

# News story: Defence Secretary praises UK efforts as RAF operations against Daesh continue

In his first visit to Iraq, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson praised UK service personnel as British airstrikes continue to wipe out Daesh.

RAF aircraft flew on operations against the terrorist group every day over the Christmas period, striking terrorist compounds, trucks, mortars and pockets of fighters engaged in close quarter, street fighting with Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The dangers we face are changing and are intensifying rapidly. Eliminating the threat from terrorism is critical to our security at home and abroad. Our brave Armed Forces are working tirelessly, day and night, to defeat Daesh after helping to recover significant territory in Iraq.

Only by defeating this evil and barbaric group for good will we reduce the deadly threat they pose to us, which is why we won't stop until their global network is destroyed.

RAF aircraft have carried out over 1,700 strikes against Daesh in Iraq and Syria since 2014 and in his first visit to Cyprus, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson also met the crews who are playing a vital role in the coalition campaign to totally defeat Daesh.

Fast jets flying out of RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus and remotely piloted Reaper aircraft continue to provide support to the SDF on the ground who are clearing the last remaining pockets of Daesh terrorists in Eastern Syria.

Typhoons, Tornados and Reapers worked closely with coalition partners, offering vital intelligence and close air support throughout December, destroying Daesh targets near Abu Kamal, Abu Hardub and Abu Hammam.

He also visited UK personnel in Taji and Baghdad, as well as Kuwait, praising their efforts as part of the UK's contribution to the global coalition fight Daesh.

In Kuwait, he met with US Lieutenant General Paul Funk the Commanding General of the global coalition as well as Major General Felix Gedney, Deputy Commander-Strategy and Support and the most senior UK officer in the military campaign against Daesh.

They discussed the success of the military campaign in both Iraq and Syria,

but also reflected that Daesh have not yet been defeated as pockets of fighters still remain and will continue to pose a threat at home and abroad.

In Baghdad, Mr Williamson met with the Iraqi Defence Minister and visited the Iraqi National Security Agency, commending the efforts of the Iraqi Security Forces and reiterating the UK's commitment to the long-term security and stability of Iraq. This follows from the Prime Minister's pledge in her recent visit to address the evolving threat from Daesh and countering the dispersal of foreign fighters as Daesh is squeezed out of the battlefield in Syria and Iraq

He also visited UK troops stationed in Taji who, along with over 600 British soldiers on the ground in Iraq, are helping to train that country's forces. UK troops have so far helped train around 60,000 Iraqi Security Forces in battle-winning infantry, counter-IED, engineering and combat medical skills. In addition to personnel on the ground in Iraq, the UK has provided over 1,400 military personnel from all three Services as part of its three year involvement.