

# Blue Win

*This summer, the Luftwaffe and Israel Defense Force met in an historic union over German soil.  
Patrick Roegies, Ben Gorski and Jurgen van Toor report*



# Wings 2020



**F**or the first time in history, Israeli Air Force jets have landed on German soil.

Six F-16C/D Barak multirole fighters were there to take part in joint exercises with Luftwaffe Eurofighters, marking an historic moment for both countries. The Israeli Air Force delegation, which also included support aircraft, deployed to Nörvenich near Cologne, the home base of Taktisches Luftwaffe Geschwader 31 'Boelcke' between August 17 and 28. In the first week they participated in Exercise Blue Wings 2020, and were then involved in the Multinational Air Group Days (MAGDAYS). The Israel Defense Force and the Luftwaffe have trained together in the past, but always on Israeli territory. One such co-operation was the Israeli-

organised, 2019 Blue Flag at Ovda Air Force Base in the south of Israel, near Eilat.

The build-up to the deployment started on August 6, with the arrival at Nörvenich of two C-130Js, 662 – callsign 'IAF129' and 663 – 'IAF130'. They were followed on August 12 by Hercules KC-130H 545 'IAF131'. The following day C-130J 'IAF132' also landed at the base.

The IAF delegation also included Hatzor Air Force Base's 101 Squadron, which is referred to as 'The First Fighter Squadron', equipped with its F-16C-40 Barak 2020 single-seaters, and 105 'The Scorpion Squadron' flying the F-16D-40 Barak 2020 twin-seaters.

The aircraft from Hatzor flew to Germany on August 17 using radio callsign 'ATOMI 1-6'. They were ▶

*Left: F-16D Barak from 105 Sqn seconds before touchdown*  
Ben Gorski

# Exercise Report

supported by three KC-707 Re'em tankers assigned to 120 Squadron using the radio callsigns 'GIANT 1, 2 and 3'. However, GIANT 2 returned to Israel halfway through the journey.

Also involved were a G550 Nachshon Eitam CAEW (Conformal Airborne Early Warning), radio callsign 'GLORY 1', assigned to 122 Squadron, plus a KC-130H Karnaf, radio callsign 'IAF133' – all based at Nevatim Air Force Base in Israel.

## Too good to miss

With a challenging environment due to the spread of COVID-19, this represented the IAF's only international exercise in foreign airspace this year. It was considered too important an opportunity to be missed, giving crews the chance to enhance their skills, maintain readiness in the face of a wide range of challenging scenarios, and continue strengthening bonds with foreign air forces.

"The IAF will participate in the exercise for the first time as Germany's guests," said Lt Col A, Commander of the 105 Squadron, as head of the Israeli Air Force deployment team. "This is an opportunity to showcase our abilities and learn about NATO's flight and training techniques."

*The tail of the TLG31 flagship 'The Sword of Boelcke'. In the background is another specially marked Eurofighter, 'Quadriga Tranche 4', departing on full afterburners*

*Ben Gorski*



*'The Sword of Boelcke' Eurofighter on final approach, with weapons, fuel tanks, undercarriage and intakes clearly visible*

*Ben Gorski*

*During the deployment, the Israeli Air Force conducted two sorties a day. The morning sortie usually comprised six aircraft, with four taking to the air in the afternoon*

*P Roegies*





Two-seater F-16D Barak from 105 Sqn departs Runway 25 from Nörvenich Air Base. Note the large supplementary fuel tank that was fitted for the long flight from Israel  
Ben Gorski



KC-707 272 from the Re'em 120 Sqn on short final approach Ben Gorski

The preparations for this deployment started almost a year earlier, when IAF officials visited Germany to discuss the possibilities. "We meet here and remember what happened in the past, and do everything possible to work together in the future," General Norkin said during that visit. Ideally, a German air base in the south would have provided a more convenient temporary base, but Nörvenich, close to Aachen in the west of the country, offered infrastructure advantages.

In the first week of the deployment, the IAF joined in a ceremonial flight, which on August 18 included a 'Memory for the Future' fly-by over the former Dachau concentration camp, led by an Israeli Gulfstream G550 and including F-16 fighters and two German Eurofighters, in memory of Holocaust victims.

During that flight, they also flew over Fürstenfeldbruck Airport, close to Munich, to commemorate the 11 Israeli Olympic team members who were murdered during the 1972 terrorist attack.

The Israeli Air Force Commander, Maj Gen Amikam Norkin, led the fly-by in the Gulfstream G550, alongside the Commander of the German Air Force, Lt Gen Ingo Gerhartz, and the IAF's first female squadron commander, who is in ▶





**A C-130J 662 from the 103 'Elephants' Squadron Ben Gorski**

charge of 122 'Nachson' Squadron, Lt Col G.

Afterwards, an official memorial ceremony was held at Dachau attended by, amongst others, the German Federal Minister of Defence, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, and the Israeli Ambassador to Germany, Jeremy Issacharoff. The deputy commander of 109 Squadron spoke at the ceremony – being a grandson of a Holocaust survivor who was imprisoned at that camp the event held special significance. A 'Yizkor' reading was also given by Rabbi Mendel Moraity in memory of the victims. The entire ceremony was broadcast live on



**'The First Fighter Squadron' was founded on May 20, 1948. These days it operates the F-16C Block 40 Barak from its home base at Hatzor P Roegies**

several Israeli digital platforms. While strategically important, the deployment was also very valuable in strengthening Israeli-German co-operation. The IAF conducts, and will continue to

conduct, joint exercises with other air forces to maintain its fitness for purpose and readiness, as well as to advance relations and build co-operation between forces. On a tactical level, the Israelis

appreciate the opportunity to learn from other air forces and train in unfamiliar territory, sometimes under challenging conditions. They see this as a vital step in the continuous improvement of their pilots' knowledge and experience.

Israel's Blue Flag biennial exercise is a good example of this, providing the chance to train with several different foreign air forces, with a view to enhancing capabilities across the board.

The Luftwaffe conducted the aerial training under NATO's 'Framework Nations Concept', aimed at standing up fully-trained and interoperable multinational task forces among allies and NATO partners.

Introduced by Germany in 2013, the initiative is intended to support the formation of larger groups of forces to improve the level

**A KC-130H Karnaf 545/4X-FBZ from 131 Sqn. The exercise was supported by the two Hercules squadrons based at Nevatim Air Force Base. This KC-130H touched down at Nörvenich just before the Israeli F-16 aircraft arrived. It departed back to Israel later that afternoon Ben Gorski**





*The KC-707 carried out an initial approach on the arrival day. Here it is turning on to short finals for Runway 25 Ben Gorski*



*Israel Defense Force Gulfstream V SIGINT from 122 Squadron Ben Gorski*



*A Eurofighter operated by TLG31 returns from its mission Ben Gorski*



An F-16C Barak from 101 Sqn departs Runway 25 from Nörvenich Air Base for a morning mission Ben Gorski



G550 Nachshon Eilam from 122 Sqn lines up for Runway 25 Ben Gorski

of combat readiness within the alliance, ensuring that military flying assets are interoperable, well trained and fully operational.

The aim is to achieve an initial operational capability by 2023, and reach full operational capability in 2026. Each associated event typically consists of two rehearsal days and two live-flying days.

According to Lt Gen Ingo Gerhartz, the Chief of the German Air Force, the Multinational Air Group exercise days represent an excellent example of multinationalism at work, allowing the Luftwaffe to operate 'shoulder-to-shoulder' with European allies and partners in preparation for combined missions.

MAGDAY events are usually scheduled each quarter during the year, and Germany hosts them as the Framework Nation for the project. However, due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, there has been a significant reduction in the frequency of the exercises, which has been limited to two events in 2020. The previous MAGDAY took place in June, with participants from the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland and Slovakia.

Israel – a NATO partner country under the Mediterranean Dialogue programme – participated in the

*There's showing off, and then there's full-afterburner antics! The Germans gave the Eurofighter a good work-out for the enjoyment of their Israeli guests Ben Gorski*



Israel Defense Force F-16s taxiing to the active Runway 25, ready for the day's exercise Ben Gorski



Multinational Air Group exercise during the second week of the deployment to Germany between August 24 and 28, including some night-time missions.

Fighter jets and tanker aircraft from Germany and Israel practised aerial drills in a multinational setting, along with Czech and Hungarian Gripens, making this a truly combined air operation. The Hungarian Gripens were temporarily deployed at Jagel Air Force Base in Germany for the duration of the exercise.

The main focus of this MAGDAY, concluded on August 27, 2020, with missions to practise air superiority against fictitious opponents and ground-based air-defence systems.

Another particular highlight of the event was the participation of Israeli F-16 fighters and a Boeing 707 with refuelling capabilities.

Israel has maintained close links with the alliance for more than 20 years and there are hopes these can be strengthened. In early September 2019, NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Defence Investment, Camille Grand, concluded a two-day

### Bluewings 2020 participants

Squadron	Name	Type
101 Squadron	The First Fighter Squadron	F-16C-40 Barak 2020
103 Squadron	The Elephants Squadron	C-130J
105 Squadron	The Scorpion Squadron	F-16D-40 Barak 2020
120 Squadron	The International Squadron	KC-707 Re'em
122 Squadron G-V Nachshon Shavit	The Nachshon Squadron	G550 Nachshon Aitam
131 Squadron	The Yellow Bird Squadron	C-130E Karnaf C-130H Karnaf. KC-130H Karnaf
TLG31	Boelcke	EF2000 EF2000T

visit to the country after meeting with senior representatives of Israel's ministries of defence

and foreign affairs. Discussions covered enhancing the alliance's co-operation with the Israel

Defense Forces in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Additional topics, including weapons proliferation and arms control, cyber defence and research and development were also covered. In other meetings with civilian and military officials, the Assistant Secretary General discussed civil preparedness and air defence.

In the end, this successful summer 2020 deployment to Germany was a major step forward in increasing co-operation between NATO and Israel. **AFM**



An F-16D two-seater, from 105 Squadron. On August 20, 1950 an operational training body was founded within 'The First Fighter Squadron'. It expanded and earned the 'Scorpion' nickname P Roegies