Change of Command at NISRF: NATO Intelligence Force at Sigonella Base

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On June 16, 2025, the Sigonella naval air base in Italy was the setting for a ceremony of great importance for NATO, which saw the change of command of the NATO Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Force (NISRF). Brigadier General John B. Creel (USA) officially took command of the unit, which has become a fundamental strategic pillar in NATO's operational capability. The NISRF, which is responsible for providing timely and high-quality intelligence to NATO decision-makers, is a multinational force of absolute relevance, capable of ensuring strategic and operational awareness of the forces deployed across the Alliance's territory.

The NISRF Force has its main operational base in Sigonella, a nerve center for NATO's surveillance and reconnaissance activities. Its capabilities, which include a fleet of RQ-4D "Phoenix" remotely piloted aircraft and a highly qualified team of analysts, place it in a unique position to monitor and collect essential data on ongoing operations, supporting crucial strategic

decisions. The NISRF has been recognized as a "fundamental pillar" for NATO, which through it maintains control over land and waters, addressing a variety of threats such as terrorism, maritime security, and ground force protection.

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During the ceremony, Air Marshal Johnny Stringer (United Kingdom) praised the transformation of the NISRF under the leadership of Brigadier General Andrew M. Clark, who led the unit since 2022. Under his direction, the NISRF has become an "impeccable, reliable, and indispensable" force, a change that has allowed the Alliance to operate in complex scenarios and ensure collective security in a timely and effective manner.

The Tenth Anniversary of NISRF and Its Operational Growth

The year 2025 marks a decade of operations for the NISRF, a milestone that has seen the evolution of the unit from an embryonic concept to a highly operational multinational force. Originally established in 2015 as the NATO Alliance Ground Surveillance Force, the NISRF has changed its structure and operational capability, evolving into a crucial air and ground intelligence force for NATO. Thanks to its fleet of RQ-4D aircraft, capable of conducting surveillance in any weather condition, the NISRF can ensure a complete and continuous view of areas under NATO responsibility.

During General Clark's management, the NISRF reached its initial operational capability, with the integration of RQ-4D "Phoenix" unmanned aircraft that significantly improved data collection

capabilities. This change represented a fundamental transition for the Alliance, as it allowed NATO to strengthen its surveillance and intelligence system, even in challenging contexts, both day and night. General Clark emphasized how, thanks to his leadership, the unit has moved from a theoretical concept to a concrete operational reality, which is today defined by its performance and the trust NATO places in it.

Furthermore, the NISRF plays a strategic role in ensuring situational awareness for the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), providing data and intelligence to support operations throughout the region. The Sigonella base, therefore, is not just a command center but represents an essential node within NATO's joint intelligence system.

The Future of NISRF and New Challenges under General Creel's Command

With Brigadier General John B. Creel taking command, the NISRF is ready to take another step forward in its development. General Creel brings with him extensive experience in the field of ISR operations, having served in numerous NATO commands and the United States Air Force. In his speech, the new commander emphasized that the NISRF is not just about advanced technology, but also about the people and partnerships that make up its beating heart. His leadership will focus on expanding and strengthening the foundations created by General Clark, continuing to provide effective surveillance in complex scenarios.

The NISRF is organized into three main components: the NISRF Operations Wing, which manages data collection and analysis operations, the NISRF Support Wing, which handles logistical and technical support, and the NISRF Training Center, which ensures the continuous preparation of personnel. This structured and integrated approach ensures that the unit is ready to respond to the ever-evolving challenges in the global security landscape. The training center, in particular, is crucial for maintaining a high level of competence among intelligence professionals, who are constantly updated to face new threats and emerging technologies.

With General Creel's new command, the NISRF will continue to play a central role in NATO's joint operations, contributing to ground force protection, crisis management, and assistance in the event of natural disasters. Its mission will increasingly focus on providing timely, accurate, and useful information, ensuring the collective security and operational readiness of the Alliance.

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The change of command ceremony not only marked a leadership transition but also reiterated the strategic importance of the NISRF, which will remain a crucial element for NATO's military operations and its ability to effectively respond to global security challenges.

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