

UK Launches Sweeping Defence Overhaul to Address Modern Global Threats

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The UK government has unveiled its most ambitious defence reform in decades, aiming to modernise the country's military capabilities in response to growing global threats from state and non-state actors. The newly published Strategic Defence Review outlines an increase in defence spending, major investment in nuclear and advanced weapons

systems, and a reorientation of the armed forces towards agility, lethality, and technological superiority.

At the heart of the review is a pledge to raise defence spending from 2.3% to 2.5% of GDP by 2027, with a longer-term ambition of reaching 3% if economic conditions allow. The review warns that the security environment is “more serious and less predictable than at any time since the Cold War,” citing threats from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Defence Secretary John Healey stated that the UK must remain “battle-ready” in an era of escalating global risk.

One of the most significant announcements is the expansion of the UK’s nuclear deterrent. Up to twelve new AUKUS-class nuclear-powered submarines will replace the current Astute-class fleet by the late 2030s, reinforcing Britain’s maritime capabilities. The Ministry of Defence will also invest £15 billion in new nuclear warheads and acquire twelve US-made F-35A jets capable of carrying tactical nuclear weapons, restoring an air-based nuclear option not seen since the Cold War.

The British Army, while not growing substantially in troop numbers, will see a technological transformation. It will maintain around 76,000 regular soldiers, but focus on becoming more lethal and digitally enabled through drones, long-range precision missiles, and artificial intelligence. A new Cyber and Electromagnetic Command will be operational by the end of 2025, reflecting the increasing importance of non-conventional warfare.

To support the strategy, six new domestic munitions factories will be built, and the UK plans to manufacture up to 7,000 long-range weapons during this parliamentary term. A £400 million Defence Innovation Fund

will foster next-generation technologies, including a digital battlefield coordination system known as the Digital Targeting Web.

The UK also reaffirmed its participation in the Global Combat Air Programme with Italy and Japan to develop a sixth-generation fighter jet and formalised a mutual defence pact with Germany. While the overhaul has been welcomed as timely and necessary, defence analysts stress that consistent funding and efficient execution will be critical to achieving its long-term goals in an increasingly unstable global environment.