

U.K. Royal Navy Submarines Set for £265 Million Tomahawk Missile Upgrade



The guided-missile destroyer USS Chafee (DDG 90) launches a Block V Tomahawk, the weapon's newest variant, during a three day missile exercise in 2020. *U.S. NAVY / Ens. Sean Ianno*

LONDON – The United Kingdom's stock of Tomahawk Land-Attack Missiles will be upgraded on Royal Navy submarines to ensure the weapon is even more effective against future threats, the U.K. Ministry of Defence said June 1.

In a £265 million (\$334 million USD) contract with the U.S. government, with maintenance and technical support at the U.K. sites of BAE Systems, Babcock International and Lockheed Martin, the Royal Navy's Astute-class submarines will be armed with an enhanced Block V standard missile, capable of striking severe threats at a range of up to 1,000 miles.

At approximately 5.6 meters long and weighing 2,200 kilograms

– a similar weight to a 4×4 car – the high subsonic Tomahawk was first introduced into U.K. service in 1998 and can hit inland targets from the sea within minutes. A weapon of choice since then, it has been successfully deployed during operations in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq.

“This upgrade will equip our Astute-class attack submarines with the one of the most lethal and precise long-range strike weapons,” said Minister for Defence Procurement Jeremy Quin. “Enhancing this cutting-edge missile system will ensure the U.K. can strike severe threats up to 1,000 miles away.”

The Tomahawk missiles will be upgraded as part of a foreign military sale with the U.S. government, which was negotiated by the MoD’s procurement arm, Defence Equipment and Support, and will be active from July.

Making use of existing U.S. research and expertise on the upgraded missile, the contract will mean the United Kingdom continues to receive full access to the U.S. Tomahawk program, support package and upgrades.

“Not only will this FMS sustain and improve a proven, crucial operational capability for any future conflicts, it will continue to ensure interoperability with our U.S. allies and the follow-on support arrangements will sustain jobs for UK industry,” said Ed Cutts, DE&S’ director of weapons.

Due to be operational in the mid-2020s, the upgraded Tomahawk will align with the delivery of the latest Astute-class submarines.