

US Deploys F–15EX Fighters to Japan Ahead of 2026 Stationing

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The U.S. Air Force has quietly deployed two F–15EX Eagle II fighters to Kadena Air Base in Okinawa as it prepares for a permanent squadron presence in spring 2026. The deployment is part of Exercise Resolute Force Pacific 2025 and aims to familiarize both U.S. and Japanese personnel with the next-generation platform.

The F–15EX aircraft, assigned to the 85th Test and Evaluation Squadron out of Eglin Air Force Base, arrived at Kadena on July 12 following a stop at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. The jets will take part in training and operations designed to simulate contested, high-intensity environments in the Indo-Pacific region.

This forward deployment marks a significant shift in U.S. airpower posture. The Air Force plans to replace Kadena’s aging F–15C/D fleet with 36 F–15EX fighters, enhancing capability, readiness, and regional deterrence. Brigadier General John Gallemore, commander of the 18th Wing, described the deployment as “a glimpse into the future of airpower in the Indo-Pacific.”

The F–15EX features advanced avionics, fly-by-wire controls, expanded weapons carriage, and upgraded electronic warfare systems. While it does not offer the stealth profile of fifth-generation fighters, it is optimized for long-range missions, payload flexibility, and joint operations, making it highly relevant to current strategic needs in the Pacific.

In parallel, the Air Force is planning additional modernization moves across Japan. F–35A Lightning II fighters will be stationed at Misawa Air Base, and temporary rotations of F–22s, F–35s, and F–15Es continue to bridge the gap during the transition at Kadena. These efforts form part of a larger realignment to bolster U.S. air capabilities in Asia amid rising tensions, particularly about China and Taiwan.

Kadena Air Base, located approximately 370 miles from Taiwan, is a critical node in America’s Indo-Pacific deterrence architecture. With the F–15EX’s extended range, sensor suite, and weapons loadout, the U.S.

enhances its ability to respond rapidly and integrate seamlessly with regional allies.

The F–15EX shares around 70% of its components with legacy F–15 models, streamlining maintenance and sustainment logistics. The Air Force ultimately plans to field up to 129 of the aircraft, ensuring long-term capability with reduced training and infrastructure costs.

For defense policymakers and conservative strategists, the F–15EX deployment reflects a prudent blend of proven airframes and technological advancement. It strengthens deterrence, supports allied integration, and ensures the U.S. remains operationally dominant in one of the world's most strategically vital regions.