

News story: Defence Secretary reaffirms leadership in NATO on Washington visit

During his first meeting with US Secretary for Defense James Mattis in the American capital, the Defence Secretary said Britain had shown leadership across the alliance and has helped encourage an increase of more than £40bn of defence investment by NATO states.

The UK has consistently met NATO's 2% of GDP spending target, Sir Michael said in Washington, and has lead by pressing allies to increase their own fiscal commitment. In the past year NATO countries have committed around £43bn more towards collective defence, at a time when a large number of assurance and deterrence activity is taking place across NATO's eastern European flank.

He set out how the threats to security are growing and changing, but reflected on the fact that since his visit to Washington in 2015 the UK has delivered by committing to 2%, sailed her first Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carrier and sent thousands of personnel on NATO exercises and deployments by land, sea and air.

Sir Michael said:

Today our nations are facing a wave of multiple, concurrent, diverse global threats. From Islamist extremism, Russian state aggression, sponsors of terror and North Korea testing nuclear bombs and firing off missiles, to the insidious spread of misinformation and Wannacry like cyber attacks. Such events demand an international response, so we see Brexit as an opportunity not to step back from European defence but to step up to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security. In particular, we're bolstering our bonds with NATO, the cornerstone of our defence.

Sir Michael met Secretary Mattis in Brussels last week at the NATO Defence Ministerial meeting, where they discussed a range of security issues including Syria, where US jets struck in response to a chemical weapon attack. Sir Michael explained at the Pentagon how the UK is acting to protect the UK and allies from threats.

He said:

We're performing a pivotal role in the Counter-Daesh Coalition, attacking Daesh positions, training local forces, using our cyber capabilities to disrupt their activities, an overall contribution which is second only to the US.

And he discussed the impending fall of Mosul, a key location in Daesh's ill-fated, so-called caliphate.

He said:

It's striking to think that back then Daesh were closing in on the gates to Baghdad, yet now they are close to defeat in Mosul.