Italy at the center of NATO air defense: Poggio Dart 25 concluded and a new Air Policing Exercise with France

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Italy confirms its role as a reference point in the security of European airspace through two important training activities conducted between November and December 2025: **Poggio Dart 25**, a major NATO integrated air defense exercise, and **APEX Foxtrot**, a bilateral Air Policing simulation with France.

Two distinct events, but united by a single goal: to ensure a credible, interoperable air defense system ready to respond to any threat.

Poggio Dart 25: the Italian Air Force leads the Alliance's integrated air defense

From **November 24 to December 4, 2025**, the Poggio Renatico Range hosted the **PODA25**, one of the most complex NATO exercises dedicated to Command and Control (C2) and

integrated air and missile defense.

Directed by the **Deployable Air Command and Control Centre (DACCC)**, the exercise brought together assets and personnel from multiple Alliance nations, consolidating the ability to operate in a **multidomain**, **multinational** context with high technological standards.

A Turkish F-4 fighter taking off from the 51st Wing base in Istrana during the Poggio Dart 25 exercise - Copyright Italian Air Force

Assets and units involved

Italy deployed a wide range of operational capabilities:

- **F-35, EF-2000, Tornado PA-200**
- **C-130J** for tactical transport
- **KC-767A** for aerial refueling
- **P-72A** for maritime patrol
- **MQ-9A** and **E-550A CAEW** for ISR and C2

These were joined by:

- **F-35B and AV-8B** from the Navy
- **JTAC from the Italian Army**
- Allied assets, including **USAF F-16s** from Aviano and **Turkish F-4s** deployed in Istrana

The MQ-9A drone for ISR operations of the 32nd Wing of Amendola (Foggia) used during Poggio Dart 25 - Copyright Italian Air Force

C2, interoperability, and ACE concept

The PODA25 also represented an advanced testing ground for the **Agile Combat Employment (ACE)** concept, thanks to the deployment in Cervia of the **Deployable Air Defence Radar (DADR)**, integrated into the NATO air and missile defense system.

The missions – interceptions, escorts, simulated defense and attack activities – were coordinated through a solid C2 system, reinforced by the contribution of the **NATO E-3A AWACS**, which improved real-time situational awareness.

Statements

Major General Luca Maineri, Commander of the DACCC, highlighted:

> *“With the PODA25 exercise, the DACCC strengthens the Alliance's Defense Forces' ability to operate as a unit in a modern and complex context, ensuring security and operational readiness in every scenario.”*

The PODA25 confirmed the DACCC's ability to operate as an **autonomous command node**, fully integrated with the NATO network and independent of fixed infrastructures.

An F-35B fighter from the Navy: Poggio Dart 25 was one of the most complex NATO exercises dedicated to Command and Control (C2) and integrated air and missile defense, with a strong joint forces connotation - Copyright Italian Air Force

Italy–France Air Policing: the APEX Foxtrot exercise strengthens common defense

On **November 18**, the bilateral exercise **APEX Foxtrot** took place, aimed at testing cooperation between Italy and France in managing complex air defense scenarios.

Directed by the French command **CAPCODA** and conducted together with the **Aerospace Operations Command (COA)** of Poggio Renatico, the activity simulated a **hijacked civilian flight (“renegade”)** scenario, one of the most delicate profiles in European Air Policing.

The exercise, directed by the French CAPCODA and conducted with the COA of Poggio Renatico, simulated the management of a hijacked civilian flight (“renegade scenario”) to test operational readiness and cross-border cooperation between the two countries - Copyright Italian Air Force

Operational activities

During the simulation:

- The **Eurofighter Typhoons of the 4th Wing** operated in coordination with the **French Rafale Cs**
- The missions were initially managed by the French centers, then handed over to the **22nd DAMI Group** once entering Italian airspace
- Constant coordination with civilian air traffic control entities (Milan and Rome SCCAM)

Objectives and interoperability

The exercise consolidated:

- The **sharing of tactical information** (situational awareness)
- The procedures for **cross-border handover**
- Alignment with **NATO standards** for Air Policing

An activity that confirms the operational cooperation between two of Europe's most advanced air forces.

The DAMI Groups

The **22nd DAMI Group of Licola** and the **11th DAMI Group of Poggio Renatico** are the units of the Italian Air Force responsible for the detection, identification, and control of national and NATO airspace **24/7, 365 days a year**, under the Aerospace Control Brigade.

At the border between Italian and French airspace, the exercise between the two countries took place to test common air defense procedures - Copyright Italian Air Force

Conclusion

The combination of a large-scale multinational exercise like **Poggio Dart 25** and a targeted bilateral cooperation activity like **APEX Foxtrot** offers a clear picture of the current state of Italian air defense: a fully **interoperable**, **technologically advanced** system, **integrated into the NATO network** and **constantly trained** for real and complex scenarios.
A continuous commitment that ensures the security of national airspace and contributes concretely to strengthening Europe's defensive posture.

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