

News story: Defence Secretary praises personnel keeping Britain safe over Christmas

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson meets personnel from the Household Cavalry and Isiah the horse

Gavin Williamson met members of the Household Cavalry at Horse Guards in central London, as they make preparations for their ceremonial duties across the festive period.

As well as providing the Queen's Life Guard for the official entrance to the Royal Palaces, and at Horse Guards, the same regiment was mobilised on London's streets after this summer's Westminster Bridge terror attack in support of the Metropolitan Police.

The Defence Secretary toured their historic Whitehall home with Colonel Crispin Lockhart, Chief of Staff for London District, after witnessing troops preparing their horses for guard duty.

While duty continues at home, more than 5,000 Armed Forces personnel will be working around the globe to help keep Britain safe. UK troops are involved in 25 operations in 30 countries. Around 1,000 people are working to fight Daesh and train the local security forces from locations in Iraq and the wider Middle East, as well as from RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus. In the Caribbean, RFA Mounts Bay joins other Royal Navy warships deployed elsewhere over the festive period.

The Defence Secretary himself is due to travel to Poland shortly, where he will meet personnel on operations with NATO partners including the US. He said:

We live in a world where threats are constant and increasing, and that means we have to be professional, be dutiful and be committed. Our enemies do not go on holiday at Christmas so our Armed Forces remain vigilant. I am so grateful to the brave men and women of our Armed Forces for providing that commitment, working to keep us safe while so many of us relax over Christmas. From here in central London to the seas of the South Atlantic, thousands of our people are making a sacrifice which should be warmly recognised by all of us.

In addition to operations in the Middle East and in the Caribbean, soldiers, sailors and airmen are working in locations ranging from Estonia to east Africa, and since 1969 the UK has had submariners on patrol for every minute of every day, providing the UK's nuclear deterrent.

In the South Atlantic, over 1,000 personnel are stationed in the Falkland Islands, while in Afghanistan, troops from the Army and other services are training the Afghan National Security Forces.