NATO's Phoenix Flies Over the Baltic: New ISR Strategy Begins from Pirkkala

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June 2025 marks a turning point for NATO's Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Force (NISRF), with the operational activation of the high-altitude, long-endurance (HALE) remotely piloted aircraft RQ-4D *Phoenix* from the Finnish airbase of Pirkkala. For the first time, the Alliance has projected this advanced capability into Nordic territory, demonstrating its operational flexibility across the entire perimeter of the Alliance.

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This deployment confirms the evolution of the concept of “advanced ISR capability,” transformed into concrete action. The use of the *Phoenix* allows for persistent surveillance over strategic areas for thousands of kilometers, contributing to rapid, informed, and effective decisions. All this was made possible by impeccable logistics: the Portuguese Air Force managed the swift and professional transport of NISRF equipment and personnel from the Sigonella base to Pirkkala, a tangible testament to allied readiness and cooperation.

As highlighted by NATO's Allied Air Command, the *Phoenix* represents a force multiplier that strengthens collective security in a region, the Baltic and Arctic, increasingly crucial from a geopolitical perspective.

Cooperation, Interoperability, and Human Resources

The deployment in Finland offered not only operational benefits but also exceptional human and professional value. General Janne Jaakkola, Commander of the Finnish Defence Forces, emphasized the symbolic and strategic importance of the event:

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> "*It is an honor for Finland to host such a capability. For a small nation, a capability of this kind is beyond our reach. But as a member of the Alliance, it is now also at our disposal.*"

His words echo the essence of NATO: an alliance where the most advanced capabilities become shared assets, strengthening the sense of belonging and internal cohesion. General Jaakkola also reiterated how the initiative has fostered mutual learning:

> "*We learn from each other, learning to operate in different environments, both in terms of hardware, software, but above all human resources. After this successful deployment, we know each other better, we know the procedures and the way of working.*"

This experience has indeed allowed Finnish personnel and the multinational NISRF team to integrate operationally, improving the understanding of respective doctrines and consolidating mutual trust. Brigadier General John B. Creel, Commander of the NISRF, spoke openly about *Agile Combat Employment* as a guiding concept:

> "*We project capable and mission-ready forces, flexible, unpredictable, and responsive wherever they are needed.*"

Strategy and Vision for the Future of the Alliance

Beyond the technical success, the deployment of the *Phoenix* in Pirkkala represents a strategic lesson for the entire NATO. The ability to rapidly transfer such a complex system to a new operational area demonstrates that the Alliance is ready to face dynamic environments and ever-evolving situations.

Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Gonzalez-Carnero, Commander of the NISRF Detachment, highlighted the professionalism and adaptability of the personnel:

> "*Our personnel adapted quickly and effectively to the unique environment here in Finland, working in conditions very different from our base in Sigonella.*"

The future of NATO also involves the integration of next-generation ISR capabilities in increasingly diverse geographical and operational contexts. The success of Pirkkala lays the groundwork for future deployments in other sensitive regions of the Alliance, with the aim of ensuring informational superiority, speed of action, and credible deterrence.

In conclusion, the operation in Finland represented much more than a simple exercise: it was a concrete demonstration of NATO's modern vision, where technology, people, and strategic cooperation merge to tackle the challenges of the present and the future.

News link: https://ac.nato.int/archive/2025-2/from-concept-to-capability-nisrf-operates-the-nato-rq4d-phoenix-from-finland