



The Hellenic Air Chief Leadership Perspective: Shaping Superiority and Security

The Critical Role of Air Power in Modern Warfare and NATO Security

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Introduction

In modern warfare, where skies serve as both battle-grounds and corridors of deterrence, the mastery of **air power** stands paramount. It is the backbone upon which nations' and alliances' defence and deterrence capabilities rest.

Our era, defined by geopolitical volatility and evolving security threats, underscores the unparalleled importance of air power within NATO forces. As conflicts around the globe continue to unfold, the imperative to **shape superiority and ensure security** in the skies remains the only route to a stable and prosperous future for our nations.

Enhancing NATO's Air Power Strategy: Agile Deployment and Cohesive Operations

Recent armed conflicts have underscored the importance of adaptability and innovation in modern air warfare. Lessons learned from operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea regions have highlighted the need for **agile, interoperable air forces** capable of responding swiftly to dynamic threats and changing battlefields.

Within the NATO Alliance, air forces play a pivotal role in safeguarding collective security and projecting stability across the Alliance's borders. From conducting air patrols and surveillance missions, to providing close air support and strategic airlift capabilities, NATO air forces are at the forefront of deterring aggression and ensuring the integrity of Allied nations' airspace.

A key tenet of NATO's air power strategy lies in the seamless integration and interoperability of Allied Air Forces. Through joint training exercises, multinational operations, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms, NATO Air Forces enhance their ability to operate cohesively and effectively in diverse operational environments. Thus, the **Agile Combat Employment (ACE)** concept has emerged as a cornerstone of NATO's strategy to enhance operational flexibility, resilience, and dissuasion against evolving threats. By dispersing forces, leveraging

expeditionary basing, and maximizing the use of existing infrastructure, ACE enables NATO air forces to rapidly deploy and sustain operations in contested environments, enhancing their ability to project power and respond decisively to emerging threats.

Hellenic Air Force: A Strategic Hub in NATO's Framework

Greece, as a strategic nexus within NATO, is nestled at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The Hellenic Air Force (HAF), often hailed as the 'Guardian of the Aegean and the southeast Wing of the Alliance', embodies the ethos of **reliability, readiness, and resilience**. For that, the HAF, tracing its origins back to the turbulent days of the early 20th century, has undergone a metamorphosis to evolve from humble beginnings into a formidable force in modern air warfare. From the iconic Spitfires of World War II to the sleek F-16 Fighting Falcons and the Rafales of today, the HAF's journey has been one of **adaptation, innovation, and unwavering dedication to excellence**. With a diverse fleet of aircraft, including F-16s, Rafales, Mirage 2000-5s, and soon, the cutting-edge F-35 Lightning II, the HAF boasts a formidable array of capabilities designed to meet the challenges of contemporary warfare. In addition to its aircraft inventory, the HAF has invested heavily in surveillance systems, missile defence technology, and cyber capabilities, ensuring its readiness to confront emerging threats in the digital age. Thus, from conducting Air Policing missions over NATO Balkan States to supporting maritime security efforts in the Mediterranean, the HAF's contribution serves as a testament to its reliability and readiness in times of crisis.

The Hellenic Air Force's exceptional reliability within NATO makes it a strong contributor to the **NATO 2030 Initiative**. Its advanced capabilities, operational excellence, and steadfast dedication to collective defence ensure it is well-equipped to support NATO's goals effectively. Investments in next-generation capabilities such as the F-35 are essential to maintaining a credible preventive posture and staying ahead of emerging threats. The HAF's arsenal, supported by the powerful Patriot Surface Based Air Defence System (SBAD) systems, and other advanced capabilities, aligns with NATO's objectives to modernize and adapt to the evolving security



An impressive formation of Allied fighter aircraft, including F-35s, Rafales, Mirages, and Gripens, conducts a coordinated flyover above the Aegean Sea, highlighting interoperability and collective defence capabilities among NATO partners.

landscape to ensure the Alliance remains prepared to confront 21st-century challenges.

Whether patrolling the skies of the Aegean, the South-eastern Mediterranean Sea, the Balkan NATO states, or participating in multinational exercises alongside NATO Allies, the HAF's operational prowess remains unparalleled. It is a testament to the dedication and professionalism of the men and women who don the uniform, their unwavering resolve echoing through the annals of history and resonating across the vast expanse of the skies they defend.

Strengthening Collective Defence and Security Architecture

Greece has long been a dependable and committed contributor to NATO's collective defence and security efforts. Our country's defence policy is closely aligned with NATO's strategic objectives, and we consistently invest in our military to ensure that we meet the Alliance's operational demands. Greece consistently exceeds NATO's 2% GDP target, often exceeding 3%, demonstrating our enduring commitment to maintaining a strong defence posture.

Our contribution to air defence and NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) stands as a cornerstone of the Alliance's collective security architecture. Designed to detect, track, and neutralize a broad

range of airborne threats – from ballistic missiles to unmanned aerial vehicles – it provides a vital layer of protection for NATO member states, with Greece, as a key member of the NATO Alliance, playing a significant role in supporting and enhancing its effectiveness. Positioned strategically in southeastern Europe and equipped with advanced air defence capabilities, Greece serves as a vital hub within NATO's IAMD network, delivering critical surveillance and early warning systems to identify and monitor potential regional threats.

[...] *'Greece remains a steadfast security provider within NATO, contributing on land, at sea, and in the air to ensure the collective defence of the Alliance while promoting peace and stability in the region.'*

Greece makes a vital contribution to NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINAMDS), the operational system implementing NATO's IAMD strategy, through its deployment of the Patriot SBAD system. As a key component of NATINAMDS – a network of interconnected national and NATO assets including sensors, command and control infrastructure, and weapons – the Patriot, with its long-range surveillance radar and sophisticated fire control, significantly enhances NATO's ability to defend Allied airspace

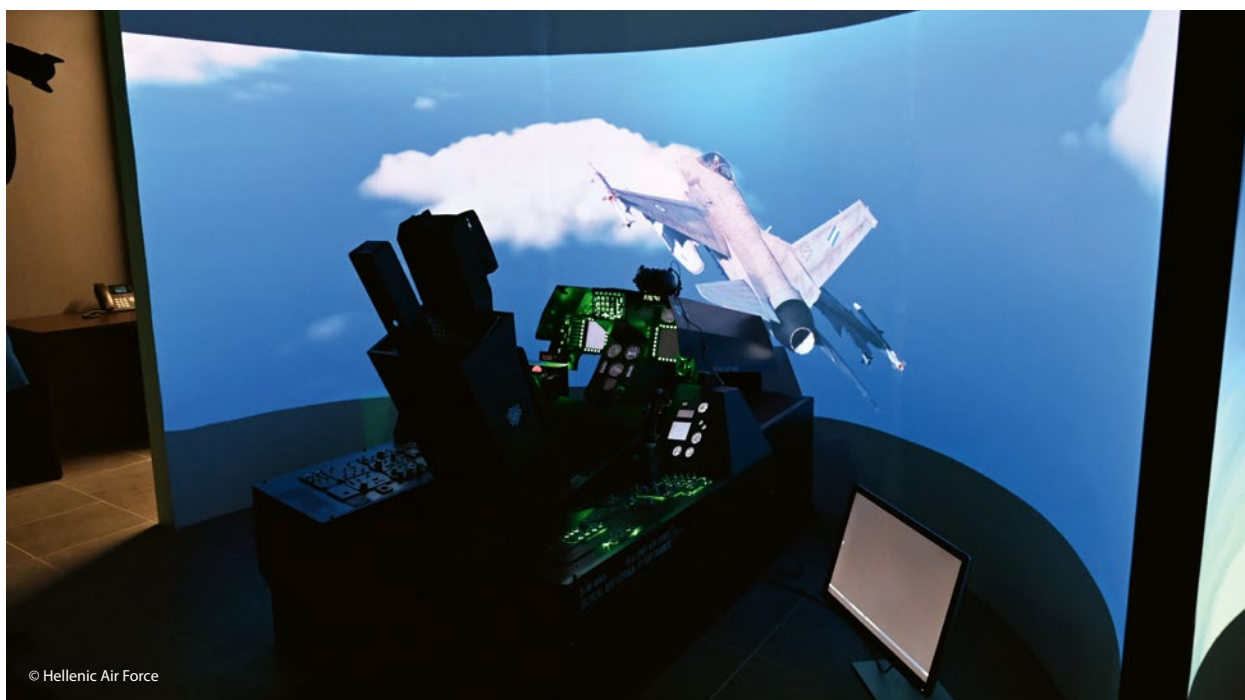
against a wide range of airborne threats, from ballistic and cruise missiles to advanced aircraft.

Greek air power has also been an essential addition to NATO's defence, through **air policing** and surveillance operations over the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkans. Our pilots play a vital role in securing Allied airspace, ensuring protection against unauthorized incursions and potential threats. Greece's strategic location allows us to act as a vigilant guardian of these critical air corridors, and our participation in numerous NATO missions underscores the professionalism and dedication of the HAF. By maintaining an advanced fleet of fighter jets and continuously upgrading our capabilities, Greece remains at the forefront of NATO's collective air defence efforts.

Furthermore, Greece has consistently demonstrated its commitment to NATO's crisis response and humanitarian efforts, actively supporting the Alliance's operations. Our strategic location enables us to provide essential logistical support for NATO missions in the Middle East and North Africa, whether during conflict or natural disasters. Greece regularly contributes to

disaster relief and humanitarian assistance missions, reflecting the values of solidarity and cooperation that define both our nation and the Alliance. Through these efforts, Greece upholds its role as a reliable partner and a key pillar in NATO's security architecture, contributing to global stability and regional security beyond our immediate borders.

Finally, our participation in joint air defence exercises, training programs, and information-sharing initiatives strengthens NATO's interoperability and overall air defence posture. By conducting regular drills and exercises with Allied forces, Greece enhances its ability to integrate seamlessly into NATO's air defence network and coordinate joint initiatives in support of Alliance objectives. Thus, the HAF, through its innovative training programs, has developed and utilized its brand new Live Virtual and Constructive concept of training via the Synthetic Training Squadron and through modern technologies. Under this capability, which allows us to conduct complex and joint tactical scenarios, the HAF supports training at various courses such as Ground Forces Support, Maritime Warfare Support, and Operations.



The HAF employs its innovative Live Virtual Constructive training concept, enabling complex joint tactical scenarios across courses like Ground Forces Support, Maritime Warfare, and Operations.

Adapting to Hybrid Threats: The Evolution of NATO's Airpower Doctrine

Moreover, hybrid threats and hybrid warfare pose significant challenges to NATO's security and stability, requiring a comprehensive and adaptive response. The HAF's participation in NATO's efforts to counter hybrid threats, including cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and irregular warfare tactics, underscores its commitment to collective defence and resilience in the face of multifaceted challenges.

[...] *'From the iconic Spitfires of World War II to the sleek F-16 Fighting Falcons and the Rafales of today, the HAF's journey has been one of adaptation, innovation, and unwavering dedication to excellence.'*

The modern landscape of military aviation demands a nuanced understanding of both historical precedent and future trajectory. In the age of asymmetrical warfare and rapid technological advancement, the ability to anticipate, adapt, and innovate defines the success of air power doctrine.

One of the fundamental lessons gleaned from recent conflicts is the need for **flexibility and interoperability** in air operations. No longer confined to traditional theatres of war, air forces must navigate complex, multidimensional battlegrounds where the lines between friend and foe blur with alarming frequency. This necessitates a paradigm shift in both strategy and tactics, where **agility and adaptability** reign supreme. In addition to that, the evolution of air power extends beyond the realm of traditional warfare to encompass a wide array of security challenges, including cyber warfare, information warfare, and hybrid threats. As the boundaries between physical and virtual battlegrounds blur, air forces must adapt to confront these new and evolving threats head-on.

In the pursuit of air superiority, modern Air Forces must embrace a multifaceted approach that combines advanced technology, strategic planning, and operational

excellence. The F-35 Lightning II, with its advanced capabilities, is a key enabler. Moreover, the ACE concept further maximizes the F-35's potential by enabling rapid dispersal and redeployment, enhancing responsiveness and resilience in dynamic threat environments. While managing the logistical and security aspects of ACE is crucial, the resulting increase in operational tempo and adaptability significantly strengthens the F-35's effectiveness, delivering a decisive advantage on the battlefield.

Furthermore, additional NATO investments in Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) must be in place to revolutionize the battlefield, offering the Alliance persistent surveillance, reconnaissance, and strike capabilities without the unnecessary exposure of airmen or more costly means. At the same time, in any future conflict, the **innovation cycle** must be significantly shortened from current expectations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that innovation cycles cannot extend beyond a few weeks; otherwise, the adversary will quickly develop countermeasures to neutralize our capabilities.

Readiness through Multinational Training: The Cornerstone of NATO's Commitment to Success

In addition to technological advancements, modern air forces must **prioritize training and readiness** to ensure their personnel are prepared to meet the challenges of 21st-century warfare. This includes proficiency in complex air-to-air and air-to-ground operations, as well as joint and multinational exercises such as **Ramstein Flag 2024 (RAFL 24)** to enhance interoperability and cooperation with Allied forces. This includes common training standards, shared Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs), and seamless communication and information-sharing mechanisms to ensure unity of effort and coordination in the event of a crisis or conflict.

The RAFL 24 exercise, held at Andravida Air Force Base in Greece, concluded from 30 September to 11 October, 2024, marking the first time this major NATO event was ever executed. The exercise brought together over 140



A Hellenic Air Force F-16V flies in formation with an F-35 over the Greek coastline, representing the transition to next-generation airpower as Greece prepares to integrate F-35s into its fleet in the coming years.

fighter and enabler aircraft, and more than 1,100 sorties were flown within the Athens Flight Information Region (FIR). Greece's leadership in facilitating this exercise highlighted its key role in multinational defence initiatives, leveraging its infrastructure and expertise.

Participants included 12 NATO nations such as France, which deployed Rafale jets and Airborne Early Warning (AEW) E-3F aircraft; Greece, contributing F-16s, Rafales, Mirage 2000-5s, and F-4Es; the US with F-35s and KC-135s; and a range of other nations like the UK, Spain, Italy, Canada, and Sweden, among others, bringing a diverse array of F-35s, Eurofighters, Gripens, and unmanned systems like the MQ-9. Notably, NATO's own AEW E-3A and AGS unmanned systems also took part, underscoring the Alliance's focus on IAMD.

This exercise exemplified NATO's focus on common training standards, shared TTPs, ensuring unity of effort in any future crisis. The exercise incorporated scenarios such as Counter Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), IAMD, Joint Engagement Zone Operations, Dynamic Targeting, and Air-to-Air Refuelling, emphasizing NATO's commitment to comprehensive defence strategies. These missions were conducted at a high operational tempo, day and night, mirroring the real-world challenges NATO forces might face.

Greece's extensive experience in hosting multinational exercises, particularly through INIOCHOS, was instrumental in ensuring the smooth execution of RAFL 24. The exercise, grounded in the 'Train as you Fight' concept, demonstrated the value of joint operational readiness and interoperability between NATO Allies, setting a new standard for future NATO exercises. It underscored the Alliance's commitment to maintaining peace and security across the Euro-Atlantic region by remaining adaptable and united in the face of emerging threats.

RAFL 24 not only showcased NATO's readiness to operate in contested environments, but also reinforced the bonds of cooperation and shared strategic purpose that are fundamental to the Alliance's strength. As NATO moves forward, RAFL 24 serves as a crucial milestone, enhancing the Alliance's ability to face modern threats with innovation, adaptability, and unparalleled coordination. By emphasizing training, readiness, and cooperation, it reinforced the bonds between Allied nations and ensured that NATO remains capable of defending the Euro-Atlantic region against evolving threats.

As we reflect on the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead, let us remain vigilant, united, and resolute in our pursuit of shaping superiority and security in the modern era. It is not only our capabilities that are tested

but also our resolve to uphold the principles of freedom, democracy, and solidarity that bind us together as members of the NATO Alliance. Now, more than ever, our collective strength lies not only in the advanced technologies and cutting-edge capabilities we possess, but also in the determined spirit of cooperation and camaraderie that defines us as Allies.

Shaping Airpower: Strategies for Superiority and Security

Looking ahead, the NATO 2030 initiative outlines a vision for the Alliance's future, emphasizing the need for greater **resilience, innovation, and strategic foresight**. As NATO air forces embrace this vision, they must remain vigilant in the face of evolving threats while also capitalizing on emerging opportunities to enhance collective security and stability. Thus, the journey towards shaping superiority and security in modern NATO air forces is an ongoing and dynamic process. It requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses not only traditional air force capabilities but also **agility**

and adaptability in the face of evolving threats. By embracing these principles and leveraging the collective strength of Allied air forces, NATO can navigate the complexities of the modern security landscape and safeguard the skies for generations to come.

In conclusion, Greece remains a steadfast security provider within NATO, contributing on land, at sea, and in the air to ensure the collective defence of the Alliance while promoting peace and stability in the region. In an era of evolving threats, NATO's modern air forces play a pivotal role in shaping air superiority and safeguarding the Alliance's security. By leveraging advanced technology, rigorous training, and enhanced cooperation, these forces can maintain a strategic edge over potential adversaries, project stability across NATO's borders, and uphold the core values of freedom, democracy, and solidarity. United in purpose, NATO air forces are prepared to confront 21st-century challenges and safeguard peace in the Euro-Atlantic region. Despite facing a myriad of geopolitical challenges, the Hellenic Air Force remains committed to shaping the superiority and security within NATO for years to come. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lieutenant General Dimosthenis Grigoriadis is the Chief of the Hellenic Air Force General Staff (HAFGS), assuming his duties on 12 January, 2024. Born in Thessaloniki, he joined the Hellenic Air Force Academy in 1983 and graduated in 1987 as a 2nd Lieutenant. With over 4,000 flight hours, he has flown F-5A/B, and F-16C/D aircraft. Prior to his current role,

he served as Commander of the HAF Support Command (January 2023–January 2024) and Deputy Chief of the HAFGS (March 2022–January 2023). As Chief, he oversees the organization, training, and equipping of all HAF personnel and serves as a military advisor to the Minister of National Defence as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Council.