

British Fighter Jet Lands on Japanese Carrier in Historic First

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A British F-35B Lightning II has landed on a Japanese aircraft carrier for the first time, marking a significant milestone in the defence cooperation between the United Kingdom and Japan. The operation, carried out this week, underscores the strengthening military partnership between the two nations amid rising security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region.

The historic landing took place on the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force's (JMSDF) JS Izumo, one of Japan's largest warships. The F-35B, a short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) stealth fighter operated by the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, successfully conducted deck operations during a joint exercise designed to enhance interoperability between the British and Japanese armed forces.

This achievement follows years of growing defence collaboration between London and Tokyo, driven by shared concerns over China's military expansion and the strategic importance of keeping sea lanes open in the Indo-Pacific. Both governments have emphasised the need for closer ties, culminating in a defence pact signed earlier this year, allowing each nation's forces to train and operate more closely.

Defence officials described the landing as a practical demonstration of this alliance in action. According to the UK Ministry of Defence, the exercise not only tested the operational capabilities of the F-35B on a Japanese carrier but also helped refine joint procedures, making future cooperation more seamless. The British jet's presence on the JS Izumo reflects the progress Japan has made in adapting its vessels to operate advanced fighter aircraft. The ship underwent extensive modifications in recent years to accommodate the F-35B, marking a notable shift in Japan's post-war defence posture.

The Royal Navy's involvement in the exercise is part of the UK's wider strategy to maintain a sustained presence in the Indo-Pacific. With global shipping routes under increasing strain from geopolitical tensions, Britain has signalled that it intends to play a greater role in safeguarding freedom of navigation.

A senior UK defence source noted that the historic landing demonstrated the real-world benefits of alliances. “This is not just about hardware; it is about trust, coordination, and a shared vision for regional stability,” they said.

For Japan, the collaboration is equally significant. As regional threats grow more complex, Tokyo has sought partnerships with like-minded nations to bolster its defence capabilities. The ability to operate alongside Britain’s cutting-edge aircraft offers a tangible boost to Japan’s deterrence posture.

The event comes at a time of heightened maritime activity in the Indo-Pacific, with both China and North Korea increasing military exercises and weapons testing. In response, the UK and Japan have deepened their engagement not only bilaterally but also through joint initiatives with other regional allies such as the United States and Australia.

The successful integration of a British fighter jet into Japanese carrier operations sets a precedent for more ambitious joint exercises in the future. As both nations continue to invest in advanced defence capabilities, the partnership is expected to remain a central element in the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

This landmark moment aboard the JS Izumo is more than a technical achievement; it is a clear signal of unity and readiness in an increasingly contested region.