# Britain accelerates drone integration in Armed Forces with £4.5bn investment inspired by Ukraine conflict



Britain’s Armed Forces are poised for a transformative shift towards high-tech warfare, with significant investments in drones and unmanned aircraft to address the evolving landscape of modern conflict. As detailed by defence sources, this anticipated strategic change is inspired largely by lessons drawn from the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has underscored the vital role of advanced technology in contemporary military operations.

The imminent strategic defence review, set to be released shortly, promises to outline a new direction for British military capabilities. Already, drones have found a purpose in the Armed Forces primarily for close surveillance operations. However, the forthcoming changes are expected to significantly enhance this role. Reports suggest that the Royal Navy may establish a squadron of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) operating from its aircraft carriers, while the Royal Air Force (RAF) plans to integrate laser-armed swarming drones from its next-generation Tempest fighter jet. Furthermore, the establishment of a new drones regiment within the Army will be supplemented with long-range artillery and enhanced cyber capabilities.

Defence Secretary John Healey, addressing the pressing need for this technological evolution, remarked on social media about the transformation of warfare. “We’ve seen warfare changing [and] we are now learning the lessons from Ukraine,” he stated, highlighting the need for the forces to adapt to these rapid changes. He emphasized that traditional fighter jets, which currently define military strength, will need to operate in concert with newer drone technologies that can be quickly assembled and deployed.

Despite these promising developments, the backdrop of decades of underfunding presents challenges. British Armed Forces face critical shortages of warships, armoured vehicles, and modern fighter aircraft, which could undermine the swift implementation of new technologies. The need for substantial investment in areas such as anti-missile defence systems is pressing, especially given recent fears about vulnerabilities to potential missile attacks, particularly from Russian forces.

In February 2024, the UK government announced a £4.5 billion investment over a decade to enhance military drone capabilities, citing the necessity to learn from frontline engagement in Ukraine. The funding aims to bolster intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, strike, and logistics functionalities across all branches of the Armed Forces. The commitment to procure drones at scale reflects a broader strategic imperative to modernise military hardware amidst geopolitical tensions.

This move towards comprehensive drone integration is not without hurdles. The UK’s Ministry of Defence has faced significant delays in rolling out advanced drone systems, notably the Protector UAV programme, which has exceeded its initial timeline by five years and incurred substantial cost overruns. Originally planned for deployment in 2018, these advanced drones are now expected to be operational by the end of 2023 and are designed to fulfil diverse roles including intelligence and combat operations.

Moreover, the Army is actively pursuing various unmanned platforms. Recent orders for quadcopters and fixed-wing drones under the Tequila programme are aimed at achieving operational deployment by late 2024. The integration of micro-unmanned aerial vehicles by specialist units underlines the commitment to enhancing capabilities across different operational theatres.

The focus on drones extends beyond surveillance and logistical support; it also encompasses developing counter-drone technologies. Recent tests by the British Army of anti-drone systems, such as Raytheon’s laser weapon mounted on military vehicles, illustrate the increasing necessity for protective measures against the proliferation of drones in conflict zones. These advancements testify to the strategic thought shaping the UK’s defence posture in an era where technology increasingly dictates the outcome of military engagements.

As the UK military embarks on these ambitious reforms, scrutiny remains over whether the impending defence review will meet the Government’s assertions of being a comprehensive evaluation of military needs. Early indications suggest that vital procurement decisions may not feature prominently in the final output, raising concerns among defence experts and political commentators about the review’s efficacy.

Tory defence spokesman James Cartlidge commented on the critical need for timely investment, asserting that any advancements would not come a moment too soon. He cautioned, however, against any inclination towards 'penny-pinching' in military procurement that may compromise the required strategic enhancements.

Ultimately, as the UK prepares its armed forces to meet the challenges of 21st-century warfare, the integration of advanced drone technology stands as a cornerstone of this transition. This high-tech revolution, coupled with the lessons learned from ongoing conflicts, aims to forge a more adaptable and resilient military force capable of responding to future challenges.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
2. Paragraphs 1, 6.
3. Paragraphs 6.
4. Paragraphs 1, 2.
5. Paragraphs 4.
6. Paragraphs 5.
7. Paragraphs 2, 4.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14723189/Government-eyes-advanced-tech-drive-prepare-armed-forces-challenges-modern-warfare.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-learning-lessons-ukraine-spend-57-bln-military-drones-2024-02-22/> - In February 2024, the UK government announced a £4.5 billion investment over the next decade to equip its armed forces with military drones, inspired by lessons from the Ukraine conflict. This funding aims to enhance intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance, strike, and logistics capabilities across the British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force. The Ministry of Defence emphasized the need to learn from the Ukrainian frontline to procure drones at scale for the UK's Armed Forces. The UK has already supplied Ukraine with drones and plans to continue supporting with uncrewed systems, including a £200 million allocation from a £2.5 billion support package. The British military currently utilizes drones like the Evolve Dynamics Sky Mantis and the Reaper MQ-9A.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/01/07/mod-drone-programme-five-years-late-530m-budget/> - The UK's Ministry of Defence faced a five-year delay in deploying advanced drones, with the Protector UAVs now expected by the end of 2023, at a cost £530 million over budget. Initially slated for 2018, the Protector drones are intended for intelligence, surveillance, targeting, and reconnaissance operations for the RAF. They can also deploy bombs and missiles against enemy forces. The delay has extended the life of existing Reaper drones, which are now expected to remain in service until November 2023. The Protector drones offer advantages over the Reaper, including longer operational range and the ability to operate in civilian airspace, allowing for training and operations within the UK and Europe.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/britain-tests-raytheons-anti-drone-laser-military-vehicle-2024-07-22/> - In July 2024, the British Army tested Raytheon's anti-drone laser weapon mounted on a Wolfhound armored vehicle at the Porton Down military facility. This development underscores the increasing importance of counter-unmanned aerial systems (C-UAS) technologies in modern warfare. The high-energy laser is designed to neutralize aerial drones, responding to the intensified use of drones in conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. The U.S. Army has already deployed this laser, having conducted over 40,000 hours of tests and successfully targeting more than 400 drones. The UK's adoption of such technology highlights the need to protect military assets from drone threats.
5. <https://euro-sd.com/2024/09/articles/40309/autonomous-warriors-british-army-seeks-to-integrate-unmanned-platforms/> - The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) is integrating unmanned platforms into the British Army's operations. In 2022, the MoD ordered 159 Indago 4 quadcopters and 105 fixed-wing Stalker VXE30 drones under the Tequila programme, aiming for operational deployment by late 2024. Additionally, the MoD ordered Elbit Magni-X micro-UAVs in January 2023 for specialist Army units. In May 2023, the MoD issued a request for information regarding options for an armed small unmanned aerial vehicle (SUAV) for the Army. In September 2023, the British Army announced the formation of a new uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) group under the Joint Aviation Command (JAC).
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_equipment_of_the_British_Army> - The British Army's equipment list includes various unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The Hydra 400 jet-propelled drone, capable of carrying three Brimstone laser-guided missiles with a launch range exceeding 30 km, was showcased at DSEI 2023 and is set for testing in the Army’s Warfighting Experiment (AWE). The Army also operates the Evolve Dynamics Sky Mantis and the Reaper MQ-9A drones for surveillance and attack missions. Additionally, the Army has trialed the Sur-Ron Firefly electric motorcycle for reconnaissance and communication tasks, and selected the Rheinmetall Mission Master SP for its Robotic Platoon Vehicles program in 2022.
7. <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/12/british-army-runs-armed-drone-test-campaign-to-assess-urban-warfare-strike-options/> - In December 2023, the British Army conducted an armed drone test campaign to assess urban warfare strike options. The trials included various unmanned aerial systems (UAS) such as Aether’s Strike One, XTEND’s Wolverine, Hybrid Drones’ Hydra heavy lift, and Wright Airborne Computing’s Midge. The campaign aimed to optimize British Army effectiveness in urban environments, focusing on reconnaissance-strike capabilities and human-machine teaming. The trials were part of the Army’s Warfighting Experiment (AWE) Urban Series, designed to inform urban operations doctrine development and technology horizon-scanning.