

US Nuclear Weapons Return to UK for First Time in 17 Years

July 22, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



The United States has reportedly redeployed tactical nuclear weapons to the United Kingdom, marking their return after a 17-year absence. The deployment is widely seen as a significant shift in NATO's deterrence posture, with the weapons believed to have arrived via a C-17 transport aircraft from New Mexico to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk. This development

sends a strong strategic message amid escalating global tensions with Russia and China.

For years, the UK's nuclear deterrent has been solely sea-based through its Trident missile system. However, this redeployment introduces a new air-launched capability as part of NATO's Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) programme. The move coincides with the introduction of 12 US-made F-35A fighter jets, capable of deploying B61-12 gravity bombs. These jets will be stationed at RAF Marham in Norfolk and represent a renewed integration of the UK into NATO's forward nuclear posture.

Extensive infrastructure upgrades across RAF Lakenheath and other European bases suggests long-term planning. NATO-funded vaults and enhanced security facilities are understood to support the storage and maintenance of US nuclear warheads. Although the US and UK governments have not officially confirmed the presence of the weapons, multiple defence analysts interpret these preparations as clear indications of renewed nuclear readiness.

Russia has strongly condemned the move. A spokesperson from the Russian Foreign Ministry described it as a "destabilising escalation," warning that it could provoke countermeasures and worsen European security dynamics. Nevertheless, supporters argue that reintroducing these weapons reinforces NATO's deterrent credibility and provides a flexible response option in the event of a crisis.

Legally, the redeployment remains compliant with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as the weapons remain under US ownership and control. The arrangement mirrors existing NATO nuclear-sharing agreements, whereby

participating nations host US weapons but do not possess direct launch authority.

The redeployment is also underpinned by the long-standing US–UK Mutual Defence Agreement, first signed in 1958 and renewed indefinitely in 2024. This framework allows close defence cooperation, particularly in nuclear planning and deterrence policy.

From a centre-right perspective, the reintroduction of US nuclear weapons to UK soil is a necessary and pragmatic move. It strengthens national security, enhances NATO's credibility, and ensures the UK maintains a visible role in allied deterrence. While critics warn of increased risks, the decision signals strategic clarity at a time when deterrence and preparedness are paramount in an increasingly volatile world.