

History made as UK F-35s complete first operational missions

F-35s have flown alongside Typhoon aircraft on operational flights over the skies of Syria and Iraq, as part of the ongoing fight against Daesh, the Defence Secretary has confirmed.

It follows a successful training period in Cyprus, known as Exercise Lightning Dawn, aimed at building capability for the aircraft and supporting elements.

Due to the exceptional performance of the aircraft, pilots, and support staff during this time, it was decided that they were ready to make their operational debut from RAF Akrotiri, alongside the Typhoons.

Speaking at RAF Akrotiri, Defence Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

The F-35s are the most advanced jets our country has ever possessed and will form the backbone of British air defence for decades to come.

They have passed every test their training has thrown at them with flying colours and their first real operational mission is a significant step into the future for the UK.

The first RAF F-35B operational sorties were flown on Sunday 16 June in support of Operation Shader, the UK contribution to the Global Coalition's counter Daesh mission in Iraq and Syria. The two aircraft conducted a patrol over Syria, and UK F-35s have flown a further 12 sorties since then.

The F-35 is the first aircraft to combine radar-evading stealth technology with supersonic speeds and the ability to conduct short take-offs and vertical landings.

The Lightning force is jointly operated by the RAF and Royal Navy. 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:

This first operational mission for the UK's F-35 Lightning confirms the impressive progress which we have made in introducing this formidable new capability into service.

It is testament to the outstanding abilities of our dedicated and highly trained air and ground crew that 617 Squadron has achieved this important milestone so quickly and so effectively.

Admiral Tony Radakin CB ADC, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, said:

It's great to see our F35B Lightning jets already proving themselves on operations so early in their life cycle, ably demonstrating the fantastic capability these world-leading aircraft offer.

This Autumn, our aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth will return to the East Coast of the United States to conduct Operational Trials with our Lightning Force, taking this 5th generation capability to the next level as they prove their ability to operate from the sea.

For decades to come, this exciting new combination of aircraft carriers and F35B Lightnings will provide a potent, globally deployable carrier strike capability, a powerful conventional deterrent and the centrepiece of our country's expeditionary forces.

Later in the year, 617 Squadron will embark in HMS Queen Elizabeth for the first time. The UK jets will conduct Operational Tests, alongside 17 Test and Evaluation Squadron, onboard the carrier in the USA during the WESTLANT 19 deployment, proving their capability at sea. This is vital step on the path to the first Carrier Strike Deployment planned for 2021.

The UK currently owns 17 F-35B aircraft with the reformed 617 Sqn arriving back in the UK last year. More jets are due in Britain over the coming years, including the imminent arrival of 207 Sqn at RAF Marham, and there is an overall plan to procure 138 aircraft over the life of the programme.

The programme has already generated \$12.9 billion worth of orders and at peak production will support thousands of British manufacturing and engineering jobs.

UK Air Component Commander for the Middle East, Air Commodore Justin Reuter, said:

The pilots, crew and aircraft have exceeded all training objectives since deploying to Cyprus so it was only right that they made the next step on their journey.

The UK has played a vital role in liberating swathes of territory once subjected to Daesh's cruel regime, and the deployment of our newest and most advanced jets signals our commitment to the enduring defeat Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

The Defence Secretary also used the visit to hold a meeting with her Cypriot counterpart, Savvas Angelides, to further bolster bilateral ties.

[Biomed Academy launched in Warsaw](#)

Biomed Academy is a joint initiative of British Embassy Warsaw and the Polish Development Fund, in cooperation with the Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University.

The programme was agreed upon during the [third British-Polish intergovernmental consultations](#), which took place in December 2018 in London.

17 Polish healthtech firms were carefully selected to participate in the academy. Their representatives will take part in two weeks of workshops on business development and technology transfer, aimed at enhancing their business capabilities.

British Ambassador to Poland, Jonathan Knott, said upon launching the programme:

“Participants of this programme were selected on a competitive basis. We hope they will use this opportunity to develop, but also foster more and more partnerships between the UK and Poland.”

[Victim Surcharge circular: June 2019](#)

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[PM launches new drive to tackle barriers faced by disabled people](#)

Higher accessibility standards for new housing, an overhaul of statutory sick pay, and greater workplace support are part of renewed efforts to ensure disabled people can fully participate in society.

New national outcomes data for disabled people will also be published, shining a light on injustices and driving action to tackle barriers they face.

With around a fifth of the working age population living with a disability, the Prime Minister has also announced a new cross-government disability team.

Incorporating the Office for Disability Issues, the new team will sit alongside the Government Equalities Office and Race Disparity Unit in a new Equalities Hub at the heart of government.

This team will work closely with disabled people, disabled people's organisations and charities to develop a new approach to disability, with their views and experiences at the forefront of any new policy. Further measures will be set out later this year.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

My determination to identify and tackle injustices, wherever they exist in society, remains as strong as ever.

So I am proud to announce new measures to break down barriers faced by disabled people, whether in employment, housing or elsewhere.

"We all have a crucial role – businesses, government and civil society – in working together to ensure that disabled people get the support they need, and go as far as their talents can take them.

Recognising that too many disabled people still live in unsuitable homes, the Government will consult on mandating higher accessibility standards for new housing.

This could help deliver up to 300,000 new accessible and adaptable homes every year. Guidance will also be published to help councils meet current standards for accessible housing in England.

A consultation on new measures to help employers better support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in work will also be published next month.

These include reforming Statutory Sick Pay so it is better enforced, more flexible to encourage a phased return to work, and covers the lowest paid.

The Government will also consult on offering small and medium employers a conditional rebate to support those who manage staff on sickness absence and help them get back to work.

The Work and Pensions Secretary will also explore how to improve support for those on disability benefits through a Green Paper, for which her department will engage extensively with disabled people's organisations and charities.

Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Disabled people encounter too many challenges in life and I want to see these end.

We want to change the landscape for disabled people and to make sure there is always a level playing field for them.

Because all of us need an equal chance to live a life of opportunity and fulfilment.

We intend to support disabled people in all phases of their life so that the pursuit of equality is a shared goal.

Other proposals include:

- New employee rights to request workplace modifications on health grounds
- New metrics to compare how well companies deliver for disabled customers in essential markets, such as energy, broadband and water.
- New research to ensure disabled people are at the heart of future Government policy, to be published early next year.

Richard Kramer, Chief Executive for the disability charity Sense, said:

Today's announcement is a significant one for disabled people, and addressing the inequalities they face.

For too long now, disability policy has been focused on what benefits or services disabled people do or don't access, rather than the lives they want, and have a right to lead.

Equality for disabled people is everyone's business and cuts across all areas of policy and life, which is why we have been calling for and welcome this new cross government approach.

We know that today is just the beginning of the journey, but we

look forward to working with the government as this work takes shape, and ensuring it is led by and centres around disabled people to truly deliver meaningful change.

Mark Hodgkinson, Chief Executive at disability equality charity Scope, said:

Continued action from government to tackle the barriers Britain's 14 million disabled people face is welcome.

Making workplaces more flexible, improving market regulation and government coordination are positive steps in the right direction.

We know that half of disabled people feel excluded from society [1], and are too often shut out of work. Life also costs more if you are disabled, and Scope research shows that these costs add up to on average £583 a month [2].

We have long-called for a concerted effort from government to improve the lives of disabled people in this country. It is therefore positive to see recognition from government that a joined up approach is needed and necessary.

David Isaac, Equality and Human Rights Commission Chair, said

The barriers experienced by disabled people in their everyday lives are unique. We have long said that addressing key issues such as housing and secure employment so disabled people can live independently in their communities requires a joined-up strategy.

The creation of a cross-government team to coordinate disability policy is a bold statement from the government to tackle these problems and a very welcome move.

It will help ensure the views of disabled people are better represented at the heart of government and will create a more coherent approach to improve the daily lives of millions of disabled people across the country.

We look forward to working closely with government to improve the experiences of disabled people in all areas of life.

Mike Cherry, FSB National Chairman, said:

Everyone in our society deserves the opportunity to thrive. For all of our members who employ themselves and others with disabilities, the right Government support is crucial.

It's good to see Government consulting on an SSP rebate and support

in accessing occupational health as part of a comprehensive package, showing the Government is serious in backing small businesses and the self-employed to do more of what they do best – using everybody’s talents to provide the jobs and wealth our communities thrive on.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Every person, whatever their ability or age, must have the opportunity to succeed in life – that means providing new homes that meet the everyday needs of whoever lives in them.

However, too many of the homes built in the past have not lived up to this basic promise, which is why we’re looking very closely at strengthening accessibility requirements, including making them mandatory for all new homes.

Tackling childhood obesity: £1.5 million funding for local projects

Five local councils will be awarded £100,000 a year over a 3-year period. The funding will help them to test and refine their ideas for addressing childhood obesity and health inequalities. The councils are:

- Bradford
- Blackburn with Darwen
- Nottinghamshire
- Lewisham
- Birmingham

The Department of Health and Social Care, the Local Government Association and Public Health England (PHE) are supporting the councils to trial new programmes in their areas, which could help shape future national policy.

Planned programmes include a scheme by Birmingham City Council to offer health, food, nutrition and physical-activity focused apprenticeships for 15 to 19 year olds in deprived areas, where obesity rates are highest.

The council will also create a local metric, the ‘Birmingham Basket’, to capture local consumer habits. This will help inform policies and measure impact.

Bradford will partner with local mosques to support South Asian children – who are at a greater risk of obesity – by providing places and fun ways to

exercise, alongside healthier food.

Blackburn and Darwen council will work with local restaurants and takeaways to improve menus and incentivise healthier options. This scheme will look at ways to work with outlets to adopt healthier options, for example through free waste removal, subsidised advertising on council-owned estates and a potential health food hub.

These programmes will help the government to consider further steps that could be taken to enable local action on childhood obesity.

The work is part of [the Trailblazer programme](#) and the [second chapter of the government's childhood obesity plan](#), which was launched last year.

Public Health Minister Seema Kennedy said:

Every child deserves the best start in life – communities need to come together to play their part in helping the next generation to be healthy and active. Prevention is at the heart of our NHS Long Term Plan, but a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in public health.

These pilots are rightly rooted in the needs of the communities they serve and I look forward to seeing what benefits this grassroots approach has on our nation's obesity problem.

Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist at PHE, said:

While obesity has no quick fix, these trailblazers are forging innovative solutions that clearly prioritise children and their long-term health.

From expert local knowledge, to local authority intervention, community support and government action, we all have crucial roles to play in combating obesity.