The Sixth Generation Axis: After Germany, Poland Also Aims at GCAP

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The global air defense landscape is undergoing an accelerated metamorphosis. In March 2026, **Poland** broke the ice by officially declaring its interest in the **Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP)**. This move follows just weeks after Germany's strategic opening, marking a potential "domino effect" that could transform the Italian-British-Japanese project into the de facto standard for NATO air forces and its Pacific allies.

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What is GCAP: Beyond the Concept of "Fighter"

The **Global Combat Air Programme** is not simply about building a new airplane. Launched in December 2022, it is a sixth-generation **"system of systems"** aiming for full operational capability by **2035**.

The core of the project is a heavy stealth fighter that will serve as a digital "mothership," integrating:

- **Combat Artificial Intelligence:** To manage the pilot's information overload.
- **Loyal Wingmen:** Autonomous drones flying in formation with the fighter, executing radar jamming or ground attack missions.
- **Integrated Sensors:** Newly designed radars capable of acting as microwave weapons to fry enemy electronics.
- **High-Efficiency Engines:** Developed by Rolls-Royce and IHI to ensure supersonic cruises without afterburner (supercruise).

Germany's Move: Pragmatism Beats Ideology

At the beginning of 2026, **Germany** shook European diplomatic tables. Historically a partner of France in the competing **FCAS** (*Future Combat Air System*) program, Berlin began looking at GCAP for chronological and industrial needs.

- **The Time Factor:** While GCAP aims for 2035, the Franco-German FCAS is plagued by cross-vetoes between Airbus and Dassault Aviation, pushing the delivery date to 2045. Germany cannot afford a decade of air inferiority.
- **The Role of Italy:** Rome has played a crucial "bridge" role. The Italian Defense Minister kept channels open with Berlin, emphasizing how GCAP's modularity allows the integration of new partners without compromising development speed.

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Poland: From US Dependence to European Sovereignty

The announcement on March 23, 2026, by Polish Deputy Minister **Konrad Gołota** highlights an ambitious strategy. Warsaw, already purchasing 32 F-35 fighters from the United States, now wants to move from a mere customer to a **technological partner**.

> "*Our aerospace industry requires development. In recent decades we have not produced aircraft in Poland," Gołota told TVP Info.*

Joining GCAP would offer Poland:

1. **Technology Transfer:** Direct involvement of the state giant **PGZ** in the production of components and software.
2. **Strategic Autonomy:** Participating in development means being able to maintain and upgrade its aircraft internally, without being totally dependent on Washington.

3. **Political Weight:** Sitting at the table with the United Kingdom, Italy, and Japan elevates Poland's rank within the global military hierarchy.

The Challenges of Integration

Despite the enthusiasm, the entry of two new giants like Germany and Poland poses significant challenges:

- **The Industrial "Pie":** The founding members (BAE Systems, Leonardo, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries) have already defined much of the division of labor. The inclusion of Airbus (Germany) and PGZ (Poland) will require a complex renegotiation of production shares.
- **Governance:** The program is managed by the **GIGO** (*GCAP International Government Organisation*). The addition of new governments could slow down decision-making processes that have so far been surprisingly fast compared to European standards.

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Towards Global Hegemony

If Germany and Poland formalize their accession by the end of the year, the GCAP would become the largest defense project on the planet outside the United States.

With **Great Britain** ensuring the link with "Five Eyes" intelligence, **Japan** covering the Pacific theater, and the **Italy-Germany-Poland** trio overseeing Europe, the GCAP would no longer be just an aircraft, but the backbone of global security for the second half of the 21st century.

News link: https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2026/03/23/poland-eyes-benefits-of-joining-gcap-sixth-generation-fighter-project/