



FACT SHEET

U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet

UNITED STATES AIR FORCES IN EUROPE

U.S. Air Forces in Europe, with headquarters at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, is a major command of the U.S. Air Force. It is also the air component of the U.S. European Command, a Department of Defense unified command.



Mission

As the air component for U.S. EUCOM, USAFE directs air operations in a theater spanning three continents, covering more than 20 million square miles, containing 91 countries, and possessing one-fourth of the world's population and about one-third of the world's Gross Domestic Product.

During the Cold War, USAFE was a fight-in-place force postured for a large-scale conflict. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has transitioned to an Air Expeditionary Force with a mobile and deployable mix of people and resources that can simultaneously operate in multiple locations. Its role in Europe and Africa has included warfighting as well as humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, and other non-traditional contingencies throughout its area of responsibility.

In peacetime, USAFE trains and equips U.S. Air Force units pledged to NATO. In fulfilling its NATO responsibilities, USAFE maintains combat-ready wings based from Great Britain to Turkey. USAFE plans, conducts, controls, coordinates and supports air and space operations in Europe, parts of Asia and Africa to achieve U.S. national and NATO objectives based on taskings by the U.S. EUCOM commander.

In support of national and NATO requirements, USAFE assets stand ready to perform close air support, air interdiction, air defense, in-flight refueling, long-range transport and support of maritime operations. USAFE remains a formidable force despite a rapid drawdown that saw its main operating bases cut by 67 percent following the end of the Cold War. As witnessed in the command's support of contingency and humanitarian operations throughout Europe and parts of Africa, USAFE remains a highly responsive and capable combat force.

Personnel and Resources

More than 41,000 active-duty, Reserve and civilian employees are assigned to USAFE. Equipment assets include about 220 fighter, attack, tanker and transport aircraft, and a full complement of conventional weapons.

Organization

USAFE consists of five main operating bases along with 80 geographically separated locations. The main operating bases are: RAF Lakenheath and Mildenhall in England; Ramstein and Spangdahlem Air Bases in Germany and Aviano AB in Italy. These bases report to Air Command Europe, ACEUR-USAFE's Management Headquarters, located at Ramstein AB during day-to-day operations. During contingency operations 16th Air Force, also located at Ramstein, is USAFE's Warfighting Headquarters, and commands attached forces.

History

USAFE originated as the 8th Air Force in 1942 and flew heavy bombardment missions over the European continent during World War II. In August 1945, the command was given its current name, U.S. Air Forces in Europe. At that time, USAFE had 17,000 airplanes and 450,000 people.

During the Berlin Airlift in 1948 to 1949, USAFE airlifted more than 1.6 million tons of food, fuel and medical supplies to the blockaded city. With the formation of NATO in 1949, the United States was committed to help defend Western Europe against aggression from the Soviet Union, a mission that continued until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

In March 1973, Headquarters USAFE transferred from Lindsey Air Station, Wiesbaden, West Germany, to Ramstein Air Base. In the mid-1980s, USAFE maintained and operated 25 main bases and more than 400 geographically separated units in 190 different locations. These bases supported about 850 aircraft. The community stood at more than 140,000: 60,000 active-duty airmen, 10,000 civilian workers, and almost 70,000 family members.

Beginning in late 1990, USAFE mobilized and moved more than 180 aircraft and 5,400 people to the Persian Gulf area in support of operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In addition, 100 aircraft and 2,600 personnel deployed to Turkey for Operation Proven Force, which denied

the Iraqis a safe haven for their military forces in northern Iraq. USAFE also activated aeromedical staging facilities and contingency hospitals. More than 9,000 patients, mostly suffering from noncombat-related illnesses and injuries, were evacuated to Europe and more than 3,000 were treated at USAFE medical facilities.

After Desert Storm, USAFE provided emergency relief to Kurdish refugees fleeing Iraqi forces and enforced a no-fly zone over Northern Iraq. This mission, known first as Operation Provide Comfort and later Operation Northern Watch, continued until March 2004.

Since 1990, USAFE has handled more than 70 contingencies—more than twice as many in the 1970s and 1980s combined. For example, the command took part in Operation Provide Hope I and II, which airlifted food and medical supplies to the people of the former Soviet Union, and Provide Promise, the airlifting of supplies into war-torn Yugoslavia from July 1992 until December 1995.

USAFE also provided air protection over the skies of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Operation Deny Flight. Along with allies from NATO countries, USAFE aircrews applied airpower in Operation Deliberate Force, the bombing campaign that paved the way for the Dayton Peace Agreement. USAFE then helped deploy Peace Implementation Forces and equipment to Bosnia for Operation Joint Endeavor and sustained them by airlift.

USAFE forces again mobilized in March 1999 when NATO intervened in Kosovo to stop Serb repression of the province's ethnic Albanian majority. Efforts to find a diplomatic solution collapsed, resulting in Operation Allied Force – the NATO-led air war over Kosovo. The 78-day operation ended June 20, culminating in the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo and the eventual return of refugees to their homeland. USAFE's 3rd Air Force led Joint Task Force Shining Hope, established to assist the hundreds of thousands of refugees expelled from Kosovo by Serb soldiers and paramilitaries. USAFE continues to contribute to NATO-led forces promoting peace and stability in Kosovo.

In February 2000, USAFE forces again responded to a humanitarian crisis, this time in southern Africa. Joint Task Force Atlas Response was established to airlift aid to victims of massive floods in Mozambique and other nearby South African countries. Working with international relief agencies, U.S. forces assisted with a variety of humanitarian-related activities, including the airlift of food and medical supplies, aerial surveillance and rescue operations in the region.

USAFE has been in the front lines of the Global War on Terrorism since Sept. 11, 2001. During Operation Enduring Freedom, it supported an air bridge from Europe to Asia that delivered 3,300 tons of humanitarian daily rations to northern Afghanistan, opened a base in Kyrgystan for coalition forces, and established a medical evacuation network that moved nearly 4,000 patients. USAFE deployed 24 fighter aircraft, eight KC-135 tankers and nearly 2,400 people in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It opened an important airfield in northern Iraq and provided critical en route support to deploying forces, not to mention vital logistical and medical support to forward-deployed forces.

Today, USAFE airmen are engaged in a wide range of active U.S. military efforts in Europe and Africa, including realistic U.S. and NATO exercises and the Global War on Terrorism. The command also plays a major role in furthering democracy in the former Eastern Bloc, as USAFE people take part in Partnership for Peace exercises and Military-to-Military contact programs.

Point of Contact

U. S. Air Forces in Europe, Public Affairs Office; Unit 3050, Box 120; APO AE 09094-0120; DSN 480-6565 or commercial (011) 49-6371-47-6565; e-mail: usafe.pai@ramstein.af.mil.

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