

GREEN SHIELD II EXERCISE

Green Shield II exercise reinforce bilateral ties

As a result of cooperation in Green Shield 1 in 2007 which was an exercise in the Saudi desert between France and Saudi Arabia it was time for a return visit of the Royal Saudi Air Forces (RSAF) to France. Between 4 and 16 October 2009 base Aeriennne 102 Dijon-Longvic hosted the participants for Green Shield 2 with a delegation of no less than five F-15C's and one f-15d two-seater from 5 Squadron RSAF based at King Fahd Air base in Taif.

Comparing skills

The Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Forces Lt. General Abdulrahman bin Fahd al-Faisal called the participation of the RSAF along with the French Air Force in Green Shield 2 to develop military cooperation between France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia very important but also very much significant in the aim to develop combating capability. Saudi Air Colonel Hamed al-Emari explained in Dijon that his country was hoping to benefit from French electronic capability to be better prepared for any future war. The French forces in his opinion would benefit in these bilateral exercises from Saudi desert combat expertise which was gained in particularly during the liberation of Kuwait. The improvement of skills can also be reached when exercising in different environments besides exchanging each others working methods. The Saudi Ambassador in Paris Muhammed Bin Ismail Aal Al Sheikh mentioned the long cooperation over decades between the two countries in air- and naval defence reached new dimensions in the scores of Saudi military students being trained at French institutions. The Green Shield 2 joint military exercise is one of the most sophisticated military drills the Saudi Royal Air Force has so far carried out outside the kingdom.

Mid-air refuelling

The operation to bring in six Boeing F-15C/D Eagle fighters required a fleet of three Boeing KE-3A tankers from 18 Squadron Al Kharj localised near Riyadh for in flight refuelling and 11 Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules were involved to transport equipment. About 175 Saudi personnel took part in the exercise. The KE-3A flew on Istres in the South of France. Dijon base Commander Colonel Bruno Paccagnini told reporters that the mid-air refuelling part was one of the most critical elements. It was a huge logistic operation for them and a test for experience long distance deployment of fighters. Analysts said the Saudi Arabia is looking to build long-range air strike capabilities and this was a good occasion.

Rafales

France introduced not only the Mirage 2000-5F into the theatre but also Rafales from St. Dizier. The Rafales played the 'bad guys' in opposing forces to the Mirages and F-15's. Two missions were flown each day (1 x morning, 1 x afternoon) by two F-15's and two Mirage 2000-5F's and some Alpha jets. Different scenarios out of the spectrum of air warfare were on the program. The daily drills of on hour flying each mission incorporated combat and reconnaissance tasks. During the first few days of the exercise local training flights were flown to get familiarized with the European weather and French airspace. Towards the end of the exercise, missions were intensified and more complex. Interoperability was developed by learning from each others procedures. The exercise had a joint character with involvement of ground-element and an EC-725 performed CSAR operations on an area with a downed pilot

while the F-15's and Mirages flew Combat Air Patrols (CAP's). You could say there was a really compare of skills and matching of types considering the advanced types involved. For both France and Saudi Arabia it is quite interesting how the F-15's compare with the Rafales. The actions were conducted with assistance of a French E-3F AWACS from Avord.

Participants

Saudi Air Force

5th Sqn (F-15C/D, deployed from Taif - King Fahd Air Base)

French Air Force

EC01.002 "Cigognes" (Mirage 2000-5F, based at Dijon)

EE02.002 "Côte d'or" (Alphajet, based at Dijon)

EC01.007 "Provence" (Rafale, based at Saint-Dizier)

EDCA00.036 "Berry" (E-3F, based at Avord)

EH01.067 "Pyrénées" (EC725 Caracal based at Cazaux)

The event tells how the Saudis are assessing the performance of their F-15 and how they see it in comparison with that of the Rafale. It also tells them about their future plans regarding the F-15. Once developed as an air - superiority fighter the F-15's only could show their superiority by matching a latest generation fighter and when shortcomings occur it could direct the kind of upgrade the F-15 should need. Observers suggested that the exercise was also an opportunity for France to promote the Rafale, for which Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are possible export customers. Noting that the two air squads were closely matched, Dijon base commander Colonel Bruno Paccagnini said that much was gained by both sides from the exchange of field information and expertise. The French squadron commander, Staff Major Coste, added that Saudi pilots trained with U.S. forces and the French with NATO, facilitating cooperation, as both received training in the same school of combat.

Royal visit

Saudi Assistant Minister for Defence and Aviation and Inspector general for Military Affairs Prince Khalid Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz inspected his country's troops at the Dijon base and watched some of the joint drills. Prince Khalid Bin Sultan was accompanied by the commander of the RSAF General Abdulrahman bin Fahd Al – Faisal. He also met with French Defence Minister Herve Morin for talks on bilateral military collaboration and was briefed on the progress of the exercise by participating pilots. In a departure statement to the Saudi press agency Prince Khalid Bin Sultan remembered the meeting between General Charles de Gaulle and late King Faisal Bin Abdulaziz and said it was a turning point in the French Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia's cooperation with all countries depends on its national forces needs and priorities. So far France did a very good job in his eyes to prepare the exercise so well and mentioned that Saudi Arabia is the Middle East and Asia's sole country that sends its planes fully-equipped with fuel supplies and air re-fuelling aircraft, for training in France.