

RAF Typhoons hand over NATO Romania duties to Canada

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FOUR ROYAL Air Force Typhoon FGR4 fighter aircraft departed Romania on 28 August, ending the UK's five-month leadership of NATO's enhanced air policing mission in the country. Since April the Typhoons – from 3(F) Squadron, RAF Coningsby – had spent alternate weeks on high-readiness standby to defend NATO's airspace over the Black Sea, augmenting the Romanian Air Force's existing air defence capability. The Royal Canadian Air Force is now preparing to assume responsibility for the NATO mission, while two of the RAF's Typhoons proceed to Estonia to join NATO training with the British Army.



The Typhoons deployed to Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, near the Black Sea port of Constanta, as part of the RAF's 135 Expeditionary Air Wing under the code-name Operation BILOXI. More than 300 regular and reserve RAF personnel from 16 RAF units – supported by Royal Engineers soldiers – were involved in the mission. Typhoons launched once in response to Russian air activity over the Black Sea, and flew more than 280 sorties to support NATO training with Romanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian armed forces. Towards the end of 135 EAW's tour of duty, eight of its personnel were awarded the Romanian Air Force's highest peacetime honour for their work in the country.



135 EAW's Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Andy Coe, said: "As we hand over NATO duties to our colleagues in the Royal Canadian Air Force, the men and women of 135 EAW can be proud of what we have achieved. In our five months here, we were ambassadors for the RAF Whole Force, and for a truly global Britain. We learned much from our Romanian friends, even as we passed on our experience to them and to our other allies in the region. It's been a privilege to lead a team who have embraced NATO's principles with complete enthusiasm and dedication."

The RCAF's Air Task Force Romania, comprising 135 specialists from across the Canadian Armed Forces, is preparing for a vital NATO certification on 31 August – the final stage in its preparation to lead

the enhanced air policing mission. Four RCAF CF-188 Hornet fighter aircraft from 409 Tactical Fighter Squadron arrived in Romania on 20 August, and will be patrolling the skies shortly after the NATO certification.



Air Task Force Romania Commander Lieutenant Colonel Mark Hickey said: "As we bid farewell to our British friends, my entire team's focus is now on supporting Canada's allies here in Romania and across the wider region. Canada will always stand up for the freedom and collective security of our NATO allies; that's why we are happy to assume leadership of this important mission. My team will make Romania and Canada proud."

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The BBMF's Merlin Engines

Following the recent pause in flying our Merlin-powered aircraft for safety reasons, OC BBMF said: "Please see below the MOD's latest release on the subject of BBMF Merlin engines. As I hope you all know, my aim is to keep these vital and unique artefacts of Britain's proud history in the sky forever. To do that we sometimes have to take extra precautions, with our eye sharply on continuing safety, to ensure that we can keep them flying for future generations. I thank each and every one of you who has voiced their support and shown their understanding. We will get them back into the blue as soon we can.

Lest We Forget."

The update from the MOD:

"Our investigation has confirmed an issue with a pinion gear in a Merlin engine. With the precise cause of the problem known, each pinion gear is now being inspected to confirm it meets our exacting standards, with the BBMF and industry putting all of our efforts into getting these beautiful aircraft safely back in the air as soon as possible."

News story: Defence Secretary strengthens ties between UK and Oman

During the two day visit, the Defence Secretary met with the Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs, His Excellency Sayyid Badar bin Saud bin Harub Al Busaidi, signing a Memorandum of Understanding and Services Agreement in Muscat. The agreement secures UK use of facilities at Duqm, ahead of the completion of the UK Joint Logistics Support Base at the port, giving Britain a strategically important and permanent maritime base east of Suez, but outside of the Gulf.

The booming Duqm Port complex provides significant opportunity to the defence, security and prosperity agendas for both the UK and Oman. It has dry dock capability able to accommodate submarines and the UK's flagship, HMS Queen Elizabeth, which is the largest and most powerful warship ever built for the Royal Navy.

From Duqm, HMS Queen Elizabeth will be able to project influence across an important region. She will fulfil multiple roles from providing air power anywhere at any time, to supporting allies or delivering humanitarian aid and the port itself provides Britain with a hub from which to tackle issues such as the fight against Daesh.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

This agreement ensures British engineering expertise will be involved in developing Duqm as a strategic port for the Middle East, benefiting the Royal Navy and others.

Oman is a longstanding British ally and we work closely across diplomatic, economic and security matters. Our commitment to the Duqm port project highlights the strength of our relationship.

Through ensuring a permanent UK presence at Duqm, the UK will be able to shape the development of the Naval facility to support its carrier capability and wider British security needs in the region. Alongside at Duqm was HMS Monmouth, who has recently completed a five month deployment to the Gulf where as part of an international coalition she was involved in drugs busts worth £400m. The Defence Secretary praised the work of the sailors whose actions removed a key funding stream for terrorists in the region.



Sir Michael Fallon with His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs

Once completed, the UK Joint Logistics Support Base, a multi-million pound joint venture between British defence company Babcock International and the Oman Drydock Company, will provide the UK a permanent training facility in addition to a key military logistics centre in the Gulf. It will also be connected to other Gulf countries by the Gulf Rail Project.

The UK and Oman are established allies in the Gulf, with a wide range of shared interests. With a particularly strong defence relationship, the infrastructure built at Duqm port will support Exercise SAIF SAREEA 3 in 2018, the largest UK-Oman joint exercise for 15 years.

[News story: World renowned RAF Red Arrows to tour Middle East](#)

Updated: new version

On a visit to Kuwait, Sir Michael will announce that the Reds will perform in the country as part of a wider regional tour, with a programme that will

promote the United Kingdom's long-standing relations across the Gulf. The Defence Secretary will also review the campaign to defeat Daesh with commanders in the coalition headquarters in Kuwait.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

This historic Red Arrows tour will be a visible demonstration of UK engagement across the globe, flying the flag to promote Britain in important capitals through the GREAT campaign.

Kuwait is a vital partner. I will be looking to strengthen our military relationship with more frequent joint exercises and I will be reviewing the next steps in the campaign against Daesh with commanders at the Coalition's headquarters in Kuwait.

At a time when the UK is negotiating a new, deep and special partnership with the European Union, it is continuing to look outwards globally. The tour will highlight the partnership with the British Armed Forces in each nation visited, as well as demonstrating that the UK is 'open for business', committed to peace and security, and a leading player on the global stage.

The UK was one of the first members of the coalition and has focussed on supporting Iraqi security forces and the Syrian opposition to defeat Daesh. British soldiers in Iraq have trained over 58,000 Iraqis in battle winning infantry, counter-IED, engineering and combat medical skills and the RAF have struck over 1,400 Daesh targets in Iraq and Syria as well as providing highly valued surveillance and reconnaissance, air-to-air refuelling and transport aircraft.

Ahead of the three year anniversary next month of UK involvement in the military campaign, the Defence Secretary review the progress with coalition Commander, US Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend and British Major General Rupert Jones, the Deputy Commander.

During the visit, the Defence Secretary will also announce a draft Defence Cooperation Accord which formalises the relationship with Kuwait and covers loan personnel and support to UK military personnel on training in Kuwait, which follows UK participation in exercise Desert Warrior earlier this year, the first time UK and Kuwaiti forces had exercised together for 15 years.

The Red Arrows tour will allow for further close cooperation with Kuwaiti and regional armed forces and promote opportunities for investment and trade with the UK, encourage government-to-government engagement to develop economic partnership, and showcase the excellence of STEM education with UK universities with displays in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.

ROYAL AIR FORCE PERSONNEL RECEIVE HIGH HONOURS IN ROMANIA

ROYAL AIR FORCE PERSONNEL RECEIVE HIGH HONOURS IN ROMANIA

EIGHT ROYAL Air Force personnel stationed in Romania on NATO operations received the Romanian Air Force's highest peacetime award at a ceremony in Bucharest on 22 August. The personnel – from 135 Expeditionary Air Wing (135 EAW), based at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base – received the Romanian Air Force Emblem of Honour from the Chief of the Air Force Staff, General Laurian Anastasof, for their contributions to NATO's enhanced air policing mission.



Since April four Typhoon FGR4 fighter aircraft from 3(F) Squadron, based at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, have been deployed with 135 EAW to reinforce Romania's existing air defence capabilities. Commanded by NATO's Combined Air Operations Centre at Torrejon, Spain, the Typhoons have spent alternate weeks at high readiness to respond to unusual air activity over the Black Sea, in order to reassure Romania and other NATO members of the Alliance's resolve to defend its airspace. During the mission Typhoons had to scramble once – on 25 July – in response to Russian activity above the Black Sea.

Gen Anastasof presented the awards at a ceremony at the Romanian Air Force's headquarters in Bucharest. During the ceremony he praised the RAF's "outstanding" support for NATO and Romania and said he was proud of the UK's strong show of "solidarity and deterrence".



135 EAW's Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Andy Coe, was the first to be decorated by Gen Anastasof. Wg Cdr Coe said: "I can't express how proud I am to receive such a high honour from our Romanian friends and allies. But I'm absolutely clear that those of us who were honoured received our awards as ambassadors for our teams, for NATO and for the Royal Air Force. We work as a Whole Force, and that's how we'll celebrate too."

135 EAW is currently drawing down its presence in Romania as the Royal Canadian Air Force prepares to assume the responsibility for NATO's enhanced air policing mission. Four RCAF CF-188 fighter aircraft arrived in

Romania on 20 August.



The RCAF's Air Task Force commander, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Hickey, said: "135 EAW and 3(F) Squadron have put in place an outstanding handover schedule for us, and it has been a pleasure working with our British counterparts. We look forward to the exchange aspects with Romanian Air Force personnel located in Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base as we go ahead with this NATO enhanced Air Policing mission. This is the third time since 2014 that the RCAF will be flying Romanian skies and the CF-188 Hornets deployed on this operation are ideally suited to assist Romanian Air Forces with this mission. Romania is our ally and we are committed to the principle of collective defence of the Alliance."

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