



ARX160 heading into retirement: the NARP replaces it after a much shorter life than the FAL BM59 and AR70/90

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For decades, the standard rifle of the Italian soldier was a companion destined to last an entire generation. The **FAL BM59**, progressively adopted between the late 1950s and 1960s, and then the **AR/SC/SCP 70/90** family, introduced starting in 1990, accompanied the Italian Army for very long periods, crossing profound technological, doctrinal, and geopolitical changes.

With the **Beretta ARX160**, however, history seems destined to be different.

Born within the framework of the **Soldato Futuro** program, operationally tested as early as the late 2000s and progressively entering units in the following decade, the ARX160 is now beginning to give way to the new **Beretta NARP - New Assault Rifle Platform**.

Beretta Defense Technologies confirmed that the first contract for the Italian Army concerns **7,000 NARP in 5.56×45 NATO caliber** and that progressive distribution began in the fourth quarter of 2025, with the objective of gradually replacing the ARX160 currently in service.

This naturally does not mean that tomorrow ARX160s will disappear from Italian armories. Replacing tens of thousands of individual weapons takes years and the two platforms will inevitably continue to coexist.

Yet a historical fact emerges strongly nonetheless: **the ARX160 risks having one of the shortest cycles, if not the shortest, among the main standard rifles of the postwar Italian Army.**

From the FAL BM59 to the AR70/90: when a rifle lasted decades

The comparison is significant.

The **FAL BM59**, derived from the great Garand design family but profoundly transformed to meet Italian needs, was adopted by the Italian Army in the early 1960s and remained for decades one of the main individual weapons of combat units, until the progressive introduction of the **AR70/90** family.

Its operational cycle thus developed over approximately three decades.

Then came the AR70/90 family, in different AR, SC, and SCP configurations. But the transition from the old to the new rifle was not immediate, and Somalia probably represents one of the most effective images of that transition.

When the operation Ibis began, in December 1992, some of the paratroopers of the Folgore were still operating with the FAL BM59. The new SCP 70/90s were initially present mainly among the raiders of the [9th Assault Paratroopers Battalion "Col Moschin"](#), who also formed the first Italian contingent to arrive in Mogadishu on December 13, 1992.



On the left in the photo: Folgore paratrooper during an operation in Mogadishu, Somalia, armed with the FAL BM59. At the beginning of the Ibis mission, the old rifle was still widely issued to units, shortly before the progressive introduction of the AR/SC/SCP 70/90 family. - Copyright book "Il Volo dell'IBIS"

A few months later, the situation changed rapidly.

According to what was declared to our blog by **Paratrooper Vincenzo Palumbo**, then serving with the [186th Folgore Paratroopers Regiment](#), today President of the ANPd'I Section in Naples and coordinator of the "Reduci - Battaglia del Pastificio" group, the **SCP 70/90s** arrived at the unit in Siena still in wooden crates in mid-May 1993 and, just ten days later, departed with the men heading to Mogadishu.

Somalia thus became one of the first major operational proving grounds for the new rifle family: within a few months, **units went from the FAL BM59 to the SCP 70/90 directly on the eve of a real mission**, bringing the new weapon system from storage to the theater of operations almost without interruption.

From that point on, the AR/SC/SCP 70/90 family would accompany the Italian Armed Forces for over twenty years, until the progressive introduction of the ARX160.

In this case too, the replacement was not immediate. The AR70/90s continued to be used for years after the arrival of the first ARX160s. In May 2011, for example, the Italian Air Force officially defined the ARX160 as the "natural successor" to the AR70/90 during the delivery of new rifles to the 16th Wing.

It is, in essence, the same process we will see now between ARX160 and NARP: not a sudden replacement, but a progressive transition in which the old and new platform will inevitably

continue to coexist.



Somalia, June 1993. On the left, Second Lieutenant Gianfranco Paglia, Gold Medal for Military Valor, and Paratrooper Corporal Carmelo Mandolfo, Silver Medal for Military Valor of the Army, both decorated for their conduct in the fighting of July 2, 1993 in Mogadishu. In the photo both are armed with the Beretta SCP 70/90 - Photo courtesy of Carmelo Mandolfo

The ARX160 was born for the soldier of the future

To understand why its trajectory might be shorter, however, we must avoid an error: judging the ARX160 by 2026 standards.

When it was designed, it was decidedly modern weaponry.

The ARX160 was born within the broader **Soldato Futuro** program, which aimed to transform the individual fighter into an integrated system made up of weapon, communications, sensors, protections and observation capabilities.

The Army still describes it today as a next-generation rifle developed to exceed the performance of the Beretta 70/90: polymer structure, contained weight, high maneuverability, fully ambidextrous configuration, telescopic stock and Picatinny rails for day and night aiming systems.

The weapon was also part of a much broader ecosystem. In the Soldato Futuro concept it could be paired with the GLX160 grenade launcher and the ICWS system, with IR camera, TV camera, visible and infrared laser and integrated aiming systems.

For the time, it was an extremely advanced conception.

And above all, the ARX160 was not born solely at the designers' tables.

One of its first operational trials took place directly in Afghanistan. Some examples were employed by the **Brigata Paracadutisti "Folgore", both by the Special Forces of Col Moschin, and by the Airborne troops of the maneuver Regiments**, and it was precisely from observations from the operational theater that ergonomic and technical modifications were introduced.

In other words, the ARX160 was itself a child of the wars that followed September 11th.



Paratroopers of the "Folgore" Brigade employed in Operation Strade Sicure in front of the Colosseum, equipped with Beretta ARX160 rifles. The weapon accompanied, for over a decade, also deployments on national territory, in addition to operational missions abroad. - © Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta S.p.A.

Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine have compressed technological cycles

A BM59 could remain conceptually current for many years.

An AR70/90 could traverse an entire military generation receiving relatively limited updates.

In the 21st century, this has become much more difficult.

Afghanistan, Iraq and especially Ukraine have compressed the technological cycles of ground combat.

Over the past twenty-five years, the rifle is no longer simply the individual weapon around which sight, sling and magazine revolve.

It has progressively become a **platform on which converge optics, night vision systems, IR lasers, illuminators, thermal devices, sound suppressors and other accessories**, while simultaneously changing ammunition, individual protections, combat methods and employment procedures.

Afghanistan and Iraq had already demonstrated how rapidly real-world needs could modify configurations and doctrines.

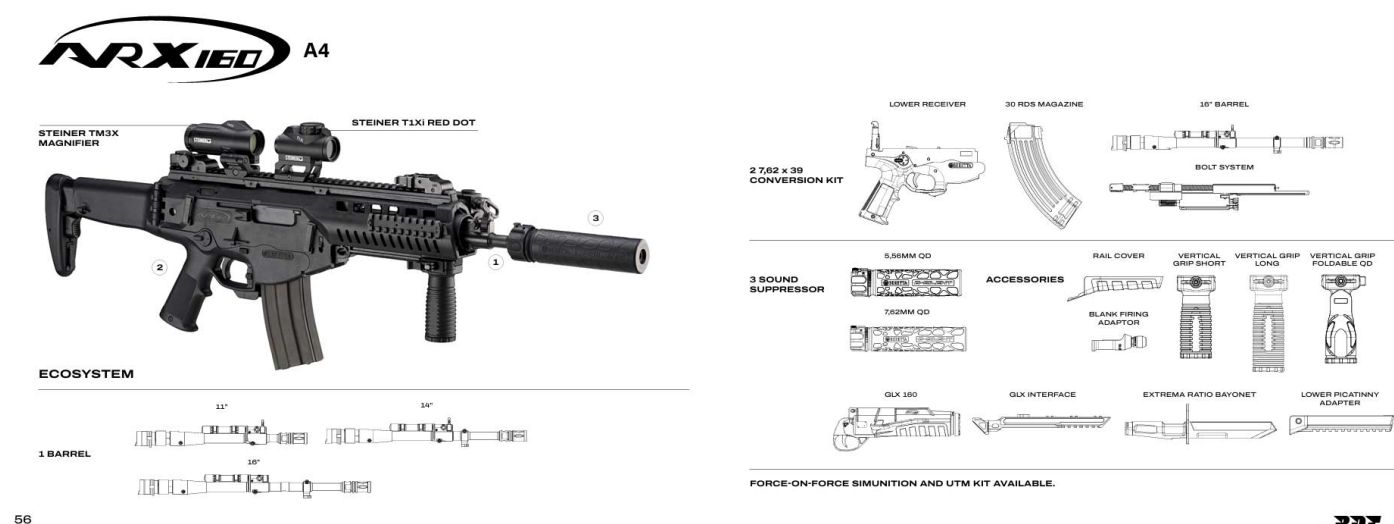
Ukraine has further accelerated this process.

The contemporary battlefield now evolves at a pace that can hardly be compared to that of the Cold War: sensors, drones, night vision devices, thermal equipment, detection systems, suppressors and night combat capabilities enter the units and rapidly modify what is also required of the individual weapon.

Consequently, the technological lifespan of a platform is inevitably shortened.

Not because after fifteen years a rifle suddenly stops working.

But because **the system in which it must be inserted changes**.



Beretta ARX160 A4, one of the most mature evolutions of the ARX160 platform. The configuration featured different barrel lengths, accessories, sound suppressors and even a conversion kit in 7.62×39, confirming how modularity was already one of the central points of the ARX project. - © Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta S.p.A.

ARX160: a failure? No

It is therefore wrong to interpret the arrival of the NARP as a rejection of the ARX160.

The ARX160 introduced to the Italian Army characteristics that, compared to the AR70/90, represented an obvious generational leap.

Complete ambidexterity, modularity, barrel change, ability to modify the ejection side, polymer structure, contained weight and strong integration with accessories were particularly innovative features when the project took shape.

And the weapon continued to evolve as well.

The Army developed the **A3** version, incorporating requests from operators in the development and experimentation activities of the Forza NEC program.

In 2016 the Armed Force explicitly indicated the completion of the upgrade from the ARX160 A1 to the A3.

The point therefore is not that the ARX160 was technically wrong.

It is that between the weapon imagined in the two-thousands and the one required by today's combatant, much has changed.



Beretta ARX160 equipped with GLX160 underslung grenade launcher, configuration developed as part of the Future Soldier program to integrate individual fire and support capability with 40 mm ammunition in a single platform. - © Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta S.p.A.

The NARP Arrives

Beretta launched the NARP program in **2018**.

The first functional prototypes were delivered to units of the Italian Army in 2022 for testing and evaluation, while the platform was presented publicly at DSEI London in 2023.

The development itself tells something important: while the ARX160 was still fully in service, work on the next generation had already begun.

Beretta defines the NARP as a platform designed around five main capabilities: **lethality, reliability, ergonomics, modularity, and reduction of acoustic and visual signature**.

And it is precisely this last element that tells how much priorities have changed.

The sound moderator, for example, is no longer considered merely a specialized accessory for Special Forces. The management of the weapon's acoustic and visual signature is increasingly entering into the overall design of the system.



Two Italian Army soldiers equipped with the new Beretta NARP, the weapon platform destined to progressively replace the ARX160 in units - Copyright Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta S.p.A.

But the NARP is not an “Italian M4”

Aesthetic similarity often leads to oversimplification: **“Beretta abandoned the ARX160 to go back to making a modern M4”**.

It is a misleading definition.

It is true that the NARP deliberately adopts **ergonomics familiar to AR platforms**.

And it is Beretta itself that says so: the company speaks of “ergonomics similar to AR platforms”, while simultaneously emphasizing the presence of specific characteristics developed internally.

The reference to the AR-15 is evident also in the general upper/lower structure and in the arrangement of the controls. The geometry of the controls was studied to facilitate transition for operators already familiar with AR platforms.

But stopping at the external appearance means ignoring the mechanics.

The traditional M4 uses the operating system derived from the AR-15/M16 with gas conveyed to the bolt carrier group.

The **NARP instead uses a gas subtraction system with short-stroke piston**, associated with a rotating bolt. It is the same configuration officially indicated by Beretta in the technical specifications of the platform.

The recovery system is moreover contained within the weapon, a solution that also allows the use of optional folding stocks, something not possible on a traditional M4 without major modifications to the architecture.

The NARP also features gas regulation, a charging handle with quick-release system, M-LOK interfaces, and design already oriented toward the use of a sound moderator.

In other words:

the NARP takes from the AR ecosystem what has become the ergonomic standard in recent decades, but it is not simply a clone of the M4.

It is a Beretta platform developed around contemporary requirements using an ergonomic language now extremely widespread among military and Western Special Forces.

The distinction is important.

The ARX160 deliberately sought to break with many previous conventions. The NARP appears instead more pragmatic.

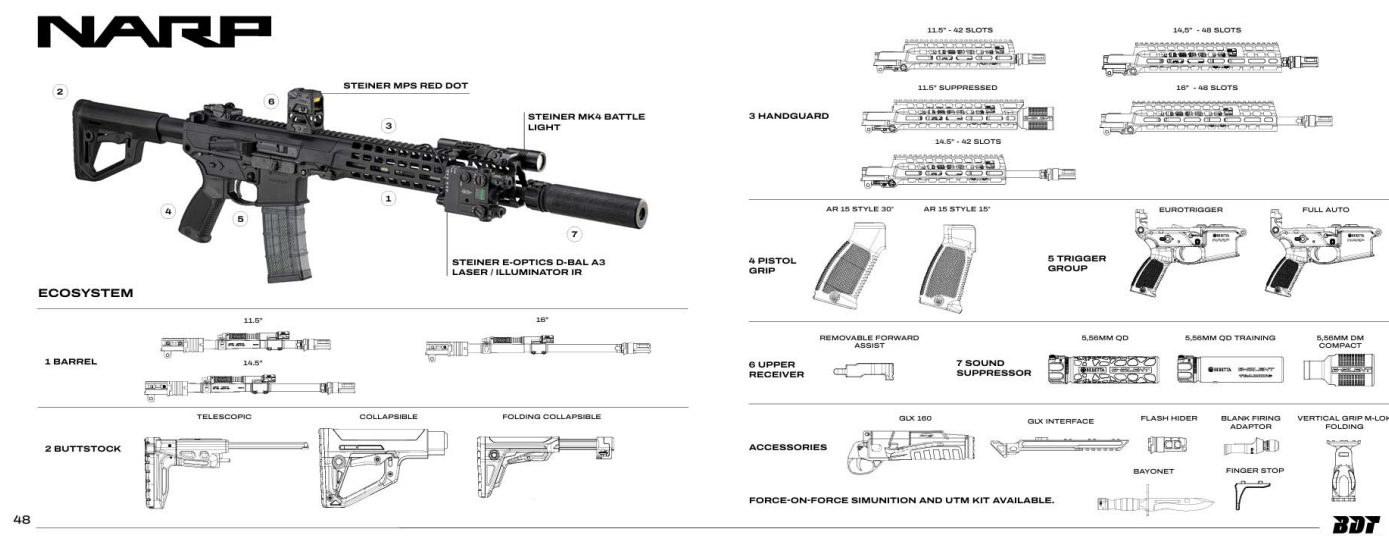
It does not necessarily seek to reinvent the ergonomics of the assault rifle, but adopts solutions already familiar to many operators and concentrates innovation on mechanics, reliability,

modularity, signature management, and integration with accessories.

It is a different philosophy.

And probably it is precisely the experience gained in the last twenty years that suggests it.

When a soldier continuously transitions from multinational training to NATO missions, when Special Forces from different countries work together, and when much of the Western market uses controls that are now very similar, even **ergonomic standardization becomes an operational advantage**.



The modularity of the Beretta NARP: the platform can be configured with barrels and handguards of different lengths, different stocks, trigger groups, grips, sound moderators, GLX160 grenade launchers and numerous optical and tactical accessories. An ecosystem designed to adapt the same weapon base to different missions and roles. - © Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta S.p.A.

Not just 5.56 NATO

Another important signal is the willingness to transform NARP into a true family.

The first Italian contract concerns the **5.56x45 NATO version with 14.5-inch barrel**, but Beretta already has configurations in **.300 Blackout** and **6.5 Grendel**.

Beretta Defense Technologies has also confirmed development of a **7.62x51 NATO** variant.

The platform is therefore born with an evolutionary margin that goes beyond the simple one-to-one replacement of the ARX160.

And perhaps this is the true meaning of the word **Platform** contained in the NARP name.

Not a single rifle necessarily destined to remain identical for thirty years, but a base on which to build different configurations and capabilities.



Beretta NARP in 6.5 Grendel configuration, one of the variants developed to expand the modularity of the new platform beyond the standard 5.56×45 NATO caliber. - © Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta S.p.A.

Does the service rifle no longer last a generation?

The history of the ARX160 could therefore also mark the end of an era.

The BM59 and AR70/90 belonged to a world in which a major individual armament program could be conceived with an operational cycle of several decades in mind.

The ARX160 was instead born precisely at the moment when that logic begins to change.

The post-September 11 wars produced an enormous amount of operational feedback.

Afghanistan and Iraq modified equipment and tactics directly during conflicts.

Ukraine is doing something even more radical: it is showing how quickly commercial technology, sensors, drones, electronic warfare and new forms of observation can modify the battlefield.

In this environment, expecting an individual system to remain technologically unchanged for thirty years might simply no longer be realistic.

And this is probably the key to understanding the brief arc of the ARX160.

Not a rifle born poorly.

On the contrary, **a rifle born at the wrong moment to be able to age slowly.**

When it appeared it represented the future of the Italian soldier.

Fifteen years later, that future had already changed.

And the NARP represents not only its successor: it represents a different way of conceiving the individual weapon and, above all, its life cycle.

Because today the problem is no longer to build a rifle necessarily destined to last thirty years.

It is to build a platform capable of **evolving rapidly enough not to be overtaken by the battlefield before even reaching the middle of its operational life.**