



Balancing

As **Riccardo Niccoli** finds out how Italy's Aeronautica Militare performs a precarious balancing act between high-end capability and diminishing funds.



A Tornado ECR from 155° Gruppo of 50° Stormo takes off. This unit will be merged with 6° Stormo in the summer, and 50° Stormo will be deactivated. The ECR will be the last Tornado type to be operated, and will serve until 2025.

Italian Air Force organisation

THE HEADQUARTERS of the Italian Air Force is the Stato Maggiore, located in Rome. The operational command and force provider is the Comando Squadra Aerea (Air Squad Command) in Rome, which controls the Comando Operazioni Aeree (COA, Air Operations Command) at Poggio Renatico (which does not control flying units, but manages air operations). The Comando Forze da Combattimento (CFC, Combat Forces Command), the Comando delle Forze di Supporto e Speciali (CFSS, Support and Special Forces Command), and the 9a Brigata Aerea Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance do not operate any aircraft. The training schools are under the Comando delle Scuole/3a Regione Aerea in Bari, while all the technical and logistic aspects are with Comando Logistico, whose only flying unit is the Reparto Sperimentale Volo (Test Wing).

The basic flying unit is the Squadriglia (Flight), and two or more Squadriglie form a Gruppo (Squadron). One or two Squadrons form the Stormo (Wing). A flying unit with more than two Squadrons may be designated Brigata Aerea (Air Brigade), and two Wings or more can be grouped under an Air Brigade.

SINCE THE late 1990s, the Aeronautica Militare (AM, Italian Air Force; the more common AMI acronym is less accurate) has been in the process of downsizing while seeing a constant improvement in capability thanks to the introduction of state-of-the-art aircraft and equipment.

Although budgets continue to shrink (from €4.11bn in 2002 to €2.91bn in 2015), personnel numbers decline (from 48,623 in 2002 to 41,686 in 2014) and flying hours diminish (from 103,570 in 2002 to 84,654 in 2014), the AM fields consistent and effective capabilities in all sectors.

Thanks in part to the

introduction of new systems, its effectiveness also owes much to experience gained during international operations (primarily in Iraq and Afghanistan); constant resource optimisation; and the assessment and development of basic and operational training at flying schools and unit level.

Combat fleets

The Eurofighter Typhoon, locally designated F-2000A (TF-2000A for the two-seater), is the AM's most modern tactical asset. Introduced from 2003, it equips five Gruppi (squadrons) in three Stormi (wings) at Grosseto, Gioia del Colle and Trapani. All Italy's 75 Tranche 1 and 2 aircraft are

High-Tech and Low Budgets



in service, Alenia Aermacchi meanwhile delivering the first Tranche 3A jet on August 31, 2015.

On paper each Stormo has around 30 aircraft assigned, with the exception of 37° Stormo at Trapani – which, being a forward operating unit with limited maintenance capability, has only one Gruppo of reduced strength. Each of the three Stormi maintains a quick reaction alert (QRA) cell of two aircraft dedicated to the protection of national airspace.

The Tranche 2 fleet is being upgraded to P1E standard, and in March last year the Stormi were involved in the type's first air-to-ground campaign in Italian service. Five jets deployed

to Decimomannu, using the local range to deliver inert GBU-48(V)/B Paveway III laser-guided bombs (LGBs) guided by Litening III targeting pods. The opportunity was also taken to live-fire the 27mm BK27 Mauser gun against ground targets.

It marked the introduction of a swing-role capability, in step with core programme developments. It was also to ensure air-to-ground capability is sustained when the AMX is retired, and to compensate for a reduced order for F-35s. In a bid to optimise its future force, the AM would like to retire its Tranche 1 F-2000As, and attempts to sell them are under way.

The frontline combat fleet also

includes the Panavia Tornado (locally designated A-200) in IDS and ECR versions, the former in service since 1982. The IDS continues with 6° and 50° Stormi, although the latter will be deactivated not later than the end of this year, possibly even this summer. At the same time, its sole squadron, 155° Gruppo (Italy's only Tornado ECR operator), will move to Ghedi under 6° Stormo.

Originally 100-strong, the much reduced Tornado fleet is going through a mid-life upgrade (MLU) programme which, begun in 2002, was divided into three parts to spread costs and quickly introduce new technologies. The initial phase (MLU 1st Upgrade or Retrofit

Enabling Task 6 – RET.6) included 18 jets, which underwent work between 2002 and 2007.

The second phase (Full Basic MLU or RET.7) included 15 aircraft and ran from 2008 until 2013. The third and final phase (Full MLU or RET.8), for 25 aircraft, began in 2013 and should conclude this year.

The modifications add compatibility with RecceLite and Litening III pods and introduce new weapons, including the GBU-24, GBU-32 JDAM, AGM-88E and Storm Shadow. At the same time, the aircraft undergo a life extension programme, increasing airframe life from 4,000 to 6,000 flying hours. ►

The fleet will be reduced to 40 aircraft (all to RET.8 standard, thanks to the further upgrade of the RET.7 jets) for operation by 6° Stormo in attack, strike, reconnaissance and SEAD roles until the end of their operational life. The last Tornados retired will be ECRs, around 2025.

The AM's third tactical jet is the Alenia Aermacchi/Embraer AMX (designated A-11). The Italo-Brazilian attack aircraft entered service from 1988, Italy taking 110 single-seaters and 26 AMX-T two-seaters.

An MLU designated Aggiornamento Capacità Operative e Logistiche (ACOL, Operational and Logistic Capability Upgrade) involved 52 AMX airframes between 2007 and 2010. In July 2014, the remaining 40 or so operational aircraft were consolidated into 51° Stormo at Istrana, which now controls three Gruppi.

Between 2009 and 2014 the AMX ACOL flew within the NATO ISAF force in Afghanistan, accumulating some 9,000 hours. It performed well, thanks to the RecceLite and Litening III pods and Lizard LGBs.

Nonetheless, the AM had planned to retire the AMX fleet this year, but delays in the F-35 programme will probably see the type remain in service until at least 2018.

At the time of writing [March 18], the Final Assembly and Check Out (FACO) facility in Italy had completed two Lockheed Martin F-35A fighters.

The first was handed over to the Italian Government by the US Government in a ceremony on December 3, 2015. Italy is committed to buying 90 F-35s, 60 'A' models for the AM and 30 'B' models evenly split between the AM and Navy.

The first aircraft (AL-1, MM7332) made its first flight on September 7 last year from the air force base at Cameri, where the FACO is located. It was ferried to the US, arriving at Patuxent River on February 5.

The jet was the first F-35 to cross the Atlantic, thanks to the



Above: An AMX from the 'Black Cats' task group over Afghanistan is armed with two Lizard 500lb LGBs. The ItAF maintained an AMX task group in theatre, under the ISAF force, from 2009 to 2014. *Italian Defence*
Below: Helicopter basic training is performed on the TH-500B model, which is operated by the 72° Stormo at Frosinone. Some of these helicopters are also loaned to the SAR units for liaison and currency training.



support of Italian KC-767A tankers, a C-130J for oceanic SAR and two-seater Typhoons as chase.

After electromagnetic tests, in May it will be assigned (together with the other first four aircraft) to Luke AFB, Arizona, to be part of international training.

The first F-35 based in Italy, the sixth off the production line (AL-6), will be assigned to 32° Stormo at Amendola later this year or early in 2017.

Two Stormi will operate the Lightning II – 32° and 6° based at Ghedi, which is likely to receive

its first aircraft by 2022. It seems F-35Bs of the AM and Navy will be grouped on a single airbase, probably Amendola, to share technical and logistical support.

UAS

The AM operates two types of unmanned air system (UAS), the MQ-1C Predator A+ and MQ-9A Predator B, both assigned to 32° Stormo. Among the first operators of this more capable class of UAS, the AM ordered its first five RQ-1B Predator As in 2001.

The first arrived in January 2004 and the system was immediately deployed to Iraq (for Operation Iraqi Freedom), where the Predator flew until 2006.

In June 2007 it deployed to Afghanistan for the ISAF mission.

Upgrade to Predator A+ standard began in 2009 and



Above: An MQ-1C Predator A+ of 32° Stormo at its home base in Amendola. Italy operates a total of eight of UAVs, including the last two produced by General Atomics, which closed the production line in late 2015. All images by author unless stated

Italian Air Force Orbat (Flying units only) – March 2016

Units	Type	Location	Units	Type	Location
Comando della Squadra Aerea			Roma		
Comando Forze da Combattimento (CFC)			Milano		
2° Stormo		Rivolto	84° Centro CSAR	HH-139A	Gioia del Colle
80° Gruppo OCU	-		85° Centro CSAR	HH-139A	Pratica di Mare
Gruppo Missili		Spada	46a Brigata Aerea		Pisa
4° Stormo		Grosseto	2° Gruppo	C/KC-130J/J-30	
9° Gruppo	F-2000A		50° Gruppo	C/KC-130J/J-30	
20° Gruppo OCU	TF/F-2000A		98° Gruppo	EC/C-27J	
6° Stormo		Ghedi	Int. Training Centre	C-130J, C-27J*	
102° Gruppo OCU	Tornado IDS		14° Stormo	Pratica di Mare	8° Gruppo
154° Gruppo	Tornado IDS		71° Gruppo	P.180A/RM	
156° Gruppo	Tornado IDS		31° Stormo		Ciampino
32° Stormo		Amendola	93° Gruppo	Falcon 900, V/UH-139	
28° Gruppo	MQ-1C, MQ-9A		306° Gruppo	A319CJ, Falcon 50	
632a Squadriglia	FT-339C*		Comando delle Scuole / 3a Regione Aerea		
36° Stormo		Gioia del Colle	60° Stormo		Bari
10° Gruppo	F-2000A		Gruppo Volo a Vela	T/FT-339*, U-208A, TH-500B*, Gliders	Guidonia
12° Gruppo	F-2000A		61° Stormo		Lecce
37° Stormo		Trapani	212° Gruppo	T-346A, FT-339C	
18° Gruppo	F-2000A		213° Gruppo	T-339A	
50° Stormo		Piacenza (1)	214° Gruppo IP	T/FT-339*	
155° Gruppo	Tornado ECR/IDS		70° Stormo		Latina
51° Stormo		Istrana	207° Gruppo	T-260B	
101° Gruppo OCU	AMX-T/AMX		674a Squadriglia	T-339A*	
103° Gruppo	AMX		72° Stormo		Frosinone
132° Gruppo	AMX		208° Gruppo	TH-500B	
313° Gruppo AA	T-339A/PAN	Rivolto	Gruppo IP	TH-500B*	
Comando delle Forze di Supporto e Speciali (CFSS)			Centro Addestramento Equipaggi Multi Crew	Pratica di Mare	
1a Brigata Aerea Operazioni Speciali (BAOS)			204° Gruppo	P.180*	
Cervia			Comando Logistico		
9° Stormo		Grazzanise	Centro Sperimentale Volo	Pratica di Mare	Roma
21° Gruppo	HH-212ICO		Sperimentale Volo		
15° Stormo		Cervia	311° Gruppo	various	
615a Squadriglia	TH-500B		Ispettorato dell'Aviazione per la Marina		
83° Gruppo CSAR	HH-139A		41° Stormo		Roma (2)
80° Centro CSAR	HH-212	Decimomannu	88° Gruppo	P-1150A	Signonella
81° CAE	HH-139A, HH-212*, HH-101A	Cervia	86° CAE	P-1150A*	
82° Centro CSAR	HH-139A	Trapani			

Notes: * = Aircraft on loan from other units. (1) = 50° Stormo to be disbanded by summer 2016. (2) = The Ispettorato dell'Aviazione per la Marina (Inspectorate for Naval Aviation) is located at the Italian Navy Headquarters, and coordinates the MPA operations: the aircraft are owned by their Air Force, but the operational control is of the Navy, and the flying crews are mixed.

today eight are in service, including the last two produced by General Atomics which were delivered in December 2015.

Predator B was ordered in 2008, with all six aircraft delivered by 2009. The type first flew operationally during Operation Unified Protector over Libya in 2011. The Italian Predators have

been committed to the KFOR mission over Kosovo, ISAF in Afghanistan, the Mare Nostrum mission in the Mediterranean and the EU Naval Force mission Atalanta in Somaliland.

Under special regulations, the Predators are permitted to operate in Italian airspace, usually from their home base at

Amendola or at Decimomannu.

The AM had a long-standing requirement to arm its Predator Bs and finally received US Government authorisation for the work on November 4, 2015. A contract for Hellfire missiles and GBU-12 and GBU-38 laser guided bombs has been prepared, but currently it appears to be

delayed due to a lack of funds.

Predators have meanwhile deployed to Kuwait, supporting operations against Daesh, since 2014.

The Piaggio Aerospace P.1HH Hammerhead, a new and larger UAS, is expected to enter service shortly. Launched in 2013, it is a medium-altitude, long-endurance ►

Below: A formation of the three types operated by the 61° Stormo, the Italian Air Force (ItAF) jet training school: T-339A, FT-339C and T-346A, which are used for the phases two, three and four of the combat jet training. 61° Stormo via Author





(MALE) development of the P.180 twin turboprop. The AM has ordered six aircraft, three ground stations and full ISR suites.

Transport and support

The AM's support and mobility fleets comprise five types plus three dedicated to VIP and medical transport. It has operated four Boeing KC-767A jets for strategic transport and in-flight refuelling since January 2011; they are assigned to 14^o Stormo at Pratica di Mare, near Rome.

The aircraft can be configured for passengers, cargo or both, have a maximum range of more than 12,000km (6,480nm) and can themselves be refuelled in flight.

The type offloads fuel either through the flying boom under its rear fuselage or via two hose drum units in underwing pods.

Once accepted, the KC-767A was rapidly introduced into service, flying operationally from early June 2011 during Unified Protector. It provided vital support to Italian aircraft and, more importantly, those of allied nations. Today, one KC-767A is permanently assigned to Task Force Air Kuwait, supporting operations against Daesh.

The transport fleet primarily comprises the Lockheed Martin C-130J Hercules, introduced in July 2000 with two Gruppi di 46^a Brigata Aerea (Air Brigade) at Pisa. The AM purchased 22, ten of them the lengthened C-130J-30 version.

Twenty remain in service, with three of the short-fuselage version usually configured to KC-130J standard.

As such they are dedicated in-flight refuelling tankers, supporting Typhoon, Tornado

The Alenia Aermacchi T-260B basic trainer serves with 70^o Stormo – these aircraft suffered engine problems which were only resolved in 2014. It is possible that a new basic trainer could be introduced into service within the next few years.





Above: A formation of F-2000As from 4° Stormo over the Mediterranean Sea. The type equips three fighter wings, and deliveries of the Tranche 3A model have been under way since 2015.

and AMX, FT-339C and the Navy's Harrier II Plus.

The Hercules has been used widely at home and overseas in every operation involving the Italian armed forces and in its first 15 years' service the fleet logged more than 150,000 hours. The C-130J is assigned a wide variety of missions, including personnel and equipment transport; paratrooping; SAR (including oceanic SAR); container delivery system (CDS) drops; Joint Precision Air Delivery System (JPADS) operations; tactical work on short and unpaved runways, and with NVGs; special operations support; and medevac.

Block 7.0 operational software is currently being introduced in an important flight management system upgrade. An aircraft was sent to Lockheed Martin at Marietta, Georgia, in mid-2013 for software trials, returning in the summer of 2015. The remainder will be modified at their Pisa base.

Consideration is being given to an engine retrofit to AE2100D3

standard, solving wear issues arising from the installation of earlier-standard engines in their nacelles.

The AM's second tactical transport, the Alenia Aermacchi C-27J Spartan, entered service in January 2007. Twelve are assigned to 98° Gruppo, 46ª Brigata Aerea. The aircraft has proved excellent, especially for operations on short and unpaved runways, at altitude and for special operations support.

The Spartan has deployed widely, especially in Afghanistan. Two airframes have been converted to

EC-27J Jamming and Electronic Defence Instrumentation (JEDI) standard, which became operational in 2012; they fly counter-IED missions.

A second version has been under development since 2013. The MC-27J Praetorian is optimised for special operations, command and control plus ISR. Equipped with the Wescam MX-15Di electro-optical turret, it features a workstation for three operators in the cargo bay.

A weapon system, probably an

Oto Melara unit based on the 20mm M61 Vulcan, will also be added, transforming the MC-27J into a gunship. Alenia Aermacchi is converting three aircraft and introduction into service is imminent.

The venerable BR.1150 Atlantic continues to fulfil the AM's maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) and SAR requirements. The first of 18 entered service in 1972 and a handful of survivors remain operational with 41° Stormo at Sigonella, Sicily.

The type is near the end of its ►



Above: The first Italian F-35A lands at Cameri Air Base, on September 7, 2015, after its maiden flight. Italy currently has a requirement for 90 F-35s, one third being for the B model.

Current and recent deployments

Unit	Aircraft	Base
Task Force Air Al-Bateen	C-130J	Al-Bateen (UAE)
Task Force Air Kuwait	Tornado, MQ-9A, KC-767A	Ali Al Salem (Kuwait)

Missione Italiana di Collaborazione

Nel Campo della Difesa (MICCD)	HH-212	Luqa (Malta)
Task Force Air Siauliai*	F-2000A	Siauliai (Lithuania)
Task Force Air Gibuti*	MQ-1C	Gibuti

Notes: * Disbanded in 2015. The Task Force (TF) Air Al Bateen was activated in 2002 to support Italian operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, operating as a hub for those areas. Today it has two C-130Js assigned. The TF Air Kuwait was established in October 2014 to provide support to the Italian and allied forces committed to Operation Inherent Resolve. It comprises two MQ-9As, four Tornado IDS for recce/ISR missions and one KC-767A for in-flight refuelling. The MICCD at Malta provides training support to local forces; it has one HH-212 helicopter assigned. The TF Air Siauliai, activated within the NATO Baltic Air Patrol programme, operated from January 1 until August 27, 2015, with three F-2000A Typhoons. Lastly, TF Air Gibuti was active from August 2014 until February 2015, with two Predator A+ drones in support of the European operations against piracy in the Indian Ocean.



Above: Two T-346As from 61° Stormo flying near the town of Lecce. This type is destined to play the role of LIFT trainer for those pilots destined to fly Typhoon, F-35, Tornado and AMX.

operational life, and its retirement is expected by the end of 2016. Its successor has been identified as the ATR-72MP, a military version of the successful ATR72-600 airliner, developed as an MPA. The first delivery should be by June or July this year.

The AM has ordered four ATR72MPs, the mission systems prototype having flown for the first time in December 2014. The aircraft will be configured for a future anti-submarine capability but initially equipped for maritime patrol, electronic intelligence and SAR. The type is considered a stopgap while funds are awaited for a full multi-role MPA, such as the Boeing P-8.

Other multi-engine aircraft in service are 17 Piaggio P.180s. Introduced from 1993, the type serves 14° Stormo's 71° Gruppo. From 2011, four were modified as P.180RM navaid calibration aircraft. The remainder of the fleet flies liaison and light transport duties and provides advanced training for pilots moving on to the multi-engine fleets.

Three types satisfy the AM's



Above: A C-27J from 46a Brigata Aerea at low level near Elba island. This transport is operated by 98° Gruppo, along with a number of specialised C-27J variants.

VIP transport needs – the Airbus A319CJ (three are on strength, but one has been declared surplus), Dassault Falcon 900 (three 900EX and two 900EASY, two of the former being surplus) and two Dassault Falcon 50s. All these jets are flown by 31° Stormo at Rome-Ciampino airport.

Meanwhile the Italian Government recently concluded a leasing agreement for an ex-Etihad Airbus A340-500. Its introduction into service as a presidential aircraft is expected soon.

Two examples of the Gulfstream G550 Conformal Airborne Early Warning & Control (CAEW) are expected to enter service, with first delivery expected later this year. Purchased from IAI, the aircraft will fly as special mission platforms, operating in airborne early warning, C4I, command post and net-centric warfare roles as well as providing communication nodes.

The first airframe arrived in Israel for modification in September 2015 and the pair will be assigned to 14° Stormo.

Trainers

The AM's pilot screening trainer is the Alenia Aermacchi SF.260EA (T-260B). Bought to replace the old SF-260AM, 30 of the new variant began entering service in 2005. Flown by 70° Stormo at Latina, the aircraft's initial pilot screening role is known as Phase 1.

The T-260B suffered engine problems during 2013 and 2014, leading the AM to study replacement options. Among them, the T-344 Very Efficient Smart Power Aircraft (VESPA) was considered, based on the old Caproni C-22J very light jet trainer project. Nonetheless, the T-260B remains active.

The Alenia Aermacchi MB.339 – as the T-339A (MB.339A) and FT-339C (MB.339CD) – provides basic and advanced training. The T-339A entered service in 1979 and some of the 106 purchased have been modified to MB.339A/PAN configuration for 313° Gruppo 'Frecce Tricolori', the national aerobatic team, which usually has 12 aircraft assigned. Some T/FT-339s are detached to other units for continuation training and liaison duties.

An MLU between 2002 and



Above: In the maritime patrol role, the ItAF still operates three examples of the old Breguet BR.1150 Atlantic, assigned to 41° Stormo at Sigonella. They are due for retirement at the end of 2016.

Below: The C-130J fleet is split between two squadrons of the 46a Brigata Aerea at Pisa. They include the KC-130J tanker version, which is used to support the tactical fleet, including the AV-8B+ Harrier IIs of the Italian Navy.



2006 extended the useful life of 50 aircraft for between 15 and 20 more years. Most of the T-339A fleet is now with 61° Stormo at Lecce, delivering Phase 2 and 3 training with 213° Gruppo. Graduating students are destined for the fast jet fleets.

The T-339A's successor has been identified as the Alenia Aermacchi M-345HET, a development of the M-311. Service entry is scheduled by 2018 and orders for about 50 are expected, while withdrawal of the T-339A is anticipated around 2020.

The FT-339C flies with 212° Gruppo at Lecce and, until 2015, was used to deliver Phase 4 lead-in fighter training. An initial batch of 15 aircraft delivered from 1997 was followed in 2002-04 by 15 more.

Some FT-339Cs fly with other units, including 32° Stormo and the Reparto Sperimentale Volo (RSV, Flight Test Wing) for liaison and other duties.

The FT-339C is expected to serve until 2025, but its successor, the Finmeccanica/Alenia Aermacchi M-346 (T-346A for the Air Force), started operating with 61° Stormo in late 2014. At the time of writing (March 2016), 212° Gruppo had five T-346As, the first course (of four Italian pilots) having begun in September 2015.

The AM has nine T-346As on order – six in a first batch and three in a second, all for delivery later this year. A total purchase of 15 to 18 aircraft is expected. The type is also likely to be used as an aggressor for training



Above: A P.180RM from 14° Stormo on the ramp at Pratica di Mare. Four P-180s have been modified to this standard since 2011 and undertake navigation-aid calibration duties.

with the fighter squadrons.

Helicopter training relies on the NH-500E (T-500B), 50 of which were introduced from 1990.

Today they fly with 208° Gruppo, 72° Stormo, at Frosinone, training pilots for the AM, the other armed forces and the state corps.

Also significant to the AM's training effort, the piston-engined SIAI S.208M (U-208A) light aircraft is used by 60° Stormo's Gruppo di Volo a Vela (Glider Squadron) at Rome-Guidonia for glider towing and liaison.

Twenty are on strength alongside 12 gliders of various types which are used for cadet training and experience flying.

A recent addition to the training aircraft fleet is the Tecnam P2006T, a light twin-engine piston aircraft which will be used for the basic training of multi-engine student pilots.

A contract for the delivery of an integrated training system (three aircraft, one simulator, training for instructor pilots and technicians and technical support for 3,600 flying hours in three years) was signed in December 2015, and delivery to 70° Stormo is imminent.

Helicopters

Delivered in June 2015, the AM's most modern and powerful helicopter, the AgustaWestland HH-101A Caesar, is operated by 15° Stormo and fulfils CSAR and special operations missions. Its initial operational capability (IOC) was declared on February 25 this year and 12 aircraft are under contract.

The Caesars will equip 21° Gruppo, which currently operates under 9° Stormo at Grazzanise flying the remainder of 35 AB212/AM helicopters in service for SAR missions since 1979. From 2005, 18 AB212/AMs were upgraded to Implementazione Capacità Operativa (ICO, Operational Capability Implementation) standard for CSAR.

The AgustaWestland HH-139A is now taking over the SAR role, having entered service in January 2012. Fifteen were ordered, including two for VIP duties designated VH-139A. They are all assigned to 15° Stormo at Cervia and its four SAR centres at Decimomannu, Trapani, Gioia del Colle and Pratica di Mare.

In June 2012 the AM received two ex-Protezione Civile (Civil Protection)

UH-139A helicopters, 72° Stormo using them for advanced training. The type was intended as a stopgap until a new, larger and more capable military-dedicated helicopter became available.

Likely to have been satisfied by the AW149, the requirement relies on the availability of new funds, and the HH-139A may have to remain in service for some time.

Valid and modern

In spite of continuous budget cuts, the AM remains among the most powerful and effective European air forces. Its leadership realised many years ago that the way to maintain and improve capability was to reduce the number of its bases, flying units, aircraft and, wherever possible, personnel, directing resources to maximise the quality and effectiveness of its training.

In its fighter force, tankers and transports, advanced training, special operations and electronic warfare capabilities, the AM boasts valid and modern assets. But the lack of new budget allocations means the challenge will be garnering sufficient resources to keep those assets operational.



Above: The strategic transport and tanker missions are assigned to four KC-767As operated by 14° Stormo at Pratica di Mare. This type is able to refuel with both of the available systems: probe-and-drogue as well as the boom.