

Britain Brings Back Nuclear-Capable Jets Amid Rising Global Tensions

In a major shift not seen since the Cold War, the United Kingdom is reintroducing airborne nuclear capability to its defence strategy. The government has confirmed plans to purchase 12 U.S.-built F-35A stealth fighter jets, capable of carrying B61 tactical nuclear bombs. This move adds a powerful second leg to Britain's nuclear deterrent, which for decades has relied solely on its submarine-based Trident missile system.

The decision comes at a time of growing international instability. With threats mounting from Russia, China, and escalating conflict in the Middle East, British defence leaders argue the country must evolve its nuclear posture to remain credible. The reintroduction of an air-launched nuclear option gives the UK more flexibility. It aligns its capabilities more closely with NATO allies like the United States and France, who have continued to maintain dual-capable aircraft.

Strategically, this is about more than just planes and bombs. By rejoining NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements, the UK strengthens its role within the alliance and sends a clear message of deterrence to potential adversaries. The new jets will likely be stationed at RAF Marham or possibly at RAF Lakenheath, a US-operated base in the UK. Although the nuclear weapons themselves remain under U.S. control, they would be delivered by RAF pilots in any hypothetical NATO-led conflict.

Economically, the deal is also a boost to the UK's defence industry. Thousands of jobs across aerospace and military supply chains are expected to be sustained or created, with British firms involved in manufacturing components and providing long-term support for the aircraft.

Politically, the move will not be without controversy. Arms-control advocates and opposition politicians have already voiced concern about nuclear escalation and the risks of rearming in this way. But government officials insist the move is not about provocation, it's about preparation. The changing global landscape, they argue, requires credible and flexible deterrent tools.

As part of the broader 2025 Strategic Defence Review, the UK also announced plans to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027, with a long-term goal of reaching 5% by 2035. These investments include upgrades in cyber capabilities, missile defence, and domestic munitions production.

Ultimately, the decision to bring nuclear-capable jets back into service is a defining moment in modern British defence policy, one rooted in a sober assessment of a more dangerous and unpredictable world.