

Beat: News

UK air operations assisting the Iraqi government

Fight against ISIL

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USPA NEWS - British forces have continued to conduct air operations to assist the Iraqi government in its fight against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

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1 April: Royal Air Force aircraft have conducted further successful strikes on terrorist targets in northern and western Iraq. Tornado GR4s from RAF Akrotiri conducted an armed reconnaissance mission on Friday 27 March in the Mosul area, in the course of which they identified an excavator being used by ISIL to construct defensive positions against continuing Iraqi and Kurdish offensives to liberate the local population from oppression by the terrorists.

A Brimstone missile made a direct hit on the vehicle, destroying it. Another Tornado patrol, on Sunday 29 March, provided close air support to Iraqi forces near Tikrit, and the accuracy of the Brimstone missile system allowed a successful attack to be conducted on a terrorist armoured personnel carrier positioned under a road bridge. RAF Reaper remotely piloted aircraft have also continued their work to provide overwatch to Iraqi forces, and on Tuesday 31 March, a Reaper supported Iraqi army operations in Anbar province.

As well as providing invaluable surveillance coverage, the aircraft was able to assist the Iraqi ground forces with a Hellfire missile strike on a terrorist position that was directing small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire onto an advancing army unit.

As well as providing air support to the Iraqi ground forces, the international coalition is also helping train and equip them.

Having helped provide extensive infantry training to the Kurdish peshmerga, British military personnel are now leading the development of a specific coalition programme to improve the ability of the Iraqi and Kurdish troops to deal effectively with the significant threat posed by improvised explosive devices left behind by ISIL as they are forced onto the defensive by successful government offensives.

Previous air strikes

1 March: A Reaper tracked an ISIL truck loaded with weapons and ammunition, and scored a direct Hellfire hit.

In the north of Iraq, meanwhile, British and coalition military instructors continue to provide infantry training for the peshmerga as they prepare for further offensives to extend the areas they have already liberated from terrorist control. HMS Dauntless and HMS Kent remain in the Gulf, supporting air strike operations by US and French aircraft carriers.

2 March: A pair of RAF Tornado GR4s led other coalition aircraft in an attack on a series of ISIL fortified positions south of Kirkuk. These bunkers posed a potential threat to offensive operations by the Kurdish peshmerga, who have also benefitted from equipment and extensive training provided by British and coalition military instructors. Meanwhile, in western Iraq, RAF Reapers provided close air support to an Iraqi Army offensive in Anbar province. The retreating ISIL terrorists sought to hold up the Iraqi advance with numerous improvised explosive devices.

One vehicle-borne bomb posed a particular obstacle to the Iraqi ground forces, so a Reaper destroyed the vehicle with a Hellfire missile. Later that night, another Reaper assisted Iraqi troops who had come under fire from the terrorists, carrying out an attack with a Hellfire missile on the ISIL position.

4 March: A Reaper, which was providing air support to Iraqi army units, spotted the muzzle flash of a heavy calibre weapon.

Close investigation allowed the Reaper's crew to locate an ISIL towed artillery piece, which was then destroyed with a Hellfire missile. Investigation allowed the Reaper's crew to locate an ISIL towed artillery piece which was destroyed with a Hellfire missile.

5 March: Reapers continued to provide close air support to Iraqi ground forces in the west of the country.

An ISIL vehicle was destroyed during Thursday morning, and then in the evening a series of Hellfire engagements took place. An ISIL vehicle check-point was neutralised, an attempt by terrorists to launch an attack on Iraqi troops was disrupted by three successful missile strikes, and finally an armed pick-up truck was destroyed late that night. The Reapers also provided surveillance support to two further air strikes by coalition fast jets.

8 March: A Reaper armed reconnaissance patrol provided surveillance for a coalition attack on an armed terrorist truck, then conducted an Hellfire attack on a second vehicle.

9 March: The afternoon saw a pair of Tornado GR4s conduct close air support for Kurdish peshmerga on the offensive south of Kirkuk. When the peshmerga came under fire from ISIL terrorists the GR4s were able to conduct successful strikes with Paveway IV guided bombs.

11 March: A Tornado patrol located a camouflaged 130mm heavy artillery piece near Al Qaim in western Iraq, and destroyed it with Brimstone missiles. Later that day, Tornado GR4s, along with Sentry surveillance and Voyager tanker aircraft, provided close air support to Kurdish peshmerga engaged in eliminating ISIL strongholds in and around the city of Sinjar.

An ISIL position was identified ““ they were using a building to fire at close range on the advancing Kurdish unit. Working closely with the Kurdish forces the Tornado crews conducted a precision attack with a Paveway IV guided bomb which successfully destroyed the position. A little later, a second stronghold was identified ““ a base being used by a terrorist heavy machine-gun team ““ this too was successfully attacked with a Paveway IV.

Later that same day, an RAF Reaper provided similar support to Iraqi military units in Anbar province. The Reaper’s crew tracked ISIL vehicles moving at speed on the open road and destroyed two with Hellfire missiles. The Reaper then worked closely to designate targets and provide surveillance support for a further five strikes by other coalition aircraft on enemy positions in the area.

13 March: Tornado GR4s were patrolling ahead of the latest peshmerga offensive near Kirkuk. An armed ISIL truck, which had been firing on the Kurds was destroyed with a Brimstone missile. The GR4s then used Paveways in successful attacks on two buildings in which terrorists had taken up position.

14 March: Tornados flew in support of the Iraqi army to the north-west of Haditha. An ISIL armoured personnel carrier and another armed terrorist vehicle were identified, and both were struck by Brimstone missiles.

15 March: a GR4 patrol was back in northern Iraq, operating over Mosul. Knowing that the Iraqi forces plan at some point to launch an offensive to retake the city from the terrorists, ISIL have been making efforts to construct defences in and around Mosul, and the GR4s were able to disrupt some of this engineering work with Paveway and Brimstone strikes. In a similar fashion, a further Tornado mission in the early hours of Monday morning conducted a Brimstone attack on a vehicle being used to create defences at Anah, near the Haditha Lake.

Meanwhile, in northern Iraq, good progress is being made by a British team of military instructors to establish a training programme to help the peshmerga with techniques to meet the threat from improvised explosive devices (IED). These are increasingly being relied upon by ISIL as they are driven back by Iraqi forces, left as booby-traps to delay the troops advance and make it difficult for civilians to resume their normal lives. The Iraqi and Kurdish forces have already dealt with hundreds of such devices, but spreading the necessary expertise across their many units is a high priority to help save lives.

17 March: a Tornado GR4 patrol conducted extensive reconnaissance work before investigating reports of engineering equipment in use by ISIL to build defensive positions. Two excavators were located and destroyed with a Brimstone missile and a Paveway IV guided bomb.

19/20 March: another GR4 patrol came to the assistance of peshmerga advancing north-east of Mosul. Working closely with the Kurdish forces, despite difficult weather, our aircraft were able to conduct precision attacks with two Paveway IV bombs against an ISIL heavy machine gun and weapon positions.

26 March: overnight on Wednesday 25 March the UK and other coalition nation’s provided support to Iraqi ground forces in western Tikrit who are continuing their offensive against ISIL. Tornado GR4s, supported by a Voyager tanker, used Paveway IV precision guided bombs to attack three ISIL strongholds.

Earlier in the week, on Tuesday 24 March, an RAF Reaper remotely piloted aircraft provided support to Iraqi units operating in the western province of Anbar. Hellfire missiles were used against an ISIL vehicle and two positions.

Further contribution to the coalition's air campaign, two highly capable RAF Sentinel surveillance aircrafts will deploy shortly to the region. In addition, the Defence Secretary set out in a statement to Parliament on Thursday 26 March detailing the military training which the UK will provide to the Syrian moderate opposition. Details of previous airstrikes can be found by clicking on link below.

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