



The Growing British Role in the War Against the Taliban and Al Qaeda: Force Contributions and Chronology

Anthony H. Cordesman

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The British contribution in the Afghan conflict has received only passing attention in the United States, but Britain has played a continuing role since its beginning. The British Ministry of Defense has reported since the start of the war that British forces have included three Royal Navy nuclear-powered Fleet Submarines of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar classes, which were deployed for the start of operations - HMS Superb, HMS Trafalgar and HMS Triumph. The latter pair are equipped with the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile system, introduced to the Fleet in November 1998 and used operationally during the Kosovo campaign in 1999. Royal Navy TLAMs were fired on the first night of operations against Al Qaeda and the Taliban on 7/8 October 2001, and again on 13 October.

Some 10 RAF Tristar and VC-10 tanker aircraft from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire have also been deployed to support the operation. Their refuelling system is compatible with US Navy and US Marine Corps aircraft, allowing them to offer particular support to US carrier-borne assets. The Royal Air Force has the largest air-to-air refuelling tanker force in the world after the United States. Air-to-air refuelling is invaluable in modern military air operations, since the limiting factor on aircraft range and endurance becomes, to all intents and purposes, only the endurance of the aircrew, allowing aircraft to operate anywhere in the world with great rapidity.

Other RAF aircraft supporting the operation have included E-3D Sentry AEW1 surveillance and control aircraft from RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire; Nimrod R1 surveillance aircraft, also from Waddington; Nimrod MR2 maritime reconnaissance aircraft from RAF Kinloss; and Canberra PR9 reconnaissance aircraft from RAF Marham, Norfolk. The reconnaissance and surveillance assets are capable of a wide range of tasks, including the location of concentrations of displaced people requiring humanitarian assistance, a task which the PR9 has previously carried out in Africa. RAF Hercules aircraft from RAF Lyneham are providing an air transport capability within the area of operations.

The British Ministry of Defense announced on October 26 that it had decided what force deployments would offer the right balance of capabilities to enable the UK to continue to play a full part in the coalition's military operations. It stated that its present forces were primarily configured to assist in the coalition's air campaign but that the campaign will continue and develop over time, and that the UK had decided to create a large and re-balanced force in the region. It is a concrete demonstration of our resolve to see the campaign against international terrorism through to the end. We have said we are in this for the long haul and we mean it. The force has therefore been designed to ensure that we are well placed to deal with a wide range of contingencies-and to maintain operational flexibility for as long as necessary. It also allows us to accommodate the inevitable changes in the tempo of our military operations.

The forces Britain will reassign to Operation Veritas from the Exercise Saif Sareea II it is conducting in Oman will include:

- The aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, which will be re-equipped for helicopter operations;
- The assault ship HMS Fearless;
- A submarine presence able to launch Tomahawk missiles;
- The destroyer HMS Southampton;

- The frigate HMS Cornwall
- Seven Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, the RFAs Sir Tristram, Sir Percivale, Fort Victoria, Fort Rosalie, Bayleaf, Brambleleaf, and Diligence;
- Four additional support aircraft consisting of Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft and Hercules transport planes.
- In addition, some 200 men of 40 Commando Royal Marines, based in Taunton, will be aboard HMS Fearless as the lead elements of an immediately available force to help support operations. The remainder of 40 Commando-in the region of 400 men-will return to the United Kingdom but will be held at a high readiness to return to the Theatre should our operational needs make that necessary. This arrangement will also permit us to rotate companies aboard ship and so guarantee the whole Commando remains fresh and fully prepared for operations;

This mix of British air, naval, and land forces force will total some four thousand two hundred personnel in Theatre, and represents a major enhancement of the coalition's capabilities.

The British Ministry of Defense has also provided the following chronology of British participation in the war:

7/8 October

US and UK forces commenced military action against Al Qaeda and Taliban targets within Afghanistan. USAF and USN/USMC aircraft bombed and USN warships fired Tomahawk missiles at 30 targets. Royal Navy submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles were fired at a terrorist site. Targets hit included: a terrorist training camp at Garmabak Ghar, Shindand airfield And a Surface-to-Air missile site near Kandahar. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in southern Afghanistan.

8/9 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft and USN Tomahawk missiles attacked 13 targets. Targets hit included: the Surface-to-Air missile site near Kandahar and a military headquarters at Mazar-e-Sharif. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in southern Afghanistan.

9/10 October

US aircraft attacked six targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. Targets hit included: Herat airfield amd Kandahar airfield. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan.

10/11 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft, plus USN Tomahawk missiles, attacked seven targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. Targets included: a Surface-to-Air Missile storage facility near Kandahar and a terrorist training camp near Jalalabad. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan.

11 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft attacked six targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. Targets included:a Taliban vehicle depot near Charkhi and a vehicle and ordnance depot near Charkhi

12 October

A brief operational pause was observed on 12 October.

13 October

US and UK forces attacked seventeen targets. Royal Navy Tomahawk missiles were fired, and RAF aircraft flew combat support missions. One US bomb regrettably fell in a residential area. Targets included: a Taliban command and control communications facility near Heart. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan.

14/15 October

US forces engaged seven targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan. Leaflets were dropped at a number of locations throughout Afghanistan.

15/16 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft, and USN Tomahawk missiles, attacked twelve targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. The USAF commenced use of the AC-130 gunship. Targets included: A laser-guided bomb regrettably hit a warehouse storing ICRC humanitarian aid supplies. It would appear the warehouse was in a facility otherwise used by the Taliban for the storage of military equipment. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan.

16/17 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft attacked twelve targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan.

17/18 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft, including F-15E and AC-130 aircraft, engaged some dozen targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. Targets included: USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan. Leaflets were dropped at a number of locations and airborne radio stations broadcast.

18/19 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft attacked eighteen targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US carrier-based aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan. The US Department of Defense confirmed that two US Service personnel had suffered fatal injuries in a helicopter accident in Pakistan.

19/20 October

US Special Operation Command troops conducted ground operations at an airfield in southern Afghanistan and another location. USAF and USN/USMC aircraft engaged 15 targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in north-west Afghanistan. Leaflets were dropped at a number of locations.

20/21 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft attacked six targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan. Leaflets were dropped at a number of locations and airborne radio stations broadcast.

21/22 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft attacked eight targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan. Leaflets were dropped at a number of locations and airborne radio stations broadcast.

22/23 October

RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft flew operational sorties.

23/24 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft struck five targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance aircraft flew operational sorties. Targets included Taliban armour near a barracks in the Herat area USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in northern Afghanistan.

24/25 October

USAF and USN/USMC aircraft attacked nine targets. RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance aircraft flew operational sorties. USAF C-17 transports dropped humanitarian aid to large concentrations of displaced persons in north-west Afghanistan. Leaflets were dropped at a number of locations and airborne radio stations broadcast.

25/26 October

RAF tanker aircraft provided air-to-air refuelling support to US aircraft, and RAF reconnaissance aircraft flew operational sortie.

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