

RAF Fighter Jets, Surveillance and Refuelling aircraft have been in action across Europe this week in support of NATO allies

During the early morning of 15 June, Typhoons from RAF Coningsby met up with two US Air Force (USAF) B-52 bombers off the North of Scotland as they arrived from their base in the USA to conduct a long-range strategic training mission in the annual NATO BALTOPs exercise in the Baltic region.

The Typhoons welcomed the B-52s as they entered UK airspace and then escorted them across the North Sea as they were refuelled by USAF KC-135 tankers from RAF Mildenhall. The Typhoons from XI(F) Sqn were supported by a Voyager tanker from RAF Brize Norton, with coordination being provided by RAF Sentry and Sentinel aircraft from RAF Waddington.

As the B-52s from the 5th Bomb Wing, Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota left Danish airspace, they conducted additional training with French Mirage 2000 and then RAF Typhoon jets from the Baltic Air Policing mission as they flew over Latvia and Estonia.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

NATO remains the best guarantor of our collective security and we continue to stand alongside our allies in the Baltics. That is why, despite the ongoing pandemic, the RAF's participation in this multinational exercise is vital for enhancing Allied capabilities and demonstrating our combined strength.

The following day Typhoons from the RAF Lossiemouth based 6 Sqn deployed in Lithuania, switched from the BALTOPs exercise to intercept a SU-24 Fencer E and two SU-35 Flanker M Russian aircraft operating off the Baltic coast. This was followed on the 18 June by another Typhoon scramble to deter and intercept a Russian IL-20 COOT A intelligence gathering aircraft over the Baltic Sea.

Wing Commander Stu Gwinnett, the 135 Expeditionary Air Wing commander that is carrying out the NATO Air Policing mission said:

This week's missions have highlighted the flexibility of the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission; whether it's working with the US Bomber Task Force or reacting to live Baltic airspace incursions, we are ready to react. This is a testament to the flexibility, training and professionalism of the deployed RAF personnel here in Lithuania and our ability to work with our NATO partners.

Reflecting on the air activity this week Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, the Chief of the Air Staff said:

In a week that has been a painful reminder of the dangers of what we do, we have also demonstrated air and space power on a global scale, operating at range, at speed, and precisely. Royal Air Force command and control, surveillance, refuelling and fighter aircraft working alongside our NATO allies, patrolling our skies and protecting our shared freedom.