

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.

[News story: New stealth fighter jet 'takes off'](#)

At an event held at the Institute for Engineering and Technology, the Defence Secretary was joined by MPs and journalists to see what it is like to fly and land the pioneering fighter jet which will protect British lives around the world.

The global F-35 programme will support 20,000 UK jobs over the 30 year production period and already the programme has generated over £9 billion for UK industry. The cockpit demonstrator gave the Defence Secretary a feel for flying the new state-of-the-art stealth aircraft, allowing him to practice landing and taking off from the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth.

After flying the jet demonstrator, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today demonstrates that we are investing in our brave Armed Forces by making sure they have the very best equipment, securing tens of thousands of British manufacturing and engineering jobs, and ensuring Britain will always play a leading role in making the world a safer place.

These pioneering stealth jets will protect British lives as we face intensifying and evolving threats at home and abroad.

The F-35 is the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in our history, and will defend this country from terrorists, collect crucial intelligence, and safeguard our national interests from those who seek to do us harm.

The Defence Secretary was guided through the flight by Squadron Leader Andy Edgell and Lieutenant Commander Adam Hogg, two of the UK's F-35 pilots putting the aircraft through its paces over in the United States. Alongside

its short take-off and vertical landing capability, the F-35B's unique combination of stealth, cutting-edge radar, sensor technology, and electronic warfare systems provide world-beating capability of a fifth-generation fighter.

The UK currently has 14 F-35s based in the US, operated by around 150 UK personnel. These aircraft will arrive in the UK later this year at RAF Marham and initial flight trials will take place from the UK's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, in autumn off the coast of the US.

During his visit to the cockpit demonstrator, the Defence Secretary also met with representatives from some of the 500 UK companies who are in the F-35 supply chain. UK industry will provide approximately 15% of each F-35 to be built and, with more than 3,000 aircraft projected, the programme will support 20,000 UK jobs over the 30 year production phase.

Lockheed Martin UK Chief Executive Peter Ruddock said:

To date, the F-35 programme has generated \$12.9 billion (pounds figure) in contracts for British suppliers and that investment will grow as we ramp up towards full rate production. The F-35 will provide the UK Armed Forces with a game-changing capability that will allow the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force to project power around the world for decades to come.

Operated jointly by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, the F-35 Lightning jets will fly from both land bases and the UK's new aircraft carriers. The programme is on target to achieve Initial Operating Capability (IOC) by December 2018, meaning that UK F-35s will be able to operate from land bases from this point.

Following successful trials on the land based ski-ramp design, which is featured on the UK flagship carrier, and with RAF Marham runway infrastructure now complete as part of a £250m major investment programme, the UK has made significant progress over the last year in preparation for the F-35 arrival later this year.

[News story: Defence Secretary hosts Qatari counterpart at historic Horse Guards](#)

The Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and his Qatari counterpart, His Excellency Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah, have reaffirmed the important

long-term relationship between the UK and Qatar during a meeting in London.

The visit follows the Defence Secretary's trip to Qatar last December, where he signed a [£6bn deal](#) for Typhoon jets and missiles, supporting thousands of British jobs at BAE Systems.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Qatar is a vital partner in the fight against Daesh, hosting the headquarters of the coalition air campaign which is still coordinating strikes on targets in Syria every day.

Our two countries face the same threats from violent extremism and a mutual interest in supporting stability in the region, which will deliver security at home.

The visit to London focussed on defence and security cooperation between the UK and Qatar ahead of the 2022 World Cup, which is being hosted by Qatar, and lessons learned from the military support to the London 2012 Olympics. In addition to the Defence Secretary, Al-Attiyah also met with Security Minister Ben Wallace and the Deputy National Security Advisor Paddy McGuinness. His Excellency also inspected the men and horses of the Blues and Royals at the Army's historic London Headquarters at Horse Guards Parade.

[News story: War disablement pension rates 2018](#)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood) has announced the new rates of war pensions and allowances proposed from April 2018 are set out in the [War disablement pension 2018 rates document](#). The annual uprating of war pensions and allowances for 2018 will take place from the week beginning 9 April. Rates for 2018 are increasing by 3.0% in line with the September 2017 consumer prices index.

[Press release: Girls' education to be central pillar of UK foreign,](#)

development and defence policy

Updated: Added translation

Championing girls' education to promote global stability will be at the heart of UK foreign, development and defence policy to positively transform the lives of women and girls in conflict settings, senior ministers have agreed.

At an event today (16 January) at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt, Minister of State for the FCO and the PM's Special representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon and Defence Minister Mark Lancaster will launch the [UK's fourth national action plan \(NAP\) on women, peace and security](#). The plan sets out how the UK will support women in conflict zones around the world to play an active role in ensuring peace and security in their communities.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

From Somalia to Syria, and from Burma and Afghanistan, women have been instrumental in the development of the UK's national action plan on women, peace and security.

It's a sad truth that women suffer disproportionately all around the world during times of crisis. It's essential to harness the huge potential of the next generation to work towards a more secure, more prosperous future. We know that women can be agents of change which is why DFID is placing women at the very heart of its peace, security, education, and humanitarian programmes.

Minister of State for the FCO and the Prime Minister's Special representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Conflict affects whole communities, but women and children are often the worst affected.

This year the Foreign Secretary and I will focus on ensuring that girls in the poorest countries in the world receive at least 12 years of quality education because this is the single most powerful spur to development and progress.

Without question women must have a seat at the table. We know that when women and girls participate in political processes, conflict resolution and mediation their contribution helps to build a more sustainable peace.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Protecting human rights goes to the very heart of who we are as a nation, and our Armed Forces are leaders in this on an international level.

Our national action plan sets out to create a better future for women across the globe: in which there is zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, and in which women and men make a full contribution to the peace and security of all.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict and crisis and they are part of the solution. For example, evidence shows that when women participate meaningfully in peace agreements they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.

This NAP sets a bold new direction, putting women and girls at the heart of Britain's work to prevent and resolve conflict for the next five years.

Three new countries have been added to the plan Nigeria, South Sudan, Iraq in addition to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Burma and Afghanistan. The NAP sets out that to build sustainable and lasting peace and create stable societies, women around the world must be able to participate in peace processes and peacekeeping missions.

Read the new [national action plan](#).

Notes to editors

- the NAP will focus on 7 strategic outcomes where the UK can really make a difference (decision making; peacekeeping; gender-based violence; humanitarian response; security and justice; preventing and countering violence extremism; and UK capabilities) which are linked to the 4 pillars of Women, Peace and Security (prevention, participation, protection, relief and recovery)
- the NAP is part of the UK government's wider efforts on gender equality, which includes investing in teachers to provide quality education – making sure that children aren't just in school but are learning the foundational skills they need for work and life
- the Ministry of Defence has been training and mentoring thousands of African, Kurdish and Iraqi forces on combatting sexual violence in conflict situations

- through the NAP the UK will tackle violence against women and girls, and will ensure security and justice actors are held accountable to all the populations they serve including women. The UK support is also helping to drive up women's political participation in some of the most challenging contexts across the world
- as part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, DFID's work is designed to meet the needs of women and girls and insist partners engage with women at all stages of design and delivery
- UK aid for the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh for example is helping provide: access to female bathing cubicles and sanitary items for more than 35,000 girls and women; counselling and psychological support for over 10,000 women suffering from the trauma of war and over 2,000 survivors of sexual violence; and medical help for over 50,000 pregnant women to give birth safely.