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PRESS RELEASE

**FRENCH MINISTRY FOR THE ARMED FORCES
AND VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Paris, 27 March 2026

Deployment of four RAFALE aircraft for the surveillance and defence of the Baltic countries' airspace (Baltic Air Policing)

- **Four RAFALE aircraft and around a hundred airmen will be deployed at Šiauliai Air Base in Lithuania, starting on 28 March 2026.**
- **Under NATO mandate, their mission will last four months.**
- **NATO's Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission ensures airspace surveillance and aims to ensure the integrity and sovereignty of the Alliance member states' airspace.**
- **A handover ceremony with a Spanish delegation is scheduled on 31 March at Šiauliai Base.**

Under NATO mandate, the French Air and Space Force will oversee the integrity of the Baltic countries' airspace during this BAP mission, ensuring airspace is defended at all times. The French Armed Forces regularly contribute to these missions through the deployment of fighter jets. The crews and all personnel are on 24/7 alert, ready to intervene in case of suspicious or undeclared flights near the airspace of the Baltic countries.

The mission to protect the Baltic countries' airspace is a collective defence mission. Since 2004, this is the 12th time France has taken on the alert by deploying an aerial assets in the Baltic countries.

This BAP deployment strengthens NATO's deterrence and defensive posture in Lithuanian territory, alongside Lithuanian forces, through numerous joint operational activities. France and Lithuania maintain a strong cooperation on defence and security matters and share many commitments.

BAP: Baltic Air Policing

When the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) joined NATO in 2004, the Alliance deployed, at their request, air policing capabilities at Šiauliai Air Base in Lithuania. This mission, named Baltic Air Policing (BAP), aims to strengthen the means dedicated to preserve the sovereignty of their airspace by providing additional rapid reaction capabilities.

Participation in BAP is based on a voluntary rotating system among allies. By taking on the alert mission as the lead nation, France confirms the reliability of its commitment within NATO and its ability to dedicate some of its capabilities to collective security, in a strategic context that has been disrupted since February 2022 and the start of the war in Ukraine.

For more information, we invite you to consult the [press kit](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/ministere-armees/20260326_NP_Press-kit_%20AIR-POLICING-BAP-2026_EN_0.pdf) dedicated for BAP 2026 on that link https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/ministere-armees/20260326_NP_Press-kit_%20AIR-POLICING-BAP-2026_EN_0.pdf.



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