

Third anniversary of operations against Da'esh

The Royal Air Force has marked the third anniversary of the first UK airstrikes against Da'esh by continuing operations against the false caliphate.

Daesh fighters are being pinned down by the RAF in their former stronghold of Raqqa as the UK marks three years of operations against the barbaric cult in Iraq and Syria.



Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

"British forces have crippled Daesh since 2014, forcing this miserable cult from the gates of Baghdad to the brink of defeat in Raqqa. By air, land and sea UK personnel have played a tireless role in striking targets and training allies, demonstrating that our values will not be compromised at any price."

Since 2014 RAF Typhoon, Tornado and Reaper aircraft have struck Da'esh 1340 times in Iraq and 262 times in Syria. In that time the group has lost territory, finances, leaders and fighters as the 73-member coalition has liberated cities in both countries. As the second largest contributor to the Global Coalition's military campaign, the UK has flown more than 8,000 sorties providing strikes, surveillance and reconnaissance, air-air refuelling and transport.



The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

"This has been an immense effort by RAF airmen and airwomen over the last three years of continued operations, countering Da'esh in Iraq and Syria. However, the tempo continues with RAF aircraft destroying 17 targets in Syria in a single day last week."

Three years ago Daesh was barely an hour from the gates of Baghdad, but today it has lost more than 73 per cent of the territory it occupied in Iraq and 65 per cent of its former territory in Syria. The RAF has played an essential role to allies, helping Syrian Democratic Forces engaged in ground close combat and the Iraqi Security Forces who continue their advance having liberated Mosul and Ninewah province. More than 5.5 million people have been freed from Da'esh's rule and over two million displaced Iraqi civilians have returned to their homes. In Mosul alone, it is estimated that over 265,000 people have returned.



The commander of UK air operations in Iraq and Syria, Air Commodore Johnny

Stringer said:

“This has been an exceptional operational performance and contribution by the Royal Air Force over three years. The professionalism and judgement of our aircrew has been matched by the unstinting dedication of our engineers, suppliers, and intelligence staff across the Op Shader theatre and the wider support from stations across the UK.

“The evil brutality of Daesh is near its end and we will continue to provide this vital UK airpower until our mission is finished. I am immensely proud of, and humbled by, the magnificent efforts of all in 83 Expeditionary Air Group who have made such a difference in this fight.”



Recognising the valuable contributions made by many serving military personnel, the Defence Secretary announced an Iraq and Syria Operational Service Medal during his recent visit to Iraq.

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[News story: RAF Valley's future secure for next 25 years as restoration work is completed](#)

The station is primarily used for advanced fast jet training for pilots and, whilst the previous infrastructure was strong enough for the Hawk aircraft, it has been restored to support pilots training in the likes of Tornados and Typhoons.

A £20 million contract was awarded to refurbish the ageing runway and its link taxiways. The work undertaken will also provide a new section of airside perimeter road, new visual aids, aeronautical lighting and signage for the air station.

The restoration work will extend the life of the runway by a further 25 years, demonstrating the UK's commitment to Defence in Wales.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

This famous runway has been an integral part of the careers of generations of fast-jet pilots who have seen action across the world and are currently leading RAF strikes against Daesh.

I'm delighted that this investment will see the runway play that vital role for at least another 25 years, training new pilots in the skills they need to help keep us safe when flying the next generation of aircraft.

The fighter pilots who graduate go on to fly Typhoon and F35 Lightning II aircraft which secure the skies of the UK and overseas.

The station is also home to helicopter flying training where aircrew learn the skills required for mountains and maritime flying with the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. The Mountain Rescue Service which saves lives across the UK is also based at RAF Valley.



The Defence Secretary met with personnel from RAF Valley this afternoon in North Wales.

All new UK fighter pilots pass through RAF Valley before they reach their frontline Squadron. In the last 3 months, 4 graduates have gone on to fly the world's most sophisticated fighter, the F-35 Lightning II, out in the United States.

The UK currently has 11 F-35B jets being flown in the US and 120 UK personnel being trained there. By the end of the year the UK will have 14 of the jets, with initial flight trials from the brand new Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier's deck planned for next year.

As the US' only Tier 1 partner, UK industry will provide around 15% of every F-35 jet which is built, and later today, the Defence Secretary will also visit the Defence Electronics & Components Agency (DECA), based at MOD Sealand, in North East Wales.

The facility was chosen as the global repair hub providing maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade services for F-35 avionic and aircraft components. Over the lifetime of the programme, components for hundreds of European-based F-35 aircraft will be serviced and maintained at the site.

The work will generate hundreds of millions of pounds of revenue for the UK defence industry, with the potential to unlock more than £2bn of future F-35 support revenue over the lifetime of the programme, sustaining thousands of high tech jobs and skills.

A newly-refurbished hangar at RAF Valley will also house three brand-new Jupiter helicopters which will be used to train pilots from all three Services, delivered as part of the UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS).

These state-of-the-art Airbus helicopters, which closely recreate the cockpits and controls of front-line aircraft, are due to begin flying from RAF Valley later this year. The refurbishment of the hangar is part of an infrastructure improvement programme being delivered through the UKMFTS at both RAF Valley and RAF Shawbury worth a total of around £80 million.

Station Commander Royal Air Force Valley, Group Captain Nick Tucker-Lowe, said:

The visit of the Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon today has highlighted RAF Valley's vital contribution to UK defence as the home of fighter pilot training.

Our team of military personnel, Civil Servants and industry partners take great pride in their role of training the next generation of fighter pilots for the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. With our refurbished main runway, we are well prepared for the future.

UK Government Minister for Wales Guto Bebb said:

This investment in the runway is a huge boost to RAF Valley. It further demonstrates the UK Government's commitment to defence in Wales and the North Wales economy.

It is great to see Wales playing such an important role in the advancement of our defence services and with an extra 25 years now on the lifespan of this site, the future of RAF Valley and the local economy remains strong.

RAF Valley's future secure for next 25 years as restoration work is completed

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon unveiled a newly restored runway at RAF Valley on a trip to Anglesey, Wales today.

The station is primarily used for advanced fast jet training for pilots and, whilst the previous infrastructure was strong enough for the Hawk aircraft, it has been restored to support pilots training in the likes of Tornados and Typhoons.

The existing runway was ageing and so a £20 million contract was awarded to refurbish it as well as the link taxiways in addition to providing a new section airside perimeter road, new visual aids, aeronautical lighting and signage. It will extend the life of the runway by a further 25 years, demonstrating the UK's commitment to Defence in Wales.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

"This famous runway has been an integral part of the careers of generations of fast-jet pilots who have seen action across the world and are currently leading RAF strikes against Daesh. I'm delighted that this investment will see the runway play that vital role for at least another 25 years, training new pilots in the skills they need to help keep us safe when flying the next generation of aircraft."



The graduating fighter pilots go on to fly Typhoon and F35 Lightning II aircraft which secure the skies of the UK and overseas. The station is also home to helicopter flying training where aircrew learn the skills required for mountains and maritime flying ahead of employment on the RAF and Royal Navy front lines, whilst the Mountain Rescue Service is based at RAF Valley saving lives across the UK.

All new UK fighter pilots pass through RAF Valley before they reach their frontline Squadron, and in the last 3 months, 4 graduates have gone on to fly the world's most sophisticated fighter, the F-35 Lightning II, out in the

United States.

The UK already has 11 F-35B jets being flown in the US, and 120 UK personnel being trained there. By the end of the year the UK will have 14 of the jets, with initial flight trials from the brand new Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier's deck planned for next year.

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News story: New ship to support the aircraft carriers arrives in UK

The second of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's new Tide-class support ships, RFA Tiderace, has arrived in Cornwall to begin a programme of customisation that will support 300 UK jobs.

Like her sister ship RFA Tidespring, which arrived in April this year, the 39,000-tonne RFA Tiderace can carry up to 19,000 cubic metres of fuel and 1,400 cubic metres of fresh water in support of Royal Navy operations all over the world.

She has been designed to support the new Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carriers, the first of which, HMS Queen Elizabeth, arrived in Portsmouth last month.

Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

This year of the Royal Navy goes from strength to strength as we welcome yet another new ship into the UK's growing fleet. It's great to see RFA Tiderace join her sister ship RFA Tidespring in the UK today, and I would like to thank the Falmouth team for their important work.



The second MARS tanker, RFA Tiderace, arrived in Falmouth this morning.

The customisation work in Falmouth, which will install armour, self-defence weaponry and communications systems, will help to support 300 local jobs. The UK work content in the Tide Class programme as a whole, which is being delivered well within budget by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), is worth around £150 million, sustaining further jobs at 27 UK-based companies.

RFA Tiderace is expected to undergo around four months of customisation before beginning a round of final sea trials before entering service next year. Meanwhile, RFA Tidespring is expected to finish final sea trials in the coming weeks and enter service before the end of this year.

Sir Simon Bollom, Chief of Materiel (Ships) at Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, said:

Like her sister ship, RFA Tiderace will perform a crucial role in supporting the Royal Navy's global mission in defence of the UK and her interests.

I am proud to welcome Tiderace and her crew to Falmouth as part of the continued successful delivery of the Tide Class programme and look forward to welcoming the final two ships in the class over the coming months.

The Tide Class has a flight deck able to accommodate the large Chinook helicopter and offer significant improvements over previous RFA tankers such

as double hulls and greater environmental protection measures.

Tiderace's arrival comes at a time when the Royal Navy fleet is growing, as encouraged by the [National Shipbuilding Strategy announced earlier this month](#). Setting out to expand the fleet by the 2030s and generate regional prosperity for shipyards across the UK, the Strategy is ambitious in its approach.

Press release: UK AT HEART OF INTERNATIONAL MISSILE DEFENCE EXERCISE

US-led Exercise Formidable Shield has today begun in waters off the West Coast of Scotland.

A Royal Navy Type 45 Destroyer and two Type 23 Frigates will, alongside ships and crews from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the United States, join one of the most sophisticated and complex air and missile exercises ever undertaken in the UK.

Lasting a month, allies will work together to detect, track and shoot down both anti-ship and ballistic missile targets. 13 ships will fire on 12 live missile targets over four days, improving how allies work together in an air and missile defence environment.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

North Korean tests have shown the danger of rogue states developing longer range missiles. By hosting this cutting-edge exercise in anti-missile defence with allied navies Britain is at the forefront of developing a more effective response to this growing threat.

Rear Admiral Paul Bennett, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Capability) said:

Formidable Shield is a terrific example of the leading role that the UK plays in development of maritime air and missile defence – protecting our people and working with our allies.

Ahead of the exercise, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and QinetiQ recently invested £60 million into the Hebrides Range to modernise the equipment and facilities. A further £16.8 million will be invested in two new BAE Systems tracking radars, to be installed on St Kilda, and upgrade two existing radars at MOD Hebrides.

The new radars are part of the £95m Air Range Modernisation programme agreed in December 2016 with the UK MOD.