



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5 ZONE B MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone: 020 7218 9000 (Switchboard)

THE EARL OF MINTO
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

MSU/4/8/1/1/is

20th March 2024

Dear John,

During the debate on 809 Naval Air Squadron on 11 March 2024, you asked a question about the number of pilots currently manning the F-35 Lightning Force.

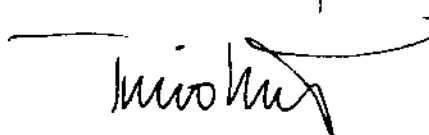
I am sure you will understand that Lightning Force is a relatively small cadre of personnel with an important frontline role.

With such a small force, we have to carefully balance placing information in Parliament which would enable our adversaries to derive our full military capabilities. Consequently, I cannot provide the number of qualified F-35 Lightning pilots as it would prejudice the capability of the Armed Forces.

However, I can reassure you that the numbers of pilots on the Force are more than sufficient to continue to equip the existing frontline squadron and provide the training requirements for Force growth to reach Full Operating Capability of two frontline squadrons in 2025.

617 Squadron is at its normal operating strength of pilots, and as I gave in the primary answer in the debate, 809 Naval Air Squadron's force growth, strength and capabilities will continue to increase throughout this and next year as further pilots graduate, as scheduled, from the Operational Conversion Unit. This will enable the first operational deployment of the squadron in 2025.

I hope this explains the position. I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Yours sincerely


THE EARL OF MINTO

Lord Lee of Trafford
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW