

Gulf air defences boosted further, as Defence Secretary visits Middle East

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Further vital air defence support for Gulf partners has been confirmed by Defence Secretary John Healey MP as he visits the Middle East.

Vital air defences from the UK are being deployed to the Middle East to further support Gulf partners from Iran's aggressive missiles and drone attacks which continue across the region.

As part of the UK's action in the collective defence of allies, without getting drawn into the wider war, the Defence Secretary is visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain. Defence Secretary John Healey MP held detailed discussions on the conflict, the Strait of Hormuz, and further UK-Gulf cooperation on regional security as the war enters its second month. The Defence Secretary recognised partners' exceptional professionalism and resolve in the face of sustained attacks, and their tireless work to protect civilian life and to safeguard foreign - including British - nationals in the Gulf. Healey met with the Emir of Qatar, the King of Bahrain and defence leaders from all three nations.

The unique joint UK-Qatar Typhoon Squadron has been flying since day one of the conflict in joint defensive operations against incoming Iranian attacks. The Defence Secretary confirmed today that he has extended the deployment of UK Typhoon jets to Qatar, as he visited UK Armed Forces at Dukhan air base to thank them for their courage and professionalism. Healey met with pilots who have been part of the flying missions day and night over Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and the UAE to support regional security. He praised the excellent work of all the armed forces and authorities of Gulf partners in protecting their countries and citizens.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Defence Secretary confirmed to the Defence Minister His Royal Highness Prince Khalid bin Salman Al Saud his decision to deploy Sky Sabre there. The deployment follows a successful recce by a UK team, and the equipment and teams will deploy this week including radars, control node, and missile launchers and a Royal Artillery battery and battle space managers to operate the system. The system will be integrated into wider Saudi and regional air defences.

The visit comes as Iran continues its aggressive missile and drone campaign against civilian infrastructure, military sites and critical national assets across the Gulf, with more than 3,500 missiles and drones fired to date.

The UK's Lightweight Multirole Launcher is now in Bahrain the Defence Secretary also announced today, supported by a team of UK experts who will help integrate the short-range air defence system into Bahraini defences.

Rapid Sentry - a ground-based air defence missile system - has arrived in Kuwait and the RAF's ORCUS system is operating in the country, allowing personnel to detect drones early and take action. The UK's enhanced support is a clear demonstration of Britain delivering on its promise to support regional partners.

The UK has been flying defensive missions in the region from day one of the war to protect British interests and British allies - after the Defence Secretary pre-deployed Typhoons to the region in

January and sent extra jets at the start of the month.

Defence Secretary John Healey MP said:

Iran's aggressive attacks continue to threaten our allies and interests in the Middle East. That's why the UK has been flying defensive missions since day one of this conflict to protect British interests and allies – and today we're delivering further support by extending our UK jets in Qatar and deploying extra air defence teams and systems to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait.

I am proud of the courage and professionalism our Armed Forces have shown since the start of the war and my message to Gulf partners is: Britain's best will help you defend your skies. I pay tribute to the heroic efforts of our partners across the Gulf in protecting their nations. We will stand by our long-term partners in the Middle East and continue to push for a swift resolution to this conflict.

The Prime Minister has been clear that the UK will not be drawn into the wider war. Iran's reckless attacks, lashing out across the region and holding hostage the Strait of Hormuz, are a threat to British interests and British allies. That is why this government has given permission to the US to use British bases for specific and limited defensive operations including degrading missile sites being used to attack ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Defence Secretary also revealed today that UK pilots operating Typhoon, F-35, Wildcat and Merlin helicopters have now racked up more than 1,280 hours protecting British nationals, British bases and partners in the Middle East.

The UK recently announced that additional LMMs have been procured for UK Armed Forces and allies in the region, part of a wider piece of work to ensure UK industry steps up at this critical time. The UK's Taskforce Sabre brings together industry and government to support Gulf states with rapid procurement of the systems and weapons they need.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gulf-air-defences-boosted-further-as-defence-secretary-visits-middle-east>