

[News story: Royal Navy and Royal Marines join major French deployment](#)



847 Naval Air Squadron stand to attention next to one of two Wildcat helicopters. They have deployed for five months with the Jeanne D'Arc. Crown Copyright.

Around 40 Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel and two Wildcat helicopters have joined the French naval task force, Jeanne D'Arc, for a five-month mission. The ship's port calls will include Jakarta, Bali, Darwin, Saigon and Singapore. British personnel will take part in amphibious exercises and Defence Engagement. This builds on the UK's very successful participation in last year's Jeanne D'Arc mission.

The UK's contribution to France's annual Jeanne D'Arc naval deployment demonstrates a shared commitment from both countries to enhance their maritime cooperation in home waters and around the world, in support of global security and prosperity and protection of freedom of navigation. This priority was agreed at the UK-France Summit in January 2018.

The deployment is part of the UK's wide-ranging programme of bilateral defence cooperation with French forces, which includes the development of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, a rapidly deployable joint UK-French force that can respond to crises.

British and French forces also operate together as members of NATO, with France agreeing to contribute troops to the UK-led enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia in 2019.

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[News story: Devon dredging and](#)

[disposal licence suspended](#)

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John Tuckett, Chief Executive Officer said:

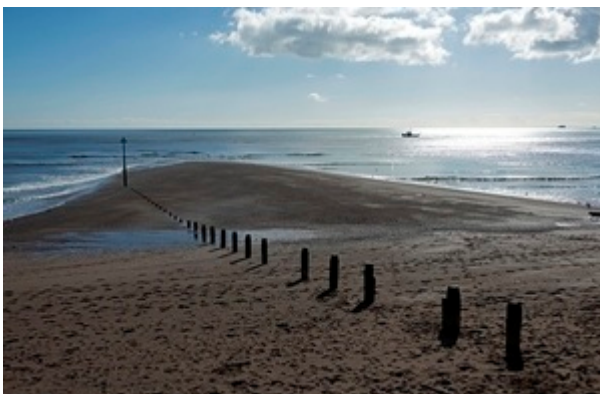
“We are aware of concerns about Teignmouth beach and are working with other agencies to look into these.

“As a responsible marine manager we have taken a precautionary approach and suspended a marine licence for maintenance dredging of Exmouth Marina and disposal of related materials at the Sprey Point disposal site. This is until we are clear that materials found on Teignmouth beach are an aesthetic issue only.

“We are confident that an assessment carried out as part of the licence application process and in line with OSPAR guidelines, showed that the material is suitable for disposal at sea.”

Further details about the marine licence are available on the [MMO's public register](#) (case reference MLA/2016/00372) and in a previous [update provided by the MMO](#).

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Speech: Foreign Secretary statement on the current situation in Syria

Mr Speaker, I'm grateful to the Hon Member for Barrow and Furness for raising this vital issue. In seven years of bloodshed, the war in Syria has claimed 400,000 lives and driven 11 million people from their homes, causing a humanitarian tragedy on a scale unknown anywhere else in the world.

The House should never forget that the Asad regime – aided and abetted by Russia and Iran – has inflicted the overwhelming burden of that suffering. Asad's forces are now bombarding the enclave of Eastern Ghouta, where 393,000 people are living under siege, enduring what has become a signature tactic of the regime, whereby civilians are starved and pounded into submission.

With bitter irony, Russia and Iran declared Eastern Ghouta to be a “de-escalation area” in May last year and promised to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid.

But the truth is that Asad's regime has allowed only one United Nations convoy to enter Eastern Ghouta so far this year – and that carried supplies only for a fraction of the area's people. Hundreds of civilians have been killed in Eastern Ghouta in the last week alone and the House will have noted the disturbing reports of the use of chlorine gas.

I call for these reports to be fully investigated and for anyone held responsible for using chemical weapons in Syria to be held accountable.

Over the weekend I discussed the situation with my Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu, and Sa'ad Hariri, the prime minister of Lebanon. Earlier today, I

spoke to Sigmar Gabriel, the German foreign minister, and I shall be speaking to other European counterparts and the UN Secretary General in the coming days.

Britain has joined with our allies to mobilise the Security Council to demand a ceasefire across the whole of Syria and the immediate delivery of emergency aid to all in need.

Last Saturday, after days of prevarication from Russia, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2401, demanding that “all parties cease hostilities without delay” and allow the “safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid”, along with “medical evacuations of the critically sick and wounded”.

The main armed groups in Eastern Ghouta have accepted the ceasefire, but as of today, the warplanes of the Asad regime are still reported to be striking targets in the enclave and the UN has been unable to deliver any aid. I will remind the House that hundreds of thousands of civilians are going hungry in Eastern Ghouta only a few miles from UN warehouses in Damascus that are laden with food. The Asad regime must allow the UN to deliver those supplies, in compliance with Resolution 2401, and we look forward to Russia and Iran to making sure this happens, in accordance with their own promises.

I have invited the Russian Ambassador to come to the Foreign Office and give an account of his country’s plans to implement Resolution 2401. I have instructed the UK Mission at the UN to convene another meeting of the Security Council to discuss the Asad regime’s refusal to respect the will of the UN and implement the ceasefire without delay. Only a political settlement in Syria can ensure that the carnage is brought to an end and I believe that such a settlement is possible if the will exists.

The UN Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, is ready to take forward the talks in Geneva and the opposition are ready to negotiate pragmatically and without preconditions. The international community has united behind the path to a solution laid out in UN Resolution 2254 and Russia has stated its wish to achieve a political solution under the auspices of the UN.

Today, only the Asad regime stands in the way of progress. I urge Russia to use all its influence to bring the Asad regime to the negotiating table and take the steps towards peace that Syria’s people so desperately need.

News story: Transport Minister recognises Midlands as ‘heart of HS2’

The HS2 minister, Nusrat Ghani, met with apprentices and businesses across the Midlands today (26 February 2018) to see first-hand how they are already

benefitting from the jobs, skills and opportunities being delivered by HS2.

In discussions with businesses at the Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, the minister talked about the vital role HS2 will play in achieving the potential of the Midlands Engine, supporting 100,000 new jobs, bringing major cities, skilled workers and businesses closer together and increasing productivity.

The minister then visited the National College for High Speed Rail. With 2,000 apprenticeships being created by HS2, she met with students to learn about how they are gaining the specialist qualifications required to build HS2 and lead the way on future rail infrastructure projects.

She also met young engineers at Rolls Royce's Apprentice Academy in Derby, discussing how HS2 will bring businesses, skilled workers and major cities closer together, and the vital role they can play in the government's [Year of Engineering campaign](#).

With an additional 186,000 engineers needed every year until 2024 to fill all the engineering roles required by the UK, the minister encouraged the apprentices to be role models and help provide one million schoolchildren with an inspiring experience of engineering.

HS2 Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

HS2 is not only the future of our rail network, delivering faster journeys for more passengers and improving connections between some of our country's biggest cities, but is essential for driving forward economic growth and developing the next generation of engineers.

Birmingham is at the heart of HS2 and already seizing the opportunities that it has to offer. Through the National College for High Speed Rail we are training the engineers of tomorrow, empowering students with the skills and experience needed to gain brilliant careers and drive forward future innovation.

I also enjoyed meeting with a diverse range of businesses to discuss their vision and how HS2 can help unlock the extraordinary economic potential of the Midlands engine, driving forward jobs, productivity and growth.

Ms Ghani also visited Curzon Street station, where she was joined by West Midlands Mayor Andy Street to discuss the regeneration of the area, with the potential to create around 14,000 new jobs and unlock 600,000 square metres of new development space across Eastside and Digbeth.

Closed in 1966, Curzon Street will reopen as a new iconic station and Birmingham's largest building, with 7 platforms providing HS2 services initially to London in 2026 and then to the north west, north east and Scotland as the full HS2 network is delivered. HS2 will unlock capacity for new and additional freight services on the existing rail network, as well as faster and more frequent trains and thousands more seats for passengers.

Patrick Twist, Chair of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Business Transport Group said:

The roundtable was the perfect opportunity for the minister to hear the thoughts of local businesses on how the HS2 project will raise productivity levels across the region, improve connectivity with other parts of the country and play a huge role in rebalancing the economy – a key tenet of the [government's Industrial Strategy](#).

As someone who grew up in Birmingham, I'm sure the minister was delighted to witness first-hand the renaissance the city has undergone over the last decade and how key infrastructure projects such as HS2 will continue to shape this narrative for years to come.