

News story: Defence Secretary steps up UK commitments to NATO

At a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers today, the Defence Secretary confirmed:

- The Royal Navy will take the lead of half of NATO's maritime forces for a year.
- Offensive cyber support to NATO operations.
- Increased UK support for advising the Afghan Government, and its defence and security forces.
- Strengthened cooperation on Maritime Patrol Aircraft.

The meeting also confirmed that Britain continues to meet its commitment of spending 2% of GDP on defence, as well as meeting the target of 20% defence spend on equipment and capabilities.

Leading NATO's maritime forces

HMS Duncan, a state of the art Type 45 Destroyer, will lead NATO's Standing Maritime Naval Group 2 (SNMG2), providing reassurance and deterrence in the Black Sea, as well as commanding NATO's counter migration activity in the Mediterranean. The naval force will also exercise together to improve the Alliance's readiness and ability to work together on operations, as well as conducting port visits in the region, including to Ukraine.

HMS Enterprise will also lead Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2 (SNMCMG2) from July this year. The Mine Countermeasures Group is a multinational, integrated maritime force, made up of vessels from a number of NATO countries. The group is mainly based in the Mediterranean and is capable of searching for and disposing of explosive ordnance. HMS Enterprise will be the flagship for the force, and will be joined by HMS Pembroke in the second half of 2017.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

As part of our leadership within the Alliance, we're stepping up our NATO commitments. Whether it's in the cyber domain, where I'm committing UK support to NATO operations, or on the high seas with HMS Duncan and HMS Enterprise leading half of the Alliance's maritime forces in the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Sea, Britain is playing its full part.

Strengthening cooperation on Maritime Patrol Aircraft

On the margins of today's meeting, Sir Michael signed a Statement of Intent on North Atlantic Maritime Patrol with his US and Norwegian counterparts. The

agreement enhances collaboration on each nation's P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft programmes and will provide NATO Allies with multiple benefits in the maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine areas.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The P-8A aircraft will play a vital role in protecting the UK's nuclear deterrent, the two new Queen Elizabeth Class carriers and supporting our NATO Allies.

By investing in these aircraft, as part of our £178 billion defence equipment programme, we're showing that we're serious in tackling the threats on NATO's North Atlantic flank.

And in stepping up our cooperation with the US and Norway on maritime patrol around our shores, we will help keep Britain safer and more secure.

Stepping up to counter terror around the world

The Defence Secretary also confirmed today that Britain is stepping up its support to Afghanistan, with around 85 extra service personnel to support NATO's mission in the country.

Britain has an enduring commitment to Afghanistan, and supporting the Government and the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces (ANDSF) helps to prevent the country from becoming a safe haven for terror.

The increase of UK personnel comes in response to a NATO request, which was made to all partner nations, for additional troops to support the Alliance's train, advise and assist mission in the country.

The additional troops will continue to work in non-combat roles mentoring the Afghan Army and Police, the Afghan Air Force, and will provide further support to the ANDSF in training and leadership development.

Underlining Britain's leadership within NATO, the uplift will add to the already significant contribution of 500 troops the UK already makes to NATO's Resolute Support Mission.

Endgame for Daesh in Mosul

Three years on since the start of the so-called caliphate was proclaimed in Mosul, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon underlined that Daesh faces its endgame in the city where it originally launched its ideological campaign of terror and violence.

Sir Michael said that the terrorist group faces irreversible momentum and

progress from local forces on the ground, and UK and Coalition aircraft in the skies. UK aircrew have now hit over 700 targets in support of operations to liberate Mosul since last year. In addition to operations over Mosul, the RAF has so far struck 69 targets in and around Raqqa in support of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) advancing on the city from the north, east and west.

With Daesh losing ground on two fronts in Mosul and Raqqa, around 70% of territory once controlled by the terror group in Iraq and 51% in Syria, has now been liberated. This amounts to over 4 million Iraqis and Syrians who have been freed from Daesh tyranny.