

# OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

Text by Aaron M. U. Church

**Hitting ISIS where it hurts.**

**U**S aircraft acting as top cover for the Iraqi security forces and militias began air strikes to roll back the rampage of the self-styled Islamic State beginning on Aug. 8, 2014. The next month, the air campaign broadened, with the aid of several Persian Gulf allies, to hit ISIS targets across the border in war-torn Syria. On the night of Sept. 22, 2014, F-22 Raptors made their combat debut leading a strike group of F-15Es, F-16s, and B-1s, after an opening barrage of sea-launched cruise missiles. The coalition quickly gained strength as allies from Australia, Britain, Canada, and Europe joined

the campaign—retroactively dubbed Operation Inherent Resolve. In the one year since OIR began, the coalition has damaged or destroyed some 10,700 targets, in what has been an air operation with the most precisely hit targets. This July, Turkey made a hugely important contribution, allowing US combat aircraft to fly from Incirlik Air Base to hit targets just over the border in Syria. Here, an F-15E Strike Eagle deployed from RAF Lakenheath, UK, refuels from an Air Force Reserve Command KC-135 over northern Iraq during the second night of F-22 strikes, Sept. 23, 2014.

USAF photo by SrA. Matthew Bruch





USAF photo by SSgt. Shawn Nickel



USAF photo



USAF photo by TSgt. Russ Scaif

**[1]** US Central Command activated a second KC-135 squadron at al Udeid AB, Qatar, this July to take some of the burden off 340th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron—the largest in the region and supporting OIR since Day One. **[2]** A Navy F/A-18F Super Hornet takes on fuel from a Royal Australian

Air Force KC-30 tanker. Australia deployed fighters, AWACS, and tankers, responding to US requests for assistance in September 2014. **[3]** Aircrews prepare two KC-10 tankers for missions into Syria, Sept. 23, 2014. **[4]** An E-3B AWACS flight engineer calculates aircraft weight and balance before

a sortie over northeastern Iraq last October. AWACS proved crucial not only to direct coalition aircraft, but to avoid run-ins with Syrian or Iranian military aircraft fighting anti-government rebels in Syria's ongoing civil war. **[5]** F-15Es took part in bombing 12 ISIS-held Syrian refineries during the opening week





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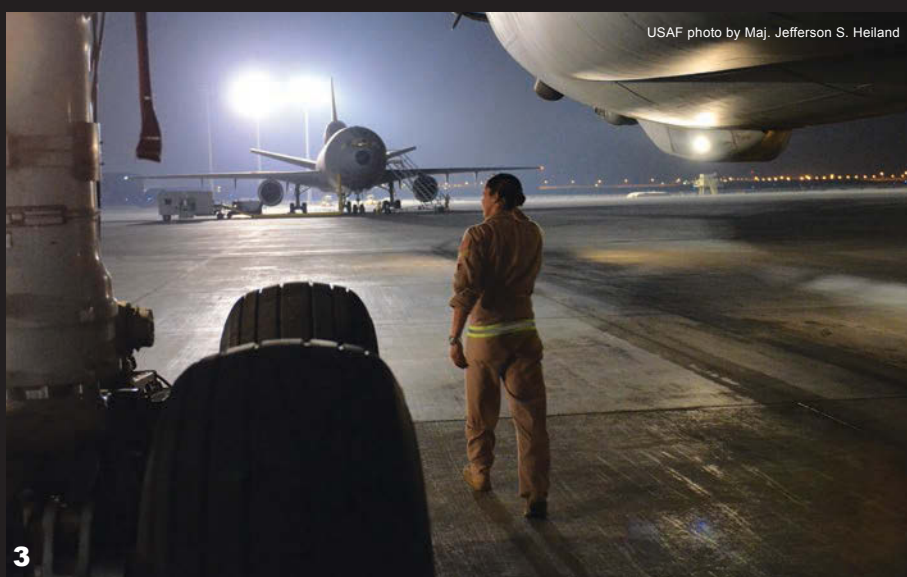


of a fall 2014 effort, denting the ISIS ability to finance and fuel its land-grab. [6] Aircrew aboard an AWACS direct coalition aircraft hitting targets in northeastern Iraq on Oct. 2, 2014. Canada announced it would contribute fighters, ISR, and tanker aircraft to the coalition the same week.



USAF photo by TSgt. Christopher Boltz

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USAF photo by Maj. Jefferson S. Heiland

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USAF photo

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USAF photo by Maj. Jefferson S. Heiland

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USAF photo by SrA. Matthew Bruch

USAF photo by SrA. Matthew Bruch



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USAF photo by TSgt. Russ Scalf



USAF photo by SSgt. Shawn Nickel

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[1] F-22s have sidestepped possible Syrian air defenses and have acted as key enablers, passing situational awareness and targeting information to other strike aircraft, since the opening days of OIR. [2] Maj. Gena Fedoruk completes a preflight check on a KC-135. As of Aug. 1, 2015, coalition refuelers had offloaded some 557 million pounds of fuel over more than 8,900 sorties for OIR. [3] KC-135 pilots Fedoruk and 1st Lt. Marcel Trott speed down the runway on a sortie to refuel coalition aircraft. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates joined US aircraft for a coalition that would eventually grow to include some 60 countries. [4] A 1st Fighter Wing F-22 prepares to taxi for the type's first test in combat. [5] F/A-18E/F Super Hornets from the carrier USS George H. W. Bush took part in the opening days of the 2014 strikes, while USS Arleigh Burke and USS Philippine Sea launched Tomahawk missiles against targets, notably, near Aleppo, Syria. [6] Lakenheath F-15Es light up the sky over northern Iraq after hitting ISIS barracks, training camps, and vehicles.

[1] A night vision goggle-equipped Strike Eagle crew sits in a blacked-out cockpit awaiting launch. [2] A 1st Fighter Wing Raptor takes on fuel from a KC-10 during a Syria strike. In summer 2014, the F-22s had been preparing to head back to JB Langley-Eustis, Va., from a Middle East deployment when they were retasked to support OIR. [3] Boom operator MSgt. Jeffrey Morris checks aircraft forms on a KC-135 flight deck before departure. [4] An A-10 pilot prepares to disembark from his aircraft after a mission for Inherent Resolve in January. [5] Airmen load cargo onto a C-5 Galaxy at Aviano AB, Italy, for the deployment of six F-16s to

Incirlik this past August. [6] A 35th Fighter Wing F-16C gets airborne at Incirlik, several days after deploying to Turkey, Aug. 12, 2015. Turkish jets joined the coalition that month, following diplomatic pressure from the US. [7] A B-1B from the 34th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron in the skies over Iraq this past February.



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USAF photo by SrA. Krystal Ardrey

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USAF photo by A1C Deana Heitzman

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USAF photo by SrA. James Richardson





USAF photo by TSgt. Russ Scalf



USAF photo by SSgt. Perry Aston



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USAF photo by Maj. Jefferson S. Heiland



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USAF photo by SSgt. Shawn Nickel





USAF photo by SSgt. Shawn Nickel

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USAF photo

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USAF photo by SrA. James Richardson

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USAF photo by TSgt. Russ Scaff

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USAF photo by SrA. James Richardson

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[1] Pilot Maj. Erik Schillo checks a KC-135 refueling boom. The hose and drogue basket attached to the boom enables the tanker to refuel probe-equipped Navy and allied combat aircraft. [2] Maintainers prepare an E-3B Sentry for a sortie in October 2014. Australia, France, and Britain have deployed AWACS for operations over Iraq. The Royal Air Force has contributed formidable ISR capability, including RC-135s, Sentinel ground surveillance aircraft, and remotely piloted aircraft. [3] An F-22 with weapons hidden within its internal bays waits for launch on its first combat mission. [4] Indiana Air National Guard A-10 crew chiefs await their returning jets at a base in the Persian Gulf, Jan. 31. The 122nd flew OIR's first A-10 rotation starting last November 2014, relieved by Michigan ANG A-10s in April 2015. [5] A 122nd A-10 takes off with a full load of precision weapons, including Maverick missiles, laser and GPS guided bombs, rockets, and a Litening targeting pod. Coalition air strikes have greatly degraded ISIS' ability to mass forces and take ground. ★