

News story: UK side by side with Allies a year on from NATO deterrence deployment

Defence Secretary meets UK personnel in Tapa, Estonia. Crown copyright.

In his first visit to the Baltic ally, the Defence Secretary reaffirmed to the Estonian President and Defence Minister the UK's unwavering commitment to Euro-Atlantic security, a year after UK forces first arrived in country.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

For nearly 70 years, NATO has been the guarantee of mutual security. The threats and dangers we face are evolving, intensifying and increasingly challenging – our commitment to our Allies has seldom been more important.

I've seen first-hand the vital role our brave Armed Forces are playing on NATO's eastern border, standing shoulder to shoulder with our Allies to deter Russian aggression.

Nearly 2000 British troops, across two rotations, have led a multinational battlegroup in Estonia as part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) deployment since it officially began just under a year ago in April 2017.

In an address, alongside his Estonian counterpart, Defence Minister Jüri Luik, to the 800 British troops and their NATO colleagues, stationed there now Mr Williamson said this reflected Britain's global outlook and commitment to the defence of our friends and Allies across the Baltic region.

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Welsh are currently based in Tapa to enhance NATO's deterrence posture and the Defence Secretary confirmed that the 1st Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment will take over from them in June as the UK's enduring presence in Estonia continues.

The UK's battlegroup forms part of the wider NATO eFP, with four multinational battlegroups deployed across the Baltic States and Poland, led by the UK, US, Canada and Germany. The UK has a further 150 soldiers based in Poland, part of the US led battlegroup, and RAF Typhoons are due to deploy to Romania in May, patrolling the Black Sea skies.

In addition to the 800 personnel, the UK has committed more than 150 vehicles to support Estonia during this deployment, including Warrior infantry fighting vehicles and Challenger 2 tanks.

The Defence Secretary also held meetings in Tallinn with the President Kersti

Kaljulaid, Prime Minister Jüri Ratas and Defence Minister Jüri Luik.