

For all but its first three years, the AFM has been able to draw on generous assistance from the Italian Military Mission in Malta. The head of the mission, Col. Salvatore Fadda explains the purpose and future of the mission to Christopher Scicluna.



Photograph by Darrin Zammit Lupi

The Italian Military Mission: Assuming new roles



Col. Salvatore Fadda

Although best known for the rescue service it provides using its Luqa-based helicopters, the Missione Italiana di Assistenza Tecnico Militare actually has specialists or instructors attached to most sections of the AFM, providing training and logistical support for anything from infantry tactics to engineering.

The mission, originally called the Missione Italiana di Cooperazione Tecnica e Militare, was formed in 1973 and its name and tasks have changed over time – with another review on the horizon.

“Over the years, the mission’s tasks have been focused on training and technical assistance to the AFM, Police and the Civil Protection Department given by personnel based in Malta. Initially, there was also a strong emphasis on



infrastructural development”, said Col. Salvatore Fadda, commander for the past two years.

The mission has 14 officers and 35 NCOs headquartered at Luqa barracks and divided into six branches – Command, Training, Logistics, Naval, Coast Guard and Air Force – Search and Rescue. It is backed by two AB212 twin-engined

helicopters and 90 vehicles including 22 large trucks, lighter army vehicles and earth movers.

The size of the mission is however expected to be scaled back in a year’s time as the mission’s assistance to the AFM becomes more focused on the Maltese military’s needs. Search and rescue missions will continue to be flown out of Malta by joint Italian and Maltese crews on the Italian helicopters, but the main tasks of the mission, which will be renamed Missione per la Collaborazione nel Campo della Difesa, will be ►

collaboration in security and defence policy, the fight against terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and human trafficking.

Ideally, Col. Massa said, Mediterranean rim countries would agree on joint maritime patrols to control illegal human trafficking, something in which the mission could be involved.

The mission will also help the AFM in its preparation for participation in overseas crisis management missions. The mission will also train the AFM in the use of equipment, the organisation of military exercises and pollution control.

Training will be provided by specialist teams which will come to Malta according to need, although a head-quarters unit will be retained here.

“Italy, while respecting Malta’s neutrality, has a long history of helping the AFM. We have been careful to keep out of internal matters while providing the help that the country needed, from assisting in the building of the new runway in the 1970s to transferring patrol boats and helicopters and providing training in search and rescue”, Col. Fadda said.

Maltese soldiers on attachment training in Forli in Italy.



Over the past few months, the mission’s instructors have been involved in the organisation of courses on security and VIP protection, not least in view of the November Commonwealth summit. Other courses have been held on de-mining, radar electronics, peace-keeping, revenue security, ship boarding and inspection, sharp-shooting, rock climbing, helicopter procedures and small boat tactics.

Col. Fadda said he admired Maltese soldiers for their commitment and one of his regrets was that most Maltese did not know much about the Maltese armed forces.

“What Maltese soldiers lack in resources they make up for through loyalty, esprit de corps, initiative and courage,” he said. “Their attitude is that they should be second to none.” ●

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