# Britain prepares to lead NATO in AI-driven military transformation



Britain's military is on the brink of a transformative shift, driven by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into its strategic framework. Defence Secretary John Healey has underscored the urgency of this initiative as he prepares to unveil a comprehensive defence review in the coming weeks. This document, according to Healey, will place AI at the forefront of military innovation, a move he deems essential not only for modernising the armed forces but also for rectifying costly procurement errors of the past.

During a recent visit to European counterparts in Berlin and Rome, Healey asserted that AI is set to revolutionise battlefield dynamics within five years, as evidenced by its impact in Ukraine. “We can see this already in Ukraine, just like in every other walk of life,” he remarked, stressing the necessity for the UK to remain at the cutting edge of defence technology. He aims to position the British military as a leader in NATO's AI initiatives, as the UK seeks to enhance its operational capabilities in an increasingly complex global security environment.

The strategic review, a year in the making under the guidance of former Defence Secretary George Robertson and General Sir Richard Barrons, is set against a backdrop of escalating military expenditure. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has pledged to boost defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027, a measure supported by indications of forthcoming funding targeted at new technologies.

Healey’s approach reflects a broader government strategy aimed at revitalising military procurement. Citing the challenges of traditional arms procurement, he highlighted recent delays with the delivery of Ajax tanks, which were ordered 15 years ago but only recently reached operational capability. This experience has reinforced the belief that the military must adopt a more agile procurement process, one capable of responding to rapid technological advancements that shorten the life cycle of military assets. He stated, “We have to be capable of upgrading and innovating at a wartime pace if we want to give our armed forces the edge over adversaries,” emphasising the applicability of AI and advanced technologies like drones in contemporary warfare.

As a part of this ambitious vision, the British military is currently trialling AI tools in diverse operational contexts, including Estonia. These systems can autonomously detect threats and evaluate the most effective responses. Recent discussions have also centred around establishing a dedicated fund for AI advancements, drawing resources from the broader military budget to ensure expedited deployment of these technologies.

The renewed focus on AI is likely to stimulate business within the defence sector, notably benefiting companies like Palantir, a major player in military technology provision. While Palantir has attracted scrutiny due to its data handling practices and the political affiliations of its founder, Healey has vocally endorsed the company’s contributions. “Palantir are playing a critical role in supporting Ukraine’s fight against Russia,” he asserted, adding that their technologies are instrumental in enhancing Britain's military readiness.

Despite these advancements, Healey faces expectations, particularly from defence advocates who hoped the review would yield substantial investments in notable military systems, such as a British version of the Israeli "Iron Dome" missile defence system. However, some experts caution that such initiatives may be overly ambitious given the current fiscal landscape and the history of prioritising deterrents abroad rather than extensive domestic defence systems.

While analysis from military leaders indicates the necessity to rapidly modernise, the focus on technological innovation remains central to the government’s strategy. General Sir Roly Walker, the new chief of the British Army, remarked that the UK has a limited timeframe to significantly enhance military capabilities in light of threats from aggressive state actors. His vision involves achieving rapid advancements in operational effectiveness through the adoption of AI and other advanced systems.

Integration of AI into the military is set not only to reshape procurement and operational frameworks but is also indicative of the larger strategic narrative driving Britain’s defence posture. As evolving geopolitical landscapes necessitate a reevaluation of security strategies, the forthcoming defence review promises to address these challenges head-on, setting the stage for a more technologically adept future for the UK armed forces.

With this imminent review, the UK’s military strategy is notably poised to undergo the changes necessary for maintaining its relevance in a world where technological supremacy increasingly defines the contours of battlefield success.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/20/uk-armed-forces-artificial-intelligence-ai-strategic-defence-review-john-healey> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/20/uk-armed-forces-artificial-intelligence-ai-strategic-defence-review-john-healey> - In May 2025, UK Defence Secretary John Healey announced a strategic defence review focusing on integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into the military. Healey emphasized the need for the UK to lead in AI innovation within NATO, citing its significant impact on modern warfare, as observed in Ukraine. The review aims to modernize procurement processes to avoid past costly mistakes and is expected to be published within three weeks, following nearly a year of work by former Defence Secretary George Robertson and General Sir Richard Barrons.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-root-and-branch-review-of-uk-armed-forces> - In July 2024, the UK government initiated a comprehensive review of the armed forces, led by former NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson and overseen by Defence Secretary John Healey. The Strategic Defence Review aims to ensure national security and strengthen the UK's position abroad. It seeks to modernize military services and equipment, adapt to evolving threats, and integrate perspectives from military personnel, veterans, MPs, industry, and academia. The review is scheduled to report in the first half of 2025.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/c1a27ef2-8681-4acd-851a-d62d6a2f8b29> - In April 2025, Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced an additional £2.2 billion in military funding for the upcoming year and plans to establish a Defence Growth Board. This initiative aims to position Britain as a 'defence industrial superpower' by increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027. The funding will support emerging technologies, including drones and AI-enabled systems, and foster collaboration with European partners through the European Defence Fund.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/2328df7f-96fc-49ad-9218-8c7ad686dcc2> - In December 2024, European AI specialist Helsing unveiled its first attack drone, the HX-2, designed to meet the growing demand for autonomous weapons amid the Ukraine conflict. The company is already deploying the HX-2 in Ukraine and offering it to the UK and other NATO allies. Helsing plans to produce tens of thousands of these drones at low cost, aiming to serve as a defensive shield against invasions. The drones are equipped with advanced software to identify and attack targets without continuous signal.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/bd9ec712-1def-4bcb-91f5-ca049641bf2b> - In April 2025, the UK Defence Review recommended expanding the country's military presence in the Arctic and High North, driven by increased geopolitical competition and new shipping routes due to melting sea ice. The review emphasizes a 'NATO first' strategy and prioritizes securing the Euro-Atlantic region. It calls for bolstering the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force capabilities, especially in intelligence, surveillance, and anti-submarine warfare, and investing in drones, next-generation technology, and the Global Combat Air Programme.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/8a741760-695b-45a2-8bd7-2b779a07fa4d> - In July 2024, General Sir Roly Walker, the new chief of the British Army, stated that the UK has three years to modernize its military in response to growing geopolitical threats from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. Walker's proposed reforms aim to double the army's lethality within three years and triple it by 2030 by adopting advanced technologies, including AI-driven software, to enhance operational capabilities. The UK's government is reviewing military spending, currently at 2.3% of GDP, with plans to increase it to 2.5%.