

RAF Tornados join NATO partners to put defences to the test

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1,100 personnel and 48 aircraft from 7 NATO nations, including the RAF's 31 Squadron "The Goldstars," have descended on Leeuwarden Air Force Base in the Netherlands for the start of the two-week-long "FRISIAN FLAG" exercise.

The local Dutch population have been treated to the spectacle of Tornados, Typhoons, Mirage and F16 aircraft taking off on the exercise, which is organised by the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) and runs from 27 March to 7 April 2017.



The RAF has deployed six Tornado GR4s for the exercise in which they will at times simulate the "Red Force Element, effectively playing the part of the enemy that will attempt to breach the defences of opposing forces from the USA, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, they will also be playing "Blue" friendly forces.

EX FRISIAN FLAG aims to provide aircrew with experience of the planning, execution and debriefing of large scale composite air operations (COMAO) in realistic scenarios by allowing partner NATO nations to work alongside one another, test each other's capabilities and develop a close working relationship. Missions being flown include various air defence scenarios including protection / escort of high value aircraft and the attack of ground targets on land and sea in a high threat environment, which include opposing fighter aircraft and ground based Patriot and SA-6 missile batteries.



Wing Commander Matt Bressani, OC 31 Squadron & the Detachment Commander of the RAF contingent at FRISIAN FLAG, said: "Working with NATO countries helps us

to

better understand our own strengths and weaknesses by testing each other's defences. With the Tornado GR4 going out of service in a few years' time, this

is an ideal opportunity to train our crews for their future beyond this airframe. The time working alongside our allies means that we will expose both air

and ground crews to working closely with Typhoon deployments from our partner

nations, allowing our boys and girls to get up close to an aircraft they could

be working on themselves in the near future. The aircrew will get to see

German, Dutch and Portuguese Typhoons in action and see how they work alongside

the American and French aircraft too."



The

Commander of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, Lieutenant General Luyt said:

"In

the current security situation, air superiority can no longer be taken for

granted. Our colleagues from the army and navy count on us to achieve air

superiority wherever required. Large-scale deployment as part of a NATO air

campaign can no longer be ruled out. What's more, we could be called on as

early as tomorrow. As the Royal Netherlands Air Force, we must once again be prepared to meet the challenge."

Editor – Ken Pike

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