

Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers will provide the UK with a leap forward in capability, providing political choice and decisive action. Today the Response Force Task Group already provides political flexibility, which is particularly important at times of regional tension. This freedom of action does not rely on gaining agreements with other countries to use their bases. With the addition of the Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers, the RFTG will see a marked increase in capability. The Aircraft Carriers will operate the potent Joint Combat Aircraft which will exploit the advantageous elements of maritime and air power; providing a spectrum of capability including surveillance, enduring deterrence, coercion and containment of potential threats to our nation's interests. Maintained at very high readiness, they will be able to act swiftly should presence alone fail.

An Aircraft Carrier is so much more than an Airfield Afloat. It will be:

...an International symbol and a source of national pride; it is a statement of intent that the UK intends to remain a global player now and in the future.

...able to act independently but, when working as part of the RFTG, it will greatly increase the UK's ability to respond to crises worldwide.

...operated across the full spectrum of military missions from evacuation operations, to disaster relief, to combat.

...deployed to those regions which threaten our nation's interests in order to influence events and enforce UK foreign policy.

...at very high readiness and will have the aircraft, aircrew, engineers and logistics ready to respond at very short notice.

...supported by the RFA, a cost effective supply chain which will support the Carriers' already impressive range and internal stores supplies.

...a mobile base for state of the art Intelligence and Reconnaissance aircraft, with the means to gather, analyse and exploit information. With access to a global resource of intelligence and data, it will provide unprecedented situational awareness, both on board the ship and in the aircraft which fly from its deck.

...inherently a Joint asset and, exploiting an enduring trait of the maritime environment, able to operate worldwide without risking the diplomatic sensitivities of elements based ashore.

...manned by personnel who understand the complexities of supporting aircraft at sea, serving in a ship focussed full time on the Carrier Strike role, they will be able to plan and coordinate the use of its assets and respond quickly, whilst also retaining the capability to easily embark additional aircraft dependent upon the situation.

...able to conduct multiple roles concurrently such as enforcing Maritime Interdiction Operations, while striking targets on land, supporting Combat SAR, conducting Maritime Surveillance, Intelligence and Reconnaissance and reassuring allies, without a footprint on their sovereign lands.

...part of an intelligent force that will utilise influence, and engage with key audiences, allies and partners to promote the UK, provide political choice, and protect our nation's interests.

THE UK'S AIRCRAFT CARRIER CAPABILITY

Looking ahead to the Carrier Strike of the RFTG

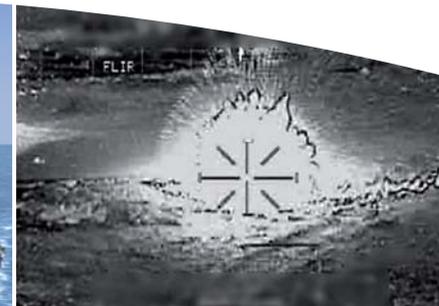


Image: US DoD



SDSR 10 confirmed the requirement to generate a future Aircraft Carrier and highlighted the need to ensure continuous Carrier Strike availability through close cooperation with the French and the United States.

Preparing for the arrival of the Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) aircraft carriers and the Joint Combat Aircraft (Lightning II).

The UK's new Aircraft Carriers are now being constructed and will mark the return of a conventional deterrent and intervention capability for Defence.

The size of these ships enables significant numbers of aircraft to be kept at very high operational readiness, and also enables an efficient maintenance and upkeep programme for all embarked aircraft. With multi-role maritime fighter aircraft embarked, the QEC will offer potent 'Carrier Strike' capability: The ability, if political options fail, to strike at targets far inland and provide direct support for troops ashore. Able to defend the skies and have effect both at and from the sea, the presence of this capability means the UK can project a powerful stabilising influence at a time and place of political choice, without reliance on the permissions of other states.

Preparing for the arrival of this capability is a complex project. The Royal Navy's close relationships with both the USA and France are key to developing the ability to operate these aircraft safely and efficiently at sea, whilst maintaining the essential maritime skills of our pilots, crews and engineers.

It is more efficient...A single aircraft carrier will spend the majority of its time deployed, ready to act and, concurrently, able to promote the UK's interests by its very presence. Flown by highly trained maritime specialists, the embarked Carrier Strike aircraft will be dedicated assets able to seamlessly integrate into the Response Force Task Group. This efficient system avoids the decrease in capability suffered with short-term detachments, or the costs involved in setting up shore-side operating facilities abroad.

Why does the UK need dedicated Carrier Strike...?

It is a national asset and an international symbol, with cross-government and cross-alliance utility... it offers the UK unprecedented options to deliver effect and influence on land, at sea, in the air and, most critically, where these environments overlap, 'the seams'. Carrier Strike offers this with minimal reliance on external support. It does not need permission from a host nation to use its airfields, nor does it require an airbase in hostile territory to be protected by ground troops, and all the time our forces can be easily extracted without leaving behind costly infrastructure. It has the advantage of reducing strike aircraft transit times to the objective and increases the speed of response to support forces or activity ashore. If enduring operations are required, it provides a secure and flexible platform which can poise for extended periods without becoming embroiled.

It is a major step forward in national capability...The Joint Combat Aircraft – Lightning II – is the world's first fifth generation maritime fighter. It will provide an impressive ground attack capability as well as air defence over a wide area. The Short Takeoff, Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant is the F35B, an aircraft which combines stealth, range and speed with a large weapon capacity. This aircraft gives the pilot access to unprecedented amounts of data in the air, enabling the right decisions to be made at the right time. As a key part of tomorrow's information orientated Royal Navy, this aircraft will provide the UK with a world class fast jet capability for decades to come.

It is more effective... Carrier-borne strike aircraft will be able to contribute to every aspect of 'Combat Air' (ground attack, air to air, intelligence gathering and targeting). They are able to do this from a base which can sail where it is needed, increasing the available time over the 'target'. Furthermore, this mobility allows for significant international opportunities including training alongside allied and neutral nations and promoting partnerships worldwide.



Image: US DoD

It is a deployed force... Aircraft Carriers will provide the UK with a worldwide presence. Able to move up to 500 miles per day this mobility, combined with the speed and range of the aircraft, mean they can simultaneously:

- Prevent conflict
- Provide security on the sea
- Extend UK influence
- Promote British industry
- Promote partnerships

... and can react at very short notice, providing flexibility of choice to government and value for money to the nation.

It is a flexible asset... this carrier capability is focussed on maritime aviation and thus benefits from the inherent flexibility of air power. Aircraft are able to role change (or specialist aircraft to embark) to conduct a wide spectrum of tasks, including humanitarian relief, capacity building, support of amphibious operations and conducting its primary role of carrier strike.

