



Aircraft carrier Cavour leads NATO response: Neptune Strike major exercise begins

Published on 17/10/2026

NAPLES – NATO has launched the fourth and final 2026 phase of **Neptune Strike**, the Atlantic Alliance's main *Enhanced Vigilance Activity*. The operation aims to strengthen deterrence and collective defense amid an increasingly complex international security environment.

Managed by NATO Naval Striking and Support Forces (**STRIKFORNATO**), the **Neptune Strike 26-4** exercise will extend from the Mediterranean Sea to the Baltic, simultaneously covering all three of the Alliance's joint operational areas.

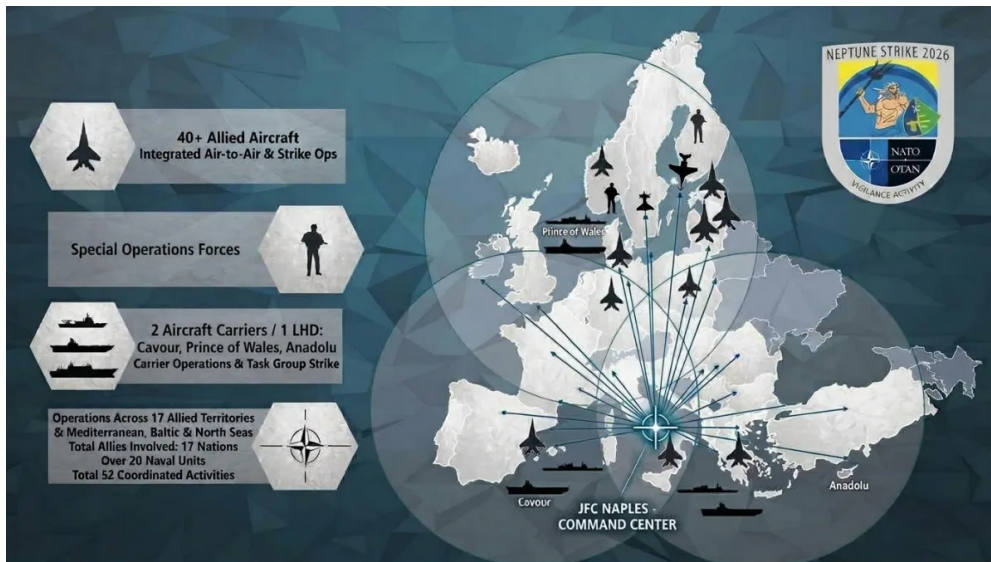
Operation figures and assets

The exercise involves the coordinated participation of a substantial multinational force:

- **17 Allied nations involved:** Albania, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

- **More than 20 naval vessels**, both surface ships and submarines.
- **40 aircraft** engaged in tactical and support missions.
- **Around 52 covert and integrated activities** across the maritime, air, land and amphibious domains.

Key naval assets and strike groups (*Expeditionary Strike Groups*) include the **Italian aircraft carrier Cavour**, the **Turkish amphibious assault ship Anadolu** and the **British aircraft carrier Prince of Wales**.



Responsiveness, interoperability and command chain

Coordinating the complex strategic architecture from the Naples operational hub is Joint Force Command Naples, where the position of Chief of Staff is held by **General Rodolfo Sganga**, a Paratrooper officer and former commander of the "Folgore" Brigade ("Aquila 1").

The primary objective of Neptune Strike is to integrate national maritime strike capabilities into a single, cohesive and highly interoperable NATO force, capable of providing the *Supreme Allied Commander Europe* (SACEUR) with flexible options across his entire area of responsibility.

Rear Admiral Eduardo Guitian Crespo (*Deputy Chief of Staff for STRIKFORNATO Operations*):

«Our task is to ensure that, when the Alliance calls, our forces are ready to act together, with speed, precision and determination. This confidence is built through rigorous planning, close coordination with Allied nations and daily work to transform national capabilities into

an integrated NATO force.»

The training activity is designed to provide a practical response to threats to Allied airspace and maritime security, with particular focus on challenges along NATO's eastern flank and on safeguarding freedom of navigation.

Admiral George Wikoff (*Commander of Joint Force Command Naples*):

«Neptune Strike is particularly relevant in the current security environment. It offers our Allies reassurance backed by credible military capability. It demonstrates that NATO is ready to defend Allied territory and deny a potential adversary the achievement of its objectives. Our purpose is to preserve peace, and we have the capability, cohesion and determination to defend it.»

A strategic and defensive framework

The Naples Command reiterates that all Neptune Strike maneuvers are **strictly defensive in nature** and are conducted in full compliance with international law and globally recognized maritime and air safety standards.