Foreign Secretary touches down in the Gulf to demonstrate support for regional allies facing Iranian aggression

12.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper travels to Saudi Arabia to show UK support for regional allies as they defend themselves from reckless Iranian aggression.

- Yvette Cooper travels to Saudi Arabia, demonstrating the UK's commitment to support long-standing partners in the Gulf.
- The Foreign Secretary condemns the appalling and reckless Iranian strikes on Gulf partner nations where hundreds of thousands of British citizens travel and reside, and highlights strong cooperation on ensuring oil supply and energy security amidst the current conflict.
- The UK continues efforts to bring British people home, with 63,000 already returning from the region, five UK charter flights have also departed from the UAE and Oman, with more in the coming days.

Demonstrating UK support for regional allies as they defend themselves from reckless Iranian aggression, the Foreign Secretary will visit Saudi Arabia today (Thursday 12th March), the first UK minister to visit the region since the start of the conflict.

Saudi Arabia is one of the UK's oldest partners in the region, with established UK businesses and tourism, but it has been subject to attack from Iranian missiles and drones, including attacks on oil facilities and the US Embassy in Riyadh.

The visit comes as the UK Government continues its intensive, round-the-clock effort to support British people in the region and safeguard UK interests, including with military support across a volatile and fast-moving situation.

Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 63,000 British people have returned home from the region. The UK Government is working tirelessly to ensure people who wish to depart can return home as safely and swiftly as possible. This includes putting on five charter flights and working closely with airlines to boost capacity on commercial flights. The Foreign Secretary will also thank Saudi Arabia for its support in helping British people leave the region, as commercial routes continue to operate from there with limited disruption.

The Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper, said:

> The situation in the Middle East remains highly volatile, and our priority is the safety and security of British people, alongside supporting our partners across the region who face continuing strikes.
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> This is why it is so important for me to be here in Saudi Arabia - an essential partner for the UK in the Gulf, who have been targeted by reckless attacks by the Iranian regime, and who have supported British nationals to come home and is working to maintain energy security and supply.
>
> Everyone wants to see a swift resolution that brings security and stability back to the

region and stops this Iranian threat to its neighbours.

During the trip, the Foreign Secretary is expected to discuss cooperation with regional partners to ensure continuity of oil supply in the face of strikes in the Strait of Hormuz. This follows the IEA's announcement of a release of 400 million barrels from the strategic reserve.

The Foreign Secretary will also highlight the strength of the UK–KSA defence relationship and Saudi Arabia's air defence capability, as Saudi Armed Forces continue to intercept threats, protecting civilians, including over 25,000 British nationals living in the country. During her visit, she will see a demonstration of the UK air defence battery, deployed since 2022 and at high readiness, prepared to defend critical national infrastructure.

The UK's defensive military action is supporting the wider region, with four extra Typhoons, three Wildcat helicopters, a Merlin helicopter and HMS Dragon being deployed. Additional RAF operations experts have also been deployed to more than five countries in the region, helping coordinate regional military and civilian airspace.

The UK is taking action to protect people back home from the impacts of the conflict on their lives and bills, and will continue to work with regional partners, including Saudi Arabia, to prioritise energy security, protect bill payers, and make sure people pay the lowest possible price at the pump.

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