

## Royal Navy's HMS Prince of Wales Begins Sea Trials Ahead of Strategic Upgrades

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The Royal Navy's flagship aircraft carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, has departed from Portsmouth to commence a new phase of sea trials as it prepares for a series of critical upgrades and future operational deployments. The trials are designed to ensure the ship and its crew are fully mission-ready for evolving global demands.

Over the coming weeks, the carrier will undergo Operational Sea Training, which includes rigorous assessments across multiple domains such as aviation operations, emergency procedures, navigation, and combat readiness. Initial training, completed earlier this month, successfully tested the ship's peacetime safety capabilities and routine flight deck operations with the F-35B Lightning II fighter jet.

These trials form part of a wider initiative to prepare HMS Prince of Wales for the integration of advanced unmanned systems and missile technologies. In line with the UK Ministry of Defence's Strategic Defence Review, the Royal Navy is transitioning toward a hybrid carrier air wing combining manned aircraft with autonomous drones and long-range precision strike capabilities launched from the flight deck.

Notably, in previous exercises, the carrier successfully launched and recovered the Mojave, a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle. These operations have paved the way for Project Vixen, which is investigating the feasibility of deploying fixed-wing unmanned systems from Royal Navy aircraft carriers. The upcoming training will focus on further refining these capabilities.

Another key element of the trials is evaluating the ship's capacity to deploy deck-launched missile systems. Plans may include cruise and hypersonic missiles launched from modular systems aboard the carrier itself. This would significantly increase the strike range of the Carrier Strike Group and reduce its dependence on escort vessels for offensive firepower.

The timing of these preparations is especially relevant, as HMS Prince of Wales is set to play a central role in Operation Highmast, the UK's Indo-

Pacific Carrier Strike Group deployment. This major strategic mission will see British naval forces operate alongside allied warships from Canada, Spain, and other NATO partners, reinforcing Britain's presence and partnerships in a geopolitically vital region.

Overall, these developments highlight a decisive shift in British naval strategy, from traditional power projection to a multi-domain, technology-driven model. HMS Prince of Wales is not only being positioned as a platform for modern maritime warfare but also as a symbol of Britain's intent to lead in future-focused defence capabilities.