



# ‘Steadfast Noon,’ NATO’s nuclear deterrence exercise, gets underway in Italy

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From **13 October**, Italian skies will be the main setting for the **Steadfast Noon** exercise, NATO's most important annual simulation for managing nuclear deterrence and response operations. The training event will last ten days and involve **17 NATO member countries**, demonstrating increased participation and coordination compared with the 14 allies in 2025 and 13 in 2024.

Aeronautica Militare and NATO leaders have confirmed that **no live nuclear weapons of any kind will be used**: the exercise will focus exclusively on training in tactical procedures, operational flow management, and the security of joint operations.

## Bases and airspace involved

Operations in Italy will be centered on the following air bases:

- **Aviano** (Pordenone) and **Ghedi** (Brescia), key logistics hubs for NATO air forces in Italy;
- Support bases within the national and allied network, including Amendola, Gioia del Colle, and Trapani.

Flight routes will cover wide areas of Italian and neighboring countries' airspace, with dedicated training areas including corridors over the **central Tyrrhenian Sea** (between Sardinia, Lazio, and Campania).

## Assets of the NATO countries involved

Approximately **60 aircraft** of various types are taking part in the exercise, including:

- Conventional/nuclear dual-capable fighters and bombers (DCA - *Dual-Capable Aircraft*);
- Reconnaissance aircraft, aerial refueling tankers and AWACS aircraft;
- Aircrews and specialized ground personnel, including logistical support from the **United States**.

Prominent allied air forces, including Turkey, are among the participants. **France** remains excluded, in keeping with its longstanding decision to keep its nuclear deterrent separate from NATO's *Nuclear Planning Group*. NATO nonetheless welcomed the European "enhanced deterrence" initiative backed by President Emmanuel Macron.

## The geopolitical context and the Alliance's messages

The exercise is taking place amid persistent international tensions, heightened by a recent *non-paper* sent by Moscow accusing the Alliance of "irresponsible" actions near the Kaliningrad exclave.

NATO leaders have clarified the key points of the operation:

*"Steadfast Noon has been planned for some time, is not linked to current world events, and is not directed against any country."*

— **Official NATO statement**

*"The exercise helps ensure a safe, secure, effective, and credible capability to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression, sending a clear message of unity."*

— **Mark Rutte**, NATO Secretary General

**Nassima Barrows**, NATO's head of nuclear policy, and Colonel **David Bull**, head of nuclear operations, reiterated that the event follows established procedures and that the strategic positions of Brussels and Rome on the nature of the training are fully aligned.