

Exercise Air Defender 2023



Peter ten Berg recounts the exercise and gives details on...

After years of extensive and thorough preparation, one of the largest exercises took off over Germany and surrounding countries early June, "Air Defender 2023". According to the German organisers, the size of this international exercise had not be seen before and therefore unique according earlier NATO standards. Around 250 aircraft and 10,000 servicemen out of 25 countries, were only some of the key figures which underlined the enormous scale of the air drill of NATO members over North-West Europe.

X-large

International exercises often try to have the majority of participants gathered at one base, to leverage on logistic and support, but also benefit with multi force mission briefings for flight crew as well as mass de-briefs to gain insight and understanding for the overall missions. Exercise samples include the US "Red Flag", "Anatolian Eagle" in Turkey and "Iniochos" in Greece. For Air Defender (AD) this was no option due to the extra large size this



exercise was aiming at. Throughout Germany, airfields were selected to base the aircraft which were all close to 3 defined airspace areas dedicated for the area. A central role was assigned for Northern Germany with Main Operating Bases (MOB) Schleswig-Jagel and only 15km further away located Hohn, where a majority of the international fighter aircraft were

based. 200 kms south of the fighter MOB's, was Wunstorf, homebase of the Airbus A-400 transport fleet of the German 62nd Transport Wing and for Air Defender acting as the main logistic hub port. Other important airfields with based and or deployed exercise aircraft included Lechfeld, Neuburg, Laage, Spangdahlem and Geilenkirchen. Additionally some foreign countries had their aircraft operating out of their home base, like Dutch F-16's and F-35's, Belgian F-16's and Polish F-16's, or foreign airbases acted as temporary Forward Operating Base (FOB) like Lielvarde in Baltic state Latvia and Caslav in the Czech Republic.

2018

German Air Force Inspector General Ingo Gerhartz explained that the Air Defender exercise had nothing to do with the invasion of Russia into Ukraine of February last year and the subsequent war. General Gerhartz explained to media that the Air Defender exercise is of such a size that years of planning are essential and that