



Luciana Littizzetto and the False Myth of Italian Military Inefficiency

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With this article, we aim to **help Luciana Littizzetto better understand reality** and **debunk the false myth of Italian military inefficiency**, clarifying a topic often treated superficially. We continue the discussion started in our previous in-depth analysis on the [response of General Bertolini and Lieutenant Colonel Paglia to the comedian's less than honorable statements](#).

Italy has actively participated in all major **international military operations**, conducted by **NATO**, the **UN**, and **international coalitions** in **extremely complex operational theaters**. From **Lebanon** to **Afghanistan**, from **Somalia** to **Iraq**, **Italian soldiers** have operated with **professionalism**, **dedication**, and **adaptability** in **high-intensity** contexts, often at the risk of their own lives.

Opinions? No, facts

These are not opinions, but **facts**: a **continuous commitment** that has ensured and continues to ensure **security** and **stability** in numerous **crisis areas around the world**.

Leaving aside the wartime past, with the **victory in World War I**, the feats of **Alessandro Tandura, the first military paratrooper in history**, the formidable innovations of the **Arditi** and the **MAS flotillas** - which laid the foundations for modern military special forces globally - and the heroic behavior of the Italians at El Alamein and **Takrouna**, as well as the courage shown during the **battle of Culqualber**, episodes that earned the Italians the honor of arms from the enemy, **contemporary history** is equally rich in events that attest to the **high professionalism, capability, and courage of Italian soldiers**.

Italian soldiers at the service of others, committed to protecting and supporting the most **unfortunate** people, often victims of conflicts and humanitarian crises, whose only "fault" is being born in the wrong place.

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Depiction of the Battle of Culqualber, where the Italians almost completely sacrificed themselves, demonstrating such valor that they earned the honor of arms from their opponents.

The 1980s: starting with Lebanon

The first Italian mission in an international peacekeeping operation was in **Lebanon, in 1982**, with the Italcon operation, during which an organic battalion remained deployed for **eighteen months**. Following the tragic events in the **Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila**, located on the western outskirts of Beirut, and consultations between the **Lebanese Government** and the **UN Secretary-General, UN Security Council Resolution 521** was adopted, leading Lebanon to request the intervention of a **Multinational Force**, also involving Italy. The goal was to **restore the sovereignty and authority of the Lebanese government** over Beirut and ensure the **security of the population**. On **March 15, 1983, Marò Filippo Montesi** lost his life in an ambush while on patrol in **Beirut**.

The **ITALCON** mission took place from **September 24, 1982, to March 6, 1984**, involving a total of **8,345 Italian soldiers**. At the end of the mission, their commitment and extraordinary operational capabilities were widely recognized internationally, attesting to their professionalism.

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Marò Filippo Montesi and the vehicle hit by machine-gun fire and grenades. He is the first Italian soldier to fall in peacetime after World War II.

Operation Airone - Iraqi Kurdistan

In **1991**, during the **Gulf War**, Italy participated in the **Airone mission**, a humanitarian operation aimed at providing **aid to Kurdish refugees**. The [Folgore Paratroopers Brigade](#) deployed **almost 1,000 men**, set up **over 600 tents** for refugee accommodation, and ensured **security in an area of 1,400 km**, receiving **official recognition from the United Nations**.

The Italian military operated in **extremely difficult** environmental conditions, thousands of kilometers from their homeland. Initially, they focused on the **creation of reception camps** and the **provision of assistance and security** to fleeing populations. Subsequently, they were **deployed against the retreating Iraqi forces** moving north under allied pressure, contributing decisively to the stabilization of the area.

For their demonstrated valor, all Italian military personnel participating in the **Airone** mission received the **Commemorative Cross** from the **Ministry of Defense**, the **Certificate of Merit from the Army General Staff**, signed by **General Goffredo Canino**, and the **Certificate of Appreciation**, awarded by **U.S. General John Shalikashvili** and **General Mario Buscemi**. The Italian intervention ensured a **security belt**, crucial for the **return of refugees** to their lands.

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ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Award-winning British photographer Derek Hudson described his experience documenting the Kurdish exodus of 1991 as "one of the most tragic things" he has ever seen.

Vespri Siciliani, at the service of Italy

On **July 25, 1992**, following the **mafia attacks** that killed magistrates **Giovanni Falcone** and **Paolo Borsellino**, the Italian government ordered the deployment of the **Italian Army** to Sicily to support law enforcement in combating organized crime. The operation began with the arrival in **Palermo** of over **1,000 paratroopers from the Folgore** on July 26, transported by the **46th Air Brigade** with **C-130 and G-222**. The contingent was deployed to guard sensitive targets, strengthen controls, and ensure public safety.

The [Vespri Siciliani Operation](#) represented one of the most significant deployments of the Armed Forces on national territory, marking an unprecedented action against the mafia.

Operation IBIS - Somalia

From **1992 to 1994**, Italy participated in the [IBIS mission](#) in [Somalia](#), deploying the **second largest contingent after the United States**. The operation was part of an international intervention aimed at **stabilizing the country** and **ensuring the safety of humanitarian aid**.

The situation in **Somalia** was dire: civil war, an unprecedented humanitarian emergency, and the presence of armed groups made any international intervention challenging.

On **December 3, 1992**, with **Resolution 794**, the **UN Security Council** authorized a military action across Somali territory, entrusting its conduct to a group of member states.

Italy, with the **IBIS mission**, provided **military and logistical support** for the **stabilization of the country** and the **protection of humanitarian operations**, as well as promoting a series of **emblematic initiatives** for the reconstruction of the **social fabric** of a nation ravaged by **years of war**, such as the **reopening of schools, hospitals, and factories**.

On [July 2, 1993](#), during one of the mission's most violent clashes, **Italian soldiers** faced an intense battle against **Somali militias in Mogadishu**. In that episode, [Paratrooper Pasquale Baccaro](#), [Sergeant Major Incursore Stefano Paolicchi](#), and [Second Lieutenant Andrea Millevoi](#) lost their lives, while then **Lieutenant Gianfranco Paglia** was seriously injured.

Throughout the mission, Italy suffered [the loss of 14 compatriots, including 11 military personnel, a volunteer nurse, and two civilians](#).

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Lt. Col. Gianfranco Paglia, injured in Somalia on July 2, 1993, is a clear testament to how serving one's country to help others can leave indelible marks for life.

Operation Albatros: Italy at the forefront for Peace in Mozambique

Parallel to the commitment in **Somalia**, an **equally crucial operational scenario in Mozambique** was unfolding.

The **Rome Peace Accords**, signed on **October 4, 1992** between the **Government of Mozambique** and **RENAMO** (Mozambican National Resistance), entrusted the **United Nations** with the supervision and control of their implementation. On **December 16, 1992**, the **UN Security Council** authorized **Operation ONUMOZ** (United Nations Operations in Mozambique), with the aim of ensuring the **pacification of Mozambique**, specifically:

- **Monitoring the ceasefire** between the local government and the **RENAMO** guerrillas, with the demobilization of **67,042 government soldiers** and **24,648 RENAMO fighters**.
- **Collection and destruction of weapons** from all parties involved.
- **Security for humanitarian workers and UN personnel**.
- **Support for the 1994 elections**, providing technical assistance and monitoring the process to prevent fraud.

Italy participated in the mission with the **ITALFOR contingent**, sent in **March 1993** for **Operation Albatros**. The unit, at a **regimental level**, included:

- **1,030 Italian soldiers**, initially from the **Alpine Brigade "Taurinense"**, then from the **Alpine Brigade "Julia"**, with the **Alpini Paratroopers Company "Monte Cervino"** **always present** in both contingents.
- **Logistics battalion**, responsible for logistical support.
- **Army Aviation Squadron Group**, for transport and aerial patrol.
- **Medical Department**, responsible for medical assistance for UN personnel and the local population.
- **Unit of 5 Carabinieri**, employed in **military police** functions.

The **Italian contingent** was tasked with **controlling the Machipanda - Beira Corridor**, a strategic artery connecting **Zimbabwe** to the **port of Beira**, ensuring security and logistical support in the region.

Italy maintained the contingent until **April 1994**. After the withdrawal of most forces, **230 Italian soldiers** from the **Medical Department and a support unit** remained in Beira under the name **"Albatros 2"**, to continue providing **medical support to UN personnel and the local population** until **December 1994**.

Thanks to its **logistical and operational efficiency**, the **Italian Contingent** was considered a **reference force**, providing **medical and logistical support** to all **UN forces present in the region**.

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Chimoio - Beira, Mozambique (1993) Alpini of the Taurinense Brigade during a rescue operation

Operation Hippocampus - Rwanda

In **Operation Hippocampus**, in **Rwanda**, the raiders of the 9th Regiment Col Moschin were engaged in one of the most risky and complex missions in their history.

On **May 10**, after an initial landing in **Nairobi**, the Italian forces arrived at **Kigali** airport, where they were immediately targeted by **mortar fire**. The **C-130** that had transported them was forced to depart quickly, leaving the detachment on Rwandan territory without available military transport.

Finding themselves isolated, the raiders requisitioned civilian vehicles, modifying them to suit operational needs. They moved through **shootouts and bombings**, reaching the remaining Italian civilians in the capital. **Within a week**, they completed the **full evacuation**, operating in an extremely unstable and dangerous context.

During the **takeoff of the last C-130**, overloaded with evacuated people, the plane was targeted by **Soviet ZU-23 anti-aircraft machine guns**, but managed to leave the country. According to **Gen. Roberto Vannacci**, then commander on the ground of the operation, it was **one of the most difficult missions ever faced by the 9th Regiment Col Moschin**.

The operation had a high cost: **Sergeant Major Marco Di Sarra**, who fell ill with **malaria**, lost his life shortly after returning to Italy.

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The Raider Non-Commissioned Officer Marco Di Sarra, who died on June 30, 1994, at the age of 31 due to an illness contracted during Operation Hippocampus in Rwanda. Di Sarra will be posthumously awarded in 1995 with the Bronze Medal for Army Valor for the battles of July 2, 1993, in Somalia.

Missions in the Balkans

The crisis in the **Balkans** saw the involvement of Italian soldiers in various international operations.

Since **1995**, Italian soldiers were deployed in **Bosnia** as part of **operation SFOR**. In **March 1997**, they participated in **mission Alba**, a **multinational operation led by Italy**. Although officially aimed at **distributing humanitarian aid**, the mission aimed to **stabilize the political crisis in Albania and prevent the outbreak of a civil war**.

From **April to October 1999**, **General Pierluigi Torelli** commanded the **Multinational Brigade North** in Bosnia.

Missions in the **Balkan area** continued throughout the **following decade**, until **2004**. From **December 2004**, the management of stabilization passed to the **European Union**, which took over with a new mission with a military component.

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Riots of March 17, 2004, in Kosovo. For the intervention in defense of the monasteries of Dakovica and Decane and the protection of the Serbian villages of Belo Polje, Bica, and Grabac, the war flag of the 186th Paratroopers Regiment Folgore will be decorated with the Silver Medal for Army Valor.

On the other side of the world - East Timor

From **September 1999 to January 2000**, the **Paratroopers of the [187th Regiment](#)**, together with the **[Carabinieri Paratroopers of Tuscania](#)** and the **Incursori of Col Moschin**, were deployed in **East Timor** as part of **Operation Interfet**.

Located in the **far southeast Asia**, East Timor was the scene of severe violence by groups opposed to its independence from **Indonesia**. In response, the UN, with **Resolution 1264 of September 15, 1999**, authorized the deployment of a **multinational force** under the command of **Australia**.

The **Folgore tactical group** was assigned the task of **patrolling and ensuring the safety of the population** in areas difficult to reach due to dense vegetation.

Operation Interfet is remembered as the **farthest mission ever undertaken by an Italian unit**.

Two emblematic images of the Interfet operation in East Timor: in the first, an Italian paratrooper distributes cookies to local children, symbolizing the humanitarian support provided to the population. In the second, paratroopers patrol the dense vegetation, conducting security and territorial control operations to ensure stability in the area.

G8 in Genoa: security at the highest levels, without compromise

In the **summer of 2001**, Italy hosted the **G8 in Genoa**, the international meeting that brought together the main **Heads of State of the world**. To support security measures, the **Folgore Paratroopers Brigade** was deployed in the **red zone of Genoa airport**.

For the days of the meeting, the **Italian paratroopers** operated as **Public Security Agents**, with the task of:

- **Controlling, stopping, and searching** anyone entering or moving within the airport.
- **Guarding hangars and sensitive points**, applying strict **rules of engagement** for area protection.
- **Monitoring the perimeter area** with special forces operators armed with **carbines and night vision goggles**.

On **July 20**, the paratroopers were assigned a task of primary importance: **guarding the perimeter of Air Force One**, the American presidential plane, ensuring the safety of **President George W. Bush**.

An extremely delicate task: the surveillance of President George W. Bush's Air Force One. During the G8 in Genoa, it was the Folgore Paratroopers who ensured its safety.

Operation Ancient Babylon - Iraq

During the **Ancient Babylon mission** (2003-2006) in **Iraq**, the **Italian contingent** operated in a sensitive area, with **Nassiriya** as the nerve center.

The **attack of November 12, 2003** against the **Maestrale base in Nassiriya** marked a turning point. On **April 6, 2004**, Italian units – including the [11th Bersaglieri Regiment](#) and the [Savoia Cavalleria](#) – were involved in an **18-hour** clash, the longest combat for the **Italian Army**

since **World War II**.

The action earned the **11th Regiment** the **War Cross for Military Valor**. Despite the relative stability of the Shiite sector, Italy suffered heavy losses, including the **19 fallen** in the **Nassiriya attack**, the bloodiest suffered by the Italian Armed Forces in missions abroad.

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The "skeleton" of the Maestrale base in Nassiriya after the attack in which 12 Carabinieri, 5 Army Soldiers, and 2 Italian civilians lost their lives.

In the challenging Sudan

In the **summer of 2005**, the [183rd Paratroopers Regiment Nembo](#) was deployed in **Sudan** for operation **Nile**.

The **task of the Pistoia Paratroopers**, framed within the **Task Force Leone**, was to **enforce the peace treaty** signed on **January 9** between **Sudanese President Omar el-Bashir** and **John Garang**, leader of the **Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)**, the main independence movement. This agreement **ended twenty years of war** for control of the **southern regions of Sudan**.

The operation takes place under the command of the **UN**, with very specific rules of engagement, but in a **delicate and unstable operational context**. The climate of tension and the difficulties on the ground make the mission particularly challenging, but these very challenges highlight the **determination and professionalism of the Italian military**.

Thanks to the **exceptional work of Task Force Leone**, **Italy stands out in peacekeeping in Sudan**, achieving an **extraordinary success**. The **Italian effort is recognized and applauded by the UN itself**, consolidating the prestige of the **Italian Armed Forces in international missions**.

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Operating in Sudan was extremely complex, given the context left by the twenty-year war for control of the southern regions, which ended in a situation of strong instability.

Returning to Lebanon

On **August 28, 2006**, an Italian naval contingent set sail for **Lebanon** as part of **Operation Leone**. The fleet was composed of the **aircraft carrier Garibaldi**, the landing ships **San Marco** and **San Giusto**, the **frigate Espero**, and the **corvette Fenice**. From the port of **Marghera (Venice)**, a merchant unit also departed carrying the **Italian Army's Engineering Corps equipment**.

At the beginning of **2007**, the [186th Paratroopers Regiment](#) was redeployed in **Lebanon**, an area already known to the paratroopers from **Siena**, as Lebanon was the first foreign operational theater of the **Italian Army**. The regiment had already participated in the **Italcon mission** in the '80s.

Despite the time elapsed, the situation appeared **unchanged**, with a context of **instability and devastation** similar to that of **25 years earlier**.

The **task** of the Italian military was to ensure that the **Lebanese operational area**, intended for the **disarmament of Hezbollah**, was not used for **offensive activities**. The Italians were engaged in **patrolling, escorting, and protecting sensitive sites**, playing a crucial role in the **stabilization and security mission** of the region.

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San Marco Marines in Lebanon in 2006.

June 2006, the birth of Task Force 45

In **June 2006**, the [Task Force 45](#) was established, the largest **deployment of Italian special forces** ever deployed since the post-war period.

Already in **July of the same year**, the unit went into action in the **Afghan mountains**, participating in **Operation Medusa**, one of the most significant operations conducted by the international coalition in Afghanistan.

Operational tasks of Task Force 45:

- **Disruption of Taliban formations**, with particular attention to the neutralization of **group leaderships**.
- **Prevention of attacks** directed against Italian and coalition military personnel.
- **Hostage liberation**, both civilian and military.

- **Support to Afghan police forces** in executing **arrest warrants** against individuals considered dangerous.
- **Fight against illegal arms trafficking** destined for insurgent groups.
- **Security for political, civilian, and military figures**, both local and international.
- **Creation of safe zones** pending the arrival of conventional forces.

The **commitment of Task Force 45** proved decisive in countering the most extreme Taliban forces and stabilizing areas under insurgent threat.

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Lieutenant Paratrooper Incursore Alessandro Romani, assigned to Task Force 45. The officer lost his life in combat on September 17, 2010, while, with his detachment, he was going to capture Afghan terrorists identified by a Predator UAV while placing a device under a bridge.

Missions in Afghanistan

Italy and the **Italians** played a central role in the ISAF and Resolute Support missions in **Afghanistan**, assuming command of the **Regional Command West (RC-West)**, an extensive area of about **162,000 km²**, as early as **2006**.

To testify to the **importance of Italy** and its **soldiers** during the NATO-led ISAF mission, only **four countries** – later reduced to **three** – held the **command of the five regional areas (Regional Commands - RC)**.

- **RC-West (RC-W)** – (under Italian command, included the provinces of Herat, Badghis, Farah, and Ghor)
- **RC-East (RC-E)** – (under U.S. command, included provinces like Kunar, Nangarhar, and Paktika)
- **RC-South (RC-S)** – (under British and later U.S. command, included provinces like Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, and Uruzgan)
- **RC-Southwest (RC-SW)** – (under U.S. command, covered Helmand and Nimroz)
- **RC-North (RC-N)** – (under German command, included northern provinces like Balkh, Kunduz, Baghlan, and Faryab)

Herat hosted the main Italian operational base, Camp Arena. The RC-West, under Italy's control since 2006, was tasked with ensuring security, supporting Afghan forces, and facilitating the region's reconstruction.

General Marco Bertolini was also the first Italian, in **2009**, to hold the prestigious position of **Chief of Staff** of the **ISAF mission**, placing himself at the top of the entire operation, composed of **tens of thousands of soldiers** from **over 40 nations**.

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In 2011, there were over 130,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan, from 48 nations.

The Italian commitment, **the largest since World War II**, continued until **2021**, with the **final withdrawal of the contingent**, led by the **186th Paratroopers Regiment Folgore**, in a context of **high danger and strong instability**. The **return operation**, conducted by then **Colonel Federico Bernacca** (*current Commander of the Paratroopers Brigade Folgore*), was carried out with **virtually no notice**, due to the **sudden change in the international geopolitical scenario**.

During the long **deployment**, lasting over **15 years**, the **Italian Armed Forces** were involved in numerous **armed clashes**, suffering the loss of 53 soldiers and reporting **723 wounded**.

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The coffins of the six Paratroopers fallen in the Kabul attack on September 17, 2009, before their return to Italy from Afghanistan.

Operation Safe Streets: the military safeguarding national security

The **Operation Safe Streets**, launched in **July 2008**, involved the deployment of the **Italian Armed Forces** in **combating crime** and **maintaining public order**, in support of the police forces.

Extended several times over the years and still ongoing, the mission assigns **Italian soldiers** the **status of Public Security Agents**, with duties including:

- **Patrolling and surveillance** in high-risk areas, in collaboration with police forces.
- **Combating petty crime** and preventing illegal activities.

- **Guarding sensitive sites and targets**, such as embassies, places of worship, stations, and critical infrastructure.
- **Increasing deterrence** against potential threats to public safety.

The operation, active in **numerous Italian cities**, represents an excellent model of **collaboration between armed forces and law enforcement**, unique in Europe, significantly contributing to territorial security.

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The Chief of SME, General C.A. Carmine Masiello in conversation with the Safe Streets military in Rome. The operation, launched in 2008, represents an excellent model of collaboration between armed forces and law enforcement.

Returning to Somalia

In **January 2010**, the **European Council** approved the deployment of a **military mission** to contribute to the **training of Somali security forces**, named **European Union Training Mission Somalia (EUTM or EUTM-S)**. The mission's **headquarters** was initially established in **Kampala, Uganda**, until **March 2013**; subsequently, from **April 2013**, it was moved to **Mogadishu**, at the **Mogadishu International Airport (MIA)**.

The **Italian national contribution**, defined by **Law 131/2016**, authorized the deployment of up to **423 soldiers** and **18 land vehicles** throughout **2017**, with tasks ranging from **training Somali Armed Forces** to **contingent security**, from **logistical and administrative support** to the role of **Commander's staff**.

Since **2014**, **Italy** has held the position of **Mission Commander**, with **General Massimo Mingiardi** as the first Italian commander of the mission. **Currently**, the mission is still ongoing and is under the leadership of **General Giuseppe Zizzari**.

The **EUTM Somalia mission** contributes to the **training of Somali soldiers**, focusing particularly on the preparation of **officers, specialists, and instructors**. This operation is among the **European Union initiatives** to **stabilize Somalia**, still a conflict zone, where the **Mogadishu government**, supported by **African Union troops**, opposed the **Al-Shabaab Qaeda militias**.

A further confirmation of **Italy's constant commitment** in **international operations** for the **security and stability** of **countries in difficulty**.

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Italian soldiers engaged in training Somali soldiers in mine detection and removal techniques during the fifth mandate of EUTM-S in 2018.

Libya, defending the medical mission

With **just a few weeks' notice**, in **September 2016**, Italian soldiers were sent to **Libya** as part of **Operation Hippocrates**.

Their **main task** was to ensure the **security of the Italian contingent** engaged in the **medical mission in Misurata**. The unit included **65 doctors and paramedics, 135 logistics personnel**, an **organic company of paratroopers** from the **186th Paratroopers Regiment Folgore** designated for the “defense force” and a **specialist unit** from the **8th Paratroopers Sappers Regiment Folgore**.

The operation's base was located at the **former Libyan Air Academy**, where an **advanced unit of raiders from the 9th Regiment Col Moschin** was already operational, tasked with preparing the ground for the Italian intervention.

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Field hospital in Misurata. The Paratroopers of the Folgore will ensure the security of the facility and medical personnel.

Operation Prima Parthica - Fight against ISIS

Since **2014**, Italy has participated in **Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR)**, a multinational coalition of **84 nations and 5 international organizations** engaged in countering **Daesh** in **Iraq and Syria**. The operation took place within the framework of **Art. 51 of the UN Charter** and **Resolutions 2170 and 2178 of 2014**, in response to the Iraqi government's request for assistance.

A key role was played by **General Roberto Vannacci**, who between **September 2017 and August 2018** assumed command of the **national land contingent** in **Operation Prima Parthica**, also serving as **Deputy Commanding General for Training** of the anti-ISIS coalition.

A constant commitment in crisis theaters

These are just **some examples**, which should **invite Ms. Littizzetto and those who share her views to a more in-depth reflection**.

Currently, **Italy** is engaged in **40 international missions**, including **Operation Leonte** in **Lebanon** as part of **UNIFIL**, the **MISIN mission in Niger** for **training local forces**, the **Task Force Praesidium** in **Iraq** for the **protection of the Mosul Dam**, and the **EUTM-Mali mission** for **supporting the reorganization and training of the Malian armed forces**.

The **Italian Armed Forces** continue to operate with **professionalism and dedication**, confirming themselves as a **reference point at the international level**.

It should also not be forgotten the role of the **Italian Army** on national territory: in addition to the **operational deployments** already mentioned, such as the **Vespri Siciliani** operations, the **G8** in Genoa, and **Strade Sicure**, it is always at the **forefront in emergencies**, intervening in cases of **floods, natural disasters, and health crises**, such as the **COVID-19 pandemic**, providing **support and assistance to the population**.

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Conclusion

The **Italian Armed Forces** are an essential component of the **country's security and defense policy**, with a level of preparation aligned with the best **NATO standards**. Their commitment has resulted in the sacrifice of **numerous soldiers, fallen in the line of duty**.

Sterile and derogatory criticisms do not undermine the value of the men and women who, with **dedication and a spirit of service**, operate daily for **national and international security**, often in **high-risk contexts**.

Rather than mocking those who serve with sacrifice, it would be appropriate to **inform oneself and recognize** their contribution to **global peace and stability**, a commitment carried out with professionalism and a sense of duty.