

# Soaring Eagles

Peter R Foster visited Konya air base in Turkey to report on this year's Anatolian Eagle exercise



*The RSAF has always been a keen supporter of Anatolian Eagle, deploying a variety of types over the years. The Eagles from No 13 Squadron undertook a variety of missions as part of Blue Air forces – F-15D 1331 departs to fly 'sweep' for the main package.*

**T**HE ANNUAL International Anatolian Eagle exercise held at Turkey's Konya air base took place in late June against a background of continuing unrest in neighbouring Syria.

The exercise, one of three held annually in Turkey (the other two being national events), suffered from the withdrawal of a number of planned participants. While the cancellation at an early stage by two NATO countries for budgetary reasons can perhaps be understood, the last-minute pull-out of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) is more difficult to understand. Having said all that, the exercise saw some well-balanced packages involving up to 54 aircraft.

## International participation

Foreign participation included a pair of Boeing E-3A AWACS aircraft from the NATO Airborne Early Warning Force (NAEFW) based at Geilenkirchen, Germany, which led to a smattering of US, Danish, Canadian and other NATO personnel mingling at briefings and debriefings with their largely Arab partners. With most participants coming from southern NATO nations and the

Middle East, Anatolian Eagle has always been guaranteed to attract regionally important air arms, and this year was no different.

The Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF – al-Quwwat al-Jawwiya al-Malakiya as Sa'udiya) attended with No 13 Squadron, an air defence unit flying Boeing F-15 Eagles; it brought seven 'C' models and one 'D'. These were joined by six Lockheed Martin F-16E-60 Desert Falcons from the United Arab Emirates Air Force & Air Defence (UAE AF&AD) sporting a variety of camouflage colours. The aircraft were fitted with the Lockheed Martin SNIPER XR advanced targeting pod.

## Aims of Anatolian Eagle

- To systematically test and evaluate the fighters' combat readiness statuses;
- manage tactical training progress;
- build a background and knowledge base in order to research tactical aeronautics;
- conduct research to allow fighter elements of the Turkish Air Force Command to reach the military goals in the shortest time and with minimum resource and effort;
- support the definition of operational requirements, supply, and research and development activities;
- allocate training environment in order to fulfil the requirements of the Turkish Air Force Command;
- support tests of existing/developed/future weapon/aircraft systems.

## Home team advantage?

The home team, the Turkish Air Force (Türk Hava Kuvvetleri - THvK), included elements drawn from four frontline fighter units: 142 Ceylan (Gazelle), 162 Zipkin (Harpoon) and 192 Kaplan (Tiger) Filos, all operating various versions of the Lockheed Martin Fighting Falcon; and ten McDonnell Douglas F-4E-2020 Terminators flown by crews



*RSAF Lockheed C-130H-30 1630 lands at Konya on the final day as Lockheed Martin F-16D 93-0691 from 192 Filo 'Tigers' waits to depart.*

from 111 'Panter' (Panther) Filo.

These days all Terminators are pooled at their home base of Eskisehir, which 111 shares with its sister unit, 112 'Seytan' (Satan) Filo. That said, a number did sport 111's panther motif whilst others were adorned with shark mouthed nose decoration. Aircraft wearing the markings of these two squadrons were joined by a small number of Terminators wearing those of the resident 132 'Hançer' (Dagger) Filo during most packages.

The upgraded F-4E-2020 is capable of deploying a number of modern munitions including laser-guided bombs and AGM-65 Maverick missiles. It is still a formidable platform – even though it is significantly less agile than more modern types – and the addition of Rafael's Litening III advanced targeting pod increases its effectiveness.

During the exercise there were no obvious signs of AGM-142 Popeye missiles being used but the F-4s regularly flew with the indigenous TÜBITAK-SAGE SOM cruise missile. It is possible that the Israeli-developed AGM-142 was not used in deference to the sensibilities of the Arab participants in the exercise; that was certainly given as the reason for earlier versions not being used in Operation Desert Storm.

With some 250 F-16s of all versions and modifications in the THvK's inventory it was to be expected the type would dominate the exercise. Both 152 Filo 'Zipkin' from Bandirma and 192 Filo 'Kaplan' from Balikesir brought a selection of their Block 40 jets although the aircraft were drawn from the wing rather than just squadron assigned aircraft



**Above: AWACS control was provided by the NATO Boeing E-3A component with two aircraft, LX-N90448 and LX-N90452, being detached for the two-week period. In future exercises it is hoped that Turkey's own Boeing 737 AEW aircraft will share this role, although at present the system is still under development.** All images by the author

providing for a mixture of unit markings. Akinci-based 142 Filo 'Ceylan' attended in squadron strength, bringing eight single-seat F-16Cs and five two-seat F-16Ds, aircraft from the recently delivered Block 50+ variant. Although still devoid of squadron or even wing insignia the long-spine Block 50s certainly make for an imposing-looking war fighter. There was also a single Block 30 aircraft from Akinci.

Akinci's chief of maintenance confirmed that the wing had received the bulk of its new aircraft and that final deliveries under the 'Peace Onyx IV' programme were nearly complete.

### Large package

Using the normal building block approach, the complexity of each package grew over the two-week training period with 'package

lead' being rotated through all participating nations and units. The first mission on the penultimate day was led by the UAE AF&AD, an important regional air force that is keen to take advantage of training opportunities such as this.

The exercise is not of course all about fast jet combined air operations (COMAO) packages. The Turkish Air Force provided air-to-air refuelling not only with one of its Boeing KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft but also a single Lockheed C-130 Hercules and an Airbus Military CN235 for transport and special forces mission scenarios. The resident search and rescue flight, 135 Filo, with its Eurocopter AS532UL Cougar helicopters, while not actively engaged in the exercise, was on CSAR standby throughout the period.



**Above: Lockheed Martin F-16E Fighting Falcon 3038 of the United Arab Emirates Air Force & Air Defence recovers to Konya on the final mission of the exercise. The aircraft predominantly carried out Blue Air missions within the COMAO package with the crews undertaking mission lead on at least one occasion.**

### Value for money

In total the exercise involved some 540 Turkish and 525 international personnel. They gained experience in a high-impact, mind-concentrating environment, exercising in the relatively uncluttered air space offered by the range coordinators at Konya. The freedom afforded at this central Turkish location enabled package commanders to follow the 'train as you fight' doctrine that normal everyday training perhaps cannot provide.

The value of exercises like Anatolian Eagle cannot be overstated. Turkey's location, on the frontier of Europe and Asia, makes it easily accessible to participants from both continents. Excellent facilities like those offered by Red Flag in the United States or Maple Flag in Canada with their sophisticated high threat-based scenarios are an option but in these times of dwindling defence budgets it is easy to see how Turkey and its Anatolian Eagle exercise might be attractive to nations that want excellent training in clear airspace at a fraction of the cost of deploying to North America.



**Above: Konya-based 132 Filo F-4E-2020 Terminators line up in preparation for a Red Air mission against the returning COMAO package during the final mission. The two jets, 68-0497 and 68-0532, are both former US Air Force aircraft transferred to the Turkish Air Force in 1991 from the 347th Tactical Fighter Wing at Moody AFB.**