

NATO AWACS Surveillance Aircraft Support to the Counter ISIL Coalition



AIM: Responding to the threat posed by ISIL, NATO has deployed AWACS surveillance aircraft to support the US-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. NATO’s advanced Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft are helping to make the skies safer by providing greater situational awareness, and thereby boosting and enhancing the Coalition’s overall “air picture”.

NATO’s AWACS aircraft have been supporting the Coalition with air surveillance and situational awareness since October 2016. They do not coordinate Coalition air strikes. AWACS only fly in international airspace or over Turkey. AWACS are capable of detecting aircraft hundreds of kilometers away, meaning that they can monitor Iraqi and Syrian airspace from inside Turkish airspace.

NATO’s deployment of AWACS aircraft is an important contribution to the Counter-ISIL effort and a clear signal of NATO’s determination to help fight

terrorism. By providing AWACS support, NATO is demonstrating its resolve to tackle security challenges coming from the Middle East and North Africa.

AWACS - Airborne Warning and Control System Aircraft

NATO operates a fleet of 16 AWACS surveillance aircraft. They are the only major military assets directly owned by NATO; other assets are provided by Allies on an operation-by-operation basis. Derived from the Boeing 707 aircraft, AWACS planes can provide air surveillance, command and control, battle space management and communications.

Using a radar dish mounted on top of the airplane, AWACS planes have the ability to detect aircraft and ships at great distance. NATO’s AWACS are based at the NATO Airbase Geilenkirchen in Germany, with forward operating airfields in Greece, Italy, Norway and Turkey. AWACS crews are drawn from 15 different NATO member countries.

AWACS have played an important role in NATO operations and missions for more than three decades, including in Afghanistan, Libya and the Balkans. NATO AWACS planes began reconnaissance flights over Eastern Europe in March 2014, in response to Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea.

General Characteristics

AIRFRAME: Boeing 707

CREW: 16-30

OPERATING ALTITUDE: Around 10km.

RADAR COVERAGE: An AWACS plane flying at 10km altitude has over 312,000 km² in its field of view. AWACS can detect low flying targets within 400km and medium altitude targets within 520 km.

RANGE: AWACS have an unrefueled range of around 6,000 km – or eight to ten hours of flying.

PARTICIPATING ALLIES: 16 Allies contribute to the AWACS programme, 15 Allies provide aircrews.



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