
THERESA MAY: BRITAIN COMMITTED TO DEFENCE OF EUROPE

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The UK is unconditionally committed to the defence and security of Europe, Prime Minister Theresa May has said.

She was speaking to British troops based in northern Estonia with Nato, ahead of an EU summit in the capital Tallinn.

Mrs May hopes to build a new security partnership with Brussels and offer UK expertise in combating cyber threats as Brexit preparations continue.

She will meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the sidelines of the talks.

Some 800 troops have been in Tapa since April, alongside Estonian and French forces, as part of a Nato effort to reassure eastern European nations fearful of Russia's increasing assertiveness.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Estonian Prime Minister Juri Ratas joined Mrs May in visiting the troops, who will be joined by forces from Denmark in the new year.

Addressing the troops, Mrs May said: "While we are leaving the European Union, as I have said many times, we are not leaving Europe so the United Kingdom is unconditionally committed to maintaining Europe's security.

"Russia's continued aggression represents a growing danger to our friends here in Estonia as well as Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and our response must be clear and unequivocal.

"By stepping up Nato's deterrence and defence posture you are showing that we are equipped to respond to any threat that we face. You are showing that we are ready to do so."

'Big gaps'

Later, she will make it clear to EU leaders that the UK is ready to continue contributing troops, equipment, expertise and money to EU operations, and to align foreign policy with Brussels where appropriate.

Speaking ahead of her visit, Mrs May said the threats Europeans face - from terrorism to cyber-crime and illegal immigration - are "increasing in their scale and complexity".

"With the largest defence budget in Europe, a far-reaching diplomatic network, world-class security, intelligence and law enforcement services, and our position at the heart of Nato, the UK's

role in Europe's defence has never been more vital," she said.

"As we prepare for Brexit, I want to build a bold, new security partnership with the EU."

On Thursday, Brexit Secretary David Davis said "decisive steps forward" had been made in the latest round of UK-EU talks.

Mr Davis was speaking at the end of the first talks since Theresa May's speech in Italy last week, in which she said the UK wanted a two-year transition.

But EU negotiator Michel Barnier said there were still "big gaps" on some issues, adding that it could take "weeks or months" before the two sides could agree to move to the next stage of talks.

Kaynak/Source: