

Defence Secretary visits British troops defending NATO's eastern flank in Estonia

News story

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace gave his personal thanks to British troops deployed in Estonia over the Christmas period, during a visit to the Baltic state.



Defence Secretary Ben Wallace and Estonian defence minister Jüri Luik have lunch with troops in Tapa

At Tapa base, the HQ of the UK's largest overseas deployment, Mr Wallace discussed with members of the 5 Rifles battlegroup the vital deterrence and defence they provide in Estonia as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP).

Members of the battlegroup also provided the Defence Secretary with a visual demonstration of the fearsome capability of the Challenger II battle tanks deployed on the mission.

The UK is the lead nation of the multinational NATO eFP Battlegroup in Estonia with over 900 British troops deployed alongside Danish and Estonian forces. In meetings with Estonia's Minister for Defence Jüri Luik, Prime Minister Jüri Ratas and parliamentarians of Estonia's National Defence Committee, the Defence Secretary reaffirmed that the United Kingdom would maintain its persistent presence in the country for as long as necessary.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

While we celebrate Christmas at home, over 6400 of our Armed Forces personnel will be working away from their families to protect the people of the United Kingdom and its interests.

So I was delighted to be able to pass on all our thanks to troops in Estonia. Their presence provides a concrete deterrence to an increasingly assertive Russia and is a demonstration of the United Kingdom's unwavering commitment to European security.

Both Mr Wallace and Mr Luik agreed that the UK and Estonia see eye-to-eye when it comes to identifying the threats to regional security and would continue to deepen a tight knit defence relationship that has grown in strength since the UK first took the lead of eFP in the country nearly four years ago.

As well as being trusted NATO Allies, the UK and Estonia are both members of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force and the Northern Group of north European nations. In addition to the Army's persistent presence, the RAF have deployed to Ämari air base in the north of the country for NATO Baltic Air Policing in 2016 and 2019. The UK also contributes around 150 personnel to the US-led NATO eFP battlegroup in Poland.

Our soldiers have fought side-by-side in Afghanistan and both are currently contributors to international efforts to bring security and stability to the Sahel region in Africa.

The strength of our defence relationship was also clear this July when the Ministry of Defence loaned four Jackal vehicles to the Estonian Defence Forces until next March for elite soldiers of the Estonian Armed Forces to use on their counter-terror deployment in Mali.

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