

News story: NATO must improve agility and spend, Defence Secretary urges

Sir Michael Fallon is pressing NATO members to step up defence spending during a two-day defence ministerial at NATO's HQ in Brussels, following his first meeting with US Defense Secretary James Mattis.

Reflecting the strength of the UK-US Defence relationship, Sir Michael was the first minister Secretary Mattis called after his appointment and their hour-long meeting at NATO's HQ was the first bilateral working session today.

During their recent phone call, shortly after Secretary Mattis' confirmation, both ministers agreed on the need for NATO to be more agile and responsive so it can respond faster to new threats including cyber and terrorism.

In July NATO confirmed that the UK meets the two per cent spending target, which includes a £178bn equipment plan and rising defence spending every year of this parliament.

The Defence Secretary spoke to fellow ministers to call for other states to spend both 2% overall and to spend 20% of that on new equipment to help tackle threats.

In his face-to-face meetings with Secretary Mattis Sir Michael reassured him that the UK stands shoulder to shoulder with the US in calling for NATO to be more agile to meet new threats in the fields of cyber warfare and counter terrorism.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

NATO has been a guarantee of mutual security for more than half a century. Britain is now calling for our partners to step up and share burdens on spending and help it become more agile in dealing with new threats including cyber and terrorism.

As leading player in the Alliance we recognise the importance of backing up our operational and exercise commitments with investment in new equipment to deal with threats to our security.

Sir Michael is discussing the UK's leadership in NATO. The UK's Enhanced Forward Presence deployment to Estonia is gathering momentum, seen this week in a 600-strong exercise in Sennelager in Germany which features British personnel from the Battle Group for 5 RIFLES. Hundreds of British troops including 5 RIFLES personnel from Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire have spent the last week exercising with four Challenger II tanks, Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicles and Jackals – alongside Estonian, French and Danish troops.

The deployment of 800 British personnel to Estonia under EFP is part of a

package of measures that the UK is leading in NATO this year. These include leading the land element of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force with 3,000 British troops ready to deploy rapidly to threats wherever they arise in the Alliance, and committing RAF Typhoon aircraft to the NATO Southern Air Policing mission to offer reassurance to in the Black Sea region.

Over the two-day ministerial, defence leaders will discuss issues such as protecting NATO's southern border, developing NATO's deterrence and defence posture, and strengthening the transatlantic bond.