



JAPANESE AND BRITISH FIGHTER PLANES MEET FOR FIRST TIME SINCE WORLD WAR TWO

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British fighter planes will take on Japanese aircraft for the first time since World War Two in aerial combat drills following the arrival in Japan on Saturday of four Royal Air Force Typhoon Eurofighters.

The joint practice at Japan's northern Misawa Air Base starts on Sunday and will be the first time Japan's air force train at home with a foreign force other than that of the United States.

The jets along with a C-17 support plane touched down early in the evening under overcast skies, their high-pitched screams prompting some onlookers to cover their ears.

The Typhoons will face off against and fly with Japanese F-15s and domestically built Mitsubishi F-2s in an exercise dubbed Guardian North 16.

"We will learn from each other, and ultimately we will make friendships that will tie us together more closely in the future," RAF Lieutenant Colonel Roger Elliot, said in introductory remarks to 100 Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) personnel.

Both countries want to hone scramble techniques to counter foreign military aircraft approaching their airspaces. Both regularly shadow Russian planes and the JASDF scrambles when Chinese jets approaching its southwestern border.

As China's control of the neighboring South China Sea tightens, Japan worries that Beijing's attention is turning toward the East China Sea where Japan controls a chain of islands stretching 1,400 km (870 miles) towards Taiwan.

In the six months to the end of September, Japanese fighters took off to chase Chinese planes 407 times compared with 231 times a year earlier, according to the JASDF. Encounters with Russian bombers and surveillance planes, which fly in from the north rose 67 percent to 180 incidents.

The Typhoon visit is also an opportunity for Japan's air force see Europe's most advanced jet as it looks at proposals for developing a new fighter to replace its F-2s at a cost of as much as \$40 billion.

In 2011 Japan considered a bid by BAE Systems to sell it the Typhoon in a competition ultimately won by Lockheed Martin Corp with its F-35 stealth fighter.

Japan has yet to decide what kind of aircraft its new fighter, dubbed the F-3, will be, but the choice is between a cheaper non-stealth superiority fighter based on an existing design, such as the Eurofighter, or a more expensive program to build a stealth fighter like the U.S. F-22 Raptor.

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