

First UK night flights land in HMS Queen Elizabeth

Exercise Lightning Fury training over the North Sea is aimed at ensuring 207 Squadron achieves essential carrier flying and Landing Signals Officer (LSO) supervisory qualifications.

The exercise builds on successful trials completed on last year's 'WESTLANT 19' Carrier Strike Group deployment off the East Coast of the USA.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Few countries in the world have the capacity and technology to deploy fighter jets from an aircraft carrier in the North Sea. These trials put the UK at the helm of 5th generation warfighting and cement the UK as a Tier 1 military power.

HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales will be the first aircraft carriers in the world to be designed specifically to operate the Lightning jet. The 'Short Take Off and Vertical Landing' (STOVL) Lightning represents a step change in capability. With its advanced sensors, and stealth technology, the Lightning will provide the UK with a world-beating combat aircraft, which will be jointly manned by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy.

Commander UK Strike Force, Mike Utley said:

Operating the UK's Lightning Force from the deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth in UK waters is a significant milestone, and one we are delighted to have shown the Secretary of State for Defence in person.

This training with 207 Squadron will set the conditions for valuable warfighting exercises later this year between the operational Squadron and the ship. The future utility of these tremendous UK Defence assets is gaining clarity each day as we push the envelope of their combined ability, leading to the first combined operational deployment of the carrier strike capability next year.

Once fully operational, the UK Carrier Strike Group will be a formidable force around the world, using a number of platforms to work alongside our allies and signalling the UK's position as a global player on the world stage.

Station Commander, Group Captain James Beck said:

It was great to welcome the Defence Secretary today. This was an opportunity for him to meet with personnel from the Lightning Force and to be briefed on the activity of the Squadrons currently taking part in Exercise RED FLAG in America and Carrier Qualifications on HMS Queen Elizabeth.

The UK will declare Initial Operating Capability for Carrier Strike by the end of 2020. The UK currently owns 18 aircraft, with an additional order placed for 30 jets.

The first operational deployment for HMS Queen Elizabeth 617 Squadron and a squadron of US Marine Corps Lightning jets is due to take place in 2021.