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Britain to deploy 8,000 troops as part of massive anti-Russian operation

In one of the largest deployments since the Cold War, Britain's government announced Friday it was sending 8,000 army troops across Europe from next month to participate in a slew of military exercises.

As of April 2021, there were 86,240 soldiers serving as regulars in the British Army, meaning that around 10 percent of the entire force is being sent to confront Russia.



Tanks uploaded on military truck platforms as a part of additional British troops and military equipment arrive at Estonia's NATO Battle Group base in Tapa, Estonia, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022. (AP Photo/Sergei Stepanov)

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The troop movement, to gather momentum between April and June, is the latest escalation by Britain as part of NATO's de facto war against Russia. The announcement was made hours after US President Joe Biden signed off on a massive \$20 billion of weapons shipments

In a Ministry of Defence (MoD) press release, Commander Field Army Lieutenant General Ralph Wooddissie said, "The UK makes a significant contribution to the defence of Europe and the deterrence of Russian aggression. The British Army's series of exercises is fundamental to both. We continue to deploy across Europe, from the Baltic to the Aegean, to train and fight alongside our allies and partners, providing powerful, capable and ready forces to support NATO."

Troops will be deployed mainly in a series of four separate NATO wargames codenamed Arrow, Hedgehog, Defender and Swift Response.

There is no exact number of troops participating from the countries involved but the MoD noted, "Tens of thousands of troops from NATO and Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) allies and partners are involved in the exercises."

The UK-led JEF comprises nine other "High North, North Atlantic and Baltic Sea" nations: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. It was established in 2014 at the initiative of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative government and the United States/NATO.

An MoD breakdown states, "Troops from B Squadron of the Queen's Royal Hussars have deployed to Finland this week to take part in Exercise Arrow. They will be embedded into a Finnish Armoured Brigade, with participation from other partners including the US, Latvia and Estonia. The exercise will improve the ability of UK and Finnish troops to work alongside each other as part of the JEF, deterring Russian aggression in Scandinavia and the Baltic states."

NATO's Exercise Swift Response began this week and "sees elements of 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team and 1 Aviation Brigade Combat Team operate alongside French, American, Italian, and Albanian counterparts in North Macedonia. There are 4,500 personnel on the exercise including 2,500 British troops. The exercise involves parachute

drops, helicopter-borne air assaults and sees a company of French paratroopers integrated into the 2 Parachute Regiment Battlegroup and an Italian battlegroup working to a British chain of command.”

In Exercise Hedgehog, in May, “the Royal Welsh Battlegroup and the Royal Tank Regiment exercising on the Estonia-Latvia border alongside 18,000 NATO troops, including French and Danish, who are part of the British-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence. Hedgehog is the biggest military exercise in Estonia and takes place every four years.”

While Operation Hedgehog is underway, “Exercise Defender in Poland is ongoing until late May, with 1,000 soldiers from the King’s Royal Hussars Battlegroup and C Squadron of the Light Dragoons deployed alongside troops from 11 partner nations including Poland, Denmark and the United States. This exercise involves Challenger 2 tanks and other armoured vehicles deploying from the NATO Forward Holding Base in Sennelager, Germany. The deployment is supported by 104 Theatre Sustainment Brigade operating from the UK and in bases in Europe.”

Britain has taken part in and sometimes led NATO operations for years, backing the encirclement of Russia. Over the past year this has intensified, beginning with the May 2021 launch of NATO’s Carrier Strike Group 21 armada, headed by the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier.



The HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier with seven helicopters visible onboard at Portsmouth harbour. May 1, 2021 (credit: WSWS media)

Early last month, more than 3,000 sailors and Royal Marines were deployed to the Arctic Circle, ashore, at sea and in the skies of Norway, as Britain's contribution to Cold Response 2022. This involved around 30,000 troops from 27 NATO allies and "partners". The two-week operation, a live-fire rehearsal for war on Russia's northern flank, was the largest military exercise hosted in Norway since the Cold War. The Joint Forces website noted, "Britain's biggest warship, HMS Prince of Wales, led the naval fleet, demonstrating her ability to act as NATO command ship—a role she will hold for the rest of 2022. This was the first time one of the Royal Navy's Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers has been so far north." The "ship's role in the exercise saw her work side-by-side with a breadth of British and Allied air power from F-35B Lightning stealth fighters to the Americans' unique Osprey MV22 aircraft and Sea Stallion helicopters."

Norway shares a 200 kilometre (124 mile) land border with Russia, with the operation's drills involving 200 aircraft and 50 vessels held a few hundred kilometres from Russia.

The UK's military build-up was prefaced with a statement Monday on Ukraine from Defence Secretary Ben Wallace. He boasted that Britain had already handed Ukraine "more than 5,000 anti-tank missiles, 5 Air Defence systems with more than 100 missiles, 1,360 anti-structure munitions, and 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives." Weeks after hostilities began the UK stepped up its arming of Ukraine with "Starstreak high velocity and low velocity anti-air missiles. I am able to now report to the House that these have been in-theatre for over 3 weeks and they have been deployed and used by Ukrainian forces to defend themselves and their territory."

While Parliament was in Easter recess, "my ministerial team... hosted a Ukrainian government delegation at Salisbury Plain Training Area to explore further equipment options. This was quickly followed by the Prime Minister announcing a further £100 million worth of high-grade military equipment, 120 armoured vehicles, sourcing anti-ship missiles, and high-tech loitering munitions for precision strikes."

The UK was now “offering a deployment of British Challenger 2 Tanks to Poland to bridge the gap between Poland donating tanks to Ukraine, and their replacements arriving from a third country.”

Britain is deploying virtually the entire capability of its armed forces from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, Wallace boasted. “We have temporarily doubled the number of Defence personnel in Estonia, sent military personnel to support Lithuanian intelligence resilience and reconnaissance efforts, deployed hundreds of Royal Marines to Poland, and sent offshore patrol vessels and Navy destroyers to the Eastern Mediterranean. We have also increased our presence in the skies over south-eastern Europe with four additional Typhoons based in Romania. That means we now have a full squadron of RAF fighter jets in southern Europe, ready to support NATO tasking.”

A *Daily Telegraph* article reported, “In a further message to the Kremlin, nuclear-powered attack submarines from the UK, US and France have berthed in Britain’s Faslane naval base on the Clyde [in Scotland], home to the UK’s strategic deterrent.

“Earlier this week HMS Audacious, a Royal Navy Astute-class hunter-killer boat, was seen loading Tomahawk missiles at the naval facility in Gibraltar. The submarines are all understood to be preparing to take part in naval exercises in the north Atlantic, due to start in the coming days.”

After nearly triggering an armed conflict last summer with Russia in the Black Sea, when a British warship entered waters near Crimea, Wallace said Thursday that the UK would send anti-ship Brimstone missiles to Ukraine specially to prevent a Russian blockade of the Black Sea.

Wallace threatened that Russia could not be allowed to “control the Black Sea” as “it’s not theirs anymore.” The *Telegraph* reported, “The latest intelligence assessment from the Ministry of Defence suggests there are 20 Russian navy vessels in the Black Sea, including submarines.”

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