



FACE-TO-FACE WITH PUTIN'S NUKEs: BRITAIN TO SEND 150 TROOPS TO RUSSIA'S KALININGRAD BORDER

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29.11.2016

Express.co.uk, 28 Nov 2016

BRITAIN is to send around 150 troops to Poland near the border with the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, where Vladimir Putin has stationed a nuclear-capable missile system.

Soldiers from the Light Dragoons regiment in Catterick, along with a number of armoured vehicles, will arrive in Orzysz in north-east Poland next year in a bid to underline London's commitment to NATO.

British troops on the ground in Orzysz will come within 50 miles of Russia's feared Iskander and S-400 long-range missile defence systems.

Iskander missiles are equipped to fire nuclear warheads and their deployment to Kaliningrad put swathes of Europe in the crosshairs of Moscow's short-range ballistic missile programme.

With a range of roughly 300 miles, the missile can hit targets as far away as Berlin, Poland and Sweden with an atomic warhead.

But British troops would be based just a fraction of that distance away.

The S-400, dubbed the 'Growler' by NATO, is an anti-aircraft missile system that can cover short and long-range targets.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said the deployment of British troops was "a glimpse of the future, of how we will be deepening our country-to-country relationships with key partners in Europe".

The promise of UK troops to protect Poland from Russian aggression is being interpreted as an attempt to court Warsaw's backing for a compromise Brexit deal that would favour Britain.

Theresa May is hosting a summit meeting with Polish counterpart Beata Szydlo to build alliances ahead of the Brexit negotiations.

Mrs May said: "Today's meeting puts beyond doubt the common ground we share, the importance we attach to our bilateral relationship and the benefits it brings.

"We share a clear commitment to take our co-operation to the next level and to firmly establish the UK and Poland as resolute and strategic allies in Europe."

Mikhail Barabanov, a senior research fellow at the Moscow-based Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, which advises the Russian Defence Ministry, warned earlier this year it was "inevitable" that the Kremlin would deploy missiles there permanently by 2019.

The Iskander, a mobile ballistic missile system codenamed SS-26 Stone by NATO, replaced the Soviet Scud missile and can carry conventional or nuclear warheads.

Iskander missiles have been deployed twice by Russia on exercises in Kaliningrad - but on both occasions they are believed to have been withdrawn.

Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave separate from the mainland and on the Baltic Sea, houses dozens of warships, submarines, land troops, a naval brigade and two military airbases.

Commanders fear in a conflict Russia's significant military buildup in the province could block attempts by NATO to reach the Baltic states and north-eastern Poland.

Kaynak/Source: