



Neptune Strike 26-1: NATO's Naval Elite Deployed in the Mediterranean

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From **March 25 to April 1, 2026**, the Central and Western Mediterranean become the focal point of **Neptune Strike 26-1**, NATO's main enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA). Coordinated by the **STRIKFORNATO** command in Oeiras (Portugal), the operation mobilizes firepower and strategic projection capability that unites European naval excellence.

Three Strike Groups for 360-Degree Defense

The integration of maritime forces features three pillars of European defense:

- **Italy:** The Carrier Strike Group of the aircraft carrier **Cavour**, escorted by the destroyer **Caio Duilio** and the frigate **Virginio Fasan**.
- **Spain:** The amphibious assault group of the **Juan Carlos I**.
- **France:** The strategic support of the aircraft carrier group **Charles de Gaulle**.

Projection from Sea to Continent

The exercise is not limited to the maritime domain. Thanks to the synergy between **fourth and fifth generation** fighters (such as the F-35B embarked on the Cavour) and the support of **RQ-4D** drones from the *NATO Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Force* (NISRF) in Sigonella, the range extends across the entire European continent.

The missions include:

- **Engagement of land targets:** Long-range attack simulations in ranges located in **Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania**.
- **Presence in the Black Sea:** Operations in international airspace to ensure constant vigilance on the Alliance's southeastern flank.
- **Multidomain Interoperability:** Demonstration of NATO's ability to strike with precision by coordinating air, land, and naval assets.

A Global Coalition

Although Mediterranean-led, Neptune Strike 26-1 sees the contribution of **12 nations**: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, and the United States.

"Conceived in 2020, the Neptune Strike series demonstrates NATO's speed in integrating multinational forces. These are defensive activities, planned long-term and fully compliant with international law, adapted to respond promptly to global scenario developments."

The Role of Italy

For the **Italian Carrier Strike Group**, this iteration represents the culmination of a journey of operational maturity. It is not just about border defense, but about exercising **active deterrence** that protects freedom of navigation and stabilizes vital trade routes, confirming Italy as a pivot of security in the "Wider Mediterranean".