

News story: UK's most advanced jets deploy overseas for the first time

Britain's new cutting-edge F-35B aircraft will depart their home station of RAF Marham in Norfolk later this year for Cyprus in their first overseas deployment.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

These formidable fighters are a national statement of our intent to protect ourselves and our allies from intensifying threats across the world.

This deployment marks an important milestone in this game-changing aircraft's journey to becoming fully operational.

Owned and operated by the RAF, the Lightning Force is jointly manned by both the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. This deployment will allow personnel from both services to gain vital experience in maintaining and flying the aircraft in an unfamiliar environment.

The deployment will also train and test all aspects of moving this aircraft to a new location, including logistics, maintenance, and sustainment of all the equipment and crew that comes with this impressive aircraft.

The Lightning, as the aircraft is known in the UK, is the first to combine radar-evading stealth technology with supersonic speeds and the ability to conduct short take-offs and vertical landings. With the ability to operate from land and sea, the F-35 forms a vital part of delivering a 'carrier strike' capability to the UK when combined with Britain's new Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers.

Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

It is great to see 617 Squadron, the modern day Dambusters, flying the most advanced and dynamic fighter jet in the UK's history and about to start their first overseas deployment.

I have no doubt that this short deployment will offer many tests, but likewise I am confident that our highly trained and skilled personnel will rise to the challenge and confirm our ability to deliver truly formidable capability.

Admiral Sir Philip Jones KCB ADC DL Royal Navy, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff said:

This first overseas deployment of these world-beating British F-35B aircraft to RAF Akrotiri, together with their embarkation in HMS Queen Elizabeth for the first time in the Autumn of this year, are important milestones to prove their readiness for deployed operations anywhere in the world in defence of our national interests.

The UK currently owns 17 F-35B aircraft with the reformed 617 Sqn having arrived back in the UK last year, with RAF Voyager aircraft providing air-to-air refuelling on their trans-Atlantic journey. More jets are due in Britain over the coming years, and there is an overall plan to procure 138 aircraft over the life of the Programme.

The F-35 is the world's largest defence programme at over \$1.3 trillion, with UK industry providing 15% by value of every one of over 3,000 jets set for the global order book. That makes the economic impact greater than if we were building 100% of all 138 aircraft which we intend to buy. The programme has already generated \$12.9 billion worth of orders and at peak production will support thousands of British manufacturing and engineering jobs.