

Baltic Air Sovereignty Training Event (Bast-E) On 21 October 2008

In the October 2008 edition of *The Ramstein Sword* an article was written entitled 'Baltic Air Policing – Solidarity Among Partners'. Summarizing, since spring 2004, NATO has been directly supporting the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania under the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS) umbrella and providing aircraft required for Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) and Air Policing on a rotational basis. This article reports on a recent Training Event conducted as a visible sign to the population of Estonia, Latvia and



A US F-15 Eagle flies toward boom of a KC-135

Photo by USAF Sr Airman Miranda Moore

The Baltic States



Lithuania of NATO's presence to ensure their air sovereignty.

The Baltics provide a unique setting for QRA/Air Policing aircraft as the area is surrounded by NATO nations, PFP Nations and neutral countries in close proximity to Russia and Belarus. In addition, the Kaliningrad Oblast, which is part of Russian territory, is surrounded by NATO Nations with the international airspace over the Baltic Sea as the only unrestricted 'way in and out'. The Baltic area falls within the remit of Combined Air Operations Centre 2 (CAOC2) at Uedem, Germany, which works closely with the Command and Reporting Centre (CRC) at Karmelava, Lithuania.

During a recent visit to the Baltics by CC-Air Ramstein's Deputy Commander, Air Marshal David Walker, high-ranking leaders from the Baltic Region requested the opportunity to hold additional air-related training which CC-Air Ramstein offered to conduct. In addition to reinforcing NATO's resolve and commitment to the Baltic Nations through



a BAST-E, an event that would also provide the opportunity to:

- Train personnel and validate procedures within APA2.
- Execute C2 functions of the Integrated Air Defence.
- Conduct intra-regional coordination, airspace management, cross-boundary operations and information exchange.
- Enhance interoperability of the Baltics and other neighbouring NATO countries.
- Ensure air sovereignty.

Within a month operational planning at Ramstein was completed by the distribution of a CC-Air Ramstein Operations Order, incorporating design development of the air operation. Further detailed planning was conducted in conjunction with the Air Tasking Order (ATO) process in order to save preparation time. The event was planned to take place on 21 October 08 with alternative weather back-up days of 22 and 23 October 08. The overall idea was to bring air defence assets into the three Baltic States from abroad for a sustained period of time and without forward basing. Though not an exercise, this was a challenging training event primarily aimed to conduct an intense and realistic training opportunity for CRC Karmelava and its full in-



Polish F-16 – an aircraft of this type participated in BAST-E

Photo: POL AF M Wojtowicz POL F-16

tegration into NATINADS. Participating in the event were USAF F-15s and KC-135s, based in the United Kingdom as well as Polish and Danish F-16s. Czech aircraft originally planned to participate were withdrawn just prior to the event due to scheduling conflicts.

With planning complete and good weather, three separate waves launched during the day with tanker support. Incoming and outbound fast jet flights were intercepted and visually identified by the QRA(I) assets, located at Siauliai Air Base. After the initial interception the first wave focused on 1v1 air-to-air missions. The second wave conducted 2v2 with a pair of Danish F-16s. The third wave once again

conducting 2v2 missions with Polish F-16s. These air-to-air missions provided excellent training opportunities for the CRC Karmelava. In a mentorship role, the US provided a Fighter Controller to the CRC for the event.

During execution QRA aircraft conducted low approaches over two of the three national capitals to 'show the flag'. The Riga fly-over was cancelled due to civil Air Traffic Control (ATC) restrictions.

Overall assessment of the training event was that it fulfilled the objectives and intent as laid out in the OPORD. It highlighted successful C2 functions and information exchange was achieved seamlessly within the CRC. There were no significant issues with ATC or cross-boundary operations.

Through BAST-E, NATO has again demonstrated that preserving the integrity of NATO airspace is a collective task and that agreements exist to ensure a single standard of security within NATO's area of responsibility, even for those NATO Nations lacking the full range of Air Defence assets within their own military. By training the Air Policing standard tactics, techniques and procedures among Allies, NATO can reduce air incidents and improve air security to the benefit of the whole region. This is not achieved without the requisite routine training such as BAST-E.



Danish F-16AM Fighting Falcon

Photo: Courtesy Royal Danish Air Force Danish F-16AM

