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Britain's Largest Warship Ever: Big Asset or Big Embarrassment?

Bigger doesn't always mean better.

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- [29-12-2017](#)

On December 7, after eight years of construction, the British Navy commissioned the largest ship it has ever produced: the HMS Queen Elizabeth. This new aircraft carrier is the first of its class, with a second--the HMS Prince of Wales--expected to be commissioned in 2020.

For Britain, these new capital ships are a breath of fresh air for a military that has been gutted by years of budget cuts. At present, the British Army has only 78,000 troops, even though it's supposed to have 82,000. Added to that, British Finance Chancellor Philip Hammond has suggested that the Army could even be shrunk down to 50,000 troops. If that were to take place, the British Army would become the smallest it has been in over 200 years--and smaller than those of the major powers in Europe. It would be less than half the size of France's army (111,000 soldiers), smaller than Italy's (99,000), Spain's (77,000) and even Germany's (60,000).

In the face of all this woeful news, these new aircraft carriers are just the thing Britain needs to reestablish itself in the eyes of the world as a dominant power. The problem is, they too are plagued with problems.

The arrival of HMS Queen Elizabeth has long been anticipated by the Royal Navy. The order for the two vessels was placed in 2007, with the expectation that the ships would be put into service in 2014 and 2016. However, because of the economic crisis in 2008, the order was delayed, resulting in budget overruns. In the end, both ships cost \$7.9 billion, 80 percent higher than the original projection of \$4.4 billion. For a nation with a tight defense budget, this is a costly overrun.

To help stock these carriers, Britain has ordered 138 F-35s, the latest generation of strike fighter jet. In December, Britain took possession of its 14th F-35B, a variant that will be used specifically on the new aircraft carriers. These jets feature the latest in stealth technology and are able to land vertically and utilize short take-off procedures. However, the F-35 program has been plagued with a host of problems. The annual report from the Pentagon in January 2017 found 276 deficiencies in the combat performance of the fighter. According to the report, deficiencies were being discovered at a rate of 20 per month. In addition, Britain's Ministry of Defense has taken severe criticism for its lack of transparency. Despite repeated requests, it has failed to disclose the full cost of each aircraft once spares, upgrades and retrofits were included.

The F-35B costs around \$100 million per fighter, and each aircraft carrier will carry a complement of 26 fighters at a minimum. That is a massive investment just for planes that are proving to be more and more unreliable. Britain's huge investment into a defunct plane could just be the beginning of its financial worries. If the F-35 program fails to deliver, it will be catastrophic for Britain's new aircraft carriers built *specifically for the F-35*. The Queen Elizabeth does not have the catapult system to launch aircraft that American and French carriers have--it was designed specifically for the F-35's short takeoff and vertical landing ability. Without the F-35, the aircraft carrier effectively loses all its teeth, leaving helicopters as the only aircraft able to take off from its flight deck.

Stepping away from the design problems of the aircraft carrier, more and more voices are being raised about Britain's ability to protect the aircraft carrier in combat. Being such large, slow-moving targets, aircraft carriers are always attached to a

larger contingent of frigates and destroyers to protect them from enemy ships. But Britain doesn't have enough frigates and destroyers. "The Navy says that in a 'high-threat environment' they will be protected by two destroyers, two antisubmarine frigates, a submarine, a tanker and a supply ship," reported the *Guardian*. "That is a huge commitment for a navy that has just 19 destroyers and frigates and six available subs." Even an escort of that size is "very weak," according to some sources.

For a country that once ruled the waves, the British Navy is a shadow of its former strength. Not only has it shrunk to dangerous levels, but the new ships being produced are not giving any return on their investment. There are even concerns that the Navy doesn't have enough qualified sailors to man these new ships. After investing billions of pounds in the project, Britain has what a former British chief of defense staff member called "vulnerable metal cans."

Britain isn't the only nation that has failed to deliver on a new aircraft carrier.

Earlier this year, the United States launched its new Ford-class carrier, which was beset with all kinds of problems and budgetary issues. The aircraft carrier cost \$12.9 billion, which was nearly 25 percent over budget. It too has failed to do what an aircraft carrier is supposed to do: launch aircraft. The aircraft carrier's new launch system was supposed to be lighter and increase the lifespan of aircraft by putting less stress on the airframe. It has failed at both. The launch system has also been prone to failure. In spite of these problems and astronomical costs, the Navy is continuing to install these systems on their new aircraft carriers because to redesign the ships to use older, proven technology would cost even more.

The ship also has a problem catching airplanes as they land. An unproven arrestor technology was installed on the first Ford-class carrier, but testing found that only 25 successful landings could be made before the system failed. That's 660 times fewer than the Navy's requirement of 16,500. The system is so bad that the Department of Defense has asked the Navy to look into shelving the new technology for the older technology on the current aircraft carriers in production.

For two powers that have been known for the strength of their navies, these are costly and embarrassing investments. After years of building and planning, America and Britain aren't seeing any real fruit from their efforts. Instead, they are getting defunct technologies in both new aircraft and new aircraft carriers.

The *Trumpet* continually draws attention to America's and Britain's military woes because of what is revealed in Bible prophecy. These nations invest *billions* of dollars in defense, but they have nothing to show for it. The Bible reveals that these nations are under a curse because they have turned away from God, rejected His laws, and chose to go their own ways. As a result, God warns that their "strength shall be spent in vain" (Leviticus 26:20). That is exactly what we see in America's and Britain's military. So much money is being spent on defense, but the fruits of those investments are terrible.

God also says that He has taken away from these nations the "cunning artificer," or the skilled workman (Isaiah 3:3). At their respective peaks, America and Britain were turning out state-of-the-art military technology. Now they are designing failed weapons systems that are running multiple times over budget. At the same time, nations like Russia and China are producing hypersonic missiles that American and British aircraft carriers can't defend against.

What is happening to Britain and America? Why are both of these nations in such decline militarily? All this is explained in our free book [The United States and Britain in Prophecy](#), by Herbert W. Armstrong.

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