UK AND FRANCE BEGIN BUILD OF UNMANNED MINE CLEARANCE CRAFT

On 20 October in Paris, the UK Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin and her French counterpart, Laurent Collet-Billon, launched the next phase of a £117 million joint Maritime Mine Counter Measures (MMCM) programme.

Working with French allies, the MMCM programme will develop advanced maritime mine warfare capability: a capability which will keep the UK and France at the forefront of autonomous systems technology. This development and deployment of unmanned mine clearance vehicle will help keep personnel safe in challenging maritime environments.

The Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said: ‘This innovative project further strengthens the UK-French defence relationship and supports cutting edge research on both sides of the Channel. The development of advanced autonomous mine counter measures capability will safeguard our strategic interests, secure around 150 jobs in the UK supply chain, and protect our brave and skilled personnel.’

The MMCM programme builds on the commitment of the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the UK and France in order to improve collective defence capability within Europe and NATO.

At the launch of the scheme on 20 October Laurent Collet-Billon, Délégué Général pour l’Armement commented: ‘Harriett Baldwin, Minister for Defence Procurement, and I launched today the construction phase of the MMCM project, cornerstone of France’s Système de lutte anti-mines future (SLAMF) programme. It is a step further in the accomplishment of the strategy initiated since the Lancaster House Summit in 2010 aimed at strengthening the effectiveness and operational interoperability of our mine warfare systems, and to support the excellence of the Franco-British industrial base.’

Such cooperation allows the UK and France to share costs, build expertise, and increase the ability of both nation’s Armed Forces to work together effectively and flexibly. A prototype will be delivered to each navy in 2019, it is understood.

Led by Thales, this joint programme draws on the expertise of companies from both sides of the English Channel to the benefit of both France and the United Kingdom. Work will be shared between the two nations’ supply chains, as will the considerable export opportunities arising from such innovative technology.
This programme will secure around 150 jobs across the UK, including Somerset, Manchester and Fareham in Hampshire. Delivery of the programme will also open up opportunities for further collaboration on equipment and operations, supporting the security and prosperity of both nations.

In the UK the Innovation Initiative of the Ministry of Defence will drive the development of advanced technology and create a culture that is innovative by instinct and international in scope. This commitment to innovation was on display recently at the Unmanned Warrior exercise in Scotland, during which 40 companies and organisations demonstrated the latest unmanned systems technology. This drive for international innovation will be further strengthened by UK-French collaboration on MMCM. The success of the programme’s design phase is testament to the benefits of such a cooperative approach.

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