



The many tasks of the AFM

Many people perceive the Armed Forces of Malta as being an entity only focused on training for war! It is a perception which couldn't be further from the truth!

MAJ. DAVID P. ATTARD

Since its establishment in October 1970 the role and organisation of the Armed Forces of Malta has evolved according to existing and perceived threats as well as the duties required of it by the state.

Apart from its core military duties, the AFM has in the past been responsible for air traffic control, meteorological services, fire-fighting at the airport, pilot boat services in Grand Harbour, as well as the supervision of various labour corps engaged in infrastructural projects. Whilst such tasks served the country well, they left an impact on the military capabilities of the Force. This trend was eventually

slowly reversed and today Malta can boast of a capable armed force that is at the government's disposal to attain national security objectives.

In its broadest definition, the term national security goes well beyond purely military considerations. Security today does not only imply protection from war, but also from other dangers, threats or challenges to the survival and well being of the state.

Whilst the defence dimension of security cannot be underestimated, increased importance is being given to the non-military security aspects whether they are of a political, societal, economic or environmental nature. Such non-military threats include ►

international terrorism, human trafficking, drug trafficking and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The spillover effects of failing states, or inter-state and intra-state conflicts particularly within the African region are also having a direct and visible impact on Malta's security.

The Force must also be prepared to deal with any natural or man-made disasters.

There exists no immediate military threat such as a full scale invasion of Malta. That said, military threats against Maltese interests over issues such as resource allocation in the Mediterranean can develop over short periods of time! It is therefore the duty of any armed force to provide for the territorial defence of the state and its interests. In peacetime this is achieved through the concept of deterrence. During crisis and when deterrence fails, the state has the option to use or threaten to use what military force it has to contain and deal with the threats that risk getting out of hand.

Set within this context, the purpose of the Armed Forces of Malta is to meet Malta's security requirements both in peacetime and in crisis, as well as to provide a token contribution towards international peace, security and stability.

The Armed Forces perform four primary missions: peacetime security missions, territorial defence, crisis management, as well as defence and security diplomacy missions.

Over 85 per cent of the Armed Forces of Malta's resources are directed to the performance of peacetime security missions. These include air and maritime surveillance, security at Malta International Airport and important government buildings, dealing with bombs and other explosive devices, diving duties, anti-drug trafficking, counter-terrorism, the storage and issue of explosives for civil purposes, bank security duties, ceremonial duties, VIP transport, the control of merchant shipping, fisheries and resources protection, as well as maritime law enforcement.

The AFM also performs a number of humanitarian tasks that include the provision of a search and rescue service, medical air ambulance duties, and last but not least, securing, feeding and accommodating hundreds of irregular migrants within military barracks.

Following Malta's pledge towards the European Union's Military Headline Goal, the AFM is in the process of establishing a fully manned, trained and equipped special duties company to participate in EU led-crisis management operations. Malta has pledged to deploy an infantry platoon to participate in overseas humanitarian and rescue operations that have a mandate from the United Nations or the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe. Any decision to participate in such operations is a national decision and cannot be forced on Malta.

The AFM also performs a number of defence and security diplomacy missions. It maintains relations with the military forces of a number of countries on a bilateral basis. Such relations have along the years resulted in the acquisition of military equipment as well as the availability of excellent training opportunities for Maltese soldiers at some of the world's best military schools.

In view of Malta's membership of the European Union, the AFM has posted an officer to the Malta Permanent Representation in Brussels.

Maltese officers also participate in confidence and security building and arms control missions overseas, particularly in the Balkans in support of the Dayton Agreement.

The AFM has, for several years, also held annual military exercises with Italian forces. "Exercise Canale" is a maritime-related exercise in which all Mediterranean littoral states are invited to send observers. On the other hand, Exercise Terra Ferma is a peace support training exercise once again organised on an annual basis with Italy.

There is further potential for the Armed Forces of Malta to get involved in defence and security outreach activities. The setting up of the Combined (Malta-USA) Search and Rescue School in Malta to cater for students from the Mediterranean region will be a step in this direction. Such activities serve as confidence building measures and enhance Malta's image internationally whilst sustaining Malta's wider security interests by contributing towards peace, security and stability in the Mediterranean littoral. ●

An A (Airport Security) Company soldier on patrol at Malta International Airport.

