

Middle East Update Oral Statement

9.3.2026 - John Healey | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Statement to update the House on the Middle East.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement to update the House on the Middle East.

I want to start by praising our Armed Forces, who are working 24/7 to protect British lives and British interests in the region.

From our 400-strong air defence teams in Cyprus, who I visited last week...

To our counter drone specialists in Iraq...

Our fast jet pilots in Qatar...

Our command specialists in defence co-ordination centres...

And everyone else working on this crisis, both abroad and at home.

Iran threatens all of us.

But it is our forces who feel it most acutely.

So, I'm sure the whole House will join me in thanking them for their outstanding dedication and professionalism.

For protecting British lives. For keeping us safe.

We say to them:

You are the best of Britain in action.

The UK Government's approach throughout current developments in the Middle East is founded on three principles:

First, defensive... taking the necessary action to strengthen our collective defence.

So, we took steps from January - weeks before this current war with Iran began - to preposition Typhoons, F35s, counter drone teams, radars and air defence in the region...

As well as the additional military capability we've sent since last Saturday, when the Iranian retaliation attacks started.

Second, coordination with allies... we do not work alone.

So, we are leading and coordinating our response with NATO allies and other partners, including the US, E5 nations, and Gulf states.

I am in daily contact with my counterparts, and so is the Chief of the Defence Staff.

And third, legal... we must have a legal basis for our decisions. That allows Ministers to make sound

choices, and our military to operate with full confidence.

Our UK action is grounded in these principles:

To protect British people, British bases and British allies.

Mr Speaker, in the last week, Iran has lashed out with dangerous, indiscriminate and reckless strikes.

In the first day alone, they attacked 10 countries, hitting military and civilian targets... including hotels in Dubai and Bahrain and the national airport in Kuwait.

British troops stationed at a US base in Bahrain were within a few hundred yards of an Iranian strike.

And a small drone hit our base in Cyprus... coming from Lebanon or Iraq.

Iran has now fired over 500 ballistic and cruise missiles and over 2,000 drones.

Even after the Iranian President's apology and promise to Gulf states over the weekend, Iran still then struck multiple countries with drones and missiles, including Bahrain where 32 civilians were injured in one attack and a desalination plant was hit in another.

We totally condemn these attacks.

They are putting hundreds of thousands of people at risk, including British nationals and members of our Armed Forces.

But Mr Speaker, while Iran's indiscriminate strikes began last Saturday, the Iranian regime has for decades been a source of evil, exporting violence across the Middle East and beyond.

It has supplied nearly 60,000 Shahed drones to Putin for his war in Ukraine.

Here in the UK, they conduct aggressive cyber-attacks against us and have plotted assassination on Britain's streets.

The Iranian regime is a destructive force - which has slaughtered protestors and inflicts terrible suffering, especially against its own people.

We want to see Iran stop their strikes, give up their nuclear ambitions and restart the negotiations.

Mr Speaker, as Defence Secretary, my number one priority is protecting British people - military and civilian.

Since January, we have moved significant military assets to the region, ahead of the first US-Israeli strikes.

Those preparations made a real difference.

It meant we've conducted defensive military operations from day one.

Our F-35s destroying Iranian drones over Jordan.

Our Typhoons shooting down targets heading towards Qatar.

And our counter-drone units defeating further attacks against coalition bases in Iraq.

We acted early to protect British people and British interests, and to support our allies.

As the Iranian response became clear from last weekend, we adapted our actions to respond to the changing circumstances...

Driven at all times by military advice.

That's why we agreed a new US request for use of British bases at RAF Fairford and Diego Garcia last Sunday.

And that's why I committed further resources to the region last week...

... including four extra Typhoons, three Wildcat helicopters, a Merlin helicopter and HMS Dragon....

And I can confirm today that Dragon will set sail in the next couple of days.

I want to personally thank all those who are working tirelessly - up to 22 hours a day - to get the ship ready.

HMS Dragon will join US air defence destroyers to provide additional protection in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Let me also provide the House with the following operational update from overnight:

The UK is now conducting defensive air sorties in support of the UAE.

Typhoons successfully took out two drones... one over Jordan and a second heading to Bahrain.

The third Wildcat has arrived in Cyprus.

We have now deployed additional RAF air operations experts to more than five countries in the region... ensuring an accurate picture across the region and assisting partners with military and civilian airspace management.

And the fragments of the drone that hit Akrotiri are being analysed for foreign military hardware by our experts at DSTL.

British pilots have now racked up over 230 flying hours.

We now have eight jets in Qatar, including the joint British-Qatari squadron, who are flying in support of regional allies...

And we have more jets in Cyprus than any other nation.

I also visited our 400 strong air defence team at our base in Cyprus last week...

... in addition to the more than X,000 personnel stationed on the Island.

I was subjected to the daily air sirens they face.

I saw the impact that the Iranian proxy drone caused.

I asked the Commander British Forces, General Tom Bewick:

"Do you need anything more from us back in Britain?"

And he said to me:

"No. I have been given everything I've asked for."

The UK is leading this response to Iranian threats, in close coordination with our allies.

Cyprus's Head of the National Guard told me:

"our military cooperation has never been closer."

And our support is backed up by our NATO allies, including the US, France, Greece and Germany...

Which I discussed with E5 nations last week.

I can also confirm to the House: having given the US the go ahead to the US to use British bases for specific defensive operations into Iran last Sunday, the first US bomber landed at RAF Fairford on Friday.

As the PM set out, this activity is part of:

"the collective self-defence of longstanding friends and allies, and protecting British lives."

It is "in accordance with international law."

These missions are to destroy Iranian missiles at source.

Mr Speaker, we have also seen a ground incursion into Lebanon, with more than 400 killed and half a million displaced by recent Israeli operations.

Hezbollah is a dangerous terror organisation, tied to the regime in Iran. It must cease its attacks against Israel.

But we do not want to see Israel expand this conflict further into Lebanon.

The solution to the problems must be guided by the Lebanese people and the Lebanese government. And we urge de-escalation and the return to a negotiated process.

Mr Speaker, I know many of us as MPs have constituents with friends and family caught in the region. Worried for the safety of loved ones.

My RHF, the Foreign Secretary and FCDO teams are working as fast as possible to get our people out of the region.

Three chartered flights have now taken off, with more to come this week.

More than 170,000 people have registered their presence...

... which has allowed us to get them the information and the support that they need.

More than 37,000 British nationals have been evacuated since the start of the crisis response.

And as the Prime Minister said last week:

“We will not stop until our people are safe.”

Mr Speaker, these are deeply uncertain times.

While we deal with the immediate crisis in the Middle East, we must also maintain our strong support for Ukraine, deter increasing threats in the High North, fulfil our NATO commitments, and ensure our homeland is protected.

Our adversaries are watching.

We must manage rising demands on defence, balancing resources for best effect...

We must also deal with the cost of living impact this conflict could cause, as my RHF the Chancellor has just set out in her statement.

Mr Speaker, I am proud of the UK's response.

Acting – at all times – in our national interest.

We will defend our allies...

We will support our Armed Forces...

And we will do everything necessary to protect British lives and British interests...

To make Britain secure at home and strong abroad.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/middle-east-update-oral-statement>