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A Norwegian F-35 shadows a Russian military aircraft, reflecting the vigilance and readiness required to defend Allied airspace every day.

Sense, Make Sense, Act

Adapting Air Power for Air Defence

By Lieutenant General Jason T. Hinds,
Commander, Allied Air Command and Director, JAPCC

It is a privilege of a lifetime to assume command of Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) and serve as Director of the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC). As I look across this Alliance, from our newest members in the High North to the alert pads of the Southern Flank, I am struck by the dedication, leadership, and professionalism that our airmen bring to their units every single day. To everyone in this command, thank you. You are the shield of this Alliance.

I recognise that we do not have the luxury of easing into this new chapter. This is the most consequential time to serve in this command since the Cold War. The era of crisis management has ended; the era of collective defence is here. The threats we face, including

lethal unmanned systems, militarisation of space, and renewed high-intensity state competition, require us to eliminate complacency.

My guidance to this command is clear: NATO AIRCOM must continue to rapidly adapt to this new threat environment and work together as Allies and partners to remain ready for the high-end fight. Our mission is to deliver unparalleled allied Air and Space Power to deter aggression, and if deterrence fails, to win decisively. As airmen in charge of Air Command and Control, we are responsible for making the best use of Air and Space Power across SACEUR's area of responsibility (AOR) to achieve strategic and regional effects. We must have a clear vision, understand



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Lieutenant General Hinds (right) takes his place at the helm of Allied AIRCOM, as the colours and flags of the Alliance underscore the weight of command and the beginning of a new chapter.

our priorities, and address the challenges of today and tomorrow with urgency and resolve. Our mandate is simple: 'Fight Tonight, Fight Tomorrow, and Fight Together'.

The Strategic Anchor: Priorities and Urgency

AIRCOM's five foundational priorities remain unchanged: Counter Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD), Integrated Air and Missile Defence and Ballistic Missile Defence (IAMD and BMD), Air Command and Control (C2), Intelligence, Information and Data Sharing, and Agile Combat Employment (ACE). These priorities establish the structural basis that enables us to provide unparalleled Air and Space Power for the Alliance.

Although these priorities remain constant, the pace of implementation will accelerate. They are now daily operational imperatives rather than theoretical constructs. While we maintain comprehensive 360-degree threat awareness, the need for transformation is most urgent on the Eastern Flank. The operational environment in the East has fundamentally changed, requiring a corresponding adjustment in our posture. Enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA), Eastern Sentry, remains one of SACEUR's highest priorities. We must capitalise on the

momentum generated by this activity to deliver the defence design required for the Alliance.

The Great Transition: From Policing to Defence

For decades, we have relied on Air Policing, a peacetime mission designed to identify and escort non-hostile aircraft. That era is ending. We are now in a transition from Air Policing to Air Defence. I see eVA Eastern Sentry not just as a response, but as the primary vehicle to enable this transition into a true warfighting posture.

This is more than a change in semantics; it constitutes a doctrinal revolution. Air Policing is about law enforcement; Air Defence is about warfighting. The events of September 2025, where Russian drone incursions challenged the sovereignty of Allied airspace in Poland and Latvia, served as a wake-up call. They highlighted that in a hybrid environment, the distinction between peace and crisis is blurred. We responded rapidly with the launch of eVA Eastern Sentry, but now we must replace our reflexive response with a proactive strategy.

We are seeing progress. On 1 January 2026, the Croatian Air Force officially assumed full responsibility for its airspace within the NATO framework, using their newly



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B-1B Lancers fly above historic statuary, pairing modern long-range strike power with the enduring legacy of defence and deterrence that underpins the Alliance.

operational Rafale fleet. This seamless integration of national capability into the Allied network is the model we must replicate. To scale this effort, we are undertaking, under SHAPE leadership, a comprehensive rewrite of Standing Defence Plan (SDP) 11000 to align national and NATO plans, informed by initiatives such as the Layered Counter-UAS (LCI-X) beacon project. By implementing eVA Eastern Sentry and updating our defence plans, we are moving toward a posture of ‘Deterrence by Denial’.

Bending the Curves

As we operationalise this shift, we must address four important ‘curves’ that define our readiness:

- **The Cost Curve:** We must reverse the cost imposition strategy currently favoured by our adversaries. We cannot sustain a model where we fire multi-million-dollar interceptors at cheap, disposable drones. We must integrate ‘high-low’ mix effectors to ensure financial sustainability in a prolonged conflict.
- **The Production Curve:** Air Power requires both mass and precision. We must work with industry to ensure we have the capacity and readiness to produce munitions and platforms in reserve and on demand.
- **The Permission Curve:** The speed of modern warfare does not allow for burdensome political approval cycles during an engagement. We must anticipate and adapt our Rules of Engagement (ROE) and political approval to enable Air Defence at the tactical edge.

- **The Innovation Curve:** We must develop and use Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation to accelerate decision speed and adaptability, keeping us inside the adversary’s loop and on the right side of the cost curve.

Domain Awareness: Sense, Make Sense, Act

To fight effectively, we must master the cycle of Sense, Make Sense, and Act.

- **Sense:** We are integrating Multi-Domain Operations (MDO), unifying not only Land and Air components but also LANDCOM and MARCOM to enable awareness from the seabed to space. This involves leveraging Over-the-Horizon (OTH) technology, the Alliance Persistent Surveillance from Space (APSS) initiative, and passive detection systems.
- **Make Sense:** This is the role of C2. We are deploying tools like the Allied Exchange Environment (AXE) and Maven Smart Systems (MSS) to prioritise data sharing, fusion, and automation. We must synthesise vast amounts of sensor data into a coherent picture that allows commanders to understand the battlespace instantly.
- **Act:** We must deliver effects through a layered approach. This includes the high-low mix, integrating capabilities such as Switchblade drones onto MQ-9 Reapers to increase lethality while reducing risk to manned platforms. Acting means closing the kill chain in seconds, not minutes.



Allied aircraft fly in close formation above the clouds, reflecting the integration, reach, and shared readiness that define NATO Air Power today.

The View from JAPCC: Securing the Edge

I am proud to serve not only as AIRCOM Commander but also as Director of the JAPCC. These dual responsibilities directly reinforce each other; AIRCOM is ready to fight at any moment, while JAPCC relentlessly anticipates the future. Our Annual theme, Air Power at the Edge – Securing NATO’s New Frontiers, decisively applies the Sense, Make Sense, Act framework. JAPCC proactively identifies emerging challenges in the Arctic and Indo-Pacific, develops actionable roadmaps for Autonomous Collaborative Platforms, and codifies these innovations into NATO doctrine.

It is clear from this Journal that JAPCC has been hard at work. Following this article, Lieutenant General Holger Neumann, Chief of the German Air Force, outlines how national air forces are integrating into this

collective defence architecture, and Colonel Jonathan Whitaker, Chief of Staff, CFSpCC, explains how we are operationalising Space as a true warfighting domain.

Conclusion

Our nations demand excellence from AIRCOM, and I have full confidence that together we will continue to set the standard. Whether shifting from Air Policing to Air Defence to secure the East, or exploring the ‘edge’ of Space and Cyber to secure the future, our mission remains singular. We must be an AIRCOM team trained and ready to deliver decisive Air and Space Power for the Alliance, anytime, anyplace.

I look forward to our time together as we stand ready to ‘Fight Tonight, Fight Tomorrow, Fight Together’. ●



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lieutenant General Jason T. Hinds serves as Commander, US Air Forces in Europe, Commander, US Air Forces Africa, Commander, Allied Air Command at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and Director of the Joint Air Power Competence Centre in Kalkar, Germany. In these roles, he leads the air component to US European Command and US Africa Command, delivering full-spectrum air power across an area of responsibility spanning 104 nations throughout Europe, Africa, parts of Asia, and the Arctic and Atlantic regions, an area that includes more than a quarter of the world’s population and

economic output. Commissioned through Florida State University in 1996, he was a distinguished graduate of Joint Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training at Vance Air Force Base in 1997 and the F-15 Replacement Training Unit at Tyndall AFB in 1998. His career includes command of the 1st Fighter Wing and an F-22 squadron, and service as an F-22 instructor pilot and flight examiner, F-15C instructor pilot and weapons officer, and US Air Force Weapons School instructor. Prior to his current assignment, he served as Deputy Commander for US Air Forces in Europe and US Air Forces Africa.