

News story: UK's NATO Southern Air Policing Mission to begin in May

Sir Michael also confirmed that four Typhoons from Royal Air Force 3 (Fighter) Squadron will lead the deployment.

The Defence Secretary agreed the UK's air policing contribution during NATO defence ministerial talks in the autumn and confirmed the timing of the deployment and squadron name at the International Parliamentary Conference on National Security in London today.

The Typhoons from RAF Coningsby will be based at Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase in south east Romania for up to four months, working side-by-side with the Romanian Air Force to police the skies over the Black Sea.

Royal Air Force 3 (Fighter) Squadron has a long history. One hundred years ago it was a fighter scout unit assisting our forces in the trenches, in World War Two it was at the forefront of our air defences destroying nearly 300 V1 flying bomb. More recently it took tours of Sierra Leone and as part of Counter Daesh operations in Iraq and Syria.

The UK is the first nation to provide jets to this NATO mission, which forms part of the UK's increasing support to our Allies following the recent deployment of British troops to Estonia as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.

Secretary of State for Defence Sir Michael Fallon said:

The UK is stepping up its support for NATO's collective defence from the north to the south of the alliance. With this deployment, RAF planes will be ready to secure NATO airspace and provide reassurance to our allies in the Black Sea region.

During his speech the Defence Secretary addressed a range of national security issues, including cyber where the UK is investing its growing Defence budget in new cyber capabilities.

This comes as the UK's cyber capabilities are tested in exercises, including Information Warrior 2017, the Royal Navy's first ever large-scale cyber war games, designed to test new Artificial Intelligence able to speed up complex decision making, which starts this week.

Sir Michael also confirmed that £1.9 billion will be invested in developing cyber capabilities and skills across all Government departments, in addition to establishing the new National Cyber Security Centre, the Defence Cyber School at Shrivenham, and a Cyber Operations Centre at Corsham.

Sir Michael added:

Our military is among the best prepared in the world to tackle cyber threats – with capabilities and skills integrated into the Army, Royal Navy, and the RAF. But in such a dynamic environment we must continually test and enhance our skills.

We're interested not just in defensive but also in offensive cyber – those who threaten cyber-attacks against us need to know the risk they're running.

During the speech at Church House the Defence Secretary also paid tribute to those who lost their lives during last week's attack in Westminster.