

News story: UK to step up French operations in Africa as PM and President Macron meet for UK-France Summit

The Prime Minister is expected to make the announcement as part of the UK-France Summit at The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where she will discuss the UK's strong and wide-ranging bilateral relationship with President Macron.

The helicopters, which will provide logistic support to French troops, are part of a wider effort to increase stability in the Sahel region of Africa in order to tackle Islamist terrorism.

UK and French efforts in the region aim to provide greater stability, reducing the global terrorist threat and stemming the flow of illegal migration to Europe.

The UK has been a long-standing supporter of UN, EU and African Union military operations in Mali and has worked with international partners to prevent extremists from using the ungoverned space in the Sahel to plan and launch attacks on Europe, as well as counter the illegal trade in people, drugs, weapons and wildlife.

This is in addition to existing wider support to Africa including doubling our UN peacekeeping contribution with additional deployments to South Sudan and Somalia. Today the UK and France also agreed to work together to ensure EU African Peace Facility funding for AMISOM in Somalia.

The deployment of Chinooks to Mali will increase British support to France's Operation BARKHANE, in addition to strategic air transport flights already being carried out by the RAF.

British military personnel will not be involved in combat operations, but the deployment of Chinooks will provide a niche capability providing logistical support but also saving lives by avoiding the need to move troops by ground where they are more vulnerable to attack.

Alongside the military contribution, DfID will allocate £50m of additional aid including lifesaving humanitarian support for hundreds of thousands of people affected by epidemics, natural disasters and conflict across Mali, Niger, Chad, North Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

This will provide 320,000 people with emergency food and nutrition support and provide protection for 255,000 internally displaced people, returnees, refugees and their host communities. It will also supply clean water and better sanitation for 150,000 people.

The FCO is also exploring ways to better support the UK national interest in the region by enhancing the UK diplomatic presence.

In addition, the Home Office will work with key African partners to build their capability to tackle human trafficking in support of the UK's migration and modern slavery agenda. Discussions on taking this work forward will take place with the French after the Summit.

France has also agreed to commit troops to the UK-led NATO battlegroup in Estonia in 2019, building on the successful joint deployment which the Prime Minister and President Macron visited together last year. These personnel will make up part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe, providing deterrence in the face of increasing Russian assertiveness.

This further deployment of UK and French forces alongside our Estonian allies represents both the UK and France's shared commitment to upholding the deterrence and defence posture of NATO, and more widely our firm resolve and commitment to European security.

Today's Summit, which will be attended by UK Cabinet Ministers and their counterparts, will mark President Macron's first visit to the UK as President.

While Summits in previous years have focussed on defence and security, foreign policy and nuclear energy, the 2018 Summit will be broadened to cover the full spectrum of the UK-France bilateral relationship including prosperity, innovation, science and education.

Hundreds of thousands of British citizens live in France while hundreds of thousands of French nationals have chosen to make the UK their home. And the two countries share £71 billion in trade, making France the UK's third largest trading partner.

The Summit today will reflect the broadness of the UK-France relationship, with wide-ranging discussions also expected to focus on how the two countries can work together to address the challenges and seize the opportunities presented by new technologies.

Ministers will also discuss ways in which the existing deep linguistic and cultural ties between the UK and France can be strengthened through pupil exchanges and shared education and cultural initiatives.

As well as attending the Summit the Prime Minister and President are expected to have a private lunch and attend a reception at the Victoria and Albert Museum in the evening.

The Prime Minister said:

Today's Summit will underline that we remain committed to defending our people and upholding our values as liberal democracies in the face of any threat, whether at home or abroad.

But our friendship has always gone far beyond defence and security and the scope of today's discussions represents its broad and unique nature.

And while this Summit takes place as the UK prepares to leave the EU, this does not mean that the UK is leaving Europe.

What is clear from the discussions we will have today is that a strong relationship between our two countries is in the UK, France and Europe's interests, both now and into the future.

[Votes tonight show Gov won't get an easy ride on the EU Withdrawal Bill](#)

A Lib Dem amendment that would have forced the Government to publish impact assessments of either an agreement or no deal before a meaningful vote on the deal in Parliament has received cross-party support in a vote today.

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Author:

[Speech by Vice-President Jyrki Katainen at the press conference on the European Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy](#)

Thank you very much Frans.

This is a fascinating piece of our job – creating new markets and new opportunities, which will make our economies and societies more sustainable. Both in economic terms and environmental terms.

The Plastics Strategy is part of our Circular Economy Strategy. In the Circular Economy both words count. Without economic logic there is no Circular Economy. Without circulation our economy is not sustainable. That is why our aim with the Plastics Strategy is to create a Single Market – a true

Single Market – for plastic waste. Especially for plastic packaging waste.

In my view, we have an interesting habit of dealing with our plastic waste at the moment. We produce 26 million tonnes of plastic waste per year. And how do we deal with this?

We mostly export. So we export our plastic waste to mostly Asian countries. This does not make any sense in economic or sustainability terms. So we are throwing away 95% of the value of plastic packages and only 5% is retained in our economy. The measures we propose this time are not legislative proposals yet, but may become ones later.

Our vision is to create true economic logic to recycling plastic waste, because we have to improve both supply and demand. In this regard, let me underline the proposed revision of essential requirements for placing packaging on the EU market. There are several elements that we have to look at. In addition to the overall revision of this legislation, we are also ready to look at the opportunities to extend producer responsibility and determine whether this is a good approach. We will also look at the economic incentives to reward more sustainable design choices of plastic.

If you remember, roughly speaking a month ago, co-legislators approved our proposal which stated there should be a 55% legal target for the recycling of plastic waste. This strategy is not changing this, but what we want to do is to ensure that by 2030 all plastic packaging must be fit to be recycled. In other terms, all useful plastic packaging like cheese or ham packages must be recyclable. So if we manage to do things right, there is a market which can help us exceed the 55% legal target.

Another issue we must address is the current lack of demand for recycled plastic. There are many reasons why demand is not as good as it could be. The main issue is that those who use plastic do not have certainty of the quality of recycled plastic. For this reason we have to create quality standards. Quality standards give guarantees for material users of the quality of the material they are using.

We are also ready to explore opportunities to set some fiscal measures to improve plastic recycling and the prevention of plastic waste. It is sometimes easier to say than do, but we are exploring the opportunities to find well-functioning fiscal incentives. Furthermore, we are also ready to finance or increase financing for new innovations in recyclability and new oil-free raw materials. Horizon 2020 has already allocated 250 million Euros for this kind of innovative work and we have decided to increase the ceiling with additional 100 million by 2020. The post 2020 EU budget, of course, will be also crucial in this regard.

We already have alternative raw materials like bio-based raw materials to produce plastic but all biodegradable plastics do not function in the way we think they do. For instance, if you try to compost some of those bio-degradable plastics, they degrade only in certain circumstances and under certain conditions. So you cannot, for instance, throw these products into your backyard compost. That is why we need quality standards for

biodegradable plastics, because if you mix biodegradable plastics with oil-based plastics, it can destroy the whole recycling process as they are two completely different products.

I will stop here, but I find this to be very fascinating work. Through our Plastics Strategy we are both addressing sustainability targets and creating a new economy for Europeans.

Thank you.

Media accreditation for the informal meeting of heads of state or government on 23 February 2018

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RBS confirm rural customers will lose access to banking

Today, Les Matheson, Chief Executive, Personal & Business Banking for RBS appeared before the Westminster Scottish Affairs committee.

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