



George M. Wikoff is the new Commander of JFC Naples

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LAGO PATRIA (Naples) – The 33rd Change of Command ceremony of the Allied Joint Force Command Naples (JFC Naples) took place today at the headquarters in Lago Patria.

During the ceremony, U.S. Navy Admiral **George M. Wikoff** assumed command of JFC Naples from Admiral **Stuart B. Munsch**. Admiral Wikoff will hold one of the most significant U.S. military roles in Europe, simultaneously assuming command of the **U.S. Naval Forces Europe** and **U.S. Naval Forces Africa**.

The ceremony was presided over by the **Supreme Allied Commander Europe** and Commander of the U.S. European Command, U.S. Air Force General **Alexus G. Grynke**, and the Commander of the U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Air Force General **Dagvin R.M. Anderson**.

In the presence of the highest civil and military authorities, the **Chief of Defense Staff, Army Corps General Luciano Portolano**, and the Commander of the Joint Operational Command

(COVI), **Army Corps General Iannucci**, were also present, confirming Italy's strong and constant contribution to NATO's command structures.



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A crucial moment for the Alliance

In his speech, General Grynkewich welcomed Admiral Wikoff to NATO, highlighting the delicacy of the current strategic moment.

"In light of the alignment of our adversaries and instability in our region and beyond, Admiral Wikoff takes office at a crucial time," he stated, emphasizing how the new Commander is the right officer to lead the Alliance through any challenge. "You have my full confidence – as well as that of the military leaders of all 32 nations of the Alliance."

General Grynkewich also paid tribute to the achievements of JFC Naples under Admiral Munsch's leadership:

"As the Alliance refocused on the core tasks of deterrence and defense, JFC Naples, under Admiral Munsch's leadership, fully answered the call. You have transformed the Command into a true warfighting headquarters, maintaining leadership over NATO's most challenging missions and operations."

Addressing the military and civilians of the command, he then emphasized the value of their service:

"We rely on you to protect our countries forward and contribute to the security of a billion citizens living in NATO countries."

Admiral Munsch's command: from plan to action

Admiral Munsch, who assumed command of JFC Naples on June 27, 2022, led the headquarters in its transformation process into a modern **war-fighting headquarters**. His action focused on three main lines:

- shaping the operational environment,
- exercising and testing the Alliance's defense plans,
- promoting professional growth and cohesion among Allies.

"I am immensely proud of the multinational team here in Naples and what we have achieved together to build a command truly dedicated to conducting operations," stated Admiral Munsch. "Our collective commitment has substantially strengthened NATO's deterrence and defense posture on the Southern Flank and beyond."

During his tenure, JFC Naples has:

- **Strengthened security, stability, and partnerships** in the area of responsibility;
- Managed **five rotations of Kosovo Force (KFOR) Commanders**, facing the highest levels of violence in Kosovo since the 1999 war on two occasions, helping to prevent an escalation of the conflict and a return to large-scale war;
- **Increased political-military dialogue**, with over 300 meetings with key Alliance leaders, fostering greater availability of national forces and resources in support of NATO;
- Hosted **four editions of the Southern Commanders' Coordination Conference (SCCC)**, dedicated to strengthening security and stability in Africa and the Middle East.

"The strength of NATO lies in the enduring trust built among Allies, which represents the foundation of our collective security," recalled Admiral Munsch. "We cannot 'improvise' trust in times of crisis: that is why we consciously cultivate it every day."



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Operational readiness and large-scale exercises

Under his leadership, JFC Naples boosted operational readiness by moving from mere planning to the **actual implementation of the Alliance's defense plans**.

The Command successfully led the development and validation of the **Regional Plan - Southeast**, the first organic wartime planning effort for Europe's Southern Flank since the end of the Cold War, while promoting the integration of national defense plans into NATO's overall framework.

JFC Naples also directed major training activities, including:

- conducting **Exercise STEADFAST DART 2025**, which tested on a large scale the rapid deployment of forces on the Alliance's Eastern Flank and marked the first large-scale operational deployment of the **Allied Reaction Force (ARF)**;
- the **first deployment of the ARF in the Western Balkans** in support of KFOR, to verify its rapid response capability;
- oversight of NATO's **enhanced Vigilance Activities**, including the **NEPTUNE STRIKE** series, which demonstrated the Alliance's ability to rapidly integrate Carrier Strike Groups and Expeditionary Strike Groups and conduct multi-domain operations in Europe, including in the Black Sea for the first time.

“To deter conflict, we must be ready to fight from tonight,” emphasized Admiral Munsch. “This meant moving from planning possible missions to testing, through realistic exercises, the collective defense plans, until they become an integrated and fluid action across all domains.”

During the ceremony, Admiral Munsch was awarded the **NATO Meritorious Service Medal** by General Grynkewich, the **U.S. Navy Distinguished Service Medal** by General Anderson, and the **Order of Merit of the Italian Republic** by General Portolano.

Admiral Wikoff: continuity and commitment to collective defense

Admiral Wikoff arrives in Naples from his previous role as **Commander of the United States Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. Fifth Fleet, and Combined Maritime Forces**, held since 2024.

Assuming command, he assured his intention to continue on the path set by his predecessor, further strengthening JFC Naples' role as a key command on the Alliance's Southern Flank:

“I look forward to relentlessly strengthening our allied collective defense through an innovative approach focused on combat capability, operational readiness, and partnerships,” stated Admiral Wikoff.

With this changeover and the work of Paratrooper Army Corps General **Rodolfo Sganga**, Chief of Staff, the Allied Joint Force Command Naples confirms its role as NATO's operational hub in the Mediterranean and on the Alliance's southern fronts, ready to **deter, defend, and, if necessary, fight** for the security of all Allies.

News link: <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/newsroom/news/news-archive/2025/change-of-command-ceremony-at-allied-joint-force-command-naples>