

CSAR at Konya

Ahead of this year's Anatolian Eagle, Konya air base in southern Turkey played host to another exercise, dedicated to combat search and rescue. **Jurgen van Toor** and **Patrick Dirksen** were there.



After a few huge explosions, the dust settles, and – briefly – all is quiet again. Then, the slowly increasing volume of rotor blades is suddenly interrupted by the noise of machine gun fire as bullets rip through a line of cars. Welcome to Anatolian Phoenix 2019/1!

Konya air base is home to the well-known international exercise Anatolian Eagle (see *Eagles return to Konya*, p36-39), dominated by fast jets and a few slow-movers. Less well known is another Konya exercise: Anatolian Phoenix. This involves multiple combat

search and rescue (CSAR) assets and missions of increasing difficulty. Or as one Türk Hava Kuvvetleri (THK, Turkish Air Force) captain, flying an AS532 Cougar helicopter, said: "The first day was mostly fun flying, but later on it became hell!"

Due to the upheavals in the military after the July 2016 coup attempt, the 2017 iteration of Anatolian Phoenix was cancelled, but a small version was held again last year and 2019 saw the 21st edition of the exercise. Six of these have involved

exclusively Turkish elements, but 15 of the exercises have attracted international participants as well. This year, around 430 soldiers participated, including 180 from Turkey and the other 250 from Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Qatar, Romania, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the United Kingdom. In total, they brought ten aircraft and 14 helicopters with them. Multiple practice zones were available for the duration of the manoeuvres, including Konya's main gunnery range, LTD-9. This is located east of the town and was where the main action took place during the press day.

All scenarios centred around

a terrorist group that had settled at the border of three neighbouring countries, right next to an important oil pipeline. Coalition forces trying to defeat the insurgents had been forced to retreat, leaving some injured soldiers behind. On the day of AFM's visit, the mission was to rescue them, with the firm instruction to leave no isolated person (ISOP) behind. Because of a suspected serious anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) threat, F-16s would bomb the enemy positions first and then attack helicopters would clear the scene further if needed, so the transport helicopters would be able to land safely. ▣

Right: THK armourers load F-16C 90-0007 (c/n 4R-66, FMS 90-0007) with 500lb laser-guided bombs on the flight line at Konya. This jet, a Block 40 model, wears the markings of the resident 132 Filo – it previously served with 162 Filo at Bandırma.

SİLAH VE TANKİLER

90-0007





Above: Serial 20116 is one of Azerbaijan's advanced Mi-35Ms. While these 24 gunships serve with 1 Squadron at Qala, they are operated by the Azerbaijan Border Guards Service (DSX) rather than the air force. **Left:** A four-ship of Pakistan Air Force 'Griffins' led by F-16BM serial 90614 (c/n DH-2). No 9 Squadron 'Griffins' is located at PAF Base Mushaf where it comes under the control of No 38 (Multi-Role) Wing of Central Air Command. **Below:** Bomb's gone! A Turkish F-16 drops an unguided bomb during a close air support scenario. On the day of AFM's visit, JTACs guided 'Vipers' in to destroy four out of five 'enemy' AAA targets. All photos Jurgen van Toor and Patrick Dirksen



Anatolian Phoenix 2019

Right: A T129B unleashes 20mm fire from its gun against targets on the range. The ATAK is armed with an M197 three-barrel rotary cannon of the same type found on the Mangusta as well as the US Marine Corps' AH-1W and AH-1Z.



The 'wounded troops' requiring rescue were dropped by parachute from a Mi-17 from 3 Squadron of the Azərbaycan Hərbi Hava Qüvvələri (Azerbaijan Air Force) at Qala air base, marking the start of the rescue operation. Supervised by a Turkish Anka unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) from Incirlik air base patrolling the area, Turkish F-16s provided close air support (CAS). On clearance from Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) from Turkey and the UK, first 'Dagger 1' and then 'Dagger 2' destroyed enemy AAA using live laser-guided and unguided 500lb (227kg)

bombs, eliminating four out of five targets. Next up were 'Barut 1 and 2', a pair of Turkish T129B ATAK helicopters that used their 20mm cannon to strafe enemy positions, taking out the remaining threats. After a few more runs, the area was secure and the transport helicopters came in. They were a mixed trio, consisting of a Türk Kara Kuvvetleri (Turkish Land Forces) AS532, another Azerbaijani Mi-17 and a Turkish special forces S-70 from the base at Ankara. The helicopters remained in the hover while troops fast-roped to the ground. The wounded soldiers

were quickly stabilised and then winched up to the helicopters, which then made their way out, still protected by the T129Bs.

An urgent radio message from 'Fantom 1' – an F-16 pilot who had had to bail out of his aircraft – marked the start of the next part of the mission – recovery of a downed pilot from hostile territory. Four Pakistan Air Force F-16s provided cover while 'Hızır 1', an AS532 of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and 'Hızır 2 and 3', two Forțele Aeriene Române (Romanian Air Force) IAR-330L SOCATs from Baza 71 Aeriană at Câmpia Turzii,

landed in a triangle formation.

Special forces rapidly spread out and secured the area before approaching the stranded pilot. After verifying his identity, the aviator was embarked in one of the SOCATs. All soldiers quickly boarded the rotorcraft again and all took off within a few minutes of appearing on the battlefield. Two Azerbaijani Mi-35M gunships, from 1 Squadron at Qala air base, and operating as 'Barut 3 and 4', provided escort in case of enemy attack, but were not needed.

To mark the end of a successful operation, parachutists jumped from a Qatari Emiri Air Force C-130J-30 while carrying the flags of all participating nations, followed by a flyby of all the aircraft and helicopters that took part in the day's mission.

Anatolian Phoenix 2019 was a great success, with all scheduled missions going ahead as planned. This was the first time the Anka-S UAV had been used in these manoeuvres and it proved very useful for gathering 'live' intelligence. The drone was able to provide continuous data to the rescue helicopters that penetrated the enemy area and to the F-16s during their close air support missions.

Illustrating the wider interest in Anatolian Phoenix, around a dozen countries attended as observers, among them Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Croatia, Jordan, Macedonia, Malaysia, Serbia, South Korea, Sudan and Uzbekistan. Some of them are considering participation in a future iteration, while others came mainly to learn new techniques that will be taught to crews back at home.

The fallout of the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey might have led to some hierarchical and organisational changes within the air force, but like a real phoenix rising from ashes, this particular exercise looks like it's here to stay. **AFM**



Above: Turkish Army AS532UL Cougar serial 14020 low over the exercise area, with decommissioned tanks serving as targets in the background. This helicopter is operated by 1 Helicopter Battalion at Izmir-Gazimur. **Below:** Azerbaijan Air Force Mi-17-1V '185' on the range. The Qala-based 3 Squadron also operates a detachment of 'Hips' stationed at Kyurdamir. A total of 40 were received from 2010.

