

Greek Planes Land in Cyprus

NICOSIA — Greek fighter jets and a transport plane have landed at an air base on the divided island of Cyprus in a move condemned by Turkey and the breakaway Turkish Cypriot government in the north.

A C-130 transport plane arrived at the military base in the western town of Paphos on Monday and four Greek F-16s landed Tuesday morning.

It is the first time Greek planes are known to have landed at the base since its completion in January.

"This is an action that threatens peace and stability and cannot be ignored," the leader of the breakaway Turkish Cypriot republic, Rauf Denktash, told the local TAK news agency.

Turkey, which has 30,000 troops in northern Cyprus and is the only country to recognize the Denktash administration, was equally fierce.

"The use by Greek planes of the base is an extremely grave and provocative development that is directed to breaking trust and stability on the island and in the region," a written statement from the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

Cyprus has a defense pact with Greece, its closest ally, whereby Greece will come to its aid in the event of hostilities on the island.

"This gives a specific political message," the Cypriot defense minister, Yiannakis Omirou, said of the planes' arrival. "That the common defense doctrine will exist and will continue to develop so long as there is Turkish expansionism." (Reuters)