



BRIEFING PAPER

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UK troops in Iraq

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In the wake of the US killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, the Iraqi Parliament voted on 5 January 2020 to support a resolution to expel foreign forces.

UK and other foreign forces are in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi Government as part of either the US-led Global Coalition against Daesh/ISIS in Iraq and Syria and/or the NATO training mission in Iraq.

The Library does not have exact numbers for UK troops in Iraq but the [British Army](#) and previous [government estimates](#) suggest approximately 400 personnel are on the ground.

Operation Shader

[Operation Shader](#) is the UK operational name for its support for the US-led [Global Coalition against Daesh](#) (ISIS). The US operation is known as Inherent Resolve.

In September 2014 Parliament voted to support offensive military action in Iraq. A debate, and vote, on extending offensive military action against Daesh in Syria was subsequently held and approved in December 2015. RAF Tornado aircraft carried out the first airstrikes on ISIS targets in Iraq in September 2014 and in Syria in December 2015. The RAF is the primary service in this operation and has deployed a mixture of combat, surveillance, reconnaissance and refuelling/transport aircraft.¹

UK troops on the ground are also providing training and military advice. The Ministry of Defence says training is primarily delivered at four Iraq Building Partner Capacity Centres across Iraq. These train Iraqi Security Forces (including the Peshmerga) in preparation for operations against Daesh. The UK leads the Coalition's counter- Improvised Explosive Devices programme and also provides infantry skills, engineering and medical training.²

The UK Government provides updates on [airstrikes against Daesh](#) and related information on the [UK Government response to Daesh](#) on the Gov.uk website.

Personnel numbers

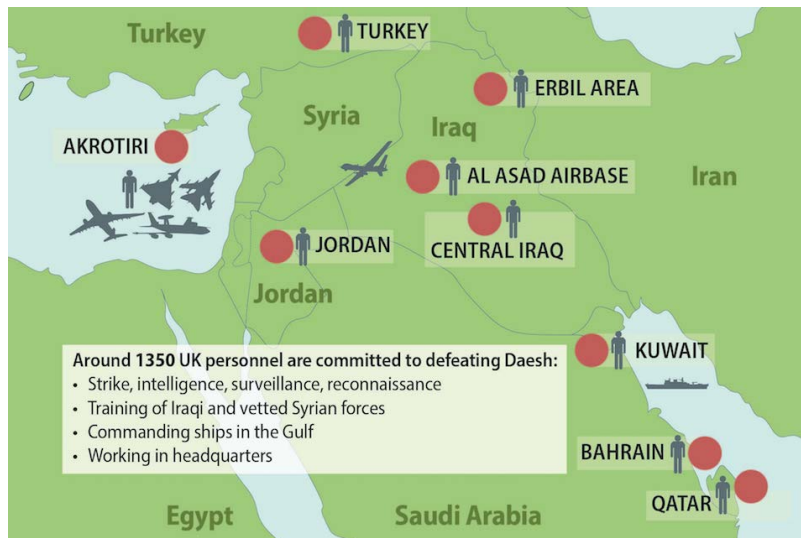
The Ministry of Defence says about 1350 UK personnel are involved in Operation Shader across the region (see map). The MOD has previously said a third of the 1,200 personnel involved in Op Shader were on the ground in Iraq: approximately 400.³ The [British Army website](#) also gives a figure of 400 personnel.

¹ More background is available in [ISIS/Daesh: the military response in Iraq and Syria](#), CBP-6995, March 2017

² [Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19](#), Ministry of Defence, 25 July 2019, p31

³ [Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19](#), Ministry of Defence, 25 July 2019, p30

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Map of UK forces committed to Operation Shader, Ministry of Defence, 27 September 2019

The NATO training mission in Iraq

NATO set up a [training mission in Iraq](#) in October 2018 following a request from the Iraqi Government and a decision made at the Brussels Summit in July 2018. Known as 'NATO Mission Iraq' it is a non-combat mission focused on "mentoring and advising national defence structures and military education institutions". It numbers [several hundred](#) from Allied and non-NATO partners, both military and civilian. A senior NATO official said the mission's remit is deliberately narrowly defined: "This is not state-building, reconstruction, or governance. It is the building up of military schools and the government's capacity to support those schools. No more than that, meaning no mission creep".⁴

The mission is based in Baghdad and operates in the capital, Besmayah and Taji. It is led by a Canadian commander. See more: [NATO Mission Iraq factsheet](#) (December 2019). It is separate to the NATO training mission that ran in Iraq from 2004 to 2011.

A NATO spokesman said on 4 January 2020 "[training activities are temporarily suspended](#)". The North Atlantic Council meets at Ambassador level on 6 January.

Personnel numbers

NATO has not provided personnel contributions by country. However, when the mission was first established the Canadian government, as the lead nation, said it would have [up to 580 personnel](#) with up to 250 Canadian personnel. In September 2019 the Secretary-General described NATO having "[hundreds of trainers and support staff](#)" in Iraq, including from partner nations such as Australia, Finland and Sweden.

The Ministry of Defence's Annual Report 2018-19 mentions "a new contribution to the NATO Mission in Iraq". It is not clear how many UK personnel are attached to the mission.⁵

Canadian media is taking a [close interest](#) in developments in Iraq because of its leading role in the NATO mission.

⁴ "Interview: John Manza, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Operations", Jane's Defence Weekly, 2 May 2019

⁵ The MOD has confirmed UK participation with the NATO mission with the author.

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[ISIS/Daesh: the military response in Iraq and Syria](#), CBP-6995, 8 March 2017

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