

Italian Air Force F-35s Deploy To Iceland For Their Third NATO Icelandic Air Policing Mission



File photo of two Italian Air Force F-35A fighters during a previous NATO Air Policing mission in Iceland. (Photo: David Cenciotti)

Four F-35A jets will operate from Keflavik for two months.

Four F-35A Lightning II aircraft of the Italian Air Force arrived in Keflavik, Iceland, on April 25, 2022, for a new contribution to NATO's Interim Air Policing mission "Airborne Surveillance and Interception Capabilities to meet Iceland's Peacetime Preparedness Needs (ASIC-IPPN)", more commonly known as Icelandic Air Policing. This is the third time Italy deploys its F-35s in Iceland, alternating their presence with the Norwegian ones, and the seventh Italian participation to the NATO mission overall.

The Italian detachment will operate from Keflavik for two months, thanks to more than 130 women and men of the Aeronautica Militare, including pilots, ground crew, support and force protection personnel that accompany the jets. According to the *Reykjavik Grapevine*, the F-35s will also perform exercises at Akureyri and Egilsstaðir airports from April 26 to May 6, 2022.

While in Quick Reaction Alert duty, the authority over interceptor aircraft will rest with NATO's Allied Air Command, while the Northern Combined Air Operations Centre at Uedem, Germany, will tactically control detachment operations and tie them into the Alliance's collective security arrangements. The Italian F-35s will replace the detachment of Portuguese F-16s that provided interceptor capabilities during their two-month deployment which ended on March 31.

"After being the first Ally to deploy fifth generation fighters on a NATO mission abroad, Italy demonstrates a sustained capability to provide modern fighter aircraft to Alliance operations," said Colonel Gianmarco Di Loreto, Commander of the Italian F-35A Task Force Air in Iceland. Our F-35A aircraft have already gained considerable international experience by participating in NATO's Air Policing missions in Iceland, but also Estonia. Staffs have also executed the national QRA duty from their home base and will continue to train crews to protect national and Alliance skies," added Colonel Di Loreto.

According to the Icelandic Coast Guard leadership, "the ongoing NATO operation in Iceland is specific and unique. Given its geographical location, Allies, in conjunction with the Icelandic authorities, have agreed that the appropriate arrangement to help keeping Icelandic airspace safe and secure is to maintain a periodic presence of NATO fighter aircraft based at NATO Keflavik Air Base." The focus of the scheduled "peacetime preparedness mission" is to carry out routine flying training and exercises for the Alliance to meet Iceland's requirements and needs to stay prepared, to monitor and to manage its airspace in peacetime.

An Italian F-35 in Quick Reaction Alert. Notice the AIM-120 in weapon bay. (Photo: Italian Air Force)

The F-35s, belonging to the 13° Gruppo (Squadron) of the 32° Stormo (Wing), departed from their homebase at Amendola Air Base, in the morning on April 25, before meeting two KC-767 tankers over Northern Italy for a first air-to-air refueling. Flight tracking websites showed that one of the tankers returned home after topping off the fighters, while the second one accompanied them all the way to Iceland before returning back.

The tanker is returning to Pratica di Mare AB #NATO pic.twitter.com/Cpnp3u1j8D

— Itamilradar (@ItaMilRadar) April 25, 2022

The Italian F-35s will carry out the QRA service in Iceland with the same configuration used to support the domestic SSSA (Servizio Sorveglianza Spazio Aereo – Air Space Surveillance Service) on a rotational basis, where the SCL (Standard Conventional Load) includes two AIM-120C5 AMRAAM (Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile) missiles in the internal weapons bay. The

Italian jets fly in this “lighter” configuration, compared to Norwegian ones, as they don’t have a short-range air-to-air missile, but this will change soon as AIM-9X Sidewinder AAMs (Air-to-Air Missiles) have been ordered by the Italian Air Force.

As we mentioned earlier, this is the third deployment of Italian fifth generation fighters to Iceland after 2019 and 2020. Before that, Italy supported the mission with the Eurofighter Typhoon fighters to safeguard the airspace above the Ally in the High North in 2013, 2017, 2018 and 2019.



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