

Defence Secretary visits Kenya and Somalia to discuss Al Shabaab

The Defence Secretary has signed a refreshed security cooperation agreement following high-level talks with Dr Fred Matiang'i, Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for the Interior, and Dr Monica Juma, Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Defence, in Nairobi this week.

The deal commits the UK and Kenya to deepening cooperation to combat shared threats such as the terrorist group Al Shabaab, cybercrime and human trafficking, and will promote regional stability. It will see the two nations meet regularly to share information on terror groups, target their backers with financial sanctions and undermine their recruitment efforts.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Kenya has long been the UK's defence partner of choice in East Africa. There are over 200 British personnel based here, and the UK Armed Forces are determined to invest further in those bilateral bonds.

Both our nations face shared threats, from violent extremism to organised crime. The security agreement we have signed will allow us to deepen our relationship and tackle regional defence issues as partners.

The signing comes as the Ministry of Defence works towards the publication of the Integrated Review later in the year, which will look to strengthen Britain's security and intelligence cooperation with key allies, allowing us to work together to identify and respond quickly to future threats.

During his visit to Kenya this week, Mr Wallace visited troops at the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK), a vital hub where UK soldiers prepare for operations around the globe.

The UK currently has around 230 military personnel based permanently in Kenya, most of them at BATUK, with thousands more visiting the country every year to take part in joint exercises. Over the past two years, the British Army and the Kenyan Defence Force have conducted 10 joint training exercises there, involving around 1,500 Kenyan troops and 10,000 British troops.

The UK is committed to security in Kenya, an important economic partner with strong links to the UK. The UK is the largest cumulative investor in the East African nation, with bilateral trade totalling over £1.4 billion in 2019. Last month Kenya signed a trade deal with the UK to deepen this relationship.

During his visit to East Africa the Defence Secretary also travelled to Mogadishu, Somalia, where he met President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo to

reaffirm the UK's commitment to helping the government build up its armed forces to combat terror groups like Al Shabaab. The British Army has over 50 personnel based in the country, and recently trained the 500th Somali soldier in basic infantry skills, with plans to train up to another 600 in 2021.