reverend Jonathon Daniel CF (UB) Royal Army Chaplain's Branch.

Sue Raftree, JCCC said:

These brave men were prisoners of war and being transported by the Germans when they were killed. The service today was to honour all 3 and to enable their families to have closure after over 70 years.

It has been a privilege for the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre to organise this service.

Reverend Jonathon Daniel CF(UB) said:

In our act of rededication we finally, after many years, complete our duty to correctly mark the place where our brothers in arms are buried. Today we honour and remember our 3 comrades whose lives were taken so cruelly and so unnecessarily. May their story serve to harden our resolve to cherish human life and do all that we can to live peacefully with one another.



The Reverend Jonathon Daniel CF (UB) Royal Army Chaplain's Branch delivers the rededication service, Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Some 6 months after escaping Camp 53 at the time of the Italian Armistice in September 1943, Pte Brown was joined by Ptes Hollingsworth and White on 5 March 1944 who were hiding in a nearby farm. En-route to Perchia they were accompanied by another man who they met known only to them as Adriano, thought also to be an escaped prisoner of war. Arriving at Perchia they made enquiries concerning the next expedition through enemy lines but no information was available so they went to a nearby farm for the night. Adriano left them stating he was going to sleep at another farm nearby but it later transpired Adriano was a German soldier.

At approximately 5am the next morning a party of German soldiers raided the farm where they were hiding and all 3 were arrested. Immediately afterwards a neighbouring farm was raided and Sergeant Mario Mottes from a Belgian parachute regiment, was also arrested. The prisoners were then marched to a German post where they were questioned and finally placed under guard. On 10 March 1944 all 4 were being transported when their lorry was stopped at Ponte Del Diavolo and they were shot.

Family members who paid their respects included Alan Austin, nephew of Pte Brown. He said:

The uncertainty over the final resting place of our uncle Lionel is something that has troubled our family for many years.

It is comforting to know that his sacrifice for our country has been recognised with a full and moving military ceremony, and that we now have a point of focus for our remembrance.

Commander Neil Thompson OBE RN the Naval and Air Attaché from the British Embassy and representatives of the Parachute Regiment, Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and the Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) also attended and paid their respects.

Commander (Cdr) Neil Thompson, Naval and Air Attaché British Embassy said:

I am proud and honoured to be representing the British Embassy at the rededication ceremony of 3 soldiers who lost their lives during the Italian Campaign under such tragic and dramatic circumstances in 1944. These 3 soldiers' dedication to duty by escaping from POW camps and trying to make their way back to fight again is indicative of the kind of war-winning spirit and courage found right across our great nation in the dark days of the Second World War.

It was really good to meet the families represented here today and I hope that we have given some comfort and closure to them. But above all, we have been able to give the soldiers themselves an identity and a lasting memory as they lie here in their final resting place just outside Ancona.

Three new headstones bearing each of the soldier's names have been provided by the CWGC, who will now care for their final resting place in perpetuity.

[News story: RAF Akrotiri opens newly-renovated runway](#)

Updated: picture change

The success of the 21 month, £46m project has now secured RAF Akrotiri, on the southern tip of Britain's Sovereign Base Area on the island of Cyprus, as a first class operating base.

The investment means that the base will continue to support the full complement of current and future RAF aircraft, and those of our coalition partners.



Night time work on the RAF Akrotiri runway.

The work however did not hinder Britain's campaign to defeat Daesh, with the RAF playing a leading role in the Coalition, striking over 1200 Daesh targets since the campaign began in 2014. Engineers completed the work around the intense pace of air operations, with the RAF working at the highest operational tempo in a quarter of a century.

Minister for the Armed Forces Mike Penning said:

This project has taken a tired and battered runway and transformed it into a modern, safe, 21st Century facility, capable of supporting operations for the next 20 years and beyond.

This has been a unique and remarkable achievement. RAF Akrotiri is not just a refuelling spot or training base. This airfield matters. It has been at the forefront of supporting our most important military operations over the last decade and more, including the current campaign against Daesh.

The project, which saw 55,000m³ of earth excavated and 44,000m³ of high-quality concrete laid, was led by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO).



A Typhoon takes off as building contractors look on.

DIO's Chief Executive Graham Dalton revealed at today's opening how proud he was of the achievements of everyone involved in upgrading the runway, without affecting operations.

Defence Infrastructure Organisation Chief Executive Graham Dalton said:

I am delighted that the upgrade to the runway at RAF Akrotiri is complete. This is a crucial asset for Defence and this project has been a huge success. DIO has worked with our customers and contractors to successfully carry out this critical work while minimising the impact on operations.

In 2019, British Forces Cyprus will become the largest Permanent Joint Operating Base and permanent deployment of British troops overseas and this latest upgrade has ensured it is more than ready.

[**News story: Joint Forces Command enjoy**](#)

successful military exercise

Government personnel recently took part in Exercise Joint Horizon 17 (JH17), a real world 'mission rehearsal' of a government response to a complex crisis in the Levant.

The exercise confirmed the capabilities of a cross-government co-operation to deal with a complex crisis involving an evacuation of non-combatants who required military support.

The exercise included the rapid deployment of Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Teams to Lebanon and Jordan. It involved the activation of the Joint Contingency headquarters in British Forces Cyprus, with other personnel based in Northwood headquarters and Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. The mission scenario involved the evacuation of non-combatants from Beirut and military support to a humanitarian disaster in Jordan. The complexity of the exercise was increased by the need to protect forces and evacuees from violent extremist organisations.

A huge range of personnel took part, including staff from:

- [16 Air Assault](#)
- [3 Commando Brigades](#)
- [Border Force](#)
- British Forces Cyprus
- Directorate of Joint Warfare
- [The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's](#) Crisis Management Department
- [The Humanitarian Resource Group](#)
- intelligence agencies
- International Police Response Cadre
- [Joint Air Force Component](#)
- Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ)
- [Joint Helicopter Command](#)
- [Maritime Battle Staff](#)
- [The Stabilisation Unit](#)



Colonel Kenyon working during the exercise. Crown Copyright. Photo: Lee Goddard. All rights reserved.

The UK Ambassadors to Beirut and Amman also joined in the exercise. Colleagues in the Standing Joint Force Logistic Component provided subject matter expertise and resilience.

Brigadier Charlie Stickland, Chief Joint Force Operations, said:

JFHQ are now better prepared, institutionally and physically, to cope with our most likely and most dangerous mission. Critically JH17 was enabled by our real world day to day relationships with cross government partners and agencies. In the future the mutual understanding, relationships and shared assessment of a real world problem developed on this exercise will pay dividends for UK crisis responses.

The exercise began with an Academic Forum in Lancaster House. Partners from across Whitehall and representatives from the Joint Force Lead Elements considered how they interact during crisis as part of a 'one government' approach.

News story: UK and France strengthen defence cooperation with new weapon system agreement

Signed during a visit by M. Collet-Billon to the Ministry of Defence, the agreement begins a three year concept phase to develop future long range weapons for the British and French Navies and Air Forces. Each country will contribute €50 million to this phase.

The Future Cruise/Anti-Ship Weapon programme will look at options to replace and improve existing Naval and Air Force weapons systems in the next decade. Lasting up to three years, this will help to define the missile designs and reduce risks to inform decisions about the next stage of the programme

Alongside sharing costs, both sides will benefit from access to each other's national technology expertise, trials and test facilities.



Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin and her French counterpart with the French and British project teams from MBDA, including Antoine Bouvier, CEO of MBDA. Crown Copyright.

Minister of Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

Our relationship with France is strong and enduring. We have a long

history of cooperation in defence and security with our European Ally.

As demonstrated by having Europe's largest defence budget, the UK is committed to European security and we will continue to collaborate on joint defence programmes across the continent. Today's agreement will sustain 80 jobs in the UK.

Délégué Général pour l'Armement Laurent Collet-Billon said:

We are launching today a major new phase in our bilateral cooperation, by planning together a generation of missiles, successor to the Harpoon, SCALP and Storm Shadow. The FC/ASW (future cruise/anti-ship weapon) programme's aim is to have by around 2030 a new generation of missiles.

This future capability is strategic, industrially as well as operationally. This new programme will be the backbone of our "one complex weapon" initiative.

The agreement is a further example of joint work under the Lancaster House Treaty of 2010 and builds on UK and French similarities in missile capabilities and delivery dates, providing significant efficiencies and securing value for money for the taxpayer.



Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin and her French counterpart Laurent Collet-

Billon meeting with members of the French and British project teams from MBDA. Crown Copyright.

During the 2016 Amiens Summit, the UK and France formally confirmed their intent to launch this project within 12 months. This agreement, which allows the Direction Générale de l'Armement to place the contract with MBDA, illustrates the dynamic nature of UK-France strategic cooperation.

UK-French cooperation already covers a wide range of fields beyond the FC/ASW programme, including research emerging from the partnership on innovation and missile technologies (MCM-ITP), work to align our capability plans, development and production centred on the Future Air-to-Surface Guided Weapon (FASGW) and the mid-life update programme of the SCALP/Storm Shadow missile systems. This new project further strengthens MBDA's industrial optimisation building on their new Centres of Excellence.