

Air Marshal Harv Smyth Named New Chief of the Royal Air Force

July 17, 2025

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Air Marshal Harvey "Harv" Smyth is set to take over as Chief of the Air Staff for the Royal Air Force (RAF) on 2 August 2025, marking a pivotal leadership transition for the United Kingdom's (UK) air defence. He will replace Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, who is stepping down following his term as Chief of the Air Staff.

Smyth, a Northern Irish native who joined the RAF in 1991, brings extensive frontline experience. He spent 15 years as a Harrier pilot and weapons instructor, flying hundreds of operational missions over Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His diverse background includes leadership roles as the UK's first F-35 Lightning Force Commander and as Director Space at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) where he laid the groundwork for UK Space Command.

Following his roles as Air Officer Commanding No. 1 Group and later as Deputy Commander (Operations), a position subsequently renamed Air and Space Commander, Smyth was elevated to Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff for Military Strategy and Operations in January 2024. His ascension to Chief of the Air Staff aligns with the UK's Strategic Defence Review and an RAF shift toward warfighting readiness, including the acquisition of F-35A aircraft and participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) nuclear mission.

The Chief of the Air Staff is responsible for the RAF's operational effectiveness, efficiency, morale, and capability development, reporting to the Secretary of State for Defence. Defence Secretary John Healey praised Smyth's "outstanding credentials" and noted his ability to guide the RAF through its next stage of transformation alongside Sir Richard Knighton's continued support.

In his remarks, Smyth said he was "deeply honored" to take on the role during a crucial period. He emphasized the need for rapid modernization to meet current and emerging threats, while supporting the RAF's personnel and advancing both air and space capability for the UK and NATO.

The announcement comes as the RAF remains committed to global operations, ranging from Operation Shader in Iraq and Syria, to joint Typhoon patrols in Qatar and enhanced air policing in Eastern Europe under NATO. It also coincides with national efforts to boost defence spending to approximately 3 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Smyth's operational depth and experience across various domains position him well to steer the RAF through a period of rapid change. As the UK emphasizes aerial and space deterrence, his leadership will be key to ensuring readiness, capability, and morale across the force.