

Prime Minister visits British troops in Estonia for Christmas

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will travel to Estonia today (Saturday 21 December) to celebrate Christmas with British troops stationed there.

The visit is a chance for the Prime Minister to personally thank servicemen and women for their service and make clear the Government's commitment to the armed forces.

The Prime Minister will serve Christmas lunch to the servicemen and women at the Tapa military base near Tallinn, and eat with them in the canteen.

Tapa is home to 850 British troops from the Queen's Royal Hussars who, alongside personnel from Estonia, France and Denmark, lead the NATO battlegroup.

This is the UK's largest operational deployment in Europe and forms part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in countries such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, to ensure the principle of collective defence can be upheld on the Alliance's eastern border.

The Prime Minister will meet troops from across the UK and tour the military base – including a hangar where he'll see tanks and other vehicles. He'll also have a bilateral with Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas.

The defence and security of the UK is a top priority for the Prime Minister. The UK is the biggest defence spender in Europe and makes a leading contribution to the NATO Readiness Initiative.

The Government is committed to continuing to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence, and next year we will spend an additional £1.9bn on the military budget.

Military personnel and veterans are at the heart of the Government's approach to defence. The Prime Minister has pledged to honour the Armed Forces Covenant, and earlier this year he created the Office for Veterans' Affairs to offer comprehensive support to those who have given so much to their country.

Speaking ahead of the visit, the Prime Minister said:

The men and women of our Armed Forces serve tirelessly every single day to keep us all safe. While we enjoy Christmas with family and friends, they will be working hard across the world to defend Britain and our allies. And today in Estonia I will meet troops working on the front line to guarantee Britain's security.

This year our military efforts in Estonia have been immense.

British troops form the largest part of NATO's mission in the country, RAF Typhoons working in Estonia have scrambled to intercept Russian aircraft straying into NATO airspace, and British Apache and Wildcat attack helicopters have bolstered NATO efforts to enhance our security, reassure our allies and deter our adversaries.

So at this time of year we should all take a moment to be thankful for the sacrifices made by our troops, many of whom will be spending Christmas on our deployments and bases around the world – be it the Baltics, Ukraine or Afghanistan – and those in Britain too.