

Speech: Launch of the Combat Air Strategy at the Farnborough Air Show

Introduction – History

May I start by stating what a huge pleasure it is to be here. This is a year of many milestones for aviation: 110 years since the first powered flight here in Farnborough; 100 years since the first mission of the newly-formed Royal Air Force; 75 years since the legendary Dambusters dropped their bouncing bombs on Nazi oppressors; and 70 years since the fanfare of the very first Farnborough Air Show. Today we celebrate those past achievements.

Present

But we also have to marvel at the high-tech achievements of the present. The UK remains a world-leader in combat air, combining skills and technology from right across Europe. It directly supports over 18,000 highly skilled jobs, with a further 100,000 in the supply chain.

It has a turnover in excess of £6 billion a year. And it accounted for over 85% of UK defence exports in the last year alone, and over 80% in the past 10 years.

Alongside our partners we're also delivering Typhoon, with more than 20,000 flying hours on operations. As well as the F35 Lightning II as the United States' only Tier 1 partner, delivering 15% by value of every F-35 built.

The Future – Tempest

But let's be clear, we're entering a dangerous new era of warfare. So our main focus has to be the future, and how we deal with the developing dangers. Today we offer you a glimpse of tomorrow, starting with the unveiling of the concept model beside me.

Tempest is a potential future fighter with advanced flexible power and propulsion systems, a virtual cockpit, swarming weapons and laser directed energy weapons. Operated either manned or unmanned, it will be rapidly upgradeable and cyber resilient. A concept, yes, but built on three credible principles – the pillars of our future approach.

Vision

First, we have a vision for developing next generation systems and weapons. That's why today we're publishing our first ever Combat Air Strategy, alongside a plan to make lofty aspirations a reality.

This is a Strategy to keep control of the air both at home and abroad, to remain a global leader in the sector and support the UK's wider prosperity

agenda, and to protect and build on key skills across the UK's industrial base.

Commitment

Next, we have an iron-clad commitment to deliver. In the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review we promised to invest in new complex weapons. And we've done what we said we'd do, working with our industry partners, investing £2 billion until 2025 to make our Future Combat Air System Technology actively take off. To make it real. To make it happen.

Make no mistake, we'll be showing the same energy, speed and commitment to bring our Combat Air Strategy to life. A new team is already on the runway, and their timetable clear. I want to see a business case for the acquisition programme by the end of the year.

Early decisions around acquiring next generation capability will be made by the end of 2020 ... final investment decisions by 2025 ... and by 2035 I want to see Tempests flying alongside our world-beating Typhoons and F-35s.

Collaboration

Finally, our approach hinges on international collaboration. Tempest is envisaged as an innovative partnership between the Ministry of Defence and the industry partners of BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Leonardo and MBDA.

But we want new partners as well. Together we want to design and build ultra-advanced equipment, far faster and keeping ahead of the breath-taking pace of technological change.

And we want to put our world class skills at the disposal of our friends, while embracing the high-end skills that they also offer and can bring to the table, building on the best of what every nation can bring.

My questions to potential partners in the room today are simple: How can you work with us? How can we work with you? Let us discuss our requirements – what we want to see from the future and we can get started.

Conclusion

So Farnborough is once more writing a new chapter in the history of our aviation nation. As we enter the next century of airpower, we're not just unveiling a concept. We're setting out a plan. Rolling up our sleeves to make sure our Royal Air Force, our Combat Air sector and our global Britain fly higher, faster and further than ever before.