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UK Defence at Risk as Typhoon Jet Plant Faces Closure

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Thousands of skilled defence workers face uncertainty as BAE Systems' Warton site in Lancashire has ceased final assembly of Eurofighter Typhoons, amid the UK government's shift to acquiring US-built F-35 jets. The decision has put an estimated 6,000 jobs at risk in Lancashire and has raised new concerns about Britain's diminishing sovereign manufacturing capabilities.

The Eurofighter Typhoon, a multi-role combat jet jointly developed by European nations, has been assembled at BAE Systems' factory in Warton for decades. Once a symbol of British

aerospace leadership, the plant has fallen quiet as work dries up. The UK government has not ordered Typhoons since 2009, and the final assembly line at Warton is winding down after completing the Qatar order placed in 2017. The last Typhoon jets, commissioned by Qatar in 2017, are nearing completion, after which the factory is expected to wind down most production lines.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's administration recently announced plans to acquire at least 12 Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth jets, aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons and designed in the United States. While these purchases are touted as vital for modernising Britain's air power, critics warn that the government is effectively trading sovereign production for dependency on American suppliers.

A recent National Audit Office report disclosed that only about one-third of Britain's F-35 fleet was capable of flying all required missions, due to chronic shortages of spare parts and engineering personnel. Shortages of spare parts and trained personnel have hindered operational readiness, raising legitimate questions about the wisdom of betting so heavily on foreign-made jets while British production capacity withers.

Union estimates suggest that Typhoon final assembly and associated supply chains directly or indirectly support more than 20,000 defence industry jobs across the UK. Union leaders and industry experts have sounded the alarm about the potential "atrophy" of skills in high-value engineering, advanced electronics, and complex systems integration. A senior engineer at Warton told GB News it felt as though the government was abandoning the aerospace capabilities built there, with little visible plan to safeguard jobs or technical skills.

Advocates of sustaining Typhoon production argue that maintaining a domestic manufacturing base is critical to Britain's national security, especially given the growing instability in Europe and the Middle East. They also point out that the Eurofighter Typhoon remains a proven, versatile platform that many allies still rely on. Instead of supporting this capability, the government has chosen to prioritise politically expedient procurement deals abroad.

While the government insists the F-35 programme will bring next-generation air power, critics warn that without new Typhoon orders, the UK risks losing an entire ecosystem of aerospace expertise. Once lost, this capacity may prove impossible to rebuild at any reasonable cost, leaving the country reliant on foreign contractors for core elements of its defence strategy.

As the last Typhoon rolls off the line in Warton, thousands of workers are left wondering whether Britain still values its industrial strength or if that, too, is destined to become another casualty of short-term policy and political calculation.

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