Dear James,

Thank you for your letter of 29th April to the Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Defence, requesting an update on collaboration with France over the WATCHKEEPER and MALE (Medium-Altitude Long Endurance) Unmanned Air Systems (UAS), to which I am replying on his behalf.

I attach a short, unclassified briefing note which explains the current position with regard to UK/French co-operation on these projects.

Yours,

PHILIP DUNNE MP

The Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
28 May 13

MSU 4.8.1.2

BRIEFING NOTE TO HCDC ON UAS COLLABORATION WITH FRANCE

WATCHKEEPER UAS

1. WATCHKEEPER, a tactical UAS, is the UK MOD’s largest current UAS procurement programme and will provide operational commanders with unmanned day/night all weather capability to detect and track targets without the need to deploy troops into potentially sensitive areas.

2. At the 2012 Summit, the UK and France agreed to examine co-operation opportunities for WATCHKEEPER and an initial study concluded that there was potential for mutual benefit as a result of cooperating on the system. The UK agreed to support France to conduct an operational assessment of the WATCHKEEPER system in France, to help inform their investment decision for a tactical UAS. In order to facilitate the assessment, the UK MOD established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide access to the WATCHKEEPER training facility and the loan of UK MOD equipment to enable live flying in France. The Watchkeeper MOU was signed by Defence Ministers on the 24th July 2012.

3. A total of 15 French Army students completed the 6-week classroom element of their Training at the WATCHKEEPER Training Facility, Larkhill, during November-December 2012. The classroom training prepared them for their live flying training which took place at West Wales Airport during January-March 2013. The French Armed Forces are currently undertaking operational assessment trials of the WATCHKEEPER system at the Istres test range in France, due to complete this summer.

4. The UK will continue to support the Anglo-French Defence and Security treaty through all of its cooperative equipment programmes, such as WATCHKEEPER.

MALE (Medium Altitude Long Endurance) UAS

5. The UK has an important future capability requirement for deep and persistent armed Intelligence Surveillance Target Acquisition Reconnaissance (ISTAR) from 2018 to 2030. This capability, known as Scavenger, is currently planned to be met by a MALE UAS. A MALE UAS operates at approx 20,000ft and is capable of conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance across a very wide area; it also has the potential to be armed and therefore deliver a solution to meet the Scavenger requirement.

6. At the UK/France Summit in November 2010, an announcement was made for the intent to cooperate with France on a joint assessment programme for a MALE UAS. However, following the French election in 2012, a re-evaluation of options and budgets by both the UK and France led to a joint decision not to sign the supporting MALE UAS MOU to commence an 18-month jointly funded Risk Reduction Phase.
This meant that the subsequent supporting contract with BAE Systems and Dassault was not placed.

7. The MOD is still considering acquisition options from around the globe for a MALE UAS capability to satisfy its Scavenger requirement. At this stage the UK has not ruled out any possibilities and potential opportunities remain for UK and France to co-operate on this in the future.