



Drone vs Drone: NATO Tests the Merops Interceptor

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NOWA DĘBA (Poland) – A pickup truck parked on the sand, a launcher in the bed, and a small gray drone shooting into the sky in pursuit of another drone. This is the scenario of the joint exercise where U.S., Polish, and Romanian soldiers tested **a new counter-UAS (c-UAS) system** capable of intercepting unmanned aircraft by launching... other unmanned aircraft.

The activity, held on November 18 at the Nowa Dęba range, involved soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 57th Air Defense Artillery Regiment of the U.S. Army along with Polish and Romanian air defense units. The exercise concluded a two-week course that combined classroom lessons, simulations, practical training, and real launches of the new system.



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A “Pocket-Sized” Anti-Drone System for NATO

The core of the capability is **a mobile system that integrates radar, electro-optical sensors, and a small interceptor drone used as a “smart projectile”**. All components can be transported on light tactical vehicles or directly in the bed of a pickup truck, as demonstrated in Poland. A team of four people is sufficient to set up the system, put it into battery, engage the target, and reload in a few minutes.

In practice, the radar and sensors detect an approaching hostile UAS, track its path, and guide the interceptor drone, which is launched from an inclined ramp on the vehicle. The interceptor flies at high speed towards the target and neutralizes it with kinetic impact – a classic case of “drone-on-drone.”

Interceptors Reused in Training, Sacrificable in Combat

During the Nowa Dęba exercise, crews engaged small simulated UAS targets, then recovered the interceptors using a parachute, allowing them to be reused in future training.

In combat, however, these drones are intended as consumable munitions: they are sacrificed to take down low-cost threats, particularly the one-way attack drones – the so-called “suicide drones” – that Russia extensively uses in Ukraine. The same type of interceptor has already been employed on the Ukrainian front against Russian UAS, providing real operational data before being deployed on NATO soil.

The commander of the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, Gen. Curtis King, highlighted three key points of the system: **lethality, effectiveness, and above all, economic convenience**, emphasizing that it is “cutting-edge technology being fought in Ukraine right now.”



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The “Merops” and the Lesson of Drone Incursions

Several open sources identify the system used in Poland as the Merops, an economical interceptor developed by the U.S. company Project Eagle. The Merops is designed to strike enemy drones **flying at over 240 km/h** and can operate even in environments saturated with electronic interference, thanks to artificial intelligence navigation functions that reduce reliance on GPS and radio links.

Poland and Romania have ordered the system following a series of incidents where unidentified drones – attributed by NATO to Russia – repeatedly violated their airspace and that of other European countries.

A Piece of the Eastern Sentry Shield

The training at Nowa Dęba is part of the broader Alliance effort to strengthen air defense on the eastern flank through Operation Eastern Sentry, launched in September after a massive Russian drone incursion into Poland.

The mission aims to integrate air, naval, and land resources – from fighters to air defense batteries, to sensors and unmanned systems – into a single layered defense architecture, the Eastern Flank Deterrence Line. In this framework, short-range c-UAS systems like **Merops constitute the “first line” against drones and small UAS**, preserving long-range missiles for more complex threats like aircraft, cruise missiles, or ballistic missiles.

Meanwhile, in Brussels, discussions are underway on complementary initiatives such as the “Eastern Flank Watch” and a “European Drone Wall,” designed to make defense against low-intensity aerial and hybrid attacks more sustainable, which are multiplying along the border with Russia.



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Why It Matters

The experience of the war in Ukraine has shown that using traditional systems – expensive fighters and missiles – to shoot down drones costing a few thousand euros is an unsustainable strategy in the long term. For this reason, **Kiev is also investing in mass-produced interceptor drones**, following the same logic of cost reduction and volume increase that NATO is now trying to apply on its own territory.

The demonstration in Poland shows that solutions of this type are no longer just prototypes, but real capabilities that can be transported on a simple pickup truck, set up in a few minutes, and integrated into broader defense networks. For countries like Poland and Romania, which are closely experiencing the consequences of the war in Ukraine, these systems represent a quick

and relatively inexpensive way to fill a critical gap in airspace defense.

For the Alliance, finally, the Nowa Dęba test is a proving ground for something even more ambitious: the ability to rapidly absorb the lessons of an ongoing conflict, transform them into concrete systems, and deploy them in a coordinated manner along the entire eastern flank.

News link: <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/merops-nightmare-for-russia-cheap-u-s-interceptor-drones/>