

News story: Defence Minister visits UK flagship of NATO maritime group in Georgia

Armed Forces Minister Mark Lancaster visited Royal Navy Type 45 destroyer HMS Duncan and other NATO warships in the Black Sea on a visit to Georgia this week. During the two-day trip (16-18 May) the Minister also discussed regional defence and security issues with Georgian government officials.

HMS Duncan is the flagship of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 which is currently on deployment to the Black Seas alongside warships from eight other NATO nations, providing a tangible demonstration of the UK's commitment to Black Sea security and Georgia's aspirations for NATO and EU integration. The British Commander of the NATO Maritime Group, Commodore Mike Utley, and HMS Duncan's Captain, Commander Eleanor Stacks, welcomed the Minister aboard where he was given a tour of the ship and met with the Ship's Company.

Armed Forces Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Our security and defence relationship with Georgia is more vital now than ever. In the face of changing threats, it is essential that we work together with friendly nations that share our interests and values.

HMS Duncan's Commanding Officer Commander Eleanor Stacks said:

Showing the Minister for the Armed Forces around the ship and him meeting personnel embarked was a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate the work we do as part of a NATO deployment and the impact we have as within the alliance's collective defence measures.

Mark Lancaster thanked the personnel on board and acknowledged the sacrifice they make being away from their families whilst in support of the Alliance. The previous week, HMS Duncan had conducted a joint exercise with an RAF Typhoon, based in Romania as part of NATO's enhanced Air Policing mission, and two Romanian Air Force MIG21s, designed to test the reaction and agility of NATO forces in a crisis scenario.

In addition to discussing regional defence and security issues with officials from the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence, the visit provided an opportunity for the Minister to thank the Georgian Government and people for their support following the poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury in March. Georgia was among 28 nations to expel Russian diplomats following the incident, standing shoulder to shoulder with the

international community's condemnation of the horrific attack.