

## UK Confirms Procurement of Additional F-35A and F-35B Jets Amid Rising Global Tensions

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The United Kingdom (UK) has confirmed plans to procure 27 additional F-35 fighter jets by 2033, including both the conventional take-off and landing variant and the short take-off and vertical landing model, as part of the next phase in its long-term fighter aircraft programme.

During a defence session in the House of Lords, Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence, Lord Vernon Coaker, stated that the upcoming procurement will consist of 12 Lockheed Martin F-35A aircraft and 15 F-35B aircraft. This purchase will support the establishment of a third front-line squadron operating the F-35B, enhancing the Royal Air Force's and Royal Navy's operational capacity.

The announcement reaffirms the UK Government's overall commitment to acquiring 138 F-35 Lightning II jets over the life of the programme, a number first outlined in previous defence reviews. The first batch of 48 F-35B aircraft is still expected to be delivered by March 2026, according to Lord Coaker.

He noted that the decision to purchase the F-35As ahead of the broader Defence Investment Plan, due later this autumn, was prompted by ongoing global security challenges. "It was important that we made that decision at this particular time in light of the threat that we face," Coaker told peers, without detailing specific threat scenarios.

Addressing questions from Lord Houghton of Richmond, Coaker clarified that the 12 F-35A aircraft will replace 12 of the originally planned F-35Bs. He explained that the F-35A variant is approximately 20% more cost-effective, potentially saving the UK about USD 240 million throughout the procurement.

However, the Minister also acknowledged a significant logistical gap: the UK currently does not possess a sovereign air-to-air refuelling capability compatible with the F-35A variant. Coaker confirmed that this will require operational support from allied nations, stating, "There will need to be allied support for that."

In response to a separate line of questioning from Lord West of Spithead, Coaker did not commit to a review of the UK's nuclear doctrine but affirmed that the doctrine is continuously under evaluation. He reiterated that broader defence spending priorities outlined in the upcoming Strategic Defence Review remain scheduled for the autumn.

This announcement signals a proactive shift in the UK's air power strategy amid heightened geopolitical uncertainty.