

Israel, Greece Sign Record Defense Deal



FILE - A Greek national flag flutters as a formation of fighter jets fly over Athens, Greece, April 4, 2017. Israel and Greece on Sunday signed their biggest-ever defense procurement deal

JERUSALEM - Israel, and Greece have signed their biggest-ever defense procurement deal, which Israel said Sunday would strengthen political and economic ties between the two countries as their air forces launched a joint exercise.

The agreement includes a \$1.65 billion contract for the establishment and operation of a training center for the Hellenic Air Force by Israeli defense contractor Elbit Systems over 22 years, Israel's defense ministry said.

The training center will be modeled on Israel's flight academy and will be equipped with 10 M-346 training aircraft produced by Italy's Leonardo, the ministry said.

Elbit will supply kits to upgrade and operate Greece's T-6 aircraft and also provide training, simulators, and logistical support.

"I am certain that (this program) will upgrade the capabilities and strengthen the economies of Israel and Greece and thus the partnership between our two countries will deepen on the defense, economic and political levels," said Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

The announcement follows a meeting Friday in Cyprus between the UAE, Greek, Cypriot, and Israeli foreign ministers, who agreed to deepen cooperation.

The Israeli and Greek air forces on Sunday launched a joint exercise in Greece, the Israeli military said.

In at least one past exercise over Greece, Israeli fighter planes practiced against

an S-300 posted on Crete. The Russian-made air defense system is also deployed in Syria and Iran, Israel's foes.

A source in the Hellenic National Defense Command said the S-300 had not been activated in the joint exercise that began Sunday.

Source:

<https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/israel-greece-sign-record-defense-deal>

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