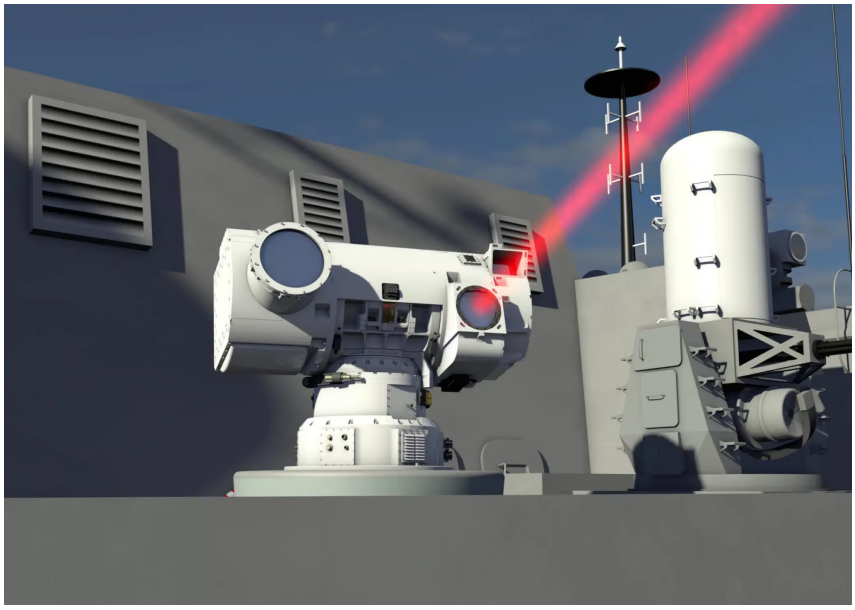

The United Kingdom Raises the Stakes: Laser Weapons, AI, and New Tanks

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The British government has announced significant advancements in the modernization of the Armed Forces, accelerating the adoption of advanced technologies and strengthening its commitment to defense spending. Among the most relevant initiatives is the early introduction of the *DragonFire* laser weapon system in the Royal Navy, the development of AI-based capabilities, and the upgrade of main battle tanks to the *Challenger 3* version.

Emerging Technologies and Defense

"We are introducing laser technology into the Navy about five years earlier than planned, which will protect our Armed Forces and allow us to learn by doing," stated the Minister for Defense Procurement, James Cartlidge Eagle. The *DragonFire* system, developed by the industry consortium led by MBDA with Leonardo UK and QinetiQ, marked a historic moment in January 2024, successfully hitting an aerial target during a high-power test.

Making this technology operational more quickly will, according to Eagle, allow for continuous improvements in areas such as integration, software systems, and overall effectiveness, while also helping to guide future decisions on directed energy weapons.

In parallel, the British government has established a dedicated £400 million fund for defense innovation, and announced that at least 10% of the Ministry of Defense's equipment budget will be allocated to advanced technologies, including autonomous and AI-based capabilities.

Defense Spending and Future Goals: 2.5% of GDP by 2027

In the spring statement, the goal of raising defense spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 was confirmed. This will translate into an increase of £14.2 billion in the fiscal year 2027-2028 compared to 2024-2025, according to estimates by the Office for Budget Responsibility. In 2024, the United Kingdom spent about £64.6 billion on defense, an increase from £61.9 billion the previous year.

Challenger 3 Program: Challenges and Developments

The process of upgrading the British main battle tank to the *Challenger 3* configuration has, however, encountered obstacles in the supply chain. Initial operational capability is expected by 2027, while full delivery of the 138 vehicles is anticipated by 2030.

"Additional resources have been directed towards resolving these issues and the next phase of trials will begin in the second quarter of 2025," explained Eagle. The program is led by Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land and includes a new turret with a 120 mm smoothbore gun, upgraded armor, and an active protection system.

The approved budget for the program is £1.9 billion and, at present, no increases are anticipated due to technical challenges or inflation. "We are confident that the Challenger 3 will continue to meet potential threats throughout its lifecycle, but we will continue to closely monitor its performance to ensure it remains at the forefront worldwide," concluded Eagle.

News link: https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/04/01/uk-rushes-naval-laser-weapon-as-major-tank-upgrade-hits-snag/