

Historic Takeoff: F-35 B Operate for the First Time from a British Aircraft Carrier

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For the first time in history, Italian F-35 B aircraft have taken off and operated from the British aircraft carrier *HMS Prince of Wales*. This historic milestone was achieved during the NATO exercise **MedStrike 25**, held in the Ionian Sea between Puglia and Sicily from May 5 to 11, 2025. The event represents a significant leap in the ability to cooperate and interoperate among allied naval forces.

Italy participated in the operation with an impressive array: the aircraft carrier *Cavour* with its embarked air group composed of **8 F-35B fighters** (6 from the Italian Navy and 2 from the Italian Air Force) and **5 AV-8B Harriers**, along with the frigates *Alpino*, *Bergamini*, *Carabiniere*, the destroyer *Mimbelli*, the support ship *Vulcano*, the patrol vessel *Borsini*, and the Portuguese frigate *Bartolomeu Dias*. A deployment that confirms Italy's expeditionary capability in the maritime and naval aviation domain.



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An Unprecedented Multinational Force in the Mediterranean

The overall deployment involved as many as **21 ships, 2 submarines, 41 fighters (including 26 fifth-generation), 19 helicopters, 10 maritime patrol aircraft**, and over **8,000 military personnel** from numerous NATO countries. Alongside the British carrier group led by *HMS Prince of Wales* and supported by *HMS Dauntless* and *HMS Richmond*, naval units from the United States (*USS Truxtun*, *USS The Sullivans*), Norway (*HNOMS Amundsen*, *HNOMS Maud*), Canada (*HMCS Ville de Quebec*), and Spain (*Méndez Núñez*) also operated.

This exercise represented a crucial opportunity to refine the operational capabilities of allied carrier groups and consolidate cooperation in complex scenarios. As stated by **Admiral Aurelio De Carolis**, Commander in Chief of the Naval Squadron and the European Maritime Force, “this type of training is essential to address maritime security challenges and ensure freedom of navigation in increasingly dynamic scenarios.”



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F-35 B: Allied Synergy and Technological Superiority

Rear Admiral Giancarlo Ciappina, commander of the Italian carrier group, highlighted how this joint deployment represents a natural evolution of the capability already achieved with last year's Indo-Pacific deployment. The ability to operate continuously from allied platforms strengthens training against conventional and asymmetric threats in a rapidly changing environment.

The star of the event was the **F-35B**, the only fifth-generation embarked aircraft currently in service in Europe. Its full integration within a multinational naval air group underscores the centrality of air superiority in maritime power projection. The F-35B proves to be a strategic asset for the defense of national and allied interests, now and in the future.

The MedStrike 25 exercise confirmed the value of **joint training** as an indispensable tool for maintaining high standards of readiness and interoperability, fundamental pillars for addressing global security threats.



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