HARRIER RETIREMENT AND SALE

The sale of 72 Harrier aircraft to the United States was confirmed on 24th November by the UK Ministry of Defence, saving around £1 billion overall. The airframes and associated parts will be used as a major source of spares to support the US Marine Corps Harrier AV-8B Fleet.

It is understood the value of the sale is $180 million (around £110 million). Added to the savings made from retiring the Harrier fleet from service, this sale takes the total estimated receipts and savings to the Ministry to around £1 billion. This will enable investment in a more modern and capable mixed fast jet fleet, including the state-of-the-art Joint Strike Fighter.

Difficult decisions had to be taken in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) to tackle the Defence Department’s £38 billion black hole which was inherited from the previous Government. Cuts predating the SDSR left the Harrier Force too small to carry out enduring operations in Afghanistan whilst maintaining the contingent capability needed for other operations such as Libya. Also, Tornado delivers the full range needed in terms of precision weapons and reconnaissance.

Peter Luff, Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology, confirmed the sale to the House of Commons on 24th November. He said, “Harrier served this country with great distinction but retiring it eight years earlier than planned was the right decision. Had we taken the decision in the SDSR to decommission Tornado instead we would not have been able to carry out the missions that were required simultaneously in Libya and Afghanistan. It was essential to retire older, less capable aircraft to allow us to invest in more modern, cutting-edge fast jets. As our operations over Libya proved, we have the capability to project decisive air power and can utilise our extensive basing and over-flight rights to great effect. The sale of Harrier is evidence of our commitment to working closely with our allies and represents a good deal for both countries.”

The sale of equipment to the US includes spares and associated support equipment. Two aircraft will also be offered to museums in order to preserve the Royal Navy’s military heritage.