

# Britain ratchets up NATO's war drive against Russia

Robert Stevens  
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Britain is to deploy warships to the Black Sea this month. Central to NATO's provocations against Russia, the deployment is part of unprecedented military operations and war games exercises being conducted in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Middle East, Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

In April, Russia began to amass substantial military forces near the Ukrainian border, after the Ukraine regime—armed to the hilt by Washington—endorsed a strategy to “recover” Crimea. Following the far-right 2014 coup in Kiev, which was supported by the US and the European Union (EU), Russia annexed the strategically vital peninsula.

On April 21, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that he was “ready” for war with Russia and that the population would “stand to the last man” amid threats of supportive action from the US and other NATO powers. A day later, the Kremlin began to pull back troops and military equipment from the border.

As tensions escalated in the Black Sea, the UK ramped up its presence in the region, with RAF Typhoon jets based in Romania, armed with Paveway bombs and Brimstone missiles, taking part in a NATO Black Sea region “air policing mission”.

Last month, the London *Times*, citing “senior naval sources”, reported that a number of warships will “peel off” in the Mediterranean from the main Carrier Strike Group force being led by the aircraft carrier, HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, and head through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea. Warships involved are to include a “Type 45 destroyer armed with anti-aircraft missiles and an anti-submarine Type 23 frigate.” The *Times* reported, “RAF F-35B Lightning stealth jets and Merlin submarine-hunting helicopters are to stand ready on the task group's flag ship, the carrier HMS *Queen Elizabeth*.”

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said, “The UK and our international allies are unwavering

in our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Giving more details on its Carrier Strike Group mission of “record size and scope,” the MoD announced last week, “The UK Carrier Strike Group will be NATO's first 5th generation Carrier Strike Group, underlining the UK's leading role in the Alliance. CSG21 [Carrier Strike Group 21] will participate in NATO exercises such as Exercise Steadfast Defender, and provide support to NATO Operation Sea Guardian and maritime security operations in the Black Sea.”

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia and the interests of competing imperialist powers have transformed the Black Sea region into a powder keg that could ignite a worldwide conflagration.

The new head of the UK's foreign intelligence service, MI6, is on record as having told Russian President Vladimir Putin that if his military had engaged Ukraine's, there would have been a “huge price” to play.

Speaking to *Times Radio* and the *Sunday Times*, Richard Moore, who took over as MI6 head last October said, “The Russians are in absolutely no doubt of where the UK stands on this issue. And they are in absolutely no doubt of where the [US] Biden administration stands on this issue, because channels are open.”

Referring to Russia engaging in a “pattern of reckless behaviour,” Moore added, “It is why we have co-ordinated so closely with our allies to make sure we are getting firm messages back to President Putin.”

The threats are in line with the designation of Russia by Boris Johnson's government in its Integrated Review of security, defence, development and foreign policy, as the “the most acute direct threat” to the UK and the Euro-Atlantic region.

In the subsequent “Defence in a Competitive Age” defence review, also published in March, Russia was again singled out as posing “the greatest nuclear,

conventional military and sub-threshold threat to European security.” The review stated, “Russia is the most acute threat in the region and we will work with NATO Allies to ensure a united Western response, combining military, intelligence and diplomatic efforts.” It pledges to work within the alliance to “deter nuclear, conventional and hybrid threats to our security, particularly from Russia.”

In his interview, Moore attempted to reignite the Skripal affair that dominated UK politics during 2018. Theresa May’s and then Johnson’s government claimed, based on unproven allegations and with no concrete evidence, that agents of the Kremlin attempted to assassinate the double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter with a deadly nerve agent, Novichok. “I still get angry about Salisbury [where both were poisoned] because I know how near we came to very significant casualties,” Moore said.

He solidarized with the right-wing opponent of Putin and stooge of the imperialist powers Alexei Navalny, citing “the thousands of protesters on the streets of well—not just Moscow—of a number of cities” as proof “that there is a deal of disaffection with Mr Putin.”

Moore described Russia as “an objectively declining power economically and demographically.” He speaks for senior political and military figures who are actively contemplating and planning for war with Russia and China, one that would be fought using nuclear weapons.

Russia still retains at least 4,500 nuclear warheads assigned for use by long-range strategic launchers and shorter-range tactical nuclear forces. As of 2019, its armed forces comprised almost one million active-duty personnel, the fourth-largest in the world, and over 2.5 million reservists.

Appraising Russia’s vast nuclear arsenal in March, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* wrote, “Of the stockpiled warheads, approximately 1,600 strategic warheads are deployed: just over 800 on land-based ballistic missiles, about 624 on submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and 200 at heavy bomber bases. Another 985 strategic warheads are in storage, along with about 1,912 nonstrategic warheads. In addition to the military stockpile for operational forces, a large number—approximately 1,760—of retired but still largely intact warheads await dismantlement, for a total inventory of approximately 6,257 warheads.”

Further evidence of the war danger surfaced this week with the MoD revealing that HMS *Queen Elizabeth* will be central to Royal Air Force raids in Iraq and Syria to be conducted as part of Operation Shader—the UK’s six

years long intervention in those countries on the pretext of fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The MoD said, “This will be the first time UK fighter aircraft are embarked on an operational aircraft carrier deployment since 2010 and will be the largest number of F-35Bs [fighter jets] ever to sail the seas.” It boasted, “F-35B Lightning fast jets will be the cutting edge of the Carrier Strike Group’s (CSG21) formidable power in the air.”

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heappey MP added, “This is a prime example of the UK Armed Forces stepping forward with our allies to confront persistent threats around the world. It is Global Britain in action.”

At the G7 Foreign ministers meeting in London this week, Foreign Minister Dominic Raab attacked Putin and demanded an end to his “brinkmanship sabre-rattling on the border of Ukraine, the cyber-attacks and misinformation and the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, that was not just a human rights abuse but a use of chemical weapons on Russian soil”.

Raab said he and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken “discussed a whole range of security issues—Iran, Afghanistan, continuing concerns about Russia, in particular on the border with Ukraine.”

Blinken warned that “if Russia chooses to act recklessly or aggressively, we’ll respond.”

Addressing the Russian “threat” this week, Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Mike Wigston told PA, “Anything is possible and the world is an increasingly unstable place.”

Noting that the F-35B Lightning jets would be deployed over Iraq and Syria, PA asked if they could also be redeployed against Russia. Wigston replied, “A couple of wise old admirals I was chatting to a few weeks ago said to me ‘never ever expect a carrier deployment to go to plan. Something will always come up.’”



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