

UK Carrier Strike Group Visits Tokyo to Reinforce Indo-Pacific Partnership

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The United Kingdom's Carrier Strike Group, led by HMS Prince of Wales, is set to visit Tokyo between late August and early September as part of Operation HIGHMAST, an eight-month deployment focused on strengthening security and economic relationships across the Indo-Pacific.

This visit marks a significant moment in UK-Japan relations, reinforcing a shared commitment to regional stability and a rules-based international order. It follows the two countries' deepening cooperation through recent agreements, including the Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Reciprocal Access Agreement, and their joint development of next-generation fighter aircraft under the Global Combat Air Programme.

According to British Ambassador to Japan Julia Longbottom, the deployment is a “clear demonstration” of the UK's commitment to Japan and the wider Indo-Pacific region. The Carrier Strike Group showcases advanced UK naval capabilities and includes what is expected to be the largest air group of F-35B Lightning II stealth jets ever embarked on an operational deployment at sea.

During the Tokyo stop, joint activities with Japan's Self-Defence Forces will enhance interoperability and reflect the UK's pivot to the Indo-Pacific. The visit also supports wider defence diplomacy efforts, offering opportunities for industrial collaboration and promoting British defence exports.

Japanese officials have welcomed the visit, citing heightened regional tensions and the value of enhanced defence cooperation with like-minded partners. The UK Government views this as a critical element of its broader global strategy, balancing NATO responsibilities with strategic engagement beyond Europe.

The Indo-Pacific now accounts for roughly a fifth of UK trade. The deployment signals the UK's intention to play a long-term role in safeguarding maritime routes and upholding international law in the region.

Operation HIGHMAST builds on the foundations laid by previous carrier deployments and underscores the UK's determination to project influence and support allies in an increasingly contested global environment.