

News story: UK and France increase security cooperation in the Channel

Updated: Minor amends to text.

The Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, and his French counterpart, Florence Parly, have reaffirmed the strength of British-French defence ties at a meeting at the historic Admiralty House today.

Following an inspection of a Guard of Honour at Horse Guards Parade, the Defence Secretary and the French Minister of the Armed Forces signed an agreement to increase British and French co-operation on countering terrorism and illegal migration in the Channel, one of the busiest maritime highways in the world.

Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, said:

As we leave the European Union we will continue our relationship with our European allies and a vital part of this will be through our defence relationship.

The Channel is of huge importance to both our countries and this new agreement demonstrates our commitment to work with international partners to help tackle the threat of piracy and terrorism around the globe and protect our people at home. The United Kingdom will always do what is necessary to protect ourselves and will work with our allies, like France, to achieve this.

The agreement builds on existing maritime cooperation between the Royal Navy and French Navy, which includes joint exercises and intelligence-sharing. It will ensure both countries use the most modern technologies and share knowledge, to help identify suspicious activities and conduct maritime security operations.

The meeting came ahead of the next [UK-France Summit](#) in the new year, which will further strengthen the UK and France's Defence cooperation under the [Lancaster House Treaty](#).

News story: The British Army combat

the illegal trade in wildlife by partnering with African parks and the Malawian Department of National Parks and Wildlife

The illegal trade in wildlife is estimated to be worth between £7 -17 billion a year.

Such is the scale of this criminal industry that it is of international concern.

Often linked to other serious organised crime, the illegal trade in wildlife impacts on much more than the existence of many species already on the brink of extinction, undermining governance and the rule of law.

Tackling this deplorable trade is a priority for the UK government, and the reason why the UK Government is holding the illegal wildlife trade conference in London next year. Working with Rangers, the British Army's soldiers has already had an impact, reducing the number of poachers entering Liwonde National Park.

Minister for the Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster said:

The illegal trade in wildlife significantly damages the ecologies and economies of many African countries, and we are determined to help defeat this problem. British soldiers have had a real impact in helping to counter poaching. Following this, the UK Government will now look at what more can be done to support the affected countries.

The Ranger training is just one example of the UK Government's wider commitment to tackling the effects of the illegal trade in wildlife.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is funding this counter-poaching partnership project with the African Parks' Rangers in Liwonde National Park. Its aim is to reduce the number of poaching incidents by providing training in proven interception tracking tactics, which will develop the rangers' counter-poaching skills.

Defra has also announced plans to impose a ban on ivory sales to help bring an end to the poaching of elephants. The proposals will protect elephants and help combat poaching by removing opportunities for criminals to trade illegally-poached ivory.

The Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, said:

The decline in rhinos, elephants and countless other species shames our generation and the need for radical and robust action to protect these treasured species is beyond dispute.

That is why we are funding training missions of this kind around the world and we have announced plans to ban the sale of ivory, which should never be seen as a commodity for financial gain or a status symbol.

These plans will put the UK front and centre of global efforts to end poaching and the insidious trade in ivory.

The charity Tusk began this project with Defra, working alongside the conservation non-profit African Parks, which has managed Liwonde National Park in partnership with Malawi's Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) since 2015.

Charlie Mayhew, Chief Executive of Tusk said:

Poaching is one of the greatest and most immediate threats to Africa's elephant, rhino and countless other species, but at Tusk we have seen that it is possible to overcome it through a combination of well-trained rangers, information gathering and analysis, and a strong level of local community support.

The British Army's involvement will have a game-changing impact in the project areas, creating a very strong deterrent to poaching and good relations with the local communities. We've been delighted to play our role in making this engagement a success.

The project got underway this summer.

Soldiers were selected from a range of units across the British Army. They were chosen based on their natural aptitude for tracking and flair for mentoring.

As a result, the make-up of the team boasted a wide range of skills and experiences including infantry, armored vehicle driving and engineering abilities.

For one member of the team, British Army Sergeant Kachoka Kingly, who grew up in the area, the deployment had a very special significance as he returns home to Malawi.

Sergeant Kachoka Kingly said:

As a local boy, this means a lot to me and my community. This is my home, and to be given the opportunity to come back and protect my country's natural treasures, I feel like a hero. Not only have I

been able to support the team with my tracking skills, it has been beneficial to the whole team to have me on board, as a translator and cultural advisor.

The soldiers worked side by side with teams from African Parks and the Malawian Department of National Parks and Wildlife to mentor the Rangers.

The joint-training combined elements of information analysis, tracking, bushcraft and infantry skills, all aimed at the successful interception of the poacher.

This partnership allowed both parties to hone and develop their skills resulting in a much more effective, agile force capable of tracking both people and animals over a long distance. The UK soldiers have been able to learn and develop their own tracking skills, something the team do not get to practice in such terrain very often.

The UK Operational Commander of the deployment, Major Tony Viney, described the three-man tracking groups as 'ghosts in the park.' Leaving a minimal trace on the ground and being able to cover vast areas, the patrols are a strong deterrent to any poacher considering entering the park.

Comp Sargent Major Francis Condron said:

Tracking is a fascinating skill, and the rangers are so enthusiastic and happy to share their experience.

It is such a useful skill to have, and now having this knowledge I think I'll be able to use it in other situations as a useful survival skill, both with the Army and at home. I have already taught my kids the basics.

Working alongside the British soldiers the Rangers have improved their patrol techniques to better use their equipment and terrain, this includes lengthening their daily patrols and reducing the weight of their equipment by 30% so they can be more agile.

With 548 km² of woodland and dry savannah to cover, the shift to these long-range patrols has paid off. During the three-month period, the teams removed 362 snare traps, two gin traps and more than 700 meters of illegal fishing nets the park.

There is no doubt that the joint team approach has made a positive impact on counter-poaching in Liwonde National Park. The Rangers made 11 arrests, all of which have led to convictions, and nine poacher camps have been destroyed.

Since 2015, African Parks has held six different courses in Liwonde training a total of 166 rangers from across six of the parks it manages, with a vision to securing habitat and combatting poaching. Significant investments have been made in up-skilling Rangers, providing them with the needed equipment

and motivating them. The British Military deployment is part of this broader sustained initiative.

These developments are having a major impact on poaching, not only through the delivery of justice but also by deterring poachers from committing such crimes in the first place.

[News story: New Defence Secretary recognises Scots defence role](#)

Gavin Williamson heard how Scots personnel and units support UK and allied operations in Iraq, South Sudan, Cyprus and the Gulf, contribute to the UK counter terrorism effort, and stand by to assist the Scottish Government and local authorities during civil emergencies, such as flooding.

Williamson met with Scotland's three most senior military officers – the Flag Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland Rear Admiral John Weale; General Officer Scotland, Major General Bob Bruce; Air Officer Scotland, Air Vice-Marshal Ross Paterson – during a visit to Dreghorn Barracks, Edinburgh.

The Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, said:

Scotland's military personnel and industrial base play a crucial role in keeping all of the people of the United Kingdom safe.

By 2020 Scotland will be home to the entire Submarine Service, an Army Infantry Brigade, the RAF's Quick Reaction Alert interceptors and submarine hunting Maritime Patrol Aircraft. Scotland is also the ideal base for crucial Defence operations and UK and Allied training requirements.

The MOD has around 10,000 sailors, soldiers and air personnel living permanently in Scotland, supported by 8,000 reservists and civilians.

Scottish industry benefits from Defence spending £1.5bn with it each year, supporting 9,750 private sector jobs in Scotland.

The Defence Board confirmed in February 2017, that £1.7 billion would be invested to upgrade Scottish military bases over the next decade.

News story: Queen to commission namesake aircraft carrier in just three weeks, Defence Secretary announces on flight-deck

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced the news as he made his first landing onto the deck of the carrier today, while she was at sea sailing around the South Coast of England.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

In a world of intensifying global threats, this magnificent ship will be a leading force fighting to protect the values of the UK and our allies. It's an honour to visit her at sea, and to meet such a passionate crew. I'm sure Her Majesty will be similarly impressed at next month's historic ceremony for the nation's new flagship, which proudly bears her name.



Her Majesty the Queen attending the Naming Ceremony for the new aircraft carrier in 2014.

The carrier is currently making great progress through her sea trials and

will return to her home port in Portsmouth in a few weeks' time. Her Majesty the Queen will then visit the ship in Portsmouth on 7 December for the formal commissioning ceremony.

Her Majesty will be joined by a host of dignitaries from the Royal Family, Government and the military, before saying a few words as Lady Sponsor. The commissioning warrant will then be read and the White Ensign raised, symbolising the acceptance of HMS Queen Elizabeth into Her Majesty's fleet.

It will be the first time Her Majesty the Queen has visited the UK's new flagship since [she formally named her in Rosyth](#), Scotland in July 2014. Since then the ship has been completed, sailed into her home dock of Portsmouth for the first time and is now continuing her sea trials. Her identical sister ship, HMS Prince of Wales, has also been formally named and is now structurally complete.



HMS Queen Elizabeth is currently on sea trials off the south coast of England.

The Defence Secretary took a Merlin helicopter from RAF Northolt and landed on the flight-deck this morning, where he met the ship's company, from the Captain Jerry Kyd to the most junior ranks.

Captain Jerry Kyd said:

I was delighted to be able to welcome the Defence Secretary on board HMS Queen Elizabeth at what is a very exciting time for the ship, for the Royal Navy, and for Defence as we move into the final

phase of our sea trials.

We spoke about the progress made on our trials so far and the exciting future ahead as the UK regenerates its strike carrier capability.

We're glad the Defence Secretary took the time to visit us and really get under the skin of this aircraft carrier and see for himself the enormous potential of this ship that will be deployed across the globe for the next half century.

Both of the UK's aircraft carriers are being delivered by the Aircraft Carrier Alliance, a unique partnering relationship between industry and the UK Ministry of Defence.

[News story: UK extends support to peacekeeping in South Sudan](#)

Updated: Image

Defence Minister Lord Howe made the announcement at the 2017 United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in Vancouver.

At the event, co-hosted by the UK and partners, which comes one year on from the meeting held in London, Lord Howe announced that the UK is extending its deployment of some 300 British Army engineers to the UN Mission in South Sudan for an additional year, until April 2020.

Defence Minister, Lord Howe, said:

We remain unwaveringly committed to international peace and security and this extension is a demonstration of that.

It's all part of the UK's efforts to deliver stability worldwide, which will help tackle issues like terrorism and mass migration, keeping us safe at home as well as improving lives internationally.

The UK is also cooperating closely with Vietnam's first UN troop deployment, as they prepare to take over the running of a field hospital in South Sudan from the UK next year.

The announcements came at the ministerial where representatives from around 80 countries and five international organisations met with the aim of

improving the conduct of peacekeeping, including training, equipment, leadership and rapid response capability.

The defence ministerial built on the momentum of the 2016 conference in London, where the '3Ps of peacekeeping reform' agenda was launched, focusing on planning, pledges and performance.

Reflecting this year's additional focus on partnerships, Lord Howe also signed a statement of intent with Bangladesh to sell two RAF C130J transport aircraft to the Bangladeshi Air Force, with the revenue being reinvested back into UK defence. The C130Js will help Bangladesh play a leading role in UN Peacekeeping Missions in the coming years.

The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Gordon Messenger, also joined with representatives from Canada and Bangladesh to launch the Women, Peace and Security Chiefs of Defence Network, to promote the integration of gender perspectives into armed forces and peacekeeping.