

UK Carrier Engages ‘Killer Tomato’ in Unconventional Live-Fire Exercise

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The Royal Navy's flagship aircraft carrier, His Majesty's Ship Queen Elizabeth, recently conducted a live-fire exercise involving an unusual target: a large, red inflatable known as the "Killer Tomato." The training scenario formed part of Operation Highmast and was designed to test the ship's close-range defence systems under realistic and high-pressure conditions.

During the drill, the Carrier Strike Group deployed the brightly coloured target into open waters to simulate a small, fast-moving vessel. The Phalanx Close-In Weapon System (CIWS), fitted aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth, was activated to neutralise the threat. The Phalanx system, an automated Gatling-style gun capable of firing up to 4,500 rounds per minute, is designed to intercept and destroy short-range incoming threats, such as anti-ship missiles or fast-attack boats. Its successful engagement of the inflatable target demonstrated both technical performance and crew readiness.

The so-called “Killer Tomato” is a widely used term in naval training circles, referring to large, bright-red floating targets deployed for live-fire practice. Though its appearance may appear comedic, the target offers a durable and mobile platform for realistic training, allowing personnel to simulate the interception of hostile craft under combat-like conditions.

HMS Queen Elizabeth is currently leading Carrier Strike Group 25 (CSG25), which includes Royal Navy escorts, Royal Air Force (RAF) aircraft, and allied vessels. The ongoing deployment focuses on enhancing maritime security, integrated operations, and alliance interoperability.

From a centre-right perspective, such exercises represent responsible and forward-looking defence planning. They ensure that Britain’s naval forces remain operationally effective and that public funds are used to deliver real strategic outcomes. The operation underscores the UK’s role as a proactive and dependable NATO and global security partner.

Although the term “Killer Tomato” might elicit amusement, the drill itself is a serious demonstration of military preparedness. It reflects the Royal

Navy's commitment to maintaining high standards in countering maritime threats, adapting to evolving challenges, and securing Britain's global interests through credible and disciplined force projection.