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BALTICA 2026

CARPATHIAN VIPERS

EFTC
EUROPEAN F-16 TRAINING CENTER

EUFOR ALTHEA

PER ASPERA AD ASTRA

REVISTĂ EDITATĂ DE STATUL MAJOR AL FORȚELOR AERIENE

Cover I: ***F-16 Fighting Falcon from 53rd Squadron | Photo by Adrian Sultănoiu***

Cover III: ***F-16 Fighting Falcon from Carpathian Vipers Detachment | Photo by Adrian Sultănoiu***

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IMPORTANT NOTE:
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AIR FORCE SELF-ASSESSMENT

"Building operational relevance through modernization, integration, and adaptable airpower employment."

The Romanian Air Force Staff held a self-assessment meeting on 30 January 2026, attended by Minister of National Defense Radu Miruță and Chief of Defense Staff, General Gheorghiță Vlad. The session served to review the execution of commitments for 2025 and to set the Romanian Air Force's principal lines of effort for 2026. Lieutenant General Leonard-Gabriel Baraboi, Chief of the Air Force Staff, together with his Deputy, Major General Aurel-Cezar Stănciulescu, presented the degree of achievement against the year's objectives. They identified the top priorities as accelerating the consolidation of the Air Force's combat capability to provide robust air surveillance and early warning, strengthen deterrence, and ensure the security of Romania's airspace and NATO's eastern flank.

Romanian Air Force Priorities for 2026: Modernization – Operational Integration – Responsibility

2025 further matured ongoing transformation activities within the Romanian Air Force, translating plans into validated operational capability. Key milestones included consolidation of F-16 squadron readiness and air defence elements, modernization of sensor networks, and infrastructure adaptation – all essential to improved airspace control and faster reaction in an Allied context. The F-16 continues to serve as a strategic transition platform: it supports NATO-standard operational procedures, trains personnel for 5th-generation systems, and enables coherent integration into the Allied air defence architecture – a necessary phase in capability evolution, not an end state.

These capability gains were sustained by a high-tempo operational calendar. The Romanian Air Force executed Air Policing on national territory and contributed to NATO Baltic Air Policing via the Carpathian Vipers detachment. The service also deployed to the European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea) with the Dacian Pumas detachment. Deployments to Article-5 and non-Article-5 missions, participation in multinational exercises, and integration into joint command and control (C2) arrangements validated high operational readiness and the ability to operate in complex, multi-national environments. Concurrently, the fixed- and rotary-wing transport fleet conducted MEDEVAC, tactical and strategic airlift, and logistical support to civil and military operations – demonstrating the complementary nature of air capabilities across the force.

Exercises and Lessons Learned

In 2025, the Romanian Air Force achieved a first-of-its-kind milestone by conducting a transatlantic flight with a C-27J Spartan aircraft to participate in Exercise Emerald Warrior 2025 in the United States. This inaugural mission demonstrated the platform's capability, as well as the crews' proficiency, to operate over extended ranges and in complex multinational environments.

The 2025 exercise program served as the primary test bed for refining doctrine and procedures, with participation in large-scale activities such as Ramstein Flag 2025, Dacian Spring 2025, Steadfast Dart 25, Dacian Fall 2025, Saber Guardian 25, Anatolian Phoenix 2025, and the bilateral exercise with the 352nd Special Operations Wing, alongside other national and multinational events, enabling the assessment of operational integration under conditions of increased complexity and generating validated operational lessons. These lessons highlighted the requirement for deeper multi-domain integration (air–land–cyber) to ensure effectiveness in contested environments, the need to enhance command and control interoperability under degraded conditions, and the identification of infrastructure and logistics shortfalls during dispersal and Agile Combat Employment (ACE) scenarios, all of which inform priority capability requirements aimed at transitioning ACE from a conceptual framework into a demonstrable capability, including improvements in rapid runway repair, expeditionary sustainment, and command node survivability.

Capability and Infrastructure

Technical modernization progressed in parallel with infrastructure optimization. Upgrades to sensor networks and the integration of federated data into joint air surveillance systems strengthened situational awareness and improved synchronization with Allied partners. Operationalizing additional air defence components has increased protective coverage and shortened detection-to-engagement timelines. Investment in air base infrastructure and training ranges focused on ensuring suitable support for modern platforms and enabling allied combined operations.

Human Capital

Personnel remain the decisive factor in transformation. Strengthening initial and sustainment training, expanding professional military education through NATO centres of excellence, and embedding personnel within multinational structures have measurably increased operational effectiveness. Operational deployments and exercise participation accelerated skill development and the institutionalization of updated procedures.

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In 2025 the Romanian Air Force launched a comprehensive digitalization effort to deliver near-real-time decision-quality information and to enhance operational responsiveness. Critical phases of this initiative are scheduled for 2026, when digitalization is expected to act as an operational and strategic force multiplier.

New European support mechanisms – notably the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) framework – provide opportunities to accelerate investment in air capabilities and infrastructure, enabling rapid transition of multinational operational experience into interoperable, sustainable capabilities.

Doctrinal and organizational adjustments are underway to ensure the Romanian Air Force can counter emerging threats and prepare for integration of next-generation platforms. The year 2026 is therefore framed by continuity and consolidation: sustaining high readiness, increasing responsiveness to evolving challenges, and maintaining a resilient logistics base supported by coherent personnel development and retention policies.

Through these lines of effort, Romania reaffirms its role as an active contributor to the security of NATO's eastern flank and to Allied operational stability. The Romanian Air Force not only contributes to joint deterrence and defence, but also functions as a stabilizing and credible element within the Allied security architecture in a regional environment marked by complex and rapidly evolving challenges.

Story by Adrian Sultănoiu

Romania's security is founded, above all, on its people

The visit of the Minister of National Defense, Radu Miruță, to the 86th Air Base, Borcea, represents more than a routine engagement– it is a clear affirmation of the unit's critical role in national defense and allied cooperation.The Minister's presence, alongside a U.S. delegation, underscores the strength of the Romania–United States Strategic Partnership and confirms that the 86th Air Base is not only a key national military installation, but also a vital node in bilateral defense cooperation and regional security architecture.

This official visit delivers a clear and unambiguous message: Romania remains a dependable NATO Ally, and the 86th Air Base is fully integrated into this enduring commitment to stability, interoperability, and collective defense.

"Today (February 16), at the 86th Air Base in Fetești, I engaged directly with pilots and their commanders–dedicated military professionals whose commitment to the mission is evident in every conversation. They are well-prepared, accountable, and mission-focused, providing clear, informed responses and demonstrating a level of determination that builds trust and confidence.

Direct engagement with personnel on the ground remains essential. It is the only way to fully understand operational challenges and develop effective, actionable solutions. Several issues raised during today's discussions already have defined paths toward resolution.

The visit was conducted alongside Senator Jeanne Shaheen, a key figure in U.S. foreign policy and a consistent advocate for Romania and the security of NATO's eastern flank. A senior member of the U.S. Senate and former governor, Senator Shaheen has actively supported legislative initiatives aimed at strengthening Black Sea security, including the development of a U.S. regional strategy and the enhancement of allied presence. Her leadership reflects Romania's strategic relevance within the Euro-Atlantic security framework.

The Senator also recognized the speed and determination with which Romania established the F-16 Training Center–an advanced, Europe-unique capability that trains Romanian, Ukrainian, and allied pilots to NATO standards, further reinforcing Romania's role in regional security.

The Romania–United States Strategic Partnership is strong, pragmatic, and results-driven. Engagements with the U.S. delegation highlighted a shared commitment to initiating concrete defense projects in the near term, further strengthening bilateral cooperation. Romania remains committed to its role as a regional security provider and will continue investing in modern capabilities, strategic partnerships, and the professional development of the military who safeguard our national security every day," stated Minister of National Defense, Radu Miruță.

Official statement, Minister of National Defense Radu Miruță

The Minister of National Defense, Radu Miruță, together with Senator Jeanne Shaheen, emphasized the importance of strengthening military-to-military relations

The Minister of National Defense also conducted an engagement with personnel of the 86th Air Base

The visit serves as a clear validation of the essential role the 86th Air Base plays within Romania's security architecture and NATO's Eastern Flank. The Minister of National Defense assured personnel engaged in discussions of the Ministry's full support in ensuring mission execution under the best possible conditions

SPANISH EUROFIGHTERS DEPLOY TO ROMANIA IN DEMONSTRATION OF NATO AGILE COMBAT EMPLOYMENT

Spanish Air and Space Force Eurofighter Typhoons have deployed to Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, Romania.
Both Spain and Germany will conduct Quick Reaction Alert under the Combined Air Operation Centre Torrejón, Spain.
Photo courtesy German Air Force

Three Spanish Air and Space Force Eurofighter Typhoons, supported by an A-400M aircraft, have recently deployed to Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) Air Base, Romania, reinforcing the Alliance's flexible and scalable force posture along the Eastern Flank.

The Spanish detachment will operate in close collaboration with German Air Force personnel already stationed and operating from Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base. The arrival of the Typhoons enhances NATO's Air Policing capabilities in the Eastern Flank and Black Sea region, ensuring the integrity of NATO airspace and strengthening measures for deterrence.

The deployment forms part of NATO Allied Air Command's eVA Eastern Sentry framework, designed to provide responsive, combat-credible airpower where and when required. By forward-deploying high-readiness fighter assets, NATO demonstrates its capability to rapidly adapt force posture in response to the evolving security environment.

"This deployment demonstrates Spain's unwavering commitment to NATO's collective defense" said Major Félix Diéguez, Detachment Commander. "Operating from Romania and executing NATO's Agile Combat Employment concept demonstrated our ability to deploy rapidly, integrate seamlessly with our German Allies, and deliver combat-ready airpower wherever the Alliance requires" he added.

A key feature of the deployment will be the execution of NATO's Agile Combat Employment (ACE) concept. The deployment of two Allies, both operating the Eurofighter, provides the opportunity for pilots, engineers, ground crews, and support staff to cross-service airframes, share expertise, and maximize flexibility while maintaining operational effectiveness under dynamic conditions.

"The deployment of Spanish Eurofighters to Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base demonstrates the strategic value of MK as a key hub for Allied air operations on NATO's Eastern Flank. Our personnel are proud to enable the rapid reception and integration of multinational forces, showcasing Romania's commitment to collective defense and the Alliance's Agile Combat Employment concept in action" said Col. (A.F.) Gabriel Goagă, Commander of 57th Air Base Mihail Kogălniceanu.

Both Spain and Germany will conduct Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) responsibilities on behalf of NATO, operating under the direction of the Combined Air Operation Centre Torrejón, Spain (CAOC TJ). The Allies will work side-by-side in mission planning cells, strengthening tactical integration and shared situational awareness.

"Operating alongside our Spanish counterparts showcases the depth of Allied interoperability," said Lieutenant Colonel Andreas Beckmann, German Detachment Commander "Together, we are reinforcing NATO's Eastern Flank through flexibility, agility, and shared understanding of the importance of regional security" he added.

Through Enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) such as this deployment, Allied Air Command continues to synchronize multinational airpower, demonstrating readiness and cohesion. The integration of Spanish and German forces at MK Air Base serves as a tangible example of NATO's unity and its ability to project airpower decisively in defense of the Alliance.

NATO ALLIES CONTINUE ACTIVITIES AND SURVEILLANCE ALONG THE EASTERN FLANK, ENHANCING INTEGRATED AIR AND MISSILE DEFENCE AND COUNTER-UAS

NATO Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) recently conducted targeted Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) training in Romania under eVA Eastern Sentry. The exercise, executed as a Flexible Deterrent Option (FDO), was designed to strengthen deterrence and enhance operational readiness along the Alliance's Eastern Flank.

The exercise focused on high-end interoperability and multi-domain integration, linking air and surface-based assets with sophisticated command-and-control structures. A primary objective was the refinement of Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS) tactics, ensuring the Alliance remains prepared to mitigate evolving aerial threats in a complex security environment.

"Eastern Sentry is a robust enhance vigilance activity that operationally models the future of NATO's air defence posture," said U.S. Brigadier General Kevin Jamieson, Deputy Chief of Staff Operations at NATO Allied Air Command. "The activities executed this week showcase the full spectrum of NATO's deterrent and defensive capabilities, securing our Eastern Flank and strengthening our posture through persistent presence."

Host nation Romania deployed F-16 fighter jets alongside Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (TB2) and the CHIRON Air Defence system. They were joined by Allied participants from Greece (F-16s), Türkiye (F-16s), and France

TUR AF and ROU AF F-16s
Archive photo by Adrian Sultănoiu

with the MISTRAL system, which complements the short-range, low-altitude air defence network of NATO airspace. Critical mission support was provided by NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), which delivered essential air pictures and coordination. The mission was controlled by the Combined Air Operation Centre UEDEM (CAOCU), ensuring seamless integration between airborne and surface-based elements to accelerate decision-making cycles.

The exercise featured a robust multinational footprint, utilizing an efficient and streamlined mix of assets to meet the mission objectives and demonstrating NATO's ability to operate as a unified, defensive force.

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Consequently, the series of FDO exercises serves as a clear indicator of the ongoing success of Eastern Sentry. This strategic framework is progressing effectively, forming a robust and evolving shield that guarantees the security of the NATO territory through constant vigilance and rapid response, ensuring a persistent and credible defensive posture.

ROU AF F-16 from 86th Air Base
Archive photo by Adrian Sultănoiu

LARGEST ALLIED C-A2AD AIRPOWER INTEGRATION FOR EASTERN SENTRY

NATO distributed the largest presence of Airpower thus far this year for two back-to-back Allied Air Command (AIRCOM)-led Flexible Deterrent Option (FDO) training missions across NATO's Joint Operation Areas (JOAs), from the Baltics to Romania, March 4-5, 2026. Romania contributed six F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft from the 48th Fighter Squadron at the 71st Air Base and the 53rd Fighter Squadron at the 86th Air Base.

On March 4, Allied aircraft conducted multi-domain Counter Anti-Access/Area Denial (C-A2AD) training near Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) Air Base, Romania. Then on March 5, Allied Aircraft exercised a find, fix, track, and target (F2T2) exercise near and around the Baltics.

The two separate yet related missions were delivered as FDO missions, focused on deterrence-oriented, carefully tailored, and scalable activity intended to signal Allied resolve and unity.

These two FDO missions were executed under NATO's enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA), Eastern Sentry. The aim of Eastern Sentry is to increase multi-domain air defences along the Eastern Flank, demonstrating Eastern Sentry's agile and adaptive nature.

Eastern Sentry is also a model for the future of NATO's Air Defence posture: Rather than focusing solely on static deployments or patrol rotations, Eastern Sentry operates as a dynamic eVA that can reconfigure itself according to the threat. Its distributed posture allows forces to move fluidly across the eastern flank -- from the Baltic States and Poland to the Black Sea region -- maintaining constant situational awareness and decision superiority.

The March 4 training mission brought together French Mirage 2000D fighters, German Eurofighter Typhoons, Spanish F/A-18 Hornets, and Romanian F-16 fighters. The German detachment, specifically, is currently operating out of MK Air Base in support of NATO's enhanced Air Policing mission. The Spanish also recently deployed to MK Air Base, primarily to exercise the execution of NATO's Agile Combat Employment (ACE) concept.

"While this mission is highly complex in both planning and execution, it is just the right scenario to train in a multi-domain environment," said German Eurofighter pilot and operations officer, Major "Flash", deployed at the German detachment at MK Air Base, Romania. "All air and ground based assets in this exercise simulate a realistic threat, enabling participants to train and solidify their ability to defend NATO Air Space and deter potential opponents."

Enabling aircraft also included a French Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) and a Spanish A400M Tanker. Romanian land assets also significantly contributed to the training, providing air operations high-fidelity training in a complex environment. The whole training mission was controlled by NATO's Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in Torrejon, Spain, integrating these airborne and surface-based elements to sharpen procedures and speed decision-making in a complex air and missile defence environment.

The multifaceted mission successfully trained joint efforts in gaining air superiority in a simulated hostile area and the destruction of notional enemy air defences (DEAD).

The next day, Allied aircraft and assets from 8 NATO Allies converged north, from Romania up to Finland, for the F2T2 training, in which air, land, cyber, and space assets succinctly coordinated with one another to successfully terminate a target. At the core of the multi-domain F2T2 mission is a commitment to improving Allied operations and cohesion.

The March 5th mission saw French Mirage 2000D fighters and Finnish F/A-18 Hornets operating together. The fighters were refuelled by A330 MRTT tankers from France and the Multinational MRTT Unit (MMU). The Polish, Estonian, and Finnish Control and Combat Reporting Centres (CRCs) provided ground-based command and control (C2), cross-domain coordination; and communicated notional targets. The mission also integrated surface-based air and missile defence (SBAMD) contributions from Estonia, the UK, and the U.S., enabling a combined air-and-ground defensive training environment. Lastly, the Canadian Joint Operations Command (JOC) also provided integral Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and operational expertise for the FDO. Controlling the northern JOA, NATO's CAOC in Uedem, Germany, controlled this mission as the key Command and Control (C2) node to monitor the airspace.

These two FDOs, in two separate JOAs, were tailored to increase interoperability; refine tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs); and improve multi-domain integration across participating Allied units. Designed for eVA Eastern Sentry, the missions strengthened NATO's enduring air and missile defence posture, including the Alliance's continuous approach to safeguarding Allied airspace.

ROMANIAN AIR FORCE
FROM INTERNAL PROFESSIONALISM TO ALLIED CREDIBILITY

The year 2026 places a premium on sustained, collective effort: accelerating modernization, hardening the allied posture, and sharpening operational readiness. That imperative frames a conversation with Major General Aurel-Cezar Stănciulescu, Deputy Chief of Romanian Air Force Staff. His operational background makes him uniquely positioned to explain how lessons from international missions and complex exercises are translated into concrete priorities and executable plans.

You assumed the Deputy Chief of Staff role during a period of consolidation and change. What were the main challenges you encountered and how did you address them?

The challenges boiled down to three priorities: keeping forces operational on current missions, aligning technical modernization with realistic maintenance and logistics capacity, and rapidly training personnel on new technologies.
We adopted a two-track approach – stabilizing ongoing operations, such as Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) air defense, transport, and support missions, while accelerating the fielding of new capabilities. Logistics and technical sustainment were treated as first-order priorities from the outset. Tight coordination between the Air Staff and operational units, combined with focused resource allocation to critical nodes, reduced short-term vulnerability and built a foundation for medium- and long-term change: infrastructure upgrades, mobile logistics hubs, and advanced specialist training courses.

How did your command experience at the 90th Airlift Base and the Air Component Command shape your priorities for 2026?

Tactical command taught me the direct links between mission execution, maintenance, and sustainment. Leading complex airlift and support operations reinforced the importance of disciplined planning, redundancy, and rapid recovery.
That experience guides investment choices toward capabilities that deliver the fastest operational return and toward processes that reduce downtime and increase overall system availability. It also underscored the need for clear, rapid vertical communications and early scenario rehearsals so tactical requirements are accurately reflected in operational-level resourcing.

Strengthening the eastern flank through participation in allied missions such as NATO Baltic Air Policing or EUFOR ALTHEA is a priority. What concrete lessons emerged from those missions?

These missions are our most reliable proof of concept. They consistently validate interoperability – both doctrinal and technical – and highlight the critical requirement for predictive, rapid-response logistics.
Operating under allied command, using standardized procedures and integrated communications systems, provides premier training for credibility within the Alliance. Exercises and deployments expose technical and operational shortfalls that point to the same strategic solutions: standardization, logistics first, and targeted investment to sustain readiness over time.
Agile Combat Employment (ACE)-style dispersal demands multi-domain integration, stronger command and control (C2) interoperability under stress, and logistics chains that function in austere conditions. We do not merely record lessons learned – we convert them into clear operational requirements that directly inform procurement, training, and sustainment decisions.

People are the decisive factor. How are you handling training, motivation, and retention amid new operational and technical demands?

People are strategic. Our approach is built around continuous, mission-tailored training across avionics, sensors, spectrum management, electronic countermeasures (ECM), and logistics.
We pair training opportunities at NATO Centers of Excellence with internal programs that integrate advanced simulation and live-flight training.
Motivation and retention depend on competitive career paths, professional working conditions, and recognition of expertise. We are improving development packages, workplace conditions, and policies that support a healthy work-life balance.
Institutional culture matters – we reward initiative and competence so experienced personnel remain in service and mentor the next generation.

What keeps you up at night regarding real, on-the-ground capacity? What are the most urgent vulnerabilities and how can they be addressed?

I am less concerned about the age of platforms than about the gap between what we possess and what we can sustain on a day-to-day basis. One of the most serious vulnerabilities is the loss of experienced specialists. When a technician leaves after 10–15 years of service, significant institutional knowledge is lost, and rebuilding that expertise takes years.
The solution goes beyond compensation alone. We must improve the working environment, modernize training into continuous, hands-on cycles, and provide junior personnel with clear, transparent career paths.
Logistics is a close second. Modern systems are often grounded simply because a critical part is unavailable. We need prioritized stockpiles, predictive maintenance practices, and budgeting that favors reliability and availability over short-term visibility. Finally, exercises expose fragility under pressure. The answer lies in investing in unglamorous but essential enablers – mobile shelters, resilient communications, and dispersed logistics nodes – to make ACE and contested-environment operations sustainable.

How does the force align with new NATO strategic realities and the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), and what role do European Union initiatives such as SAFE play?

NATO's evolving strategic environment requires continuous reprioritization focused on deterrence, resilience, and interoperability. We integrate NDPP requirements directly into national acquisition and capability development plans so platforms and systems meet both national and Alliance needs.
European Union initiatives – including SAFE (Security Action for Europe) and military mobility programs – act as capability multipliers. They provide funding mechanisms and procedural frameworks to strengthen logistics, modernize infrastructure, and improve strategic movement. Working with European partners allows us to convert these opportunities into interoperable, sustainable capabilities that enhance credibility within both NATO and the EU.

How vital is coordination between the Air Force General Staff, operational units, and allies, and what steps are essential to improve cooperation?

Coordination transforms potential into operational effect. To strengthen it, we must institutionalize shared procedures, conduct integrated exercise cycles, ensure technical interoperability at the C2 level, and accelerate lessons-learned feedback from operators to planners.
This requires both cultural change – transparency, accountability, and leadership at every level – and practical tools, such as cross-functional logistics hubs and shared digital planning and situational-awareness platforms that synchronize effort in near-real time.

Looking to 2026, what are the Air Force's main strategic objectives, and how do they connect to the Romanian Military and NATO?

The year 2026 should mark a phase of applied transformation built on three pillars: sustaining operational tempo, accelerating digitalization, and consolidating the strategic base. Our organizing principle is continuous transformation in service of collective security.
Objectives follow two closely linked axes: internal consolidation and active external contribution to Alliance defense. Internally, we aim to sustain force rhythm, leverage digital transformation as an efficiency multiplier, and prepare the organization for emerging paradigms – including doctrine for hybrid threats, unmanned aerial systems (UAS) integration, and conditions for next-generation platforms – supported by multi-year planning and European instruments such as SAFE.
Externally, our readiness and presence reinforce deterrence on NATO's eastern flank and directly contribute to the regional defense architecture. These efforts represent concrete operational building blocks within the broader Romanian Military and NATO posture.

Thank you, Major General, for your time and candor. Your leadership and focus on practical capability development will resonate with personnel and readers alike in *CER SENIN* magazine – a clear demonstration that professionalism, allied cooperation, and people remain the foundation of success in NATO and European Union efforts.

Interview by Adrian Sultănoiu

Operational Stability and Modernization

Command Experience Driving Priorities

Interoperability and ACE Lessons

Training, Retention, Institutional Culture

Sustainment and Specialist Retention

NDPP Alignment and EU Instruments

Institutional and Allied Coordination

Transformation and Deterrence

"Efficiency grows through a deliberate cycle: we test in exercises, validate in missions, and feed lessons back into procedures, training, and investment."
– Major General Aurel-Cezar Stănciulescu, Deputy Chief of Romanian Air Force Staff

Romanian C-27J Crew Executed Tactical Training Missions in the United Kingdom

Captured low flying in Mach Loop (Low Flying Area 7) from Cad West on February 24 was this Romanian Air Force C-27J Spartan, 2704, seen on its second and final pass. Courtesy photo of Tom Blanpain and Airforces Monthly

Between 15 and 27 February 2026, an air-support detachment for the Special Operations Forces deployed to a joint training module with United States partners at RAF Mildenhall, a base of the Royal Air Force.
The detachment comprised one C-27J Spartan, personnel from the Air Support Service for Special Operations Forces within the Air Force Staff, and personnel from the Special Operations Air Task Unit – FW, 90th Air Transport Base.

"The participation of the Romanian C-27J Spartan aircraft in a training event conducted in England alongside American partners represented an important step in strengthening operational readiness and cooperation with allied forces. The activity provided Romanian crews with the opportunity to train in a complex and realistic environment where procedures and operational techniques are constantly tested.
During the training module, the aircraft crew conducted a series of missions designed to enhance reaction capability and coordination in tactical scenarios. These included formation flights, tactical low-level flying, and the execution of tactical procedures specific to modern air operations.
Container and paratrooper airdrops were also conducted, representing essential missions for airlift operations and logistical support in operational theaters.
An important component of the training involved simulated operations in a hostile environment. These scenarios allowed the crews to practice responding to potential threats and refine operational techniques under demanding conditions. Exercises of this type directly contribute to improving training standards and strengthening interoperability with allied forces.
Behind every successful mission stands a dedicated technical team. Romanian maintenance specialists played an essential role in maintaining the aircraft in optimal flight condition throughout the training event. Through professionalism and attention to detail, they ensured the aircraft's technical availability, contributing decisively to the execution of all planned missions.
At the same time, the activity provided an opportunity for a valuable exchange of experience with foreign maintenance teams, facilitating the sharing of best practices and strengthening technical cooperation.
Participation in international training activities of this type demonstrates Romania's commitment to maintaining a high level of readiness and strengthening cooperation with strategic partners. The experience gained directly contributes to enhancing the operational capability of the Romanian Air Force and to the professional development of the personnel involved," stated Major (AF) Mihai Vîrdol.

BALTICA 2026

From the Carpathians to the Baltic: Carpathian Vipers on Air Policing Rotation

For the detachment preparing at 86th Air Base, the final phase prior to deployment to the Baltic region brings together operational discipline, interoperability, and logistics postured to sustain complex missions. With six F-16 aircraft and approximately 100 personnel, the Romanian Air Force aligns with allied standards to maintain a credible rapid-response capability in the vicinity of the Baltic Sea.
At a time when allied commitments are measured by solidarity, presence, and response capability, the detachment Carpathian Vipers conducted final operational preparation at 86th Air Base ahead of a Baltic Air Policing rotation. Training focused on sharpening aircrew technical and tactical proficiency and aligning procedures with allied standards – interoperability, precise communications, and rapid reaction – all prerequisites for Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) operations.

"What we do every day is a challenge, but that is exactly what we have trained for."

"The primary mission in the Baltic States is the execution of reinforced Air Policing, which means that, together with our partners, we will secure the airspace of the Baltic States for the period April–August 2026. It is an extremely important mission because it is a significant part of the collective defense contribution the Romanian Air Force brings to the Alliance. At the same time, for the personnel involved there is no better opportunity to demonstrate they are ready to operate at the highest standards, regardless of location. What we do every day (here and elsewhere) is challenging, especially given the current security context, but that is exactly why we trained and continue to train," said Colonel (AF) Mihăiță Marin, detachment commander.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT
NATO air policing missions in the Baltic region operate on a rotational model: member states contribute time, aircraft, and personnel to maintain continuous allied airspace surveillance and immediate QRA capability. This defensive architecture is built on common standards and interoperable procedures intended to ensure the identification and escort of aircraft operating in proximity to allied airspace.
Within this framework, Romania's successive contributions have strengthened the operational profile of the Romanian Air Force in collective defense missions. Through repeated rotations and participation in multinational exercises, Romanian personnel have accumulated operational experience applicable across theaters and security contexts.

FROM MIG-21 LANCER TO F-16 – STEADY EVOLUTION
Romanian participation in Baltic Air Policing carries both symbolic and operational significance. The first notable deployment occurred in 2007, when MiG-21 LanceR aircraft were forward-deployed, marking a milestone in the practical integration of Romanian capability into the allied air defense architecture.
Romanian pilots and ground crews operated within a multinational framework, applying common procedures and demonstrating their ability to integrate into a complex operational environment. Platform modernization increased mission tempo and complexity, while the transition to the F-16 introduced enhanced performance alongside expanded logistical and training requirements. The return of Romanian F-16 detachments to Air Policing rotations, confirmed from 2023

Carpathian Vipers detachment

onward, reflects both sustained commitment and the maturation of operational capabilities.

OPERATIONAL TRAINING AT 86TH AIR BASE

A comprehensive training program at 86th Air Base transformed technical and human resources into a fully deployable operational capability. Activities included academic instruction, high-fidelity simulator training, tactical familiarization flights, and exercises replicating QRA-specific scenarios.

Operating the F-16 platform requires detailed maintenance planning, assured spare parts availability, and continuous synchronization between aircrew, maintenance, and logistics personnel. The objective is to sustain a consistent level of aircraft availability throughout the deployment.

"Nothing will change in terms of our operations; only the airfield and the environment in which we operate will change."

"As a young pilot, I must fulfill the duty assigned to me through intensive training and ground study so that, up there, when needed, there is no doubt about our readiness. We feel prepared because we execute Air Policing here at home, 365 days a year. Today, tomorrow, we are on duty! Nothing of what we do operationally will change; the airfield and the operating environment will change – another sea, the Baltic Sea, and different terrain features. From our point of view, that is the only change," said Captain Alexandru Beraczko, F-16 pilot.

Beyond individual pilot responsibility, each sortie is the result of extensive ground planning and coordination. Operational environment analysis, mission planning documentation, and synchronization of technical activities are

essential for the safe execution of air operations.

"Experience on a foreign mission is defining at the beginning of a military career."

"For me, at the start of my career, the experience on an external mission is defining. I am part of the personnel preparing flight missions; I handle planning and contribute, together with my colleagues in the detachment, to flight operations. The operational environment in the Baltic States is dynamic and complex in the current geopolitical context, but I consider myself prepared and capable of meeting any mission," said Second Lieutenant Mihai-Rareș Poețelea, planning officer.

INTEROPERABILITY AND OPERATIONAL TEMPO

The success of a rotation depends on cohesion among aircrew, maintenance, logistics, and operational command. Standardized radio procedures, interoperability with allied command-and-control systems, and a predictable logistics chain are essential to maintain reduced reaction times and continuous aircraft availability.

At the same time, detachment security and the protection of operating infrastructure are indispensable components of any external deployment.

"We prepare for any situation and for specific events that may occur during the mission. We, in the Force Protection group, ensure guard and protection so that flight activities can proceed without issues from that standpoint," said Corporal Third Class Alina Enache, Force Protection.

LOGISTICS – THE BACKBONE OF AIR OPERATIONS

Sustained air operations rely on a discreet but essential logistics structure that supports every phase of flight activity. Beyond the visible presence of aircraft and aircrew, an Air Policing mission is enabled by a coordinated logistics system capable of ensuring personnel mobility, technical resource availability, and operational continuity at all times.

#WEARENATO

"We are the unseen personnel behind flight operations, without whom the flights could not be carried out."

Equipment transport, aircraft refueling, energy supply, and technical support are continuous processes synchronized with mission planning and execution. When operating away from the home base, these elements become even more critical, ensuring that each mission can be prepared, launched, and sustained safely and efficiently. Logistics thus represents a fundamental component of the operational framework, ensuring continuity and stability throughout the rotation.

"Our mission, from a logistics formation perspective, is to provide transport and support necessary for flight activities. Concretely, we support aircraft at the new location: moving pilots and personnel, refueling aircraft, and providing the power sources required for their operation. We are the unseen people behind flight operations; without us, the flights could not be executed. Still, we cannot say we are the most important. Together, we are all important for mission accomplishment," said Warrant Officer Valentin Nițu, logistics support chief.

This continuous coordination across specialties – from pilots and technicians to support elements and force protection – creates the operational stability required for deployed missions. At the same time, experience gained in such operations contributes to the continuous refinement of procedures and the consolidation of a shared operational culture within the detachment.

Lessons learned and operational adaptation

Lessons learned from previous rotations remain central to current preparations. Continuous adaptation to the evolving security environment and the integration of operational insights contribute to improving processes and increasing mission effectiveness.

"The lessons learned from previous missions in the Baltic States have already been incorporated into the training plan. The most important thing is to learn and avoid past mistakes, to optimize the process in such a way that the mission runs more smoothly. Of course, we will also generate new lessons learned for future detachments, especially given that the security situation is highly complex and dynamic – no mission is identical to the previous one," concluded Colonel (AF) Mihăiță Marin.

Allied commitment and operational credibility

The preparation of the Carpathian Vipers at 86th Air Base represents more than a pre-deployment phase. It reflects how the Romanian Air Force continuously builds credibility within the Alliance's collective security architecture.

Each Air Policing rotation reflects years of training, operational experience gained in multinational missions and exercises, and the coordinated effort of all specialties involved in air operations. From mission planning and aircraft maintenance to force protection and logistics, every element contributes to sustaining a credible rapid reaction capability.

For detachment personnel, the Baltic mission is not simply a change of airfield or geographic environment. It represents a natural continuation of the Air Policing mission executed daily in Romania and, at the same time, a direct contribution to allied airspace security. The presence of Romanian F-16 aircraft in northern Europe's Air Policing rotations confirms the operational maturity of the Romanian Air Force and its ability to operate fully integrated within a complex allied system. In essence, every Air Policing rotation is more than a temporary deployment: it is a tangible expression of allied solidarity and a shared commitment to the protection of NATO airspace.

Story by Adrian Sultănoiu
Photo: Alex Nițu, Adrian Sultănoiu

STRONGER TOGETHER

NATO–Romania Command Senior Enlisted Leader Dialogue: Military Education in Focus at the Romanian Air Force Staff

The Romanian Air Force Staff hosted a visit by a delegation from NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT), as part of an initiative focused on assessing the training and professional development system for warrant officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted personnel. Led by Command Sergeant Major Remigijus Katinas, the Allied delegation sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the Romanian Armed Forces train and develop this category of military personnel, with emphasis on the specific requirements of the Air Force.

The visit commenced with an official engagement with the Chief of the Romanian Air Force Staff, Lieutenant General Leonard-Gabriel Baraboi, setting the framework for the professional dialogue that followed. Discussions subsequently focused on one of the most critical aspects of modern force effectiveness: career progression for these personnel categories and the flexibility of the training and education system.

Within an Allied context in which all 32 NATO member states employ different organizational and training models, the exchange of experience highlighted both the distinctive features of the Romanian system and shared trends across the Alliance. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the rapid yet rigorous development of professional military personnel capable of meeting current operational requirements without compromising training standards.

Another key topic addressed was career advancement opportunities–an essential factor in maintaining motivation and fully leveraging accumulated experience. At the same time, NATO officials underscored the importance of retention packages, viewed as a critical component in sustaining a qualified force within a competitive environment.

Throughout the visit, the delegation was accompanied by a representative of the Romanian Defence Staff, Chief Warrant Officer Florea Sas, and attended a briefing delivered by the Romanian Air Force. The presentation provided a detailed overview of the military education system specific to the Air Force, as well as current training requirements. The dialogue continued in an interactive format, during which the Air Force's command warrant officer and senior NCO team, coordinated by Chief Warrant Officer Ionuț Enache, addressed delegation inquiries and contributed to identifying concrete avenues for improving the military education and professional development system.

Beyond the exchange of information, the visit reaffirmed a fundamental principle: investment in people remains one of the Alliance's most critical resources. Strengthening military education systems continues to serve as a cornerstone for interoperability and operational effectiveness.

Story by Command Senior Enlisted Leader Romanian Air Force, Chief Master Sergeant Ionuț Enache
Photo by Alex Nițu

EUFOR ALTHEA

"Mission accomplished under the winter skies of Bosnia and Herzegovina!"

"Twenty-one years ago, the Romanian Air Force marked a milestone – the first deployment to a theater of operations since World War II, through its participation in the European Union–led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR ALTHEA."

Deployed on its third rotation as part of the EUFOR ALTHEA operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dacian Pumas detachment carried out essential air support missions, directly contributing to the safety of military personnel in the theater and to the accomplishment of the international mission's objectives.

The detachment's primary mission consisted of providing search, rescue and medical evacuation capabilities for forces participating in the operation. The third rotation took place in a mature operational context, benefiting from experience accumulated during previous rotations. This experience enabled the optimization of procedures, reduction of reaction times, and effective integration into the multinational force's command and control system.

Challenges of mountain flying

Missions flown with IAR-330 Puma helicopters during winter over Bosnia and Herzegovina presented characteristics that significantly differed from operations conducted in Romania. The predominantly mountainous terrain, characterized by narrow valleys and high elevations, required heightened attention in planning and executing each mission, as well as constant adaptation of piloting techniques.

At the same time, weather conditions could change rapidly, especially in the cold season. Fog, low clouds, snow and local winds directly affected flight safety and demanded from crews a high level of professionalism, experience and operational discipline.

Missions in adverse weather conditions

The cold season was a major factor in planning and conducting air missions. Low temperatures, reduced visibility and winter weather phenomena imposed additional safety measures and a high level of preparedness.

Members of the "Dacian Pumas" detachment demonstrated the ability to adapt to these conditions, keeping aircraft and crews in a continuous state of readiness throughout the rotation. Strict adherence to procedures and professional discipline were essential elements for the safe accomplishment of missions.

Team professionalism

The IAR-330 helicopters assigned to the detachment were operated by crews with a high level of training, capable of executing complex missions in mountainous terrain and in adverse weather. Cooperation among pilots, flight mechanics, medical personnel and

At mid-January, military personnel of the "Dacian Pumas" Detachment conducted their final flight missions alongside the Italian contingent, marking the completion of the third rotation, executed from September 2025 through January 2026. This milestone also signifies the conclusion of the Romanian Air Force detachment's participation in Operation EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The third rotation caps the effort initiated in January 2025 by the Romanian Air Force, consistently contributing to the maintenance of regional stability and security through professionalism, dedication, and team cohesion.

The predominantly mountainous terrain, characterized by narrow valleys and high elevations, required heightened attention in planning and executing each mission, as well as constant adaptation of piloting techniques

technical-engineering staff was essential to the success of each intervention.
Flight activity was supported by a cadre of well-trained military personnel – pilots, flight mechanics, medical staff, technical-engineering personnel and support staff – who operated as an integrated team based on clearly established procedures adapted to the specific requirements of the theater.
Personnel morale remained high, supported by team cohesion, professional experience and awareness of the mission's importance. Romanian servicemembers conducted their duties with responsibility and professionalism, demonstrating the ability to operate effectively in a multinational environment.

Multinational cooperation
The "Dacian Pumas" third rotation operated within an extended framework of multinational cooperation, typical for the EUFOR ALTHEA operation. The Romanian detachment maintained constant cooperation with the Air Force of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with SIPA (State Investigation and Protection Agency) – the Bosnian national investigation and state protection agency – as well as with the Clinical Center of the University of Sarajevo, the primary regional provider of emergency and specialized medical services.
Through these collaborations, "Dacian Pumas" provided air support for medical evacuation missions, emergency transport and rapid response, contributing both to the safety of local and international security personnel and to assistance for the civilian population. At the same time, the Romanian detachment operated integrated with the multinational EUFOR ALTHEA battalion forces, composed of servicemembers from several participating states.

Contribution to regional stability
Through the participation of the "Dacian Pumas" detachment in the operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania reaffirmed its commitment to regional security and to the international community's efforts to maintain stability in the Balkans.
"Romanian helicopter crews were on duty at Camp Butmir and carried out, day and night, the missions assigned to them within the framework of the EUFOR ALTHEA operation.

The atmosphere within the unit was professional and cooperative, conducive to performance. Missions were conducted according to plans, and the only impediment to accomplishing 100% of the assigned tasks and the requests from EUFOR and partners were the extremely harsh and changeable weather conditions in the area. Regardless of where they conducted operations, members of the detachment carried out their duties professionally and served as honorary ambassadors of Romania in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through their constant effort, they contributed to creating and maintaining a climate of security and stability in an area characterized by numerous challenges," said detachment commander Colonel (AF) Silviu-Vasile Marincaș.

Story and photos by Captain Lorena-Adelina Nița

On 20 January 2026, the change of responsibility ceremony for the aviation detachment of Operation EUFOR ALTHEA took place in the Camp Butmir area of operations, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the presence of the EUFOR Commander, Major General Florin-Marian Barbu.
With this official event, the Romanian Air Force concluded its mission, conducted since January 2025, with the third rotation marking the end of Romania's contribution to the aviation component of the operation.
Responsibilities were transferred to the Italian Air Force, in the spirit of continuity, allied cooperation, and shared commitment to maintaining regional stability and security.

Mission Accomplished!
We report the successful completion of the mission.
At the beginning of February, personnel from the 90th Airlift Base (3rd rotation) returned home after honorably representing Romania in Operation EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
For several months, under the motto "Pro Pace Unum" (United for Peace), the "Dacian Pumas" detachment served as a pillar of stability and security in the region. Their professionalism and dedication once again demonstrated that the Romanian Air Force operates at the highest standards.
Welcome home, "Dacian Pumas"!
Story by Lăcrămioara David
Photo: Radu Postelnicu, Lăcrămioara David

EUROPEAN F-16 TRAINING CENTER

Dialogue with Commander Adrian-Călin Selejan, Head of the EFTC (European F-16 Training Center)

The transformation of the 86th Air Base into a training center for the F-16 Fighting Falcon platform represents one of the most important developments in recent years in the enhancement of the training capabilities of the Romanian Air Force and NATO partners in the region. The establishment of the European F-16 Training Center (EFTC) brought not only new infrastructure and new training programs, but also a paradigm shift in the way combat aviation training is organized and managed.
The result of multinational cooperation between Romania, the Netherlands, the defense industry and partners within the F-16 "family," the center today operates as an integrated training platform, where pilots from several states go through the stages of conversion and operational training on this type of aircraft.

In this context, the editorial staff of ***CER SENIN*** magazine asked Commander Adrian-Călin Selejan, head of EFTC, for details on the institutional transformation generated by the center's integration into the 86th Air Base, the operational and logistical challenges associated with this project, as well as the role of EFTC in consolidating air training.
The integration of EFTC into the structure of the 86th Air Base involved a complex process of organizational and operational adaptation. Beyond the infrastructure, the transformation involved the alignment of procedures, the reorganization of logistical flows and the consolidation of international cooperation.
In the following dialogue, Commander Adrian-Călin Selejan explains how this transformation was planned and implemented.
"The adaptation of the 86th Air Base Borcea to host the European F-16 Training Center (EFTC) was a strategic, multidimensional process, with major operational, logistical and doctrinal implications. From the perspective of the base management, the integration of the EFTC involved a complex institutional transformation, oriented toward NATO standardization, interoperability and increased training capacity. The EFTC (European F-16 Training Center), established in November 2023 at the 86th Air Base, as a result of the collaboration between the Ministry of National Defense, through the Romanian Air Force, and the Ministry of Defense of the Netherlands, through the Royal Netherlands Air Force, in partnership with the Lockheed Martin company and with the support of the Kingdom of Denmark, the coordinating state alongside the Netherlands of the international F-16 Coalition, is a training center for F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter pilots.
Today, the 86th Air Base operates as a F-16 training center, capable of simultaneously managing operational missions and multinational training, with a high level of predictability and standardization."

Operational priorities implemented

The implementation of the EFTC required the establishment of clear operational priorities, aimed at ensuring the integration of the center into an already complex operating environment, in which the air base simultaneously performs air policing missions and training activities.
Commander Selejan details the main measures adopted to ensure this integration.

- *"Creating a NATO-standard training environment by aligning flight and planning procedures with NATO operational concepts and standards for the F-16 aircraft;*
- *Simultaneous management of real air defense missions and the intense training flow, by optimizing planning, to support a high pace of training missions without affecting operational availability, as Base 86 already has responsibilities for the Permanent Combat Service – Air Policing (QRA);*
- *The integration of the EFTC required flexible prioritization of resources (runways, airspace, technical personnel, etc);*
- *Reorganization of logistics and maintenance departments, as well as modernization of the infrastructure."*

Impact on operational capacity and training

The creation of the center generated a significant increase in the volume of air activity, but also a diversification of the types of missions executed within the 86th Air Base.
Next, Commander Adrian-Călin Selejan talks about how this evolution influenced the training of pilots and the operational capacity of the base.
"The training pace has become more intense and predictable, according to NATO standards.
The integration of the EFTC had a direct impact on the increase in the number of annual flight hours, on the increase in the complexity and diversification of the types of missions (air-to-air, air-to-ground, complex COMAO-type missions) and also on the consolidation of the level of training of pilots within the 86th Air Base Borcea."
Coordination with civil air traffic control and aeronautical authorities
The increase in flight activity has naturally required closer cooperation with civil air traffic control structures and aeronautical authorities. The Head of EFTC explains how these coordination mechanisms are managed.
"The increase in the volume and complexity of the air activity generated by the European F-16 Training Center (EFTC) has required the consolidation of civil-military coordination mechanisms and procedures, at all levels. For the 86th Air Base Borcea, this dimension has become an essential pillar of the functioning of daily operational and training activity, especially in the context of the densification of air traffic in Romanian airspace."

The influence of multinational cooperation on procedures

The presence of instructors and trainees from several NATO countries contributed to the harmonization of procedures and the strengthening of interoperability.
In the dialogue with ***CER SENIN*** magazine, Commander Selejan highlights the impact of this cooperation on tactical procedures and on organizational culture.
"International cooperation (foreign instructors, trainees from different countries) generated, first of all, the harmonization of tactical procedures, the increase in the level of interoperability and the exchange of good practices, both in the field of flight safety and maintenance."

Lessons learned and directions for development

After the first stages of operation, the experience accumulated at EFTC already offers a valuable set of lessons learned, which contribute to the optimization of training processes and the future development of the center.
Commander Adrian-Călin Selejan presents the main conclusions resulting from this experience.

"Lessons learned:

- *Integrated planning is essential – operational, logistical and administrative components must work in sync.*
- *Human resources are the critical factor – training and retention of technical and flight personnel are vital to maintaining a high level of training in the operational environment.*
- *Organizational flexibility allows for the rapid absorption of the increased volume of activity.*

Directions for development:

- *Expanding training capacity both within EFTC and within the 86th Air Base.*
- *Integrating lessons learned from recent conflicts into training curricula.*
- *Developing training capabilities for modernized versions of the F-16.*
- *Strengthening the role of the 86th Air Base as a permanent center of excellence in F-16 pilot training."*

General structure of the curriculum

At the end of the dialogue, the head of the center explains how the curriculum is organized and the role of each stage in the training of an F-16 pilot.
"The training process within the EFTC, conducted at the 86th Borcea Air Base, is structured in stages, progressively and fully aligned with NATO standards.
The curriculum includes a solid theoretical phase (on-board systems, normal and emergency procedures, tactical doctrines and procedures, training for air-to-air and air-to-ground missions), followed by intensive simulator training and then flight training. This process is organized gradually – from initial conversion missions to integration into complex tactical scenarios and multinational exercises.
Simulators play an essential role in the training of an F-16 pilot, as they allow the practice of emergency situations and complex tactical scenarios in safe conditions, increasing the level of training before each threshold in the training process.
Evaluation is continuous and represents a defining element of the F-16 pilot training process, found in each phase of the course. Also, the safety culture represents a fundamental principle – each mission is rigorously analyzed, and the standardization of flight procedures guarantees predictability and risk control.
A defining element of EFTC is the emphasis on interoperability: training is conducted in English, according to NATO procedures, and pilots are prepared for integration into an operational squadron operating the F-16, as well as in complex multinational environments.
Through the balanced integration of theory, simulation and real flight, through a solid safety culture and through constant orientation towards NATO standards, EFTC ensures a safe and efficient transition to F-16 operation and trains aircrew capable of acting effectively in complex operational environments.
Overall, EFTC ensures a safe, efficient and fully compatible transition with Alliance requirements, strengthening the role of Base 86 as a center of excellence in F-16 training."

Pilots' experience – from simulator to QRA

To complete the picture outlined by Commander Adrian-Călin Selejan on EFTC, we also obtained a statement from a pilot in training:
"I can say that the training here is very well structured and practical. After completing the training stages in Romania – the Air Force Academy, where I flew the Cessna 172 and the basic course in Boboc, where I flew the IAK-52 and IAR-99 – I had the opportunity to go to the United States, to the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program (ENJJPT), where I flew the T-6 and T-38, the two types of aircraft used in the training program. The experience there was extremely valuable, and the level of professionalism and rigor that I encountered there I now find here, at EFTC. I had no previous contact with the F-16, but the procedures are resumed from scratch – start and takeoff, runway tour – all carried out in the minimum necessary number of flight hours, because each platform has its own particularities and must be learned rigorously. The first hours allow for the rapid acquisition of basic maneuvers and checklists, after which we gradually move on to increasingly complex missions, designed to prepare us for the use of the platform in an operational context, including for engagement in air policing missions. The F-16 training program is the result of years of experience and development, and I believe that the number of hours and content cover the objectives imposed by the Air Force. Continuous training in the squadron consolidates skills through periodic repetition of procedures, and experienced instructors bring a major plus through appropriate pedagogical methods and practical scenarios that teach us to communicate effectively and quickly apply procedures in flight. I am convinced that, through this course, we will reach the operational standard necessary for the missions we will execute."
In conclusion, through the activity carried out at Air Base 86, the European F-16 Training Center is gradually becoming one of the most important training platforms for combat aviation in Europe. The ability to train pilots on the F-16 aircraft in a multinational environment, in full compliance with NATO standards, contributes not only to the development of the capabilities of the Romanian Air Force, but also to the strengthening of interoperability and cooperation between allied states. At the same time, the experience gained within EFTC confirms the increasingly important role of Air Base 86 in the security architecture. By integrating theoretical training, simulation and real flight in a coherent and predictable system, the center contributes to the training of a new generation of pilots prepared for the contemporary operational environment and consolidates Romania's position as a regional hub of excellence in F-16 training.

Reported by Adrian Sultănoiu

Mission Continuity: Romanian Air Force EOD Group in Kosovo

Sustaining operational standards established in prior deployments, the EOD Group delivers high-level explosive ordnance disposal capabilities in a dynamic multinational setting

The institutional transformation of the Romanian Armed Forces after 1990 involved more than force reductions, restructuring, and the removal of ideological frameworks specific to the previous era. It also included the development and operationalization of capabilities designed to raise the standards of force protection and the security of critical infrastructure.
Within this broader process, the Romanian Air Force responded proactively to the collective effort of adapting military doctrine and professionalizing personnel and organizational structures. Today, the Romanian Air Force EOD Group stands as a concrete example of operational excellence– the result of a continuous process of training and specialization conducted both on national territory and in operational theaters.

Building the EOD Profession

The process of aligning with NATO standards began during Romania's participation in the Partnership for Peace, a period during which the activities of Romanian military engineers underwent significant transformation at the conceptual, doctrinal, and practical levels. Within this context, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) specialization emerged as a natural extension of the engineering mission set, driven by the growing need to ensure safe operational environments in the presence of increasingly complex explosive threats.
The formal recognition of the EOD specialty established the legal and operational framework for its development. For the Romanian Air Force, the decisive step toward professionalization came in the early 2000s, when personnel began attending international EOD specialization courses.
These early training opportunities abroad allowed the future EOD specialists to access professional knowledge, technical expertise, and the organizational culture specific to the EOD community–elements that were subsequently implemented and integrated into Romanian Air Force operational practices.

"It was not easy. We started in 2004 with two young officers and a few ambitious NCOs. It was also the year Romania joined NATO, so we had the opportunity to access NATO manuals, doctrines, and STANAGs. We studied them, extracted ideas and procedures, and implemented them within our own structures. Then came the procurement of EOD equipment and technology, another area where we paid close attention. EOD specialists cannot operate with bare hands–they require advanced equipment.
It was a difficult path, marked by frustrations but also by satisfaction. We faced outdated mentalities, resistance to change, and limited financial resources, but we also found people who believed in us and supported us. It was hard work, but we all enjoyed it. That dedication was later reflected in the results we achieved during missions, exercises, and exchanges with other nations.
We managed to build an elite structure– cohesive, highly trained, and capable of handling the most complex missions. And it continues to do so today with professionalism and confidence," said Colonel Florin Drăgoi, commander of the Romanian Air Force EOD Group between 2010 and 2019.

Establishment, Certification, and Technological Orientation

The establishment of the first EOD structure within the Romanian Air Force in May 2004 marked a significant step toward aligning with NATO directives and standards, following Romania's accession to the Alliance in March 2004.
Designed as a flexible and rapidly deployable structure, the Romanian Air Force EOD Group was tasked with neutralizing and destroying unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices, restoring the operational capability of military airfields, and extracting military and civilian personnel from environments contaminated by explosive hazards.
From its inception, the unit underwent a rigorous training process. Certification of the Romanian Air Force EOD Group during Exercise "ROUEX 2007," conducted by a NATO evaluation structure, validated the efforts invested both by EOD specialists in achieving high readiness standards and by the Romanian Air Force staff in equipping the unit with the necessary EOD systems and technologies.
The equipment and systems used are not technological novelties for their own sake, but operational tools integrated into a set of specialized procedures. The combined effect of domestically developed technological capabilities and the professional competence of the human factor represents the fundamental premise behind the operational effectiveness of the Romanian Air Force EOD Group, adapted to the current security environment.
Technological advances have had a major impact on the EOD field, significantly increasing operator safety. EOD robots are used to remotely investigate and neutralize explosive devices, X-ray systems allow the examination of internal components without opening suspicious objects, and explosive trace detection devices identify the presence, type, and characteristics of explosive materials.
In addition to these systems, EOD specialists also operate equipment such as explosive initiation devices, fuze extraction tools, EOD protective suits, telescopic manipulators, jamming systems, recoil and recoilless disruptors of various calibers, metal detectors, and bomb locators.

Operational Experience in Afghanistan

Between 2009 and 2012, the Romanian Air Force EOD Group contributed to international stabilization efforts in the Afghanistan theater of operations. During this period, three successive detachments of six personnel each deployed with their equipment under the ISAF mission, while two additional detachments of thirteen personnel operated within the KAIA Lead Nation mission.
Operating in hostile environments affected by improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance, and performing missions under complex logistical and security conditions, significantly contributed to the professional and personal development of EOD specialists.
Participation in international missions confirmed the maturity and operational capability of the structure, demonstrating its ability to manage the full spectrum of EOD missions within a theater of operations.
"Nothing compares with the experience in the Afghanistan theater of operations, where the enemies were very real and where I encountered the first real improvised explosive devices in my career. All the training, exercises, and field applications I had participated in before that moment proved extremely valuable, preparing me both professionally and mentally for the challenges and dangers encountered in Afghanistan.
However, nothing truly prepares you for the experience and the sensations of encountering the first real IED in your career or for the first real engagement with an enemy who is no longer firing training ammunition. I went through powerful and authentic experiences that pushed my adrenaline levels very high, but the satisfaction of resolving every incident without any casualties was extraordinary," said Warrant Officer Marius Turenschi, an EOD operator who served in both missions executed by Romanian Air Force EOD detachments in Afghanistan.

Returning to the Operational Theater

More than a decade after its last international deployment as a unit, the Romanian Air Force EOD Group returned to operational missions by contributing to the Allied effort to maintain peace and stability in Kosovo under the NATO KFOR mission.
In June 2025, the first rotation of a six-member EOD detachment deployed to Camp Film City in Pristina to execute assigned tasks within its area of responsibility.
The detachment's mission is to contribute to freedom of movement and a safe and secure environment through a wide range of activities: responding to incidents involving unexploded ordnance or improvised explosive devices, conducting explosive hazard assessments of critical

Sergeant First Class Eduard Radu, EOD Team Leader, EOD Detachment, Rotation II

infrastructure, supporting the operational readiness of airport surfaces, clearing routes, rendering safe and/or destroying chemical or biological munitions, providing technical exploitation support, and assisting in the inspection of commercial explosive stocks belonging to civilian companies operating in Kosovo.

When asked how lessons learned in Afghanistan are applied to the current Kosovo mission, Captain Rareș Roșu, commander of the first EOD detachment rotation, stated:

"Experience in a theater of operations is essential for the professional development of a military service member. Although the security environment, missions, and challenges differ from one theater to another, the experience gained contributes to the accumulation of knowledge and the development of the skills required to accomplish tasks and missions at the highest standards.

Given the dynamic and complex nature of the EOD specialty, the ability to act safely in unforeseen and difficult situations and to analyze problems from multiple perspectives in order to determine the optimal course of action makes participation in an overseas mission–alongside continuous training and specialized courses–an ideal method of professional development.

From an operational perspective, the lessons learned during the ISAF mission in Afghanistan provided personnel with significant knowledge and experience necessary to address the challenges presented by the KFOR mission. In the same way, the experience gained in Kosovo will contribute in the future to participation in other international missions and to the execution of EOD missions on national territory at the highest professional standards."

In January 2026, the first EOD detachment rotation completed its mission and transferred operational responsibilities to the second rotation.

For the personnel currently deployed, the Kosovo mission carries a strong symbolic value: they represent a new generation of EOD specialists trained by those who, between 2009 and 2012, established the operational performance standards of the Romanian Air Force EOD Group through successful missions conducted alongside Allied forces in conflict zones.

Continuity of Human Expertise

The effectiveness of EOD structures cannot be understood solely through the lens of technological progress. Human expertise remains an indispensable element. Technology can automate tasks, anticipate risks, and generate algorithm-based decisions. However, judgment, intuition, and the ability to rapidly adapt to unforeseen situations remain–at least for now–uniquely human capabilities. Ultimately, the experience and continuous professional development of EOD operators make the difference between a successful intervention and a potential failure.

Training the new generation of EOD specialists is therefore based not only on formal courses, exercises, and training activities, but also on the transfer of operational experience from senior personnel. The goal is not merely to produce technical specialists, but to shape individuals capable of making rapid and effective decisions under pressure.

Master Sergeant Bogdan Bițoiu, EOD Operator, EOD Detachment, Rotation II

The transmission of lessons learned forms the core of this process. The analysis of real operational experiences and of the consequences of incorrect decisions during EOD interventions represents the foundation upon which the resilience and competence of the next generation are built.

"I see this mission as both the culmination of my professional training and a major responsibility toward the team I lead. My expectations for this first mission in a theater of operations are closely linked to the desire to confirm my level of professional training and to respond effectively to the operational requirements and assigned tasks.

In the reality of the operational theater, I perceive every EOD intervention as a test of my confidence in myself and in the training I have received over many years, but also of my analytical capacity and self-control when facing risky situations. In this context, the support and experience of my colleagues represent an essential factor in ensuring our safety and strengthening team cohesion.

For me, this first overseas mission represents a defining stage in my development as a team leader, contributing to a more mature and comprehensive understanding of the battlefield," said Master Sergeant Eduard Radu, EOD team leader within the second rotation detachment.

Credibility Through Performance

With more than two decades of organizational experience, the Romanian Air Force EOD Group has consistently demonstrated professionalism and high training standards, successfully accomplishing missions both nationally and in international operations.

In a field where any mistake can have severe consequences, the personnel of the Romanian Air Force EOD Group operate with clarity, discipline, and responsibility–reinforcing through every mission the role of the Romanian Air Force in ensuring national and regional security.

Story by First Lieutenant Iftimie Ionuț-Andrei Commander, EOD Detachment Rotation II Kosovo Theater of Operations

AIR FORCE EOD TEAMS: STRENGTHENING ALLIED PARTNERSHIPS AND FORCE PROTECTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The Romanian Air Force EOD teams (Rotation II) joined forces with their Italian counterparts for an intensive combined training session in the Western Balkans theater of operations. The exercise sharpened interoperability, tactics, and procedures for countering explosive hazards under operational conditions.

Four-legged heroes on the front line – specialized mine and explosive-detection K9 teams proved indispensable. Whether countering conventional ordnance or complex improvised explosive devices, these trusted partners enable freedom of movement and enhance force protection for personnel operating in the area.

The EOD detachment remains a pillar of stability inside the NATO KFOR mission, contributing day-to-day to regional security and the preservation of peace. The activity was conducted in close coordination with allied partners and national authorities.

Source: Romanian MoD

From technical specialization to operational deployment, MWO Daniliuc exemplifies professionalism, adaptability, and commitment in Kosovo and beyond

I am Master Warrant Officer Bogdan Daniliuc, an EOD operator with the Romanian Air Force EOD Group. From the outset, my decision to pursue a military career was driven by the desire to belong to a structure grounded in honor and discipline–one that would define me both as a person and as a professional.

In 2017, I graduated from the Basarab I Military Warrant Officers and NCO School, marking the official beginning of my journey in service to the nation. During my time at the school, I discovered what the military truly represents–not just instruction, but a wide range of fields that instilled in me a sense of progress, readiness, and personal development.

Upon assignment, I chose the position of Technical Warrant Officer Specialist within the Engineering Technical Maintenance Section of the Automotive Workshop at the Pantelimon unit. Two years later, I had the opportunity to apply for positions within the EOD Group. Understanding that openings were limited and that personnel in this specialty must possess exceptional qualities, I realized I had the chance to specialize in an elite field. I therefore accepted a position within the Romanian Air Force EOD Group.

Following intensive training–both through the basic course and under the guidance of experienced colleagues–I became an EOD operator. This specialization taught me the true meaning of responsibility, self-discipline, and technical rigor, as every decision carries life-or-death consequences.

The military career has provided me, in a relatively short time, not only with exceptional professional training but also with opportunities to test my limits in international environments. I served in the Kosovo theater of operations with the EOD detachment during the first rotation, performing the duties of both EOD operator and administrator. That mission confirmed that military service requires adaptability and the ability to support the team in any role–technical or logistical–within a dynamic, multicultural environment.For me, being a service member is not merely a job; it is a commitment I undertook many years ago. It is about the pride of wearing the uniform, the camaraderie forged during missions, and the satisfaction of knowing that through my work, I contribute to the safety of others wherever duty calls.

ITALIAN NAVY
GRUPAER
Gruppo Aerei Imbarcati

"WOLVES IN TRANSITION"

Text and image air to air Gian Carlo Vecchi
Ground image Gian Carlo Vecchi and Pier Paolo Lazzarin

The introduction of a new-generation weapon system inevitably imposes radical change on those who adopt it–especially when that system effectively "skips" a generation, as in the case of the Italian Navy's Carrier Air Group (GRUPAER).

For several years, the Air Group has successfully sustained two clearly distinct flight lines: the AV-8B Harrier II Plus–now approaching the end of its operational life, yet still fully capable of performing Close Air Support (CAS) and reconnaissance missions–and the F-35B, the short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) multirole fifth-generation fighter.

Recent media reports indicate that the U.S. Marine Corps may retire its AV-8B+ fleet by the end of 2026, potentially accelerating the Italian Navy's own phase-out of the Harrier.

Within the broader framework of Italian air power, the naval aviation component represents a relatively small niche compared to larger air forces. Yet it is a niche of excellence: the ability to deploy anywhere a complex sea-based weapon system such as an aircraft carrier equipped with fifth-generation fighters. With the F-35B now entering operational service, the Italian Navy joins the very limited group of nations capable of projecting such capability from the sea–primarily the United Kingdom and the United States.

Pitch Black 2024: A Strategic Springboard

For GRUPAER, Exercise Pitch Black 2024 represented a defining moment. The Italian Carrier Strike Group, under the command of Rear Admiral Giancarlo Ciappina aboard aircraft carrier *Cavour*, was the only carrier force participating in the exercise and demonstrated the ability to operate two distinct flight lines simultaneously.

Italian F-35Bs–six aircraft deployed to the exercise, now increased to eight following 2025 deliveries–were tasked with leading composite air operations involving more than 30 aircraft. Missions included Composite Air Operations (COMAO), Defensive Counter Air (DCA), and Offensive Counter Air (OCA). Italian pilots trained daily alongside counterparts from 22 nations. Some countries, including India–an operator of two aircraft carriers–explicitly requested engagement with the Italian naval aviation component.

Achieving Initial Operational Capability (IOC)

As of October 2024, following the Indo-Pacific deployment of the 31st Naval Group, the embarked Air Wing aboard *Cavour* achieved Initial Operational Capability (IOC).

This milestone was not simply a matter of meeting numerical benchmarks established by Navy Headquarters and the Air Forces Command in terms of qualified pilots, maintainers, aircraft numbers, and weapons inventory. It represented the attainment of a genuine operational capability.

Since the delivery of the first aircraft assigned to the Group in 2021, a comprehensive Operational Test & Evaluation (OT&E) campaign has been conducted. Twelve macro-areas were defined, spanning operational effectiveness, interoperability with the carrier and other strategic assets, shipboard and shore-based logistics, operational and maintenance support, infrastructure, personnel, training, sustainability, flight safety, and information security.

Each macro-area was broken down into Critical Operational Issues (COIs), assessed through qualitative and quantitative evaluation. The overall percentage of fulfillment constituted the criteria for IOC declaration and continues to be updated as the Group advances toward Full Operational Capability (FOC).

Although fleet numbers are still growing, GRUPAER already operates in major global training and operational theaters through a synergistic integration of F-35B and AV-8B. Participation in Large Force Exercises–including Pitch Black 2024, the Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP), Falcon Strike 25, and repeated activities on NATO's Eastern Flank–demonstrated how Link-based integration between F-35 and AV-8B acts as a true force multiplier and validates the operational doctrine of fourth-to-fifth generation fighter integration.

The Dual Qualification Concept

Given limited force size, separating the two aircraft lines was not feasible. GRUPAER therefore adopted an innovative "Dual Qualification" concept. Experienced AV-8B pilots transitioning to the F-35B continued flying the Harrier to maintain combat readiness.

This ambitious initiative required a disciplined methodology similar to that used in flight-test environments, where pilots are trained to operate multiple platforms. The approach emphasized procedural rigor, reduced reliance on habit patterns, and deliberately moderated reaction tempos to mitigate risks such as mode confusion and cognitive error between two radically different aircraft.

The result effectively expanded available pilot capacity while enabling cross-fertilization of experience between platforms, capitalizing on 35 years of Harrier operational heritage. The AV-8B also continues to provide complementary capability in certain roles, including Blue and Red Air support.

Fifth-Generation Transformation

The F-35B represents a quantum leap in situational awareness. Its sensor fusion and data processing capabilities fundamentally redefine battle management. Even the most junior wingman now possesses a level of situational awareness comparable to, or exceeding, that traditionally held by mission commanders.

This evolution demands a generational shift in command structures and decision-making processes to fully exploit the immediacy and depth of fifth-generation capabilities while preserving established rules of engagement.

From a maintenance perspective, the F-35

Rear Admiral Giancarlo Ciappina
FORZE AEREE Italian Navy
Commander

introduces predictive diagnostics and globally connected information-logistics systems. Modern maintainers must combine traditional aeromechanical expertise with digital proficiency, interfacing with networked databases and advanced diagnostic tools. The aircraft's self-monitoring systems predict maintenance needs and integrate directly into the global JSF sustainment architecture.

Connectivity becomes fundamental, whether operating aboard ship or from remote deployed locations. Younger technicians adapt naturally to digital workflows, while experienced Harrier specialists contribute analytical depth derived from decades of operational practice.

STOVL Evolution: From Harrier to Fly-By-Wire

The generational transition from a mechanically driven STOVL aircraft to a fly-by-wire fifth-generation platform required doctrinal innovation. In 1999, the VAAC (Variable Advanced Aircraft Control) program explored alternative control laws for the future JSF STOVL variant using a modified two-seat Harrier.

Two candidate control logics were evaluated: one reflecting traditional Harrier concepts, and another introducing a blended regime where throttle consistently controlled speed and stick input governed longitudinal and vertical control. Testing–including carrier landings aboard HMS *Invincible*–ultimately informed the control philosophy adopted for the F-35B.

Today, STOVL operations in the F-35B rely heavily on automation. During carrier recovery, a single command initiates automatic deceleration and stabilization into hover aligned with the landing spot and ship speed. Training philosophy has evolved accordingly: simulator-based preparation now replaces much of the field practice once essential for Harrier pilots.

Whereas the Harrier lives permanently within the V/STOL regime, the F-35B operates primarily as a conventional CTOL aircraft, converting to STOVL mode only for shipboard recovery.

Integration and Multi-Domain Warfare

A defining feature of fifth-generation aviation is federated data analysis and networked sensor fusion. F-35s share a unified operational picture across cockpits, multiplying the effectiveness of each aircraft. However, the full potential of fifth-generation capability is realized only when integrated across coalition networks.

Through Link-16 and cooperative NATO integration, GRUPAER actively injects and receives data across multi-domain architectures, connecting air, land, sea, electronic warfare (EW), and ISTAR assets. This ensures that fifth-generation capability contributes to–and benefits from–the broader coalition system.

Organizational Transformation

Operating two such distinct aircraft types presents significant personnel, logistical, and structural challenges. Managing both lines requires careful human-resource balancing within a force structure already under strain.

At Naval Air Station Grottaglie, infrastructure modernization has been extensive. Enhanced security protocols, information protection requirements, and increased fuel logistics reflect the demands of fifth-generation operations. The base has also become increasingly attractive to allied air forces seeking training integration.

Across the Italian Navy, training philosophy has shifted toward high-intensity, multi-domain scenarios over large operational areas, replacing traditional range-based qualification models. Cultural transformation is ongoing and inevitably involves generational change.

GRUPAER Commander
CV Gianbattista Molteni

The Future of the "Wolves"

Captain Gianbattista "Skipper" Molteni
GRUPAER Commander

"With IOC achieved, we now look toward FOC. We await the full allocation of the 20 planned F-35Bs, expected between 2031 and 2033. We must monitor new weapons development, ensure adequate stockpiles, and prepare for retrofit programs leading to full platform maturity. Given program delays, the AV-8B will continue supporting operations at least until 2028–possibly 2030.

We cannot afford to lose the critical mass required to deploy 8–10 aircraft interoperating twice daily. Personnel strategy will be decisive–particularly increasing maintainer numbers to new levels of scale.

Full transition means achieving Full Operational Capability of the sea-based aerotactical component underpinning Italy's strategic maritime power projection through the Carrier Strike Group. This requires not only development within GRUPAER or the carrier itself, but generational growth across the entire Navy.

Strategic discussions regarding a future conventional aircraft carrier reflect the need to move beyond STOVL limitations in range and payload. Parallel growth in personnel, logistics, and organizational footprint will be indispensable.

Grottaglie must continue expanding to ensure seamless integration between shore-based Air Wing elements and embarked operations, sustaining fifth-generation sea-based air power over time and distance."

Gian Carlo Vecchi

The author wishes to thank Admiral Giuseppe Berutti Bergotto, UPICOM, Rear Admiral Jacopo Rollo, Rear Admiral Giancarlo Ciappina, Captain Gianbattista "Skipper" Molteni, Commander Federico Mariani, Commander Valeria Cucci, and the pilots and specialists of GRUPAER for their cooperation.

STEADFAST DART 26 PUTS NATO AIRPOWER AT CENTRE OF RAPID REINFORCEMENT

NATO recently concluded Exercise Steadfast Dart 26, which launched on Jan. 15, 2026, putting Allied Airpower at the heart of this rapid-reinforcement exercise across Central Europe.

Led by Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC-Brunssum), the exercise marked the Allied Reaction Force's (ARF) second deployment and its first within Brunssum's area of responsibility, integrating land, air, maritime, cyber, space and special operations forces, with activity focused on Germany.

"Last year, Steadfast Dart incorporated the first deployment of NATO's new Allied Reaction Force, demonstrating Allied Command Operations' ability to respond at a moment's notice to an emergent threat to our Alliance," said U.S. Air Force General Alexus G. Grynkewich, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). "This year's exercise builds upon that success and will again demonstrate NATO's responsiveness, as well as its strength, with forces on the land, at sea and in the air, who will operate in all domains." .

The exercise integrated Air Forces alongside land, maritime, cyber, space and special operations forces in a simulated conflict scenario involving a near-peer adversary across multiple locations in Central Europe, particularly in Germany.

NATO's Airborne Warning & Control System (AWACS) also provided airborne command and control (C2) and cross-domain coordination during Steadfast Dart 26, providing commanders an operational picture crucial for the decision-making process.

Unique to the exercise, Türkiye assumed the Combined Force Air Component Commander (CFACC) responsibility for Steadfast Dart 26 through its Joint Force Air Component, providing the senior command and control function for the air domain in support of the ARF. Embedded within the ARF headquarters at general-officer level, the Turkish Deputy Commander-Air acted as the senior air adviser, aligning air operations with the commander's intent and driving the battle rhythm to translate operational objectives into coordinated air effects. The Turkish-led CFACC function oversaw key integration mechanisms for Airpower's contribution to land and maritime operations, enhancing NATO's multi-domain capabilities.

Allied Air Command's (AIRCOM) contributions to the exercise culminated in counter Unmanned Aircraft System (c-UAS) training over the Baltics, bringing together German Eurofighters, Italian Eurofighters and Spanish F-18s, supported by an A400M tanker from Spain. The mission specifically focused on practicing c-UAS tactics, which included a Turkish Baykar Bayraktar TB3 – an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

Steadfast Dart 26 had two phases – deployment and training – and involved about 10,000 service personnel from 11 nations, including ARF units from Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain and Türkiye, with Belgium, France and Britain linking national activities. The integration phase, completed on 20 February, tested NATO's ability to assemble forces quickly under the operational command of Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS). Units merged command structures, synchronised communications, and aligned logistics and support systems – the essential groundwork that allows multinational formations to operate as one.

TÜRKIYE NAVAL DRONE CARRIER VISITED THE PORT OF ROTTERDAM AFTER COMPLETION OF PARTICIPATION IN EXERCISE STEADFAST DART

From 27 February till 1 March 2026 the Türkiye Navy/ Türk Deniz Kuvvetleri visited the port of Rotterdam, The Netherlands, after completion of its first participation in exercise Steadfast Dart held of the Baltic Coast and Northern Germany running from 15 January-18 March. Steadfast Dart 2026 is a NATO joint deployment exercise hosted by Germany under NATO's Joint Force Command Brunssum. The exercise involved approximately 10,000 personnel from 11 member states.

The Putlos Training Area (Baltic coast Germany) served as the final exercise for the maritime phase and certification of the Allied Reaction Force (ARF). The amphibious demonstration on 18 February has been an integrated rehearsal with the UCAV TB3, fixed-wing fighters, special operations forces, amphibious forces and AH-1W close air support.

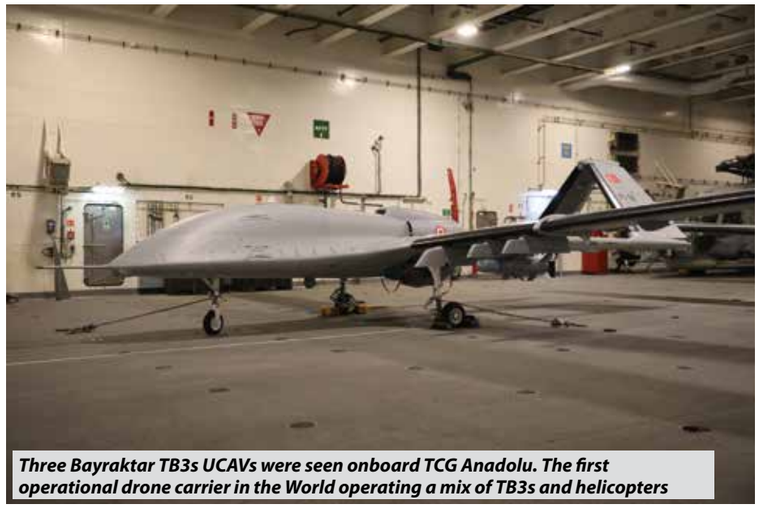
The TB3 demonstrated its capabilities as a Medium-Altitude High Endurance (MAHE)-class maritime surveillance-strike drone and, for the first time, an UCAV conducting a live-fire exercise when the Baykar TB3 launched MAM-L guided munitions on a floating target.

A second major milestone was reported on

Seen arriving in the Port of Rotterdam is TCG Anadolu/ Navy/ Türk Deniz Kuvvetleri after completion of its first participation in exercise Steadfast Dart held of the Baltic Coast and Northern Germany running from 15 January-18 March 2026

Feb. 20, after the TB3 conducted a day earlier a joint exercise with Luftwaffe (German Air Force) Eurofighter Typhoons, during an eight-hour flight to the Baltic coastline. The patrol over the Baltic Sea was described as a "joint exercise with Eurofighters." The Baltic Sea region sees frequent Russian Navy drills with units based out of the exclave of Kaliningrad, while fighter-bomber, intelligence and other aircraft are also routinely intercepted by Allied fighters.

NATO's Allied Reaction Force (ARF) was established in 2024 to replace the NATO Reaction Force (NRF). With the ARF, NATO aims to further enhance the availability and deploy ability of NATO member states. The goal is to organize and designate a larger pool of ready units across multiple domains (land, sea, air, cyber, and space) for rapid deployment. The ARF is therefore designed as a multinational highly-ready force, ready to deploy at very short notice. In recent years, the units have been commanded by Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and now Türkiye, for the first time, has assumed command of the Allied Reaction Force Amphibious Task Force and the Landing Force Command.



Three Bayraktar TB3s UCAVs were seen onboard TCG Anadolu. The first operational drone carrier in the World operating a mix of TB3s and helicopters

On 21 February 2022, the first four of a total of ten AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters from the Türkiye Land Forces were handed over to the Naval Air Command at Topel Naval Station. The transfer enables the Türkiye Navy to close down a gap in naval aviation capabilities with the first trails onboard Anadolu held in November 2022. The ten Super Cobras are part of 353 Deniz Taaruz Helikopter Filo Komutanlığı/ 353 squadron and specifically procured for operations onboard TCG Anadolu. The AH-1W fleet is a temporarily solution until the arrival of the T929 ATAK II, Türkiye's first indigenous heavy-class attack helicopter, developed by Türkiye Aerospace Industries (TAI).

"We have been training for the Super Cobra at Topel, thus not within the Türkiye Army at Güvercinlik" according to junior Lieutenant Mert Erdogan, one of the new Cobra pilots currently deployed on the Anadolu. He flew S-70s before the transition to the Super Cobra *"We started off with training on the Bell 212 for about 200hrs; afterwards an extra 300hrs of training on the AH-1W. This completed the training course"*. Most of the Super Cobra pilots previously flew S-70s. Currently 3 crews are onboard TCG Anadolu to support operations with three Super Cobras (TCB-81, TCB-84 and TCB-86).

The Türkiye Navy deployment to the Baltic Sea marked a significant milestone in the participation of Turkey and the operational deployment of the Bayraktar TB3 carrier-based combat drone (UCAV). Stead Fast Dart 2026 marked the first operational usage of an armed drones concept operating from an amphibious assault ship (LHD), as the Anadolu. Sea trials started during 2024-2025 with Baykar conducted ramp tests and sea trials. By June 2025, the TB3 had completed over 100 successful sorties.

The TB3s can be equipped with Roketsan-made MAM-L and MAM-T (maritime and long-range strike) munitions as was shown during Steadfast Dart. The MAM-L is a laser-guided "glide bomb" developed by Roketsan. It is the primary weapon for Türkiye drones like the Bayraktar TB2 and TB3 due to its low weight and high precision; it weighs 22 kilo and has a range of 15kms or +25kms with GPS/INS support. The operation, control and weapons engagement were carried out by Baykar personnel present onboard the TCG Anadolu. Prototype PT-4 was used in this test.

TCG Anadolu is the largest ship of the Türkiye Navy; the 27,000-ton, 232 meters amphibious assault ship (L400) served as flagship and command-and-control hub during the exercise. While the ship was originally built to house the F-35B VSTOL version, Anadolu currently operates as a unique drone carrier. With support of Baykar company the Anadolu is now the sole operational drone carrier in NATO. The Anadolu features command facilities supported by the GENESIS-ADVENT combat management system for UCAV operations. HAVELSAN completed the integration of GENESIS and ADVENT systems to ensure the TB3 functions as an organic arm of the ship's command center. ADVENT calculates the ship's pitch, roll, and relative wind speed in real-time, feeding this data to the TB3's flight computer for autonomous recovery on the Anadolu's short runway. The information gathered by a TB3 can be transmitted through ADVENT to other ships in the task force via tactical data links (Link 16/22), even if those ships have no visibility of the TB3.

Embarked on the Anadolu are an 800 men strong amphibious marine infantry battalion, "ZAHA" amphibious armored assault vehicles, naval special warfare elements as SAT (Su Altı Taarruz/ Underwater Offence) and SAS (Sualtı Savunma - Underwater Defense) teams.

Besides three TB3 Bayraktars, which are part of 313 Filo/313 Deniz İnsansız Hava Aracı Sistemleri Filo Komutanlığı, the task force has additionally three AH-1W Cobras (353 Deniz Taaruz Helikopter Filo Komutanlığı/ 353 squadron), three AS.532 Türk Kara Kuvvetleri/ Türkiye Army and a single S-70 from 351 Deniz Helikopter Filo Komutanlığı/ squadron onboard.

"The TB-3 is very easy to fly, forgiving and can operate in circumstances where our helicopters would not be able to operate" according to junior Lieutenant Batuhan Çakır one of the six TB-3 pilots deployed on the Anadolu. *"Compared to for example training on the AH-1W which can take about 500hrs over a 2-year period, we are able to perform training on operating the TB3 over a three to four months period.*

The TB3 is purpose-built for operations from short-deck ships; the TB3 has folding wings, reinforced landing gear, and low stall speed which enables launch and recovery without catapults or arresting wires compared to the Kizilelma UCAV which requires arrestor cables for landing and thus only operates currently out of runways till arrestor cables are available on Anadolu which will also allow future TAI Hürjet operations out of Anadolu. According to Baykar, TB3 drones carried out 232 sorties from TCG Anadolu during Steadfast Dart 2026.

The transformation of TCG Anadolu from a standard amphibious assault ship (LHD) into the world's first dedicated UCAV (Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle) has created a new naval doctrine for Türkiye operating a fleet of Bayraktar TB3s and future operations with the Kızılelma unmanned fighter and Anka-3 drones for deep-penetration missions and Electronic Warfare (EW) on the Anadolu. The drone carrier concept of Turkey has attracted interest to Navy's around the Globe.

Correspondence by Carlo Kuit and Paul Kievit / Bronco Aviation

The new castle of Manzanares el Real , also known as the Mendoza castle or simply as the castle of Manzanares el Real , is a palace-fortress of late medieval origin located in the municipality of Manzanares el Real near Madrid.

Heay Haulers
reach new heights in Spain

by Carlo Kuit and Paul Kievit/ Bronco Aviation

The 9th of April 2025 marked an important date with the delivery of the final CH-47F (locally known as HT.17A) to BHELTRA V Batallón de Helicópteros de Transporte V/ Transport Helicopter Battalion V).

The unit now has seventeen CH-47Fs on strength at Colmenar Viejo/ "Coronel Maté" Air Base with the FAMET (Fuerzas Aeromóviles del Ejército de Tierra/ Army Airmobile Forces).

Lt Col. Vázquez took over command of BHELTRA V during the Summer of 2024. He has been with the Spanish Army since 2000

"Another CH-47F is planned to be delivered by 2029; this will be a completely new helicopter compared to the upgrade programme where CH-47Ds parts were reused to build the CH-47Fs and save costs" as BHELTRA V Commander Lt Col. Vázquez adds. "We will finally have eighteen Chinooks again in our fleet by 2029. I took over command in September 2024, at the time we only had thirteen CH-47Fs on strength. My aim is to bring back the battalion to full operational level, as we went through a transition period of five years implementing the Foxtrot with our battalion" elaborates Lt Colonel Vázquez.

BHELTRA V has and will remain focusing on a wide range of heavy-lift transport tasks: moving troops and equipment, logistics in terrain, air assault, disaster relief and international missions as ISPUHEL XX (Iraq Spain Unit Helicopter). Three CH-47Fs have been deployed as Task Force Toro to Al Asad Air Base in Iraq relieving the AS332s in 2024. The unit supports the Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR). In January 2015 the first Spanish military units (special operations) deployed to Iraq as part of the newly created International Coalition to Fight Daesh. Since then, Spain has maintained its ongoing commitment to Operation Inherent Resolve, deploying various capabilities over the past ten years, such as transport helicopters, focusing its efforts on training and capacity building for Iraqi security forces. Task Force Toro operated with three CH-47Fs from April to December 2024 marking the first deployment of the new CH-47F model abroad as part of ISPUHEL XX.

"Our battalion is a genuine expeditionary unit. When we are deployed, we learn how things are done in real life. We have been able to work with other countries in Iraq as the US Army, Royal Netherlands Air Force and the Canadians. This gave us the opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other how to operate" adds Lt Col Vázquez. "For example, how to best make use of extra fuel tanks we learnt from the Dutch".

"In preparation to the deployment we had the city of Madrid simulated as being Iraq including locations as the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center (BDSC), and Camp CQCTS in Erbil" adds Captain Carballo who was part of Task Force Toro in 2024. "We were training six months as crews the whole time focusing on brown out landings, usage of flares. Some of our flights were up to seven hours flying with additional fuel tanks and using Forward Air Refueling Points (FARP). The main challenges we had in Iraq were the risks of operating in the country and the weather; as it easily heats up to 50 degrees. We did not know how the new Chinooks would handle this heat" concludes Captain Carballo who has over 350 flight hours on the CH-47F.

Plans for the transition to the CH-47F variant began in 2014, with funds allocated for the program in 2018. In January 2019 Boeing and Spain agreed an intergovernmental program to rebuild and upgrade the CH-47D fleet to CH-47F Block 1 standard under an €820 million contract.

The first helicopter arrived at Boeing's Ridley Park, PA, in 2020, after some delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first of the upgraded Chinooks (ET-420) arrived in Spain in November 2021. This first remanufactured CH-47F Chinook helicopter was delivered on 2 February 2022 and completed with the delivery of the seventeenth CH-47F on 9 April 2025 (ET-436). "Out of the seventeen original CH-47Ds a total of thirteen were rebuild reusing dynamic components, the others had brand new components" adds Captain Carballo.

In 2023 a contract was signed with Indra for the delivery of Talium (Tactical and Logistics Information for Unlimited Missions) with the contract valued €15 million. It is an advanced multi-domain mission planning and management system It is designed to plan, brief, conduct and debrief complex air (and joint) operations, combining tactical and logistical data to assess mission feasibility in real time and reduce crew workload and risk. It offers the Spanish Army's Airmobile Force advanced strategic preparation capabilities.

Talium can also be integrated into the BMS (battlefield management system), national and NATO command and control systems, air defense systems and IFF and simulators. The FAMET Tigre and NH90 helicopters already use this advanced Indra system. Talium has become a unified system for the joint operations within the FAMET.

Transformation and Maintenance

"It was decided to reuse the dynamic components of the CH-47Ds, as most had only limited hours and were in good shape". David Iturbide is the BG Helicopters manager who has been involved since 2019 with the CH-47F programme, he continues "The motor, transmission boxes, rotor blades and rotor heads all were reused, a total over 100 components per helicopter. This was a rather difficult process as each CH-47F has to be tested thoroughly after delivery". BG Helicopters was contracted by Boeing in 2019 as the prime company to be involved in the decommission of the CH-47D fleet and later on supporting the reinstallation and recommissioning of the CH-47Fs at Colmenar Viejo which was finalized in April 2025.

Currently there are 25 personnel of BG Helicopters supporting with C1 inspections (320hrs) and C2 (640hrs). "We only focus on daily visual inspections and 40hrs maintenance to FAMET technicians" adds Captain Barragan who is a pilot and now in command of the technical team. "Our main issue is that we don't have enough personnel, therefore we have BG Helicopters to take on deep maintenance for us".

BG Helicopters is a local Spanish company who has been contracted via Boeing for

Currently there are twenty-five personnel of BG Helicopters supporting with C1 inspections (320hrs) and C2 (640hrs). BG Helicopters is a local Spanish company who has been contracted via Boeing for continued maintenance support with BHELTRA V and consists of a mixture of both civilian and ex-military personnel.

continued maintenance support with BHELTRA V and consists of a mixture of both civilian and ex-military personnel. "BHELTRA V is focusing on operations, not on deep maintenance, that is where come in as BG Helicopters" explains David Iturbide, the current manager and contact person. "We are able to perform a C1 level inspection in 2 months, where the FAMET team could take up a year to do this work". "Without BG Helicopters support it would be very hard to maintain maximum operations" adds Lt Col Vázquez. "Currently we have separate contracts via NSPA (NATO Support and Procurement Agency) to work on modifications" explains David. We are currently installing an ELT (Emergency Locator Transmitter) to the fleet. Further we are installing Thales Radios by replacing one of the US radios, as these are mandatory in Spain to have and were not installed on the production line. Plans for 2026 include installment of Improved Troop Seats (ITS)". At the time of writing there are four Chinooks under maintenance with BG Helicopters with 2 of these with PCMHEL (Parque y Centro de Mantenimiento de Helicópteros), the FAMET maintenance facility at Colmenar Viejo.

To further support BHELTRA V, Boeing has a Field Service Representative (FSR) for technical support to both the FAMET technicians as BG Helicopters explains Santiago Aquilera, the current FSR. Santiago has been employed at Cuatro Vientos for over 17 years and before joining Boeing in 2021. He had a transition course on the CH-47F. "With both BG Helicopters and the CSR BHELTRA V is able to perform all work at Colmenar Viejo. When helicopters are released from deep maintenance there are twelve test pilots available to perform the necessary testing before a helicopter is accepted to operational status" as Santiago Aquilera details.

Indra Company will equip the CH-47F fleet with the latest generation electronic warfare systems as part of a 35 million contract with the Spanish Department of Defense for next generation electronic defense systems signed back in 2023. The system will incorporate Indra's ALR-400FD radar alerter, which is fully digitalized with fiber optic interconnections and is ready to detect and identify at long range the presence of enemy platforms and other radar threats by monitoring the entire radar spectrum, instead of covering different bands through partial band scanning strategies as was normal in previous generations. Further an InWarner sensor, equipped with a missile alerter and a laser alerter will be added to the fleet. The InWarner system detects whether any designator has acquired the helicopter as a target. The integration of both elements makes it possible to achieve full situational awareness and increases the effectiveness in activating countermeasures.

Especially during low-altitude flights and takeoffs and landings, Indra's InShield infrared countermeasures (DIRCM) system will protect the aircraft against MANPAD-type short-range surface-to-air missile and infrared guided missile attacks. This advanced solution directs a beam of laser energy onto the missile's thermal guidance system to deflect it, so it can neutralize multiple attacks practically instantaneously. The helicopter will additionally be equipped with chaff countermeasure dispensers and flares to neutralize these attacks. This self-protection system will be exportable to other CH-47 aircraft as well as to all types of fixed and rotary wing platforms. The systems are already in use with the A400M and NH-90 fleet.

The FAMET originally took delivery of ten CH-47C models from December 1972, adding nine commercial BV414 Chinooks to the fleet from January 1982. Following approval at the end of 1989, all nine BV414s and the nine surviving CH-47Cs were upgraded to CH-47Ds. Two of the Spanish Chinooks were lost over the years. The first of these, CH-47C Z.17-1 was lost in an accident on February 20, 1973. The second, CH-47D HT.17-13, was lost on January 17, 1995. The Spanish Army always planned to have 18 CH-47s, but the 1995 accident left the fleet incomplete.

Simulator training

In parallel to the CH-47F introduction a new state of the art simulator, developed by the Indra Company, has been acquired and delivered in April 2025. Indra is a Spanish defense company that had a significant role in supplying and modernizing the Boeing CH-47F Chinook helicopter fleet in Spain, including developing the first full-mission simulator for the Foxtrot version in Europe. It is located at the Helicopter Simulation Center CESIHEL (Centro de Simulation de Helicóptero) of the Army Aviation Academy ACAVIET (Academia de Aviación del Ejército de Tierra).

The simulator includes a Full Mission Simulator (FMS) to simulate the complete tactical environment, including weapons and threats, for realistic mission execution, a Flight Training Device (FTD) for flight dynamics and operation of the aircraft including normal and emergency procedure, Computer-Based Trainers (CBTs) for computer-based instruction to pilots and maintenance specialists to learn specific systems and functions. Further it features advanced technology like a four-channel LED projection system with an infrared channel for night vision goggle (NVG) training. The full mission simulator (FMS) rounds off the integrated simulator environment.

The new simulator is highly realistic, can be used for networked training exercises with other units. The simulation architecture is permitting joint tactical training for a mission via several simulators, in such a way that pilots which are located at different bases flying with other platforms such as the Tigre, Cougar, EC135 and NH90 can share scenarios in which the joint training is to be conducted.

Big benefit is to reduce actual flying hours, enhance flight safety, and cut operational costs. "We mainly use the simulator for new cadets who are training for Combat Ready 1 status; in their first year they will have sixty actual flying hours and about 10 hours on the simulator. Of about a total of 150 flying hours approximately thirty will be on the new simulator" according to Lt Col Vázquez.

The CH-47F simulator uses the same avionics as the actual instrument components, ensuring consistency and compatibility with future upgrades. "We have had some test pilots involved in the development of this simulator to make sure it is 100% corresponding to the real-life situation" explains Lt Colonel Vázquez. "We are able to cover all phases of crew training, from basic instruction to complex tactical maneuvers. Especially for those situations we can't train in real-life like engine or hydraulic failures the simulator is a great asset to our unit". Currently there are 42 pilots in total with BHELTRA 5, split between Officers and NCOs.

Real Life training

At the time of writing four pilots (2 officers and 2 NCOs have started their training with BHELTRA 5. "As on average we have pilots stay in our unit approximately 10 years, we need to have new pilots each year. The Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) training is 3 years with the Officers training is 5 years. Lt Col Vázquez continues "The actual number of new pilots we absorb can differ per Annum based on vacancies we have in the battalion". Captain Daniel Carballo, one of the senior pilots adds "After graduating from the Army Aviation Academy (ACAVIET) selected cadets will join BHELTRA 5. They will complete combat pilot training 2; we call it Combat Ready 2 within the squadron. We have six instructors to support the Combat Ready 2 phase. During this training the main focus is on mission planning, flying IFR and theoretical classes. In total new pilots will train 60 hrs and have 10 hrs on the simulator. After successful completion they will be Combat Ready 1 pilots. To continue to Combat Ready 1 you will need to have a minimum of at least 300 flying hours to start this course. All pilots eventually will be Combat Ready 1" concludes Captain Carballo. "Currently there are 42 pilots of which twelve are test pilots and six are instructors in the battalion" concludes Lt Col Vázquez.

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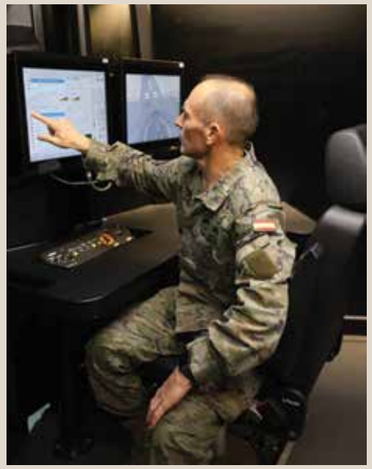

The Casas De Uceda training and firing range is often used for sling load exercises. To mimic transport vehicles these circular training loads are being used by BHELTRA V. Bigger training grounds can be found in the Zaragoza area and Chincilla.

A new hangar is being build to house the fleet of CH-47Fs. It is anticipated the new facility will be available in 2026

Quiet Quitting: Indicators and Command Decisions

"In modern armed forces, the greatest risk to readiness may not come from open failure, but from silent disengagement"

"Quiet quitting does not break discipline, but it quietly erodes initiative, cohesion, and readiness."

In today's security environment, human performance remains the decisive variable. Quiet quitting – the deliberate restriction of effort to the minimum required by the duty description – has migrated from corporate parlance into the military domain, where its effects are particularly corrosive because formal compliance can mask psycho-motivational withdrawal. A service member may execute assigned tasks correctly while withholding initiative, declining voluntary duties, reducing informal mentorship, and disengaging from unit purpose. Because such behavior does not immediately trigger disciplinary action, it can persist unnoticed and steadily erode readiness, cohesion, and the mutual trust that underpins small-unit effectiveness.

"Leadership is the decisive factor: when purpose, recognition, and trust are absent, disengagement follows."

Analyses from allied forces and defense institutions underscore that quiet quitting is not a single cause problem but a symptom cluster. Studies in United States, United Kingdom, France and Romania, and assessments by NATO, point to recurring drivers: sustained high operational tempo and inadequate recovery, leadership that is perceived as overly transactional or indifferent, generational shifts in expectations around work–life balance and professional development, and a perception that discretionary effort brings only additional burden rather than recognition or career reward. Left unchecked, these drivers produce measurable declines in voluntary training participation, mentoring, cross-training, and the informal initiative that turns a competent unit into a resilient one.

"Operational effectiveness depends not only on equipment and doctrine, but on the commitment of the people who serve."

Burnout is a central catalyst. Emotional exhaustion, detachment, and reduced professional effectiveness follow extended cycles of high demand without commensurate recovery or institutional support.

Leadership behavior amplifies or mitigates this effect. Command climates that prioritize clear purpose, individualized leader development, and visible recognition sustain motivation; climates that reward only literal compliance and increase workload for high performers incentivize defensive minimalism.

The operational consequences are real and cumulative. Units can meet formal inspection criteria while lacking the discretionary initiative required under stress, surprise, or prolonged operations. Talent pipelines shrink when personnel avoid advanced or voluntary professional development. Cohesion frays as peers shoulder uneven loads, producing latent resentment and degrading small-team trust. In sum, quiet quitting converts orderly compliance into a hidden readiness risk.

The corrective pathway is leader-centric. Commanders must expand detection beyond presence and task completion to behavioral signals: falling volunteer rates for nonrequired billets, declining after-action contributions, reduced cross-mentoring, and changes in tone during formations. Early, empathetic inquiry into root causes
– whether operational fatigue, family stress, career stagnation, or poor leader-subordinate fit – should precede punitive measures. Leader development must include coaching skills, mental-health literacy, and performance recognition techniques so that first-line leaders can both detect and remediate disengagement. Institutional measures should support these leader actions. Manageable operational tempo and enforced recovery cycles, transparent recognition linked to discretionary contributions, modular professional development options that limit prolonged separations from home, and integrated family support reduce non-work stressors and increase organizational attachment. Regular, anonymized climate assessments provide commanders timely situational awareness and permit targeted interventions before disengagement becomes entrenched.

Addressing quiet quitting does not dilute standards. Rather, it modernizes force management by pairing discipline with leadership that recognizes motivation as a force multiplier. In contemporary operations, the durability of an armed force depends as much on leaders' ability to sustain discretionary effort and initiative as on doctrine or materiel. Commanders who prioritize human performance, institutionalize recognition, and act early to reverse psycho-motivational withdrawal will preserve unit readiness, cohesion, and the operational advantage that flows from an engaged force.

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