

# CER SENIN

*Romanian Air Force Magazine*

No 4 (179) **English supplement**

◆ October - December 2024 ◆

[www.roaf.ro](http://www.roaf.ro)



**F-35 FOR ROMANIA**

**DECEMBER FIRST:  
ROMANIA'S  
NATIONAL DAY**

**PATRIOT SYSTEM:  
COMBAT READY**

**EUFOR ALTHEA**

**ROU AF F-16  
"ELEPHANT WALK"**

**EUROPEAN  
SPARTAN 2024**







EDITOR: ROMANIAN AIR FORCE STAFF

## EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF CER SENIN MAGAZINE

### CHAIRMAN:

**Lieutenant General  
LEONARD-GABRIEL BARABOI**

### MEMBERS:

**Brigadier General (AF)  
IOAN MISCHIE**

**Colonel  
CRISTIAN PĂTRAȘCU**

**Colonel  
CRISTIAN ȘOLEA**

## HONORARY MEMBERS

**DUMITRU AMARIEI  
PETRE BÂNĂ  
NICOLAE RADU**

## THE EDITORIAL TEAM

### EDITOR IN CHIEF:

**Lieutenant Colonel IOANA TEIȘANU**  
e-mail: iteisanu@roaf.ro

### EDITORS:

**Warrant Officer MARIA IONIȚĂ  
Warrant Officer ALEX NIȚU**

### TEXT EDITOR:

**LEANA TUDORAN**

### PHOTOJOURNALIST:

**ADRIAN SULTĂNOIU**

### LAYOUT & DTP:

**ADRIAN SULTĂNOIU, DIANA ȘUICĂ**

COVER I: PATRIOT SYSTEM, NATIONAL DAY PARADE

PHOTO BY BOGDAN PANTILIMON

COVER III: ROMANIAN AIR FORCE DETACHMENT,  
NATIONAL DAY PARADE

PHOTO BY ADRIAN SULTĂNOIU

COVER IV: IAR-330 PUMA HELICOPTER FROM  
DACIAN PUMAS DETACHMENT

PHOTO BY ALEX NIȚU

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### #WEARENATO

EUROPEAN AIR CHIEFS' CONFERENCE 2024 \_\_\_\_\_ 4

NATO AIR CHIEFS' SYMPOSIUM \_\_\_\_\_ 5

ROMANIA'S NATIONAL DAY \_\_\_\_\_ 6 - 7

RAMSTEIN FLAG EXERCISE \_\_\_\_\_ 9

PATRIOT SYSTEM: COMBAT READY \_\_\_\_\_ 11

DACIAN PUMAS \_\_\_\_\_ 13 - 15

ROU AF F-16 "ELEPHANT WALK" \_\_\_\_\_ 18 - 19

EUROPEAN SPARTAN 2024 EXERCISE \_\_\_\_\_ 20 - 21

EXERCISE STEADFAST NOON \_\_\_\_\_ 27

PITCH BLACK EXERCISE \_\_\_\_\_ 28 - 33

ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES DAY \_\_\_\_\_ 26 - 34

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

*The articles presented in the magazine are drawn from various sources.*

*If a particular source is not explicitly stated, the information is sourced from the Allied Air Command Public Affairs Office.*



PAGES 18-19

### ROMANIAN AIR FORCE STAFF

ȘOSEAUA BUCUREȘTI-PLOIEȘTI, KM 10,5, DISTRICT 1, BUCUREȘTI

E-mail: cersenin@roaf.ro

ISSN 3061 - 3574 ISSN-L 3061 - 3566

B 916.10; C 3146.18



Printed by  
"CENTRUL TEHNIC - EDITORIAL  
AL ARMATEI"

The responsibility for technical editing rests  
entirely with the editorial staff

This edition ended on December 15, 2024

# ROMANIA TAKES HISTORIC STEP TOWARD MODERNIZING NATIONAL DEFENSE WITH F-35 ACQUISITION



**BUCHAREST, NOVEMBER 21, 2024 – Romania has made a significant leap in advancing its defense capabilities, signing a landmark protocol to launch the Romanian Air Force's transition to fifth-generation F-35 aircraft. The signing ceremony at Victoria Palace in Bucharest was attended by Minister of National Defense Angel Tîlvăr, U.S. Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec, Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu, and other senior officials from Romania and the United States. The deal includes the acquisition of 32 F-35 Lightning II aircraft, marking a pivotal moment in Romania's defense modernization efforts.**

### STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN SECURITY

Romania's Defense Minister Angel Tîlvăr underscored the importance of this investment during the ceremony. "Investing in advanced technology and state-of-the-art defense capabilities ensures a more secure future. These 32 aircraft represent the peak of global aviation performance and will guarantee interoperability with NATO allies," Tîlvăr stated.

The agreement, finalized through a Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) between the Romanian and U.S. governments, enables the purchase of the aircraft under the U.S. Foreign Military Financing program. The deal also includes pilot and maintenance training, further enhancing Romania's operational and technical capabilities.

### BOOSTING NATO'S COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

The F-35 is regarded as one of the most advanced multi-role fighter jets in the world, equipped with stealth technology, cutting-edge sensors, and unmatched interoperability. This acquisition strengthens Romania's air defense and enhances its contributions to NATO's collective security.

U.S. Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec highlighted the broader implications for NATO:

"Romania's decision to acquire these advanced aircraft is a major step forward in modernizing its Armed Forces. It will significantly bolster NATO's long-term defense posture. The Alliance remains united in addressing common security challenges," she said.

### ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

The program extends beyond military upgrades, offering substantial economic and technological benefits to Romania. Lockheed Martin, the manufacturer of the F-35 and a longstanding partner of Romania, will provide training for personnel and facilitate the transfer of expertise. This partnership is expected to create jobs and advance Romania's defense technology sector.

### A 30-YEAR PARTNERSHIP

For nearly 30 years, the Lockheed Martin team has worked with Romania as a trusted defense and security partner. Romania's acquisition of the F-35 Lightning II is a testament to our enduring relationship and our shared commitment to maintaining a strong and capable military force. "We are pleased to

welcome Romania into the F-35 enterprise," said Lt. Gen Mike Schmidt, director and program executive officer of the F-35 Joint Program Office. "The integration of the F-35 Lightning II aircraft into the Romanian Air Force will significantly strengthen NATO's deterrence capabilities by providing unmatched strategic, operational, and tactical advantages."

### STRENGTHENING REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

With this acquisition, Romania solidifies its position as a leader in regional defense. The modernized air force arrives at a critical time, given the growing security challenges in the Black Sea region and along NATO's eastern flank.

The United States reiterated its commitment to its strategic partnership with Romania, emphasizing the shared goal of strengthening security across the NATO Alliance.

### A BOLD COMMITMENT TO SECURITY

The acquisition of F-35 aircraft underscores Romania's readiness to confront current and future security challenges. It is a significant step toward enhancing national defense while reaffirming the country's commitment to NATO's collective goals.

By embracing cutting-edge defense technology, Romania positions itself as a reliable NATO ally and a vital pillar of stability in the region, securing its role on the international stage.

Source: Romanian MoD,  
US Embassy Romania, [www.F-35.com](http://www.F-35.com)



Photo courtesy of Gian Carlo Vecchi



## EUROPEAN AIR CHIEFS' CONFERENCE 2024 CONCLUDED IN GREECE

The annual European Air Chiefs' Conference (EURAC) concluded on Thursday, October 10, 2024, marking the first time it was hosted in Greece. Air Force leaders from across Europe convened to address the theme of "Navigating Air Power through Entropy and Chaos," a reflection of the rapidly changing and often unpredictable geopolitical environment confronting the continent and its surrounding regions.

The two-day conference, held on October 9-10, 2024, in Greece, brought together Air Chiefs from NATO and partner nations, including Lieutenant General Dimosthenis Grigoriadis, Chief of the Hellenic Air Force General Staff, and General James B. Hecker, Commander of NATO's Allied Air Command. The Air Chiefs from Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland also participated. Key discussions focused on the shifting and unstable security environment in Europe, as well as the operational and organizational challenges that air forces must navigate to maintain readiness and effectiveness. The theme underscored the need for adaptability in military strategy, operational logistics, training, and



personnel management amidst evolving threats and chaotic global conditions.

### Romania's Participation

Romania was represented by Major General Leonard-Gabriel Baraboi, Chief of the Romanian Air Force Staff. His participation in EURAC 2024 reinforced Romania's commitment to contributing to regional air defense efforts and addressing collective security concerns. During the conference, General Baraboi took part in high-level discussions that touched on joint air defense strategies, regional security challenges, and common approaches to addressing these threats.

### Ramstein Flag 2024 Distinguished Visitors Day

In conjunction with EURAC, Distinguished Visitors Day (DV Day) for Exercise Ramstein Flag

2024 also took place, hosted by Greece. The exercise demonstrated the capabilities of Allied air forces in executing joint operations, further enhancing interoperability and operational readiness across the Alliance. Major General Baraboi attended DV Day, where he observed demonstrations of air defense maneuvers, underscoring Romania's interest in aligning its air force capabilities with NATO standards.

### Strategic Takeaways from EURAC 2024

The conference served as a premier platform for the European Air Chiefs to discuss key issues concerning the modernization and transformation of their respective air forces. Particular focus was placed on the ongoing efforts to enhance joint air defense, regional security

cooperation, and interoperability in the face of emerging threats. The event also fostered deeper collaboration among NATO and partner air forces, helping shape a united approach to the evolving challenges in the European theater.

The European Air Chiefs' Conference continues to play a pivotal role in guiding the future direction of air power in Europe, enabling collective responses to the uncertainties and security challenges that lie ahead. The outcomes of EURAC 2024 will further bolster cooperation and preparedness, ensuring that European air forces remain agile and ready to operate in increasingly complex environments.

**SOURCE: Hellenic Air Force and Romanian Air Force PAO**

## ROMANIAN AIR FORCE REPRESENTATIVES PARTICIPATED IN ANNUAL NATO JOINT AIR POWER COMPETENCE CENTRE CONFERENCE

From October 8-10, 2024, Brigadier General (AF) Cezar-Aurel Stănculescu, Commander of the Air Component Command under the Romanian Air Force Staff, took part in the annual NATO Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC) conference held in Essen, Germany. The event focused on the theme "Challenges and Opportunities for Air and Space Power in a Changing Security Environment."

The conference, held at the Congress Centre Messe Essen, gathered military leaders, experts, and stakeholders from across NATO and partner nations to explore innovative solutions for enhancing air and space capabilities and adapting to evolving global security threats. Participants engaged in a series of high-level panels and discussions that highlighted the critical importance of technological advancements and the need for NATO to maintain interoperability and deterrence capabilities in the air domain.

The event's agenda, rich in thought-provoking

panels and discussions, covered topics such as:

- Shifting Power Dynamics: The evolving global security landscape was a central topic, emphasizing NATO's need to adapt its strategies to counter emerging threats, including the rise of smaller states and non-state actors that can exert significant influence on the global economy and security environment.

- Role of Joint Air and Space Power: Modern warfare increasingly demands the integration of air, space, and cyber capabilities. Discussions underscored the importance of reliable connectivity and joint operations across physical, cognitive, and virtual dimensions.

- Contested Air Superiority: The rise of drones, loitering munitions, and precision-guided weapons poses a significant challenge to NATO's traditional air dominance. Experts provided insights into how the Alliance can maintain operational advantages in contested environments.

- Collaboration with Industry: With the rapid evolution of technologies in both the military

and commercial sectors, the need for close collaboration between NATO and industry was emphasized. Civilian industries play a crucial role in supporting defence modernization efforts and ensuring technological superiority. Brigadier General Stănculescu's attendance underscored Romania's active role in NATO discussions regarding the future of air and space power, aligning with the Romanian Air Force's broader objectives under the leadership of Major General Baraboi. These discussions, alongside the strategic insights gathered at the conference, will contribute to Romania's efforts in strengthening national and regional security. This year's conference once again highlighted NATO's commitment to fostering dialogue and collaboration between military and civilian sectors, ensuring that the Alliance remains at the forefront of innovation and ready to meet future challenges head-on. The discussions and solutions proposed during the event will undoubtedly shape the trajectory of NATO's air and space power in the years to come.

## NATO AIR CHIEFS DISCUSS AIR COMMAND AND CONTROL AT NACS 24-II IN RAMSTEIN



Senior leaders from Allied and Partner Air Forces gathered at Ramstein Air Base on November 14-15 to participate in the second NATO Air Chiefs' Symposium (NACS) of 2024. The event focused on advancing NATO Air Command and Control (Air C2), a strategic priority of General James Hecker, Commander of Allied Air Command.

The symposium brought together senior representatives from 27 Allied nations and 4 Partner nations, including the Romanian delegation led by Major General Gabriel-Leonard Baraboi, Chief of the Romanian Air

Force, alongside Lieutenant Colonel Ioan Darie and Command Sergeant Major Ionuț Enache. Highlighting the critical role of Air C2 in modern operations, General Hecker stated, "Aircraft, air defense missile systems,

radars, and munitions require a well-designed Air C2 system to ensure effective employment. NACS provides an ideal platform for open and candid discussions and an opportunity to strengthen collaboration across the Alliance." Discussions during the symposium covered key topics such as operational integration, the Agile Combat Employment concept, Integrated Air and Missile Defense, and the development of Allied capabilities. Leaders exchanged insights on current challenges and capability requirements, leveraging intelligence sharing and data exchange to drive innovative approaches to NATO's air and space operations. The Romanian delegation reaffirmed their commitment to Allied objectives, emphasizing the importance of modernizing and enhancing interoperability within NATO's air defense framework. Major General Baraboi highlighted Romania's ongoing efforts to align with NATO priorities, particularly in strengthening deterrence and defense postures amid evolving security challenges. Hosted semi-annually by Allied Air Command, the NATO Air Chiefs' Symposium is a critical forum for sharing expertise and perspectives on air and space power. It fosters cooperation, coordination, and capability development, reinforcing NATO's position as a global leader in air and space security.

Senior leadership from Allied and Partner air forces convene to discuss NATO Air Command and Control. Photos courtesy of Arnaud Chamberlin





# ROMANIA'S NATIONAL DAY

## ROMANIA LOOKS TO THE SKIES: A VISION FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE AND NATO EXCELLENCE

More than ever, this National Day, Romanians turned their eyes to the skies—not just to admire the aircraft, but with hope, faith, and a vision for a Romania defined by continuous progress and excellence. Today, we honor not only national unity but also the liberty and democracy our forebears fought for with weapon in hand. This is a dual celebration: the solidarity of all Romanians and the triumph of our national freedom, safeguarded through generations under the banner of the Romanian Armed Forces.

The Romanian Army stands as the guarantor of territorial integrity, independence, and national sovereignty – sacred values of a free people. Through NATO's multinational structures, Romania bolsters collective readiness and strengthens its Strategic Partnership with the United States.

We look forward with determination and optimism to a future built on excellence and progress. Romania has already proven itself as a trusted NATO partner, but the challenges of the future demand even greater resolve. We envision a strong, sovereign Romania within a free, democratic world where citizens' rights are upheld and freedoms are secure.

In an unpredictable world, it's critical to advance a unified vision for defense along NATO's Eastern Flank and a comprehensive strategy for the Black Sea region. Romanian troops, through their professionalism, have earned recognition as reliable ambassadors of both national and international values, contributing to key missions in the Eastern neighborhood, the Western Balkans, the southern vicinity, and Africa.

Romania's commitment as a serious and credible partner is evident, and the dedication and courage of its soldiers remain our greatest asset, valued and respected globally. Looking ahead, Romania is resolute in embracing its role as an active ally, playing a key part in ensuring stability in the Black Sea and reinforcing global security.

On a future December 1<sup>st</sup>, Romania's Air Force will soar higher, faster, and stronger, protecting the values that define our nation: liberty, unity, and partnership. Romania celebrates not just its past but builds its future—a future where its skies will always remain guarded by the very best.

ROU AF C-130 Transport Aircraft and IAR-99 Trainer Aircraft Fly Over Bucharest's Triumphal Arch



The Detachment of flag bearers representing the structures that participated in the Theaters of Operations



Multinational Brigade South East Detachment



Republic of Moldova Detachment



The Polish Military Contingent



10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, United States Army



The Portuguese Military Contingent



Forward Land Forces (FLF) Multinational Battlegroup



Romanian Air Force Detachment



Romanian Piranha 5 Transporter



French armoured infantry fighting vehicle (VBCI)



French LECLERC tank



Polish KTO Rosomak

This year's National Military Parade was more than a celebration of national unity and pride; it showcased Romania's steadfast commitment to the shared values of the North Atlantic Alliance. In a symbolic moment, Romania looked confidently toward the future, marking 20 years of NATO membership with a parade that reflected the professionalism of its military personnel, the strength of its partnerships with allied nations, and an unwavering drive for progress.

A special highlight of this year's parade was the participation of approximately 240 foreign service members from allied and partner nations marching alongside their Romanian counterparts. These detachments represented Albania, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Spain, the United States, Turkey, and other allies contributing to NATO operations in Romania.

One of the most anticipated moments was the aerial display over the Arch of Triumph Square. Romanian Air Force pilots demonstrated precision and excellence, accompanied by allied aircraft. The spectacle included IAR-330 Puma helicopters, F-16 Fighting Falcons, and allied platforms, showcasing cutting-edge technology and capability.

Approximately 2,500 military personnel and specialists participated in the event, representing the Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Romanian Intelligence Service, Special Telecommunications Service, National Penitentiary Administration, and Romanian Customs Authority. The parade featured 190 ground vehicles and 45 military aircraft delivering an exceptional aerial display over the capital.

This December 1<sup>st</sup> was not only a tribute to Romania's glorious past but a declaration of its resolve to continue investing in national defense, regional security, and the preparedness of its armed forces to face future challenges.

**Happy National Day, Romania!**

Text: Maria Ioniță

Photo: Adrian Sultănoiu, Alex Nițu, Mirela Viță, Bogdan Pantilimon, Cătălin Dobre





## SPANISH AIR FORCE CONCLUDED MISSION IN ROMANIA, NEW DETACHMENT TO CONTINUE NATO AIR POLICING

On November 28, six Spanish Eurofighters arrived at Mihail Kogălniceanu and took over the mission from their F-18 colleagues from December 1, ensuring continuity. The combined mission contributes to NATO's deterrence and defence posture and further improves interoperability among both air forces. Photo courtesy by "Ejército del Aire y del Espacio"

The Spanish Air and Space Force formally concluded its current deployment in Romania on November 26, during a ceremony at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base. The mission, which began in August, was part of NATO's enhanced Air Policing (eAP) initiative, aimed at strengthening the alliance's airspace security in Eastern Europe.

The departing Spanish contingent operated eight F-18 aircraft and was composed of approximately 180 personnel, including pilots and technical staff. Their efforts have been instrumental in enhancing NATO's deterrence and defense posture in the region while fostering interoperability with the Romanian Air Force. A fresh Spanish detachment will take over the mission in late November, continuing joint air policing operations alongside Romanian forces. This seamless transition

ensures uninterrupted NATO operations, as six Eurofighter Typhoons and a similarly sized team arrived at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base to carry forward the eAP mission. Enhanced Air Policing missions, established in 2014 as an adequate response to security challenges near NATO's borders, aim to bolster the Alliance's rapid response capabilities and maintain a visible deterrence posture. These operations also serve to enhance the readiness and cooperation between member nations' air forces, a priority in



the current geopolitical landscape. The Romanian and Spanish collaboration underscores NATO's commitment to collective defense and its

resolve to safeguard the Alliance's eastern flank against evolving threats.

Source: ROU AF PAO  
Photo: Narcisa Tuță

Spanish Air and Space Force personnel gathered for a group photo alongside F-18 aircraft at Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, marking the conclusion of their deployment in Romania on November 26; the mission, which was part of NATO's enhanced Air Policing initiative, demonstrated the Alliance's commitment to airspace security in Eastern Europe



## ROMANIAN F-16S SOAR 1500 KM IN NATO'S RAMSTEIN FLAG EXERCISE: STRENGTHENING ALLIED AIRPOWER AND COMBAT READINESS

The Romanian Air Force participated in the RAMSTEIN FLAG 24 exercise with F-16 fighter jets from Fetești Air Base, conducting operations in Greece's training airspace alongside allied forces in highly realistic, demanding mission scenarios.

En route to Greece, Romanian pilots relied on air-to-air refueling from a French Air and Space Force tanker, which provided essential support and a valuable training opportunity. This capability enabled Romanian pilots to project airpower over 1,500 kilometers. This exercise highlighted Romania's commitment to NATO cooperation and interoperability. Advanced joint training exercises, such as RAMSTEIN FLAG, played a key role in enhancing Romania's air defense capabilities and strengthening ties with strategic partners. During the exercise, Romanian F-16 pilots faced combat-like conditions, demonstrating adaptability and combat skills under pressure. The French tanker refueling

extended the operational range of the F-16s and provided critical hands-on training for Romanian pilots to refine refueling techniques in high-stress, coordinated scenarios. The leader of the F-16 formation stated, "These complex missions confirm the Romanian Air Force's readiness and flexibility. Air refueling is critical for long-range operations, enabling rapid responses to emerging threats." The long-standing collaboration with the French Air and Space Force in air-to-air refueling emphasized the importance of bilateral training for high readiness and operational efficiency. Exercises like RAMSTEIN FLAG showcase Romania's commitment to building robust defense capabilities and reaffirming its role as a reliable ally within NATO.

NATO's Ramstein Flag exercise in Greece represented a major air training event. Designed to refine air tactics in response to evolving geopolitical developments, it improved NATO forces' air and missile defense capabilities, addressing challenges like electronic jamming and air interdiction. With a mix of offensive and defensive maneuvers and multi-aircraft integration, RAMSTEIN FLAG marked a significant step in NATO's commitment to bolstering deterrence and defensive strength in the region. RAFL 24, part of NATO's Ramstein Flag air exercise series, was organized by AIRCOM HQ and hosted by Greece in 2024. These RAFL-type exercises emphasize tactical, live-action training specific to air operations, engaging



aviation units, air control, electronic warfare, radar, AEW, and SAM systems. In many instances, related land and naval units also participate to reinforce joint capabilities. The Romanian Air Force operated two F-16s in daytime events from Fetești Air

Base without deploying to Greece, refueling in-flight with allied support upon arrival and departure from the exercise area.

Colonel (AF) Florin Sandu



## ALLIES PRACTICED DELIVERING OPERATIONAL EFFECTS DURING COMPLEX COMBINED JOINT TRAINING OVER ROMANIA



In the last week of October, Allied aircraft from several nations conducted combined joint training with air, naval, and ground-based assets in the airspace over Romania, demonstrating NATO capabilities in support of NATO deterrence and defence.

Under the command and control of the Spanish Joint Force Air Component, NATO deployed Italian Navy F-35B and U.S. Navy F-18 fighter aircraft from two Carrier Strike Groups – the Italian CAVOUR in the Mediterranean and the U.S. HARRY S. TRUMAN in the North Sea. These aircraft conducted effective training with Spanish EF-18 jets deployed in Romania for enhanced Air Policing. The Hellenic Air Force also participated with their Rafale aircraft. On the ground, the French Air Force MAMBA air defence system and French Army MISTRAL very short-range air defence systems added complexity to the training scenarios.

French Air and Space Force and U.S. Air Force refueling aircraft enabled the projection and extended on-station time of the fighters during the training, which was tactically overseen by the

**A French Air Force MAMBA ground-based air defence system - depicted at its deployed site in Capu Midia, Romania, participated during the events creating a realistic complex threat scenario. Archive photo courtesy French EMACOM**



Control and Reporting Centre CRYSTAL in Bucharest. "NATO and the Allies exploited every opportunity to train together and to hone our air and ground crews' skills," said General Julio Sampayo Nieto, Commander of the Spanish JFAC. "Multi-domain operations such as the ones we conducted this week demonstrated and communicated the Alliance's capability to conduct precision strikes anytime, anywhere," he added. The combat training in Romania was conducted within the framework of NATO's enhanced Vigilance Activity Neptune Strike, led by Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO), and Joint Force Command Naples-led operations in support of deterrence and defence in Southeast Europe. Neptune Strike 24.2 was the eighth stage of Project Neptune, a multi-year effort focused on harmonizing work to transfer command and control of U.S. naval and amphibious forces to STRIKFORNATO to provide assurance, deterrence, and collective defence for the Alliance. It showcased the next step in NATO's ability to integrate high-end strike capabilities to support the defence of the Alliance. The current edition ran from October 24 to 31 and was conducted across the North, Baltic, and Mediterranean Seas.

The combined joint activities of multiple Allied fighter and tanker aircraft, ground-based air defence systems, and regional surveillance and control centres illustrated the Allies' approach to force projection and multi-domain integration. NATO leveraged the presence of air and naval assets, including those from the U.S., to enable meaningful training and preparation of its air and ground crews as well as controllers for deterrence and defence activities.

These drills fit within the objective of enhanced Vigilance Activities to demonstrate that NATO was transparent in its actions and preparations. NATO's posture remained focused on readiness and was non-provocative.

**Source:** <https://ac.nato.int/archive/2024/allies-practice-delivering-operational-effects-during-complex-combined-joint-training-over-romania.aspx>

## PATRIOT SPARK 24.11 ROMANIAN AIR FORCE MARKS A MILESTONE IN AIR DEFENSE MODERNIZATION

Amid rising tensions in the Black Sea region and growing threats along NATO's borders, the Romanian Air Force has achieved a notable milestone in bolstering its air defense capabilities. This progress was demonstrated during the PATRIOT SPARK 24.11 exercise at Capu Midia, where the operational readiness of a PATRIOT battery was rigorously tested and enhanced.

The PATRIOT SPARK 24.11 exercise, conducted with a fictional scenario based on previous multinational training experiences with NATO allies, aimed to assess the operational readiness of a PATRIOT system. Simulations focused on intercepting airborne threats, including cruise missiles and fixed-wing aircraft.

From December 2 to 12, a PATRIOT surface-to-air missile battery from the 74<sup>th</sup> PATRIOT Regiment participated in a tactical training exercise, including live-fire drills, as part of the PATRIOT SPARK 24.11 event at Capu Midia firing range. The system, now certified, will be integrated into the Romanian Air Force's operational forces and deployed for active service alongside other capabilities. Colonel Virgil Toşa, commander of the 74<sup>th</sup> PATRIOT Regiment, provided details about the exercise: "Today, we tested one of our PATRIOT systems through live-fire drills. The exercise scenario included the system's deployment, integration into a combat formation, and real-world engagements. The targets were destroyed, and the results confirmed the hard work of our personnel."

The training process included rigorous steps: pre-tests, simulated target drills, and live-fire exercises, all conducted at Capu Midia range. The deployment and installation of the system in a tactical environment demonstrated both the equipment's capabilities and the personnel's ability to swiftly respond to real-world scenario. PATRIOT SPARK 24.11 marks a key step in Romania's national defense modernization program. "This event is a major leap forward in

enhancing NATO interoperability and ensuring the security of the Alliance's airspace," emphasized Colonel Toşa. Integrating a system as complex as PATRIOT requires not only advanced technology but also a highly trained personnel team. "No one joins the team operating the PATRIOT system without undergoing a rigorous selection and evaluation process. Personnel training is the key to our success," added Colonel Toşa.

PATRIOT systems strengthen Romania's position as a key security provider on NATO's eastern flank. The 74<sup>th</sup> PATRIOT Regiment is equipped with three long-range surface-to-air missile systems, and the personnel involved in this exercise have undergone the collective training program known as TAFT (Technical Assistance Field Team). The operational readiness of PATRIOT systems comes at a time of significant geopolitical instability. The war in Ukraine and escalating military activities in the Black Sea region highlight the need for modern defense capabilities.

Romania's defense modernization is part of a broader effort to enhance collective security. For Romania, the PATRIOT system represents not only a weapon system but a symbol of the country's ability to safeguard national sovereignty and security in an increasingly challenging global environment. In the face of emerging threats, this development reflects Romania's determination to respond with strength and professionalism.

Text and photo by Adrian Sultănoiu





## ROU AF PARTICIPATED IN EXERCISE INTERCEPTOR 2024



From November 5-6, 2024, the Romanian Air Force conducted bilateral training with the Hungarian Air Force during Exercise "INTERCEPTOR 2024," held in Romanian and Hungarian airspace. The Romanian Air Force deployed two F-16 aircraft from the 86<sup>th</sup> Air Base, showcasing its operational readiness and enhancing joint capabilities with its NATO ally.

The exercise focused on practicing NATO-specific techniques, tactics, and procedures for Air Policing missions. It emphasized interoperability between Romanian and Hungarian air forces, strengthening bilateral cooperation under the NATO framework. Over two days, aircrews and technical teams executed joint missions involving scenarios designed to simulate the detection, identification, and interception of unauthorized aircraft violating NATO airspace protocols. Key training objectives included refining tactical coordination, implementing NATO-standard rapid response procedures, and enhancing operational readiness in a multinational environment.

\*\*\*

Romania's participation in "INTERCEPTOR 2024" underscored its commitment to regional security and the defense of NATO airspace. By working closely with Hungarian forces, the Romanian Air Force contributed to maintaining high levels of preparedness in air defense operations while reinforcing NATO's posture in Central and Eastern Europe. The exercise concluded successfully, demonstrating the professionalism and capability of participating crews to address evolving aerial security challenges.

Source: ROU AF PAO

## ROMANIAN AIR FORCE IN MULTINATIONAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXERCISE WISE WOLF-24

The Romanian Air Force demonstrated its capabilities during the Wise Wolf-24 multinational exercise, held from November 2 to 15, 2024 in the Republic of North Macedonia. This high-profile event brought together Special Operations Forces (SOF) from across the Balkans to strengthen multinational cooperation and operational readiness.

Romania's contribution stood out, with the Romanian Air Force playing a pivotal role in supporting joint operations. Two IAR 330 PUMA helicopters, from the 90<sup>th</sup> Airlift Base and 95<sup>th</sup> Air Base, were deployed to the exercise, providing essential airlift and operational support. The Romanian Air Force executed a variety of missions, including:

– troop insertion and extraction into

contested environments;

– medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) operations under simulated combat conditions;

– aerial reconnaissance and surveillance, enhancing situational awareness for ground forces;

– strategic transport of personnel and equipment.

These missions were conducted in direct support of the Romanian Special Operations Forces (SOF) detachment and other allied units, showcasing seamless integration of air and ground elements in a multinational context.

Romanian helicopters were integrated into high-profile training scenarios, observed by senior military leaders such as North Macedonia's Minister of Defence, Vlado

Misajlovski, and JSOC Deputy Commander, Colonel Ivan Raykov. These scenarios showcased key operations, including air and ground infiltration, strategic reconnaissance, direct action missions, and hostage rescue, all executed with precision and heavily dependent on the coordination and effectiveness of air support.

Wise Wolf-24 served as a proving ground for Romania's aircrews, reinforcing their ability to operate in complex, multinational environments. The Romanian Air Force's performance highlighted their expertise in delivering rapid, mission-critical support to SOF operations across a range of challenging scenarios.

This year's exercise emphasized the importance of interoperability among Balkan nations, with Romania's air assets serving as a cornerstone of joint success. The Romanian Air Force's contribution underscored its readiness to support regional security and its vital role in strengthening alliances within Southeastern Europe.

Source: ROU AF PAO



# DACIAN PUMAS

## ADVANCING SECURITY WITH EUFOR ALTHEA



Since its inception in December 2004, EUFOR ALTHEA has served as a cornerstone of the European Union's efforts to maintain peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This EU-led mission took over from NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR) and continues to ensure compliance with the Dayton/Paris Agreement, contributing to a Safe and Secure Environment (SASE) in BiH.

For Romania, EUFOR ALTHEA is more than a stabilization mission; it's an opportunity to demonstrate the professionalism, dedication, and technical expertise of its armed forces. Since Romania's first operational deployment in 2005, its contributions have been pivotal in supporting EUFOR's objectives and reinforcing the values of security and stability in the region.

Romania's engagement with EUFOR ALTHEA began with the deployment of IAR-330 SOCAT helicopters, marking a significant milestone as the first operational deployment of

the Romanian Air Force since World War II. In 2005, Romanian air detachments "ALPHA" and "BRAVO" conducted over 600 missions and accumulated 1,200 flight hours. Operating in the challenging post-conflict environment of BiH, these detachments played a vital role in ensuring mission success.

This legacy was recently continued by the DACIAN PUMAS, a detachment that deployed in January 2025. The unit, consisting of four IAR-330 PUMA helicopters (in L-RM and M variants) and a specialized team of 100 personnel, is based at Butmir Base. The DACIAN PUMAS are actively supporting reconnaissance, transport, and medical evacuation missions, contributing significantly to EUFOR ALTHEA's mission to maintain a secure environment. The deployment of the DACIAN PUMAS represents a new chapter in this ongoing effort, as Romania continues to play a vital role in one of the EU's longest-running stabilization missions.



Operation ALTHEA marked a significant milestone for the Romanian Air Force, representing its first overseas mission since World War II. Over the course of the deployment, Romanian helicopter crews executed more than 600 sorties, logging approximately 1,200 flight hours in total. Their efforts underscored Romania's commitment to international peacekeeping and security operations. The unit was stationed at Banja Luka and conducted a range of critical missions, including aerial reconnaissance, air transport, search and rescue (SAR), and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) in support of EUFOR's objectives.





*Flying in mountainous terrain during winter, especially in conditions similar to those of active Theaters of Operations, demands careful and thorough preparation. Harsh weather, rugged landscapes, and low visibility make such missions highly challenging; troops must be trained to navigate extreme conditions while ensuring equipment reliability in sub-zero temperatures. Exercises focus on maintaining operational readiness, teamwork, and the ability to adapt to unpredictable scenarios. These preparations are vital for ensuring mission success and safety in demanding environments, reflecting the military's commitment to readiness for any situation.*

**This marks a generational shift, as noted by Colonel (AF) Răzvan Roșca, Commander of the Romanian detachment:**  
*"After nearly two decades, the Romanian Air Force returns to EUFOR ALTHEA. This mission represents a generational transition and a test of our skills, particularly in the face of challenges posed by Bosnia's mountainous terrain and winter weather."*

#### TRAINING FOR THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Rigorous preparation has been at the core of Romania's readiness for EUFOR ALTHEA mission. The team underwent extensive training at Bacău Air Base, focusing on night flights, mountainous terrains, and adverse weather conditions to prepare for real-world challenges. Lieutenant Radu Teodor Miloșescu, a pilot with the 572<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, shared his perspective: "This is my first operational deployment abroad, but I've participated in international

exercises before. We've trained for night and mountainous flights, focusing on realistic conditions to prepare for challenges such as medical evacuations, transport and reconnaissance."

#### TECHNICAL EXPERTISE: THE BACKBONE OF OPERATIONS

Warrant Officer Nicolae Mircea Rusu, a veteran technician, highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and decades of expertise in maintaining the various helicopter variants.



*Night flight readiness is a vital component of training for pilots operating in the Theater of Operations. It involves mastering navigation, situational awareness, and precision in low-visibility conditions, all while utilizing advanced night vision systems and instruments.*



*Formation flight training is critical for pilots operating in the Theater of Operations, ensuring seamless coordination and precise maneuvering in complex mission scenarios. It requires mastery of spatial awareness, communication, and disciplined adherence to flight patterns, even in challenging environments.*

Ensuring mission success requires meticulous attention to detail and seamless teamwork among the technical crew. "Our team optimizes operations by adapting to the nuances of different helicopter variants, ensuring that all systems are mission-ready."

#### LESSONS FROM PAST MISSIONS

Romanian personnel bring invaluable experience from past international deployments, including operations in Mali (MINUSMA). Major (AF) Alexandru Ivan, a seasoned pilot, noted the similarities and differences between Mali and Bosnia: "In Mali, I learned the importance of adaptability in a multinational environment. While Bosnia's challenges include snow, fog, and mountainous terrain, our training at Bacău has prepared us to overcome these obstacles head-on."

#### MEDICAL EVACUATIONS: A LIFESAVING PRIORITY

One of the primary roles of the DACIAN PUMAS is medical evacuation, a task requiring precision and speed. Medical Assistant Sergeant Sorin Ciobotaru explained the advanced medical setup onboard the IAR-330 helicopters: "Two helicopters are fully equipped for patient evacuation, featuring NATO-standard stretchers, medical monitoring systems, and oxygen supplies. Each mission pairs a medic with an assistant to provide comprehensive care during transport."

#### A UNIFIED TEAM FOR COMPLEX MISSIONS

Colonel (AF) Roșca emphasized the importance of teamwork in ensuring the success of the mission: "The success of a mission depends on each

one of us, on how we fulfill the assigned tasks to the best of our abilities. Everyone is important—if one team member doesn't do their job perfectly, it will impact the entire mission." Out of 400 applicants, the best 100 were selected for the DACIAN PUMAS. This cohesive team blends youth and experience, with an average age of 30, ensuring operational agility and adaptability.

#### ROMANIA: A TRUSTED ALLY IN GLOBAL STABILITY

Romania's participation in EUFOR ALTHEA underscores its role as a reliable partner in international peacekeeping. The DACIAN PUMAS' deployment reaffirms the Romanian Air Force's commitment to excellence, highlighting its ability to adapt to new challenges while maintaining the highest standards of professionalism. As they embark on this mission, the DACIAN PUMAS not only carry the legacy of Romanian peacekeepers but also represent the enduring values of teamwork, integrity, and resilience. Their contribution to EUFOR ALTHEA is a testament to Romania's steadfast dedication to global security and cooperation. This deployment stands as a milestone in Romania's military history, showcasing its evolution as a trusted ally and its readiness to meet the demands of modern peacekeeping operations. With rigorous training, technical expertise, and a united team, the Romanian Air Force is poised to make a significant impact in Bosnia and Herzegovina, solidifying its reputation as a key player on the international stage.

**Text: Ioana Teișanu**

**Photo: Alex Nițu and Lucian Irimia**



*The three words that define the Romanian Air Force – INTEGRITY, COMMITMENT, TENACITY – also define us, the soldiers of this detachment: integrity, commitment, and tenacity. I would also add professionalism. All my subordinates are professionals; they are loyal, dedicated, and possess integrity. I would tell them to maintain their professionalism, attitude, and commitment, as demonstrated during training. We train the way we fight, and we will fight the way we have trained. For me, it is enough if they uphold the qualities they have shown during preparation. I am confident that maintaining these values will showcase the Romanian Air Force in the theater of operations, and we are proud to represent the Romanian Air Force."*

**Colonel (AF) Răzvan Roșca, Detachment Commander**



**NATO formally took control of the Aegis Ashore Missile Defence System (AAMDS) in Redzikowo, Poland, marking a pivotal step in bolstering the Alliance's missile defence capabilities.**

During a ceremony attended by senior officials, Polish President Andrzej Duda and U.S. Navy Admiral Stuart B. Munsch highlighted the strategic importance of the system, which began operating under NATO's command and control structure. Headquarters NATO Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, was responsible for ensuring the command and control of NATO's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems for the Alliance. The assumption of the AAMDS under NATO control underscored AIRCOM's commitment to enhancing Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD), aimed at defending NATO territory, its people, critical infrastructure, and essential defence capabilities. The Redzikowo site joined its counterpart in Romania as a critical component of NATO's larger ballistic missile defence architecture. This system was specifically designed to counter the growing threat of ballistic missiles, enhancing protection for NATO's European populations, territories, and forces.

"The integration of the Aegis Ashore system into NATO's defensive network underscored our collective commitment to ensuring the security of all Allies," said General James Hecker, Allied Air Command Commander. "This capability strengthened Poland's role in our employment of IAMD," General Hecker added. Admiral Munsch, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, praised the longstanding partnership between the U.S. and NATO



during the formal ceremony. He stated that the transfer solidified shared values and collective defence strategies. The Redzikowo site represented a testament to NATO's adaptability and commitment to collective defence and, more specifically, IAMD, leveraging cutting-edge technology to address 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges.

**NATO ALLIED AIR COMMAND PARTICIPATED IN EXERCISE STEADFAST DUEL, FOCUSED ON DEFENCE OF THE EURO-ATLANTIC AREA**



**The Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)-led exercise Steadfast Duel 2024 began last week, focusing on exercising more than 20 NATO Command and Force Structure headquarters, including Allied Joint Force Command Naples (JFC Naples) and Allied Air Command (AIRCOM), as the primary exercise participants, in aspects of the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area at the operational and higher tactical levels.**

AIRCOM's participation in this computer-assisted command post exercise simulated the operational directing of aircraft through the production of an effective Air Tasking Order (ATO). An ATO was a tool that assisted the Combined Forces Air Component Commander, General James Hecker, in efficiently and effectively planning, organizing, and directing air operations through centralized planning. The ATO provided a breakdown of missions for a 24-hour period, including aircraft, call signs, times, and other information needed for the Air Operations Centre's members to track and monitor missions. Steadfast Duel allowed AIRCOM to reinforce many of the best practices of NATO's air

component while also experimenting with growing capabilities, such as alternative methods of producing the ATO. "Steadfast Duel 24 was one of the most important events on our AIRCOM exercise calendar," said General James Hecker, Allied Air Command Commander. "This exercise offered us at AIRCOM a challenging opportunity to practice delivering airpower on behalf of NATO; it also allowed us to experiment further with our processes and command and control structure with the ultimate goal of identifying a much more resilient and adaptable structure," General Hecker added. By refining and exercising AIRCOM's processes, Steadfast Duel provided detailed

information, lessons learned, and best practices on how to employ aircraft sorties effectively through an efficient ATO process. These efforts delivered operational effects across domains, whether ground, maritime, air, or space-based. The exercise also enhanced liaison between AIRCOM, NATO's land component, the NATO Space Operations Centre, and other components critical for multi-domain operations. "While Steadfast Deterrence 2024 exercised elements of NATO's deterrence strategy, Steadfast Duel 2024 exercised NATO entities in the defence of the Alliance, employing all military capabilities, including cyberspace and space, within a complex scenario," said retired Major General Roger Lane, senior Exercise Control advisor for both exercises, during a June 2024 workshop held at the NATO Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger, Norway.



**On September 30 and October 1, the third Ramstein Alloy exercise of 2024 brought allied air detachments together for live-fly training in Latvia.**

Over the two-day exercise, fighter and support aircraft conducted Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) procedures and ground-based air defense activities, advancing integration and readiness to secure NATO airspace in the Baltic Sea region. Fighter jets from the current Baltic Air Policing detachments of Italy and Germany, along with Finnish jets, Latvian support aircraft, and Spanish fighters deployed to NATO operations in Romania, flew 13 missions. These missions featured aerial maneuvers, including air-to-air refueling, Close Air Support (CAS) with Latvian Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs), and Ground-Based Air

Defense (GBAD) exercises. In this multinational training environment, the Spanish National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS) GBAD unit, deployed at Lielvarde Air Base in Latvia, conducted Integrated Air and Missile Defense drills in coordination with Italian and German Eurofighter aircraft. Controllers at the Baltic nations' Control and Reporting Centers provided essential tactical control for fighter maneuvers, also directing air-to-air refueling of fighter jets by an A-330 MRTT from the Multinational MRTT Unit based at Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Allied Air Command and NATO's Combined Air Operations Center at Uedem, Germany, conduct Ramstein Alloy exercises three times annually, offering in-place Baltic Air Policing detachments valuable training with regional air forces.



**German Eurofighters flying out of Lielvarde AIR Base, Latvia, have safeguarded the Baltic Air Space under NATO orders since March 2024. Archive photo by Jannik Schagen**

This exercise series underscores among NATO members. NATO's commitment to collective defense, integrating multiple fighters and support aircraft for a robust demonstration of readiness, interoperability, and cooperation reinforce regional security.



**Spanish F-18 fighters from the NATO Air Policing deployment in Romania, flew to the Baltic Sea region enabled by Air-to-Air Refueling to join combined QRA drills. Photo courtesy by Spanish Air Force**



**The Spanish NASAMS unit, deployed at Lielvarde Air Base in Latvia, conducted Integrated Air and Missile Defence drills with Allied fighter aircraft. Archive photo courtesy by Spanish Army**



Photos courtesy by 86<sup>th</sup> AFB

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÄ/SAT	DU/SUN
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Photos courtesy by 86<sup>th</sup> AFB

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28		

Photos courtesy by 86<sup>th</sup> AFB

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÄ/SAT	DU/SUN
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Photos courtesy by 86<sup>th</sup> AFB

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÄ/SAT	DU/SUN
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Photos courtesy by 86<sup>th</sup> AFB

LU/MO	MA/TU	MU/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Photos courtesy by 86<sup>th</sup> AFB

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23/30	24	25	26	27	28	29



<i>J</i>	1
LU/I	2
	2

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

<i>J</i>	1
LU/I	2
	2

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÄ/SAT	DU/SUN
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

<i>J</i>	1
LU/I	2
	2

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÄ/SAT	DU/SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

<i>J</i>	1
LU/I	2
	2

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

<i>J</i>	1
LU/I	2
	2

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

<i>J</i>	1
LU/I	2
	2

LU/MO	MA/TU	MI/WE	JO/TH	VI/FR	SÁ/SAT	DU/SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				



# EUROPEAN SPARTAN 2024

## COLLABORATION AND PROFESSIONALISM

## FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY



From September 25 to October 11, 2024, 90<sup>th</sup> Airlift Base hosted a new iteration of the multinational Exercise European Spartan, a high-level training event dedicated to C-27J Spartan tactical airlift crews. Held for the second consecutive year in Romania, the exercise was conducted under the partnership between the Romanian Air Force and the European Defence Agency (EDA), highlighting

Romania's strategic role in advancing European defense cooperation initiatives. The exercise brought together crews from Romania, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, and Slovakia—all NATO and/or EU members—demonstrating a shared commitment to enhancing interoperability and strengthening tactical capabilities in multinational air operations.

### BUILDING TACTICAL EXPERTISE AND COHESION

European Spartan 2024 served as a cornerstone for training crews operating the C-27J Spartan. Participants engaged in diverse scenarios, enabling them to operate in an international environment, learn from partner nations, and refine various tactics, techniques, and procedures. These interactions significantly enhanced safety standards and mission efficiency in complex operations. The training emphasized adapting to unpredictable conditions, including low-level flying techniques essential for challenging missions in rugged terrains or conflict zones. Close collaboration with technical teams was another focal point, with emphasis on seamless synchronization between flight crews and support staff—a critical component for mission success.

### STRENGTHENING MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION

The exercise fostered opportunities for aligning procedures and developing joint solutions to operational challenges. This collaboration not only improved individual preparedness but also laid the foundation for common standards in European tactical aviation. EDA representative Viktor Bryaskov praised the

achievements, from perfecting parachuting and medical evacuation techniques to fostering professional and personal connections among participants. "Flexibility and participant-focused approaches were the cornerstone of this success," he remarked, extending special thanks to the Romanian Air Force for their exemplary organization.

### LEADERS HIGHLIGHT STRATEGIC VALUE

Brigadier General (AF) Ioan Mischie, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Training of the Romanian Air Force Staff, emphasized the vital importance of airlift missions, noting that the exercise enhanced mutual trust and the ability to function as a unified team in addressing shared challenges. Pilot Mihai Virdol, one of the most experienced C-27J Spartan commanders, elaborated on the significance of the European Spartan exercise, stating: "This exercise is a cornerstone of pilot training, offering a unique opportunity to operate alongside crews from different nations, share diverse tactics, and refine safety and operational standards. Over the years, we've gained invaluable skills in coordinating operations in dynamic environments, managing unforeseen challenges, and adapting swiftly to variable flight conditions. Low-altitude tactical flying, in

particular, has been a focus, helping us master techniques essential for missions in demanding terrains or high-risk scenarios." He also highlighted the evolving complexity of the exercise, noting that the latest iteration incorporated scenarios designed to address current challenges in tactical air operations. "This year, there was a stronger emphasis on improving crew collaboration and implementing more effective risk management procedures to address emerging threats. Additionally, we conducted more operations in unfamiliar terrain under adverse weather conditions, which pushed our adaptability and precision to new levels," he explained. Italian General Alessandro DiLorenzo reinforced these points, emphasizing the critical role of air transport in both peace and conflict. "Airlift is indispensable for delivering logistical support across all operational domains. By training together, we enhance our readiness to operate in multinational environments and improve our collective capabilities," he stated. The insights from leaders and participants like Pilot Virdol underscore the exercise's dual focus: strengthening tactical proficiency and fostering the interoperability necessary for successful joint operations, whether in conflict zones or humanitarian crises.

### EXEMPLARY TEAM EFFORT

Colonel (AF) Tecuceanu Emil-Florian, Commander of the 90<sup>th</sup> Airlift Base highlighted the dedication of all involved teams, from pilots and technicians to medical and logistical personnel. "Despite the immense effort and pressure, you maintained focus on your tasks, executing complex scenarios with precision. You are now ready to redeploy and apply the skills you've mastered to real-world missions," he said, expressing confidence in their readiness to meet the highest standards.

### A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

European Spartan 2024 showcased the spirit of teamwork, professionalism, and a collective commitment to European security. The exercise reaffirmed the value of collaboration and continuous training in strengthening NATO and EU defense capabilities. Congratulations to all participants for their outstanding efforts. The lessons learned and bonds formed during this exercise will be invaluable for future operations. European Spartan 2024 stands as a testament to the shared vision of a safer, more secure Europe.

*Text: Maria Ioniță  
Photo: Adrian Sulănoiu, Alex Nițu*





## NATO ALLIES FLEX CAPABILITIES OVER UNITED KINGDOM AS PART OF EXERCISE COBRA WARRIOR

Six NATO Allies participated in the Royal Air Force-led exercise, Cobra Warrior, which ran from 16 September to 5 October, 2024. Over 80 aircraft from six NATO nations participated in this year's Cobra Warrior at Royal Air Force (RAF) Waddington. NATO Allies in the exercise included the United Kingdom (UK), Finland, Norway, United States, Canada and Poland.

This twice-a-year exercise, hosted by the UK, is a life-fly field training exercise and part of the RAF's fighter weapons school graduation event. This year's exercise focused on operational to tactical high-end warfighting in a contested, degraded and limited operating environment. "Exercises like Cobra Warrior are invaluable to

advancing integration between the NATO Allies and partners. I appreciate the work done by our Royal Air Force counterparts to host this event," said General James Hecker, Allied Air Command Commander. "Cobra Warrior brings together some of the world's best fighter pilots to train side-by-side and further hone operational



tactics," General Hecker added. Several different fighter types participated in this year's exercise, from the RAF F-35B Lightning II to the Finnish F/A-18 Hornet, allowing to the Allied Air Forces to practice seamless integration and enhancing

interoperability across the Alliance. "It's always great to see our NATO Allies and partners here and get the opportunity to train together," said Wing Commander Colin Melvin, commander of the operation support wing at RAF Waddington.

In addition to fighters, the exercise also incorporated air-to-air refueling tankers, surveillance aircraft, transport aircraft and helicopters. A highlight of the exercise included an air-to-air refuel of a Finnish F/A-18 Hornet by a Canadian CC-130H Hercules.

## FRANCE DEMONSTRATED OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE DURING AGILE COMBAT EMPLOYMENT



In early November, the French Air and Space Force launched an Agile Combat Employment (ACE), deploying Rafale fighter jets to bases in Germany and Croatia practicing deployment, bed-down and operation of a fighter element from a remote site.

Three Rafale fighter jets from Saint-Dizier Air Base touched down at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, home to the U.S. 52<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Wing operating F-16s. Applying the ACE concept, the French fighters used U.S. ground support facilities and infrastructure ranging from flightline services and refueling to rearming and mission planning. A further Rafale detachment landed at Zagreb International Airport, Croatia, to practice the same concept with the Croatian armed forces. "It's a great opportunity to gather further experience with the ACE

concept under NATO's chain of command," said a French detachment commander. The deployments were conducted with a temporary transfer of authority to NATO, playing a full integration of French aircraft within the Alliance chain of command, to train pilots and mechanics as well as the command and control procedures. During the one-week deployment the French Rafale jets joined Romanian F-16, Spanish F-18, enabling aircraft and France's 'MAMBA SAMPT' air defence system over Romania to train joint air power over NATO's

eastern flank. This multi-domain mission demonstrated the agility of the Alliance and its members. NATO Allies are increasingly embracing this operational scheme of manoeuvre designed to improve resilience and survivability. The concept envisages generating air combat power from both home bases and geographically dispersed locations. It can be used proactively or reactively involving main or deployed operating bases or contingency locations. Overall, the ACE programme is designed as a plug and play concept for commanders and planners to use to increase survivability while maintaining uninterrupted operational capability.

## NATO BALTIC AIR POLICING INTEGRATES WITH B-52S AT LIVE-FIRE RANGE IN LITHUANIA



German and Italian Air Force detachments, currently supporting NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission, escorted the B-52s through the Baltic. Photo courtesy of the Italian Air Force

U.S. B-52 Stratofortress bombers assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Bomb Squadron integrated with NATO Allies in executing Bomber Task Force 25-1, exercise Vanguard Merlin at Cudgel Range, Lithuania, Nov. 14-15, 2024. Multilateral exercises serve as visible symbols in support of assurance and deterrence objectives to NATO Allies and partners. These exercises also provide valuable opportunities to synchronize and operate as a cohesive alliance that is ready and postured.

During the exercise, a U.S. B-52 Stratofortress and an Italian Eurofighter Typhoon performed air-to-ground range training with targeting aid from Lithuanian, Czech, Swedish and Norwegian joint terminal attack controllers. Additionally, a temporarily enhanced deployed team from Norway was present, further showcasing NATO's commitment to defending the alliance.

"BTF comes to the European theater a few times during the fiscal year, which gives our Allies and partners invaluable training opportunities," said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Inga "NATO" Wuerges, 603<sup>rd</sup> Air Operations Center tanker planner. "When we do live drops in ranges throughout NATO, all Allies and partners get the chance to enhance readiness capabilities to operate in a more diverse and

challenging environment." Working side-by-side, nations participating in BTF exercises are able to refine their skills and share their vision for a secure and prosperous NATO Alliance. Wuerges was integral in planning the exercise and also participated in an interview by Lithuanian talk show, Labas Rytas "Good Morning," sharing her transition from being born and raised in Lithuania to commissioning into the U.S. Air Force as a KC-135 Stratotanker pilot. "I grew up in Lithuania during the times of its struggle for independence," said Wuerges. "I think that it uncovered my calling to serve and because I was in the United States it was acceptable

for me to serve in the Air Force, in a sense that we all have to fight for our freedom." This mission allowed aircrew to familiarize themselves with the operations in Lithuania and the coalition forces on the ground, creating a combat-ready force that has depth in capability and breadth in capacity. The ability of NATO forces and equipment to operate in conjunction with our Allies and partners is critical to bolstering an extended network of capable alliances and partnerships.

Source: US Air Forces in Europe - Air Forces Africa Public Affairs

## ITALY TAKES OVER THE HELM FOR NATO'S DEPLOYABLE COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTRE

On Thursday, November 21, General James B. Hecker, Commander of Allied Air Command in Ramstein, Germany, officiated the change of command ceremony of NATO's Deployable Air Command and Control Centre (DACC).

The ceremony took place at the Italian Air Force Aerospace Operations Command (COA) in Poggio Renatico and was attended by General Luca Goretti, Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force, and Major General Robert Adang, Deputy Commander of the Royal Netherlands Air Force. The ceremony marked the transfer of responsibilities between Major General Denny Traas of the Royal Netherlands Air Force and Major General Luca Maineri, who also serves as Commander of the COA.

In his address to the authorities and guests, General Hecker took the opportunity to highlight the significant role the DACC played under Major General Traas' leadership, noting

that it has served as a "vital resource for the Atlantic Alliance and its 32 member nations, as well as a key element in deployable Air Command and Control activities". General Hecker also highlighted the operational contributions of the DACC in response to the earthquake in Turkey, during the exercise RAMSTEIN FLAG 2024, and in support of the protection of NATO's eastern flank. In conclusion, General Hecker extended his best wishes to the incoming commander, suggesting that the DACC is in excellent hands with Major General Maineri, who has gained invaluable experience throughout his career. In his farewell speech, the outgoing Commander Major General Traas expressed his gratitude to the attending authorities for their support during his tenure, emphasising that his command experience will remain indelible in his memory. "The DACC has played a key role within NATO, being deployed 75% of the time

in support of operational and training activities," he underlined. In his inaugural address as DACC Commander, Major General Maineri expressed gratitude to his predecessor for their exemplary service and conveyed appreciation to NATO and national military authorities for the confidence they have placed in him with this esteemed appointment. "The DACC", Major General Maineri continued, "is a unique projection enabler that has consistently demonstrated its versatility and excellence, both in rapid deployments supporting NATO and in its crucial role in training personnel responsible for air operational planning activities". Major General Maineri highlighted the dedication of the multinational DACC staff: "Your hard work, professional competence, and ideas will be invaluable in enabling us to face the new challenges ahead."



## NETHERLANDS MOVE FIFTH GENERATION FIGHTERS TO NATO AIR POLICING MISSION IN ESTONIA

A Royal Netherlands Air Force F-35 detachment deployed to Ämari Air Base in Estonia. The fifth generation jets are the first NATO jets to launch from the airfield after completion of major runway renovation works. The Dutch detachment and jets were welcomed during a ceremony attended by senior NATO and national military and civilian representatives.

With the successful and timely conclusion of the extensive runway repair project, Estonia – supported by Luxembourg and NATO – has demonstrated its continued support and commitment to deterrence and defence.

“Estonia is happy to host all Allies at Ämari Air Base in the framework of various exercises, NATO’s rotational air defence model, or air policing,” said Minister of Defence of Estonia Hanno Pevkur. “With the improved conditions at Ämari and a new runway, air policing can now return with F-35s – the most advanced fighter jets in the world. We are delighted to host the Netherlands as the next contributing country for NATO’s air policing mission at Ämari. Notably, the Netherlands is the first country to take over air policing at the renovated Ämari Air Base, doing so with state-of-the-art stealth fighters.”

Providing a set of F-35s for this NATO mission is another major contribution the Netherlands make to collective security in the region – already in 2023, a Dutch F-35 detachment was deployed to Malbork, Poland, and supporting



The Royal Netherlands Air Force F-35 detachment is the first NATO jets to launch from the recently renovated airfield at Ämari Air Base, Estonia, after completion of major runway renovation works. Photos courtesy of The Royal Netherlands Air Force

NATO Air Policing abroad. At home, the Netherlands are among those Allies who use the F-35 as the only platform for Air Policing exploiting the additional capabilities the aircraft offers in several respects. The present deployment to Estonia for NATO’s Air Policing mission underscores the Netherlands commitment to collective deterrence and defence.

“We are ready to operate our fifth-generation fighter jets from Ämari Air Base to provide 24/7 air surveillance and to defend ourselves and our Allies,” said Lieutenant Colonel Pascal Smaal, the Royal Netherlands Air Force Detachment Commander. “This deployment

is aimed at securing the Baltic airspace and is one of the Netherlands’ efforts to provide assurance to our Allies on NATO’s eastern flank.”

Playing a key role for NATO’s Air Policing in the Baltic Sea region, both the air bases at Ämari and Šiauliai are capable hubs where Allies combine their high-end capabilities under the Integrated Air and Missile Defence System. With the new posture of Italian, French and Dutch fighter jets NATO has a robust air capability in place that sends a clear signal to potential adversaries of the Allies’ collective readiness and commitment to preserving territorial integrity.

## NATO AIRCREW COMPLETE HIGH-INTENSITY TRAINING AT TACTICAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2024

NATO’s Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP) concluded its last Flying Course of 2024 on November 29, following three weeks of intensive training. The multinational headquarters composed of staff from eleven NATO Allies has conducted four Flying Courses in 2024. The courses aim to improve the tactical leadership skills and flying capabilities of front line fighter Mission Commanders (MCs), to improve the tactical interoperability of NATO Air Forces through exposure to tactics and capabilities of other Air Forces and to provide a flying laboratory for tactical employment concepts.

Approximately 900 personnel participated in the course, with 37 graduates, including aircrew, intelligence officers, and tactical air controllers, further enhancing NATO’s operational readiness and focus on integrating fourth- and fifth-generation aircraft capabilities.

“For over four decades, the TLP has been pivotal in developing Allied

aircrew expertise in Composite Air Operations (COMAO),” said Colonel César Óscar Acebes Puertas, TLP Commandant, reflecting on the course’s outcomes. “This session demonstrated our continued commitment to adapting to emerging technologies and modern aircraft, ensuring NATO’s tactical air operations remain unmatched.”

The TLP Flying Course 2024-4 highlighted NATO’s priority on integrating fifth-generation aircraft, such as the F-35, into operational frameworks. Nations including Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, Greece, and France deployed 22 aircraft on the Blue side simulating friendly forces, while Red Air acting as opposing forces fielded ten aircraft. NATO’s Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) also provided critical air battle management support throughout the training.

The course combined live operations and advanced synthetic training, leveraging tools like the MACE simulator to create realistic, high-stakes scenarios. Spanish Air and Space Force MQ-9 Predator B drones and German JAMKITE electronic warfare systems added layers of complexity, while air defence systems from multiple Allied nations reinforced the realism of the missions.

The success of TLP’s final flying

course in 2024 underscored the enduring relevance of the multinational programme. By integrating cutting-edge technology and fostering multinational collaboration, the course ensured that NATO remains at the forefront of tactical air operations, prepared to address dynamic security challenges across the Alliance. The Tactical Leadership Programme was established in 1978 initially in Germany, moved to Belgium in 1989 and finally was established at Albacete Air Base in 2009. Besides Host Nation Spain, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States are TLP contributing nations. The training facilities are open to all NATO Allies and Partners upon request.

On November 26, in a ceremony at Albacete, Portugal acceded to the TLP and became the eleventh member to contribute to the programme.



A formation of Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16s (including one with special retirement markings) flew a farewell tour over key locations across the country related to the aircraft’s service. Photo courtesy by Ministerie van Defensie

## NETHERLANDS RETIRED F-16 FIGHTING FALCON FLEET

The Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAF) is set to mark a significant moment as it bids farewell to its fleet of F-16 Fighting Falcons after 45 years of service. A final formation flight of the aircraft is scheduled for Friday, September 27, 2024, marking the end of an era for the RNLAF.

Introduced to the RNLAF in 1981, the F-16 Fighting Falcon has served as a versatile multi-role combat aircraft, excelling in air-to-air combat, ground attack, and reconnaissance missions. Over its operational lifespan, the RNLAF acquired 213 F-16s, manufactured under license in Belgium. The F-16 has become a global icon

of airpower, with over 4,500 units produced and more than 3,000 still in service worldwide.

As the RNLAF shifts to the more advanced Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II, which took over the Benelux air defense role in March 2024, the F-16 is set to make its final flight across the Netherlands. The F-35A is a 5<sup>th</sup> generation fighter with cutting-edge stealth, sensors, and combat capabilities, marking the next step in the modernization of the Dutch air force.

Twenty-four of the retiring jets are destined for Ukraine, where they will support the country’s defense, while others will be used

for training purposes abroad.

Frans Osinga, a former F-16 pilot and professor of war studies, described the aircraft as “incredibly agile,” likening it to “the difference between a Fiat 500 and a Ferrari” when compared to its predecessor, the F-5 fighter jet. He emphasized the aircraft’s versatility, having been deployed in peace operations, UN missions, and combat roles such as supporting NATO operations in Afghanistan and strikes against ISIS in Iraq.

The F-16 will be remembered not only for its operational impact but also for its role in defending Dutch airspace and contributing to global security efforts over nearly half a century of service.

Source: [www.english.defensie.nl](http://www.english.defensie.nl)

## BULGARIA’S FIRST F-16 BLOCK 70 COMPLETED ITS FIRST FLIGHT

Lockheed Martin has announced the successful flight of the first Bulgarian F-16 Block 70 aircraft. The flight took place on 22 October at its production facility in Greenville, South Carolina. Multiple system tests to validate the aircraft’s performance and supersonic capabilities were carried out during the flight, Lockheed confirmed.

In 2019, Bulgaria first signed a Letter of Acceptance (LOA) for eight F-16s, and a second LOA for an additional eight jets in 2022. The F-16s will reportedly replace the Air Force’s ageing Soviet-era MiG-29s. Block 70 is the latest version of Lockheed’s F-16 design

and features advanced avionics, an APG-83 radar and a modernised cockpit with new safety features.

OJ Sanchez, VP and general manager for the Integrated Fighter Group at Lockheed Martin said: “With the F-16 Block 70, the

Bulgarian Air Force will be well-equipped to secure its borders and partner with US, European and NATO allies.”

According to Shephard Defence Insight, the procurement cost for eight aircraft has been calculated to be around US\$500 million. However, the \$1.3 billion deal made with the government includes the aircraft, along with related equipment, weapons, training and logistics support.

As noted by the Bulgarian Ministry of Defence, the first

batch of eight F-16s are anticipated to be delivered in 2025. The second batch of eight F-16s will follow in 2027. Bulgaria will become the second European country to receive the F-16 Block 70 aircraft.

According to Bulgarian Military, however, this jet – and a second jet – will remain stationed in the US to be used as training platforms for incoming Bulgarian pilots.

Source: [www.shephardmedia.com](http://www.shephardmedia.com)



# COMMAND HANDED OVER AT COMBINED AIR OPERATIONS CENTRE UEDM

The command responsibility of NATO's Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) at Uedem in Germany was passed from the Belgian Air Force to the German Air Force. In a brief ceremony, the Deputy Commander of Allied Air Command – Royal Air Force Air Marshal Johnny Stringer – received the unit flag from the outgoing Commander, Belgian Air Force Major General Harold 'Harry' Van Pee, and handed it over to the incoming Commander, German Air Force Lieutenant General Thorsten Poschwatta.

Air Marshal Stringer reminded those present that "Allied Air Forces are the tip of NATO's deterrent spear, but that tip is only as good and as sharp as the quality of those forces, and the quality too of the Command and Control which is so essential to Air Power's effective employment."

In this context, Air Marshal Stringer praised Major General Van Pee for his "vision, commitment, energy, pragmatism, and unswerving focus on the operational task" and wished him the very best for his next adventure. Welcoming Lieutenant General Poschwatta, Air Marshal Stringer added: "Our very best wishes for your tour as Commander of this vital unit."

Referring to his successor, he stated: "Thorsten, you can trust the men and women of CAOC Uedem, and I know that they will continue to support the CAOC mission and their new Commander. You will need them because there is a lot of change coming to CAOC Uedem, and I wish you all the best."

Lieutenant General Poschwatta expressed the "great pride and humility" he felt in assuming command of CAOC Uedem and extended his sincere gratitude to Major General Van Pee for "his outstanding leadership and unwavering commitment" during "one of the most challenging periods in recent history." He emphasized his full commitment to the CAOC's mission and called on the "expertise, commitment, and teamwork" of the CAOC's personnel – combined with the support of NATO, the Host Nation, and wider partners – to work as a "team that shares a common purpose in protecting the security and integrity of European Air Space. Together, we will ensure that our collective defence remains strong."

The CAOC Uedem, located in northwest Germany, was responsible for all Air Policing matters in NATO airspace in Northern Europe above the Alps – safeguarding the skies over 17 different countries. This included control of NATO's Baltic Air Policing operation, where



Above: The Deputy Commander of Allied Air Command – Royal Air Force Air Marshal Johnny Stringer – received the unit flag from outgoing Commander – Belgian Air Force Major General Harold 'Harry' Van Pee – and handed it over to the incoming Commander – German Air Force Lieutenant General Thorsten Poschwatta  
Photo courtesy by Bundeswehr

contributing nations took turns providing Quick Reaction Alert forces for the three Baltic NATO members: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. It also encompassed NATO's periodic Air Policing and Surveillance mission to Iceland. Both missions sent a strong message of NATO commitment, cohesion, and solidarity. NATO's CAOC in the south was located at Torrejon, Spain, and had identical missions and tasks within its area of responsibility. Both CAOCs contributed specialist personnel to enable the formation of a Joint Force Air Component (JFAC) – for example, at AIRCOM, Ramstein – to plan, direct, task, and coordinate air operations of allocated NATO forces as required.

# SPANISH JOINT FORCE AIR COMPONENT CONTROLLED ALLIED AIR OPERATIONS

At the end of September, the Spanish Joint Force Air Component (JFAC) took over the command and control of Allied air operations from Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) at Ramstein. This enabled AIRCOM staff to prepare for and participate in the major NATO exercise Steadfast Duel 2024. For two months, AIRCOM – which was part of the NATO Command Structure – delegated its role to the air command and control experts from the NATO Force Structure. This delegation of responsibilities to the Spanish JFAC included planning, coordinating, and commanding the delivery of NATO Air Power across the full spectrum of joint operations.

The Spanish JFAC had been certified during the exercise \*Steadfast Jackal 2023\* to assume NRF Air Component responsibilities in the first semester of 2024. Its staff assured the transition to the new NATO Force Model, including the Allied Reaction Force (ARF), and remained in charge until the end of June 2025. In NATO, a JFAC planned, coordinated, executed, and controlled combined and joint operations that supported NATO

deterrence and defence missions protecting Allied populations. This air command and control entity was staffed with air experts who planned, coordinated, and controlled Allied air operations involving thousands of sorties by Allied fighters, tankers, transports, intelligence and surveillance aircraft, and airborne control platforms, providing NATO Air Power for collective deterrence and defence for the Alliance.

The NATO Command Structure JFAC was located at AIRCOM in Ramstein as the default JFAC. Besides Spain, six other nations (Germany, France, Italy, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America) had established NATO Force Structure JFACs that were trained and ready to serve as command and control units for the Allied Reaction Force or to take over from AIRCOM if needed. The use of those national air command structures gave NATO's Air and Space Power comprehensive resilience, enabling it to handle critical training requirements flexibly and to provide sustained command and control for ongoing air operations. These arrangements allowed NATO Air Power to continue effectively and efficiently commanding and controlling Allied Air Forces, which was essential to NATO's long-term operations.

# NATO HELD ANNUAL NUCLEAR EXERCISE: STEADFAST NOON

NATO conducted its annual nuclear exercise, Steadfast Noon, with more than 60 aircraft participating in training flights over Western Europe. The two-week-long exercise involved fighter jets capable of carrying U.S. nuclear warheads but did not include any live weapons.

"Nuclear deterrence is the cornerstone of Allied security," NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte stated. "Steadfast Noon serves as an important test of the Alliance's nuclear deterrent and sends a clear message to any adversary that NATO will protect and defend all Allies." The nuclear exercise was a

routine and recurring training activity that took place every October. In 2024, Steadfast Noon involved 2,000 military personnel operating from eight airbases. A variety of aircraft participated, including nuclear-capable jets, bombers, fighter escorts, refueling aircraft, and planes equipped for

reconnaissance and electronic warfare. Training flights primarily took place over host countries Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as in airspace over Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the North Sea. Planning for the exercise had begun a year earlier, and 13 Allies contributed aircraft to the drills. NATO took proactive measures to ensure the safety, security, effectiveness, and credibility of the Alliance's nuclear deterrent. Notably, the

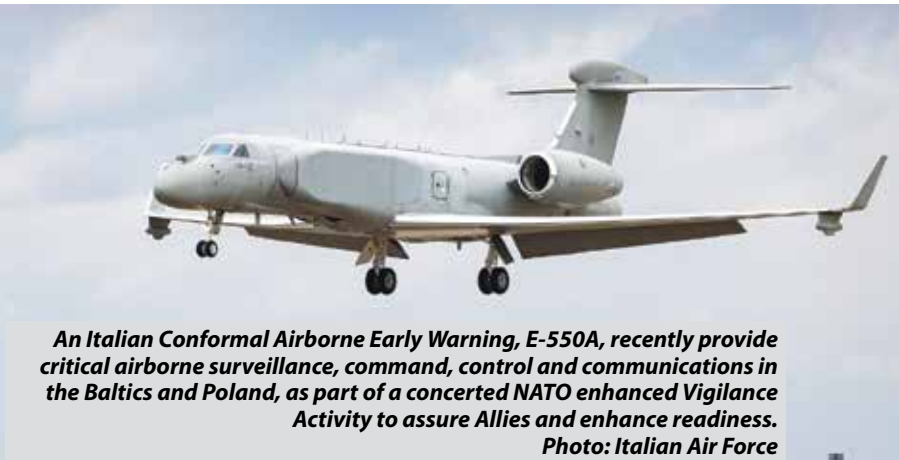
Netherlands' first Allied F-35A fighter aircraft were declared ready to perform nuclear roles during the exercise. NATO's Washington Summit declaration reaffirmed the fundamental purpose of the Alliance's nuclear capability, emphasizing its role in preserving peace, preventing coercion, and deterring aggression. The declaration stated, "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance."

# AIRCOM ASSURES ALLIES WITH ADVANCED AIR DETECTION

NATO Allied Air Command, together with the Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum and with contributions from the Allies, regularly provides airborne reconnaissance and signal capabilities to the Baltics and Poland, enhancing warning, detection, and tracking of NATO airspace.

In support of these efforts, an Italian Conformal Airborne Early Warning (CAEW) aircraft was recently controlled by NATO to provide airborne surveillance, command, control, and communications in the region as part of a concerted NATO enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA) to assure Allies and enhance readiness. The activities of the Italian aircraft in the region also demonstrate NATO's interoperability and its swift ability to integrate with maritime assets, staging effective and cohesive multi-domain sensors anywhere and everywhere on NATO territory. Multi-domain sensors allow the Alliance to maintain a complete and comprehensive Command and Control (C2) picture. "There's no point in having great capability – fighters, air defense missile systems, radars, and munitions – if you're unable to ensure they're employed effectively," said General James Hecker, AIRCOM Commander. "This requires an appropriately designed Air Command and Control systems approach, which allows us to direct our critical air assets at the moment of most need," General Hecker added. AIRCOM provides scoped and effective air detection capabilities for the Alliance, integrating assets with NATO maritime and land assets. Robust multi-domain sensors allow the Alliance to maintain an accurate air picture, providing AIRCOM, the Baltic States, and Poland with situational awareness to identify and report any possible air incursions or violations.

Multi-domain sensors allow the Alliance to have a complete and comprehensive Command and Control picture.  
Archive Photo NATO



An Italian Conformal Airborne Early Warning, E-550A, recently provide critical airborne surveillance, command, control and communications in the Baltics and Poland, as part of a concerted NATO enhanced Vigilance Activity to assure Allies and enhance readiness.  
Photo: Italian Air Force



MARINA MILITARE  
INDO-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN

# PITCH BLACK EXERCISE

*Text and photos by GIAN CARLO VECCHI*





**GOOD FIRST TIME**

An epochal date, this 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024 could not be defined otherwise, when the 31<sup>st</sup> Naval Group sets sail from the Taranto base with the wishes of good winds from the Chief of Staff of the Navy Admiral Enrico Credendino and the Commander in Chief of the naval team Admiral Aurelio De Carolis, The CAVOUR aircraft carrier accompanied by the ALPINO frigate, have an important job to do, a world first for the MM, an imposing but very demanding project that will require the maximum commitment of men and vehicles for 5 long months, but as history teaches us the challenges and objectives are prestigious, the greater the commitment will be to achieve success.

**THE 31<sup>ST</sup> NAVAL GROUP:  
A PIVOTAL ROLE IN PITCH BLACK 2024  
AND MULTINATIONAL  
INTEROPERABILITY**

The target is really important, the 31<sup>st</sup> Naval Group in its long mission will be engaged in various exercises and will touch several countries, among the most important exercises we undoubtedly mention Pitch Black 2024 in Australia, a biennial exercise organized by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), then sending the PPA Montecuccoli, the MM participated in the RIMPAC exercise (Rim of the Pacific), the largest biennial international maritime exercise in the world, organized by the US Navy, and in the PACIFIC DRAGON (again with the Montecuccoli ship), another maritime exercise international, every two years organized by the US Navy with the collaboration of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the ROK Navy (Republic of Korea Navy), and interactions with the US NAVY.

But it is on Pitch Black 2024 that we want to focus in this article, an exercise which saw the participation of 20 countries, Italy, Australia, France, Germany, India (with 6 Sukhoi SU-30MK1), Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines (with the brand new FA-50), Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, UK, USA, Brunei, Canada, Fiji, New Zealand.

Our task is to document some activities regarding the exercise and document the activities of the MM (and of the AM in an article dedicated to it) with its own aerotactic component on board, i.e. the GRUPAER, in this case truly a world first with the last jewels delivered, i.e. the F35Bs, the objective to be achieved is "simple", that is to develop cooperation and interoperability and interchangeability in a multinational and inter-force context, remembering that Italy with the embarked components of MM and AM is among the few countries in the world capable of redeploying 5<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft with their own component on board.

As you well know, it is not possible for us to publish the precise units of the aircraft embarked, but the Cavour ship has reached the considerable number of 13 aircraft embarked between F35B, AV8B and a two-seater TAV8B aircraft, while the AM naturally reached the base autonomously doing more

stages accompanied by KC-767A refuelers. Arriving at the Darwin base, one realizes an aspect that is always rarely highlighted, namely logistics.

Preparing such a large number of men, vehicles and equipment in areas located well beyond our borders in a short time has now become an essential skill to acquire, and here in Darwin all the men of the MM and AM are working to prepare communications, equipment, containers, armaments, spare parts etc., it is like a world within a world, but it is essential that everything proceeds smoothly to allow our pilots to operate as planned from 12 July to 2 August and so it was.

**BEHIND THE SCENES:  
DAILY OPERATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND  
EXCELLENCE IN MULTINATIONAL  
EXERCISES**

Living everyday life with specialists, pilots, crew members and being "accepted" gives you a different perception of their work, one of the things that impressed us most is that even when everything seems perfect in reality it isn't, a myriad arrives of problems, of variables, of misunderstandings, and this happens everywhere, but what is striking about all this? That all this is addressed and resolved every time, the problems are addressed, the misunderstandings pass, the variables evaluated and resolved, a total reliability of the entire ship system and its air component which has practically reached 100% reliability. Daily missions flown by blocks of 2-4-6 aircraft for the F35Bs and AV8Bs, (all AV8B pilots will then transition to the F35Bs), night missions, COMAO of over 30 airplanes, impressive to see sometimes even 20-25 airplanes waiting on secondary runways or connections to obtain take-off authorisation, a curious note is that Darwin airport, being also a civil airport, also accepts the landing of small aircraft, and it was not uncommon to see 15-20 aircraft remaining waiting even for 15/20 minutes stopped because a small tourist plane had to land, something like that was unthinkable for our mentality.

As regards the MM aircraft, we must say that the F35B component operated only from Darwin except for a couple of occasions while the AV8B component operated both from the Australian base of Darwin and from the Cavour ship depending on the exercise phases. GrupAer's F35B aircraft, (data exclusively from the first week of activity) flew DACT (Dissimilar Air Combat Training) missions with Australian F35, USAF F22, Korean F15, Australian F18, IAF SU30, Indonesian F16, Japanese F2 aircraft. BFM (Basic Fighter Maneuvers) with Japanese F2s, IAF SU30s, French Rafales, the AV8Bs also flew BFM missions, in practice these are close air combat, with Malaysian F18D aircraft, Italian F2000s, DACT missions with Philippine FA50s, F35s and Australian FA/18Fs, with missions lasting from one to two hours but which could be extended with the aid of in-flight refueling (almost all the tanker aircraft were based at Amberley).

The latest data available is the RANGE FAM missions (5 missions during the first week of exercise) flown for the MM by both the F35B

and AV8B, these are familiarization flights at a range, justified by the fact that both types of aircraft they carried out drops of inert armament (MK82) 500 lb BDU45B, (in practice the inert bombs are equipped with a precision GPS/laser guidance kit).

Two days before the end of the exercise, the AM personnel arrive on the Cavour aircraft carrier and will have to support the flight activities for the two AM F35Bs, which will continue the campaign together with the MM personnel.



*The collaboration with our Air Force colleagues with whom we operated in an effective, synergistic and interchangeable manner was also fundamental and constructive, to consolidate the national 5<sup>th</sup> generation expeditionary sea-based capability" – Captain Gian Battista Molteni, Commander of the Embarked Air Group*

**PITCH BLACK 2024:  
A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION AND  
STRATEGIC MILESTONES FOR THE  
ITALIAN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP**

The Pitch Black 2024 exercise ended on August 2<sup>nd</sup> with a beautiful ceremony and exchanges of gifts by the pilots of the various air forces who participated and for the MM/GrupAer component it is the time to draw up an undoubtedly very positive summary of the Carrier Strike Group and the exercise.

Tracing the official data in 22 days of training activity for the Air Wing, he reached 180 hours of flight, conducted 110 missions including (as mentioned above) BFM, DACT missions, in-flight refueling, take-offs, landings, air, air, air ground, and command and control, SEAD. While the commander of GrupAer CV Gianbattista Molteni releases the following statement:

*"Finding ourselves planning and flying missions, some of which were very demanding, represented an opportunity for growth for each of the pilots assigned to the Group and for the specialist staff operating from the ground. We were able to fly in packs of 40 or more aircraft, including*



*American F-22 fighters, Singaporean F-15s and Indian SU-30s, dealing with different tactics and procedures, refueling from tanker aircraft of various nationalities within an airspace as large as half the size of France, in the presence of air-to-ground polygons and emitters of all kinds. The collaboration with our Air Force colleagues with whom we operated in an effective, synergistic and interchangeable manner was also fundamental and constructive, to consolidate the national 5<sup>th</sup> generation expeditionary sea-based capability" said Captain Gian Battista Molteni, Commander of the Embarked Air Group, on the sidelines of the closing ceremony of the exercise, which took place at the Australian Air Base in Darwin.*

*The exercise was certainly preparatory for obtaining the IOC, as confirmed by the CV Dario Castelli, Commander of the embarked Airwing, in this regard he specified that: "The IOC of the F-35B component will allow us to operate with the Allies, ensuring complete interoperability and interchangeability. From this perspective, our participation in the Pitch Black 2024 exercise allowed us to increase and strengthen the ability to project air-naval power from the sea, even in theaters located at greater distances than the Wider Mediterranean and for prolonged periods of time. I underline that currently our country is the only one in Europe capable of expressing a credible projection*

*capability from the sea based on a 5<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft such as the F-35B".*

The Navy pilots also played the role of Mission Commander in some COMAOs made up of over 30/35 aircraft of different generations and different nations, Air Commodore Pete Robinson, Commanding Officer of the PB24 exercise, also valued the participation of the Italian component during his speech at the end of the exercise, highlighting that the Cavour aircraft carrier played an extremely important role, forging a realistic scenario in line with the current operational theaters.

**CAVOUR AIRCRAFT CARRIER:  
A HUB OF COMMAND, DIPLOMACY,  
AND MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENTS IN  
PITCH BLACK 2024**

The Cavour aircraft carrier was used as a command and control platform planning and coordinating some air operations, sharing the tactical situation in Italy every day with CINCPAC (Command in Chief of the Naval Squadron) and COMCOA (Command of Air Operations).

An extremely positive note was given by the Open Day on board the Cavour ship on 21 July, a day dedicated to the over 1000 civilians who had the opportunity to visit the aircraft carrier, enjoying the splendid day and being

able to ask questions both to CV Molteni (commander of Gruppo Aerei Imbarcati) who at CF Fabio B. pilots with almost 3000 hours of flight on AV8B+ considered one of the most expert and professional pilots of this aircraft in the world.

Naturally, in addition to civilians, numerous authorities had the opportunity to "see" our flagship up close, including the Governor General of Australia, Hon. Samantha Joy Mostyn, the Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Hon. Richard Marles, the Governor of the Northern Territory, Professor Hugh Heggie, the Minister for Education, the Hon. Mark Monaghan, the Chief of Defense Staff, Admiral Cavo Dragoon, accompanied by senior authorities from Australian Defence, the Navy and the Air Force and the Italian Ambassador to Australia Paolo Crudele.

Our personal experience ends here, and we return to Italy, but for the CSG the commitments will continue and will touch other nations such as Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Oman and Saudi Arabia allowing it to continue carrying out all the training activities that will involve the naval part and the embarked CSG, remembering that the two F35B AMs will also remain operational on board until the end for perfect integration between the FAs, it did not surprise us, in fact,







A photo that has somewhat become a symbol of Exercise Pitch Black: an Su-30 belonging to the Indian Air Force flying alongside an F-35B from the Marina Militare. The type or origin of the aircraft becomes less significant when the focus is on the shared mission of ensuring peace and stability in the region; it was an exercise which saw the participation of 20 countries, Italy, Australia, France, Germany, India (with 6 Sukhoi SU-30MK1), Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines with the brand new FA-50), Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, UK, USA, Brunei, Canada, Fiji, New Zealand



a few weeks after our return to learn from the MM press release that:  
*"Following the results obtained by the Carrier Strike Group and the achievement of the objectives of the embarked aerotactic component, today we can declare the achievement of the Initial Operational Capability (IOC) of the 5<sup>th</sup> generation national expeditionary sea-based capability".*  
 This is what was announced by the Chief of Staff of the Navy, team admiral Enrico Credendino on board the Cavour aircraft carrier, moored at the Yokosuka Naval Base, in Japan, as part of the Carrier Strike operational projection campaign in the Indo-Pacific National group.

**ACHIEVING IOC: THE F-35B'S STRATEGIC IMPACT ON ITALY'S CARRIER STRIKE GROUP AND GLOBAL DEFENSE**

The Initial Operational Capability of the F-35B component - obtained after over 2600 hours of flight and 2700 maintenance interventions - attests to the ability to express, through the 5<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft embarked on the Cavour aircraft carrier, offensive and defensive missions to counter the air threat, of engaging land and naval targets and suppressing enemy air defenses, projecting itself with the Carrier

Strike Group into remote areas and in complete logistical autonomy.  
 The F-35B flight group established on the Cavour aircraft carrier, which achieved this significant milestone, is made up of aircraft from the Navy's Embarked Aircraft Group and the 32<sup>nd</sup> Wing of the Air Force. The Navy and Air Force have achieved a growing synergy in recent years, culminating in the course of this projection campaign in the Indo-Pacific, which has made it possible to accelerate the process of developing a national capability of absolute value for Defense, which further increases readiness and Italy's ability to contribute effectively, together with allies, to global security and stability, wherever necessary.  
 Our country is the only one in the European Union to be able to form a Carrier Strike Group with 5<sup>th</sup> generation assets and - together with the USA and the UK - constitutes the very small core of NATO allies with this capability. In this key, the Carrier Strike Group with the F-35Bs is a concrete expression of Italy's rank as a medium regional power with a strong maritime connotation, and represents a tool of reassurance for allies or of deterrence towards potential adversaries: a versatile and flexible device to project oneself and be influential wherever necessary.

With the achievement of Initial Operational Capability it will be possible to promote new ones opportunities for interoperability and interchangeability between the Allies, thus conferring further depth also to international cooperation.  
*"With the IOC - added Admiral Credendino - the Maritime Defense Component takes a notable step forward in expressing the ability to project forces from the sea even in operational theaters far from the usual gravitation basins, for prolonged periods of time, pursuing complete interoperability and interchangeability in joint operations with allies and partners: one of the main objectives of the Carrier Strike Group Campaign in the Indo-Pacific".*

**The author would like to thank for the opportunity the MM, the CA Jacopo Rollo, the MM press office, the CA Giancarlo Ciappina, the CV Milos Argenton, the CV Gianbattista Molteni, CV Dario Castelli, CC Antonio Rossi, pilots, specialists and all the staff of Nave Cavour for their support, and dedicates this report to Mauro Bottoni, father of Davide, GrupAer pilot**

**With a significant contingent - including F-35s, Eurofighter Typhoons, and Harriers - the Italian Armed Forces demonstrated their ability to represent Italy's interests even at the literal opposite end of the world with robust means. Aboard the aircraft carrier Cavour, Italian naval aviators deployed as far as Australia, where they participated in the 'Pitch Black' exercise alongside numerous other units**







# ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES DAY

## A TRIBUTE TO VALOR AND NATIONAL UNITY

**October 25 marks Romanian Armed Forces Day, a celebration of the Armed Forces' vital role in safeguarding the nation's sovereignty and independence. Established in 1959, the date commemorates the 1944 liberation of the city of Carei, the final act of restoring Romanian territories lost under the 1940 Vienna Dictate.**

Initially rooted in the communist era, the celebration has evolved to honor all Armed Forces heroes, from those who fought in World War II to modern-day missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond. Romanian Armed Forces, trusted by the nation, also stand as a reliable NATO ally, contributing to global security and peacekeeping efforts. This year, a solemn ceremony at the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in Carol I Park paid tribute to fallen heroes. President Klaus Iohannis, members of the Romanian

parliament and government, military attachés, and the civilian public attended the event. Highlights included an aerial salute featuring IAR-330 Puma helicopters and C-27J Spartan planes, coordinated by the Air Force Staff and the 90<sup>th</sup> Air Transport Base. Romanian Armed Forces Day serves as a powerful reminder of the Armed Forces' enduring legacy and its commitment to the nation's sovereignty and global stability.

*Text and photo: Adrian Sultănoiu*



*As part of the Romanian Armed Forces Day commemorations on October 25, members of the military attaché corps accredited in Bucharest paid their respects by laying a wreath at the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in Carol I Park, Bucharest. This solemn gesture underscored the enduring respect and recognition of the Romanian Armed Forces' contributions to national and international security. The wreath-laying ceremony symbolized solidarity among military representatives and highlighted the shared values of honor, sacrifice, and unity that bind allied and partner nations.*







# DACIAN PUMAS

A NEW CHAPTER IN PEACEKEEPING  
MISSIONS WITH EUFOR ALTHEA