

*Mi-35 during a live exercise  
(photo via Cyprus Air Force)*



# Cyprus Air Force – one main mission, plus more

The Cyprus Air Force operate no less than 11 of the mighty Mi-35 Hind helicopters plus four SA.342 Gazelles. To understand why 75% of the complete fleet of this relatively small air arm consists of dedicated anti-tank gunships, we need to take a quick look at the recent history of the island.

Without taking sides, one can say Cyprus has known a turbulent history. Before and after the country gained independence from the British Empire in 1960 there were multiple periods of violence. In 1974 a coup by Greek colonels lead to another period of violence, with the Turkish armed forces invading and occupying the Northern part of the island. Since then the island has been divided in two parts, with a UN Buffer Zone in between. Turkish military presence in the Northern part is still very heavy today, including allegedly over 300 heavy battle tanks (M48 Pattons and recently also the more modern Leopard). Therefore it is no wonder the Cypriote armed forces invest heavily in anti-tank assets, including Mi-35s and SA.342s.

The current organisation dates back to 1995 when the Cyprus Air Force Command was formed from the National Guard. The 55 Sminarchia Machis or Combat Group report directly to the Air Force Command and is responsible for all flying assets. There

are three squadrons with helicopters and UAVs, plus an air defence and a support squadron. Nowadays all are based at Andreas Papandreou airbase, which is the Northern part of the international airport of Paphos.



*SA.342 Gazelle doing a high speed pass*