

## Airpower in the Battle for Mosul; Big week targeting ISIS; Raqqa as the next step ....

### DISRUPTING ISIS IN MOSUL

Though many news reports have focused on fighting on the ground in Mosul, airpower is an integral part of the ongoing battle to reclaim the Iraqi city from ISIS.

Air forces have been a continuous presence since before the fighting began in earnest, and the air coalition employed 1,352 weapons in Mosul from the campaign's start on Oct. 17 to Nov. 1, defense officials said.

USAF has provided ISR assets including U-2s, MQ-1 Reapers, and MQ-9 Global Hawks; KC-10 and KC-135 tankers; F-22, F-15, and F-16 fighters; and AWACS and JSTARS. In



USAF photo by SrA Miles Wilson

An airman loads a JDAM onto a weapons rack in October, during the offensive to recapture Mosul.

addition, nearly all of the munitions being used against ISIS are US precision guided weapons.

"The coalition team was instrumental in shaping the battlefield ahead of the operation to liberate Mosul," Lt. Gen. Jeffrey L. Harrigan, commander of US Air Forces Central Command, told *Air Force Magazine*.

"Taking out [ISIS] command and control, defensive positions, [vehicle-borne improvised explosive device] factories, and weapon caches has helped soften up the enemy, but this will be a tough fight. Airpower will continue to be there for the Iraqi forces, day and night, supporting them as they push forward with their plan."

In a Nov. 3 teleconference with Pentagon reporters from Baghdad, Col. John L. Dorrian, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, said the coalition air strikes "severely disrupted" ISIS' command and control, allowing Iraqi Security Forces and others on the ground to move forward.

Those critical air strikes began "months before Mosul," Dorrian said, with operations targeting the terror network's cash and oil distribution sites.

Since the battle began in mid-October, Dorrian said, "we dropped more than 3,000 munitions on [ISIS] targets," re-

moving "hundreds of fighters" and "scores of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices" from the battlefield.

"There's no question that it's very impactful and it makes a big difference," Dorrian added.

### LARGE AND COMPLEX

Army Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, told reporters in late October that the Mosul offensive "is a large and extraordinarily complex" operation—planned and executed by Iraqi forces, but supported by a "relentless campaign of strikes" from aerial bombs, artillery and mortar shells, High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), and Hellfire missiles.

Brett McGurk, the special presidential envoy for the global coalition to counter ISIS, posted on Twitter that in the first week of the fight for Mosul, the coalition launched more air strikes than during any other seven-day period of the war against the Islamic State.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi posted on Nov. 5 that "the operation to liberate Mosul is on plan and on schedule."

However, the coalition to defeat ISIS is not the only force using air assets. ISIS has been using drones extensively, Townsend told reporters.

"It's not episodic or sporadic. It's relatively constant and creative," he said. "We've seen them use them mostly for reconnaissance and surveillance, ... we have detected them using them for fire direction on the past," and they have used them to drop "small explosive devices."

Townsend said the US government is "working really hard" to find solutions, including electronic attack and "kinetic kills with small-arms fire," but as of yet has not found the best solution to what he called a "pretty thorny problem."

### NOWHERE TO RUN

As Iraqi forces continued to advance into Mosul, the operation to liberate Raqqa began Nov. 6 in Syria. Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter called Raqqa "the next step in our coalition campaign plan.

"As in Mosul, the fight will not be easy and there is hard work ahead, but it is necessary to end the fiction of ISIS' caliphate and disrupt the group's ability to carry out terror attacks against the United States, our allies, and our partners," he said in a written statement.

Townsend had told reporters that the plan was to apply pressure to Mosul and Raqqa at roughly the same time, "so that the enemy doesn't have a convenient place to go." 🌐

Jennifer Hlad is a freelance journalist based in the Middle East and a former *Air Force Magazine* senior editor.