

A400M: Germany Secures European Production, Italy Looks to the Future of Folgore and Strategic Airlift

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The future of European military airlift is once again at the center of the continental defense agenda, thanks to a decisive move by Berlin that, indirectly, **opens up highly interesting prospects for the Italian Armed Forces as well**.

The German Ministry of Defense has announced the allocation of funds in the 2027 budget for the purchase of **16 new Airbus A400M Atlas aircraft in tactical configuration**. The move provides a genuine lifeline for the European consortium, **ensuring continuity for the final assembly line in Seville** just as **the Italian Aeronautica Militare's interest in the four-engine turboprop is becoming concrete again**.

The German choice: enhancing tactical projection

The decision, reached during the Bundestag Budget Committee's overnight marathon session that concluded on Friday, 14 November 2026, is part of a **German defense budget exceeding €139 billion for 2027** (including the special fund for the Bundeswehr, with the

regular budget rising to around €110 billion). The parliamentary process will continue with a **vote by the Bundestag plenary between 24 and 27 November**, followed by consideration by the Bundesrat on 18 December.

Germany is already the A400M's largest operator worldwide, with a **fleet of 53 aircraft** delivered between December 2014 and April 2026. However, the first aircraft delivered to the Luftwaffe met a purely logistical standard, designed for transport between secure airports. As Defense Minister Boris Pistorius indicated last September, Berlin has chosen to close the operational gap by acquiring 16 aircraft equipped from the outset with **full tactical packages**: **advanced self-protection systems**, **airdrop capability for cargo and paratroopers**, and **the ability to operate from semi-prepared runways in high-threat environments**.

A lifeline for Seville

From an industrial perspective, the German order comes at a critical time. By March 2026, Airbus had delivered 139 of the 178 A400Ms ordered overall by ten nations, leaving a **backlog of just 39 aircraft** and a **production rate reduced to around eight aircraft per year**.

The order for 16 new aircraft will **extend the production outlook for Airbus's Spanish facility in Seville**, keeping the assembly line open and **stabilizing industrial costs across the entire program**, launched in 2003 by seven partner nations (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Turkey, Belgium, and Luxembourg).

The "A400M for Italy" dossier and Italian requirements

It is precisely the sustainability of the European production line that intersects with the assessments currently underway in Rome.

Although no formal acquisition documents have yet been issued, on October 30 — during a bilateral meeting in Rome between the Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force, **Generale di Squadra Aerea Antonio Conserva**, and the head of the Royal Air Force, **Air Chief Marshal Harv Smyth** — a photograph released by the British Embassy showed a **dossier titled "Airbus A400M for Italy"** on the table, bearing the logos of the Italian Air Force and Airbus.

Italy's possible entry (or rather, return) to the program would meet **specific joint operational requirements**:

- **Modernizing the transport fleet:** The fleet of **C-130J Super Hercules operated by the 46ª Brigata Aerea in Pisa**, acquired in the early 2000s, has accumulated extensive

operational use across all out-of-area theaters and requires **planning for its future replacement**.

- **Support for the Army's heavy component:** New land-force modernization programs, ranging from the ***Freccia EVO* armored vehicles** to the **future tracked systems derived from the *Lynx***, involve weights and dimensions that exceed the C-130J's payload capacity. With a **transport capacity of up to 37 tons** and a significantly larger cargo hold, the A400M would enable **independent strategic-tactical deployments** without having to rely systematically on chartering third-party aircraft.

A vital asset for the Brigata Paracadutisti "Folgore"

In this context, the availability of an aircraft of this capacity takes on **fundamental strategic value for the Brigata Paracadutisti "Folgore"**, which serves as the **Italian Armed Forces' ready reserve and rapid-deployment force**. To maintain its *Forcible Entry* capability at the highest level — forced entry into an operational theater through airborne assault — Folgore units require **continuous and intensive airborne training activity**, both for training and operations, conducted throughout the year.

The chronic operational pressure on the aircraft of the 46ª Brigata Aerea, often deployed across multiple international theaters or undergoing complex maintenance cycles, can in fact limit the availability of flight hours dedicated to parachute drops.The introduction of an aircraft such as the A400M would give Folgore a **decisive qualitative and quantitative leap**:

- **Greater force projection capacity:** The ability to carry and drop **up to 116 fully equipped paratroopers in a single sortie** (through the two side doors or from the rear ramp) makes it possible to concentrate a critical mass of forces on the ground in extremely short timeframes, multiplying the effectiveness of every training or operational mission.
- **Personnel-equipment integration and heavy airdrop resupply:** In addition to personnel, the A400M can **airdrop platforms carrying tactical vehicles, light artillery, and heavy supplies** (up to 25 tons total by airdrop), providing paratroopers in the field with immediate mobility, firepower, and logistical self-sufficiency from the first minutes after landing.
- **Allied interoperability:** Operating the same aircraft already used by Europe’s leading airborne forces — from the German paratroopers of *Division Schnelle Kräfte* to the French *11e Brigade Parachutiste* and the British *16 Air Assault Brigade* — would radically simplify

the **standardization of embarkation and airdrop procedures in multinational NATO exercises**.

A window of opportunity for Rome

Italy was among the founding countries of the A400M project in the late 1990s, before withdrawing in 2001 in favor of the C-130J and C-27J Spartan combination, while retaining a **significant industrial role through Avio Aero** (responsible for the power gearbox of the TP400-D6 turboprop engines).

Today, Germany’s decision offers Italy a **double opportunity**. On the one hand, it ensures that **the Seville production line remains active and competitive** should the Italian Defense General Staff decide to launch a multiyear acquisition program. On the other, the arrival of the new tactical aircraft in the Luftwaffe could prompt Berlin to consider, in the coming years, the **transfer or reconfiguration of some of its early logistics-configured aircraft**, creating **potential options on the government pre-owned market as well**. For Italian Defense — and for Folgore’s operational readiness — the time for technical assessments now has a far more solid European industrial framework on which to build.