

Army Aviation, its flight excellence targeted by (false) maintenance allegations after the tragedy in Bosnia

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The tragedy of **October 29, 2026, in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, which claimed the lives of four Italian service members during an activity conducted as part of Operation EUFOR Althea, has deeply affected the Esercito Italiano, the Corpo Militare Volontario della Croce Rossa Italiana, and the entire country.

In the CH-47 Chinook helicopter crash near Brčko, Sergeants **Simone Ruggia and Claudio Marchesi**, assigned to the Aviazione dell'Esercito, Lieutenant **Franco Adriano Zecchillo**, and Sergeant **Laura Procacci**, both of the Corpo Militare Volontario della Croce Rossa Italiana, lost their lives.

There were 15 people on board in total. The other 11 occupants were injured.

While investigative bodies are working to determine the causes of the crash, the incident has already sparked a political controversy over maintenance of Esercito Italiano helicopters.

The controversy makes it necessary to examine the workings of one of the Armed Force's most specialized components, reviewing fleet data, resources allocated to logistics support, and the flight safety system.

How much does Italy actually invest to keep its CH-47F helicopters operational? How does the Italian fleet compare with other European fleets? And what can we say, based on available statistics, about the safety record of the Aviazione dell'Esercito?

The answers emerge from official documents issued by the Ministry of Defense, parliamentary records, and data published by leading international military organizations.

The political controversy over CH-47 maintenance

On October 30, the day after the crash, the Five Star Movement floor leaders on the Defense Committees of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, **Arnaldo Lomuti and Bruno Marton**, issued a statement denouncing what they described as a disproportion **between resources allocated to acquiring new weapons and those set aside for maintaining equipment already in service**, claiming that they receive ongoing reports to this effect from military personnel.

According to Lomuti and Marton, while more than €10 billion is invested annually in the purchase of new weapons systems, only a "few" hundred million would be allocated to maintaining Armed Forces equipment. According to the lawmakers, this situation results in maintenance difficulties, the use of so-called **equipment «cannibalization» to recover spare parts**, and low levels of operational availability, with consequent risks to personnel safety.

The statements prompted a sharp response from **Defense Minister Guido Crosetto** and other members of the governing majority, particularly over the link drawn between alleged general shortcomings in the maintenance system and a tragedy whose causes had yet to be determined.

In particular, the minister stated:

> *«The maintenance of those aircraft exceeds that of any civilian vehicle».*

The request to assess the maintenance condition of an aircraft involved in an accident is, of course, legitimate. Indeed, it is an integral part of any aviation investigation.

It is another matter, however, to turn a hypothesis that has yet to be verified into a general judgment on the reliability of maintenance across the entire Aviazione dell'Esercito.

At present, no maintenance shortcomings have been established as the cause of the accident in Bosnia. **Only technical investigations will determine whether any mechanical issues, procedures, human factors, or environmental conditions contributed to the tragedy.**

In the meantime, it is possible to examine objective evidence documenting the organization and investments allocated to Italy's Chinook fleet.

Italy operates 16 CH-47F Chinooks: a strategic fleet for the Army

Before the accident in Bosnia, the Aviazione dell'Esercito Italiano operated a nominal fleet of **16 CH-47F Chinook helicopters**, acquired under the SMD 02/2008 multi-year modernization and renewal program.

Delivery of all sixteen aircraft was completed in January 2019, as confirmed by the Ministry of Defense in a parliamentary response dated April 29, 2021.

The CH-47F is one of the most important heavy-lift transport helicopters in the international military arena.

Featuring two tandem rotors, it has personnel, materiel, and equipment transport capabilities that make it particularly suited to supporting ground forces.

It can be employed for tactical transport, logistical support, medical evacuation, materiel recovery, and rescue missions.

The Italian fleet is assigned to the CH-47 component of the Aviazione dell'Esercito, with the **1° Reggimento AVES “Antares” di Viterbo** playing a central role.

The Chinook also represents a particularly valuable capability for joint operations, in which the rapid movement of personnel and equipment is often an essential requirement.

Its operational importance is also confirmed by the aircraft's widespread international use by numerous armed forces and by modernization programs that will extend its service for several decades.

Nearly 700 million euros for maintenance and logistical support of Italy's Chinooks

A particularly significant figure emerges from official documentation issued by the Ministry of Defense's **Direzione degli Armamenti Aeronautici e per l'Aeronavigabilità**.

On July 10, 2025, a preliminary report and procurement determination were prepared concerning logistical support for the Italian Army's CH-47F Chinook fleet.

The document, subsequently updated through supplementary notes, provided for **total multi-year funding of 697.540.000 euros for the 2025–2032 period**, allocated to technical, logistical, and maintenance support for the helicopters.

On September 29, 2025, the Ministry of Defense formally signed contract No. 1186 with Leonardo Helicopters S.p.A., for a total amount of €696,202,907.67.

The signing of the contract is **explicitly confirmed by official order No. M_D A4B89B9 DE12026 0000021 of February 6, 2026**, issued by the Directorate of Aeronautical Armaments and Airworthiness, which appoints the Contracting Officer's Representative.

This is therefore not a simple projected expenditure or an ongoing procurement procedure, but **a contract already signed for nearly €700 million**.

The program includes:

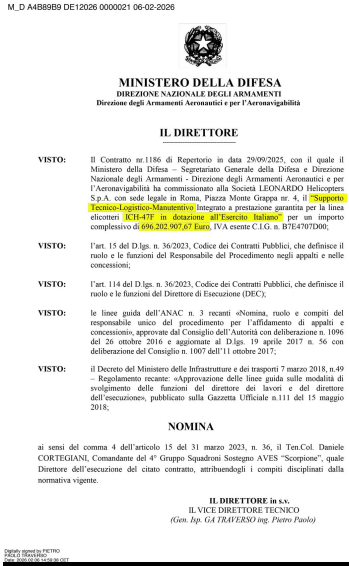
- **Overhaul, maintenance and repair of aircraft.**
- **Procurement of spare parts and replenishment of stocks.**
- **Maintenance support for turboshaft engines and related components.**
- **Technical and engineering support.**
- **Updating of technical publications and manuals.**
- **Availability of specialized ground support equipment.**

- **Direct support at Armed Force facilities through specialist maintenance teams.**

The stated objective is to preserve aircraft functionality and efficiency, ensuring the continuity of support for operational activities.

The document recognizes **Leonardo Elicotteri** as the system manager for the Italian CH-47F fleet, with regard to configuration expertise, technical documentation, incident analysis and systems upgrades.

This demonstrates that logistical support for the Chinook fleet is subject to structured, long-term financial planning.



M_D A4B89B9 DE12026 0000021 06-02-2026

MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA
DIREZIONE NAZIONALE DEGLI ARMAMENTI
Direzione degli Armamenti Aeronautici e per l'Aeronavigabilità

IL DIRETTORE

VISTO: Il Contratto nr.1186 di Repertorio in data 29/09/2025, con il quale il Ministero della Difesa – Segretariato Generale della Difesa e Direzione Nazionale degli Armamenti - Direzione degli Armamenti Aeronautici e per l'Aeronavigabilità ha commissionato alla Società LEONARDO Helicopters S.p.A. con sede legale in Roma, Piazza Monte Grappa nr. 4, il "Supporto Tecnico-Logistico-Manutentivo integrato a prestazione garantita per la linea elicotteri ICH-47F in dotazione all'Esercito Italiano" per un importo complessivo di 696.202.907,67 Euro, IVA esente C.I.G. n. B7E4707D00;

VISTO: l'art. 15 del D.lgs. n. 36/2023, Codice dei Contratti Pubblici, che definisce il ruolo e le funzioni del Responsabile del Procedimento negli appalti e nelle concessioni;

VISTO: l'art. 114 del D.lgs. n. 36/2023, Codice dei Contratti Pubblici, che definisce il ruolo e le funzioni del Direttore di Esecuzione (DEC);

VISTO: le linee guida dell'ANAC n. 3 recanti «Nomina, ruolo e compiti del responsabile unico del procedimento per l'affidamento di appalti e concessioni», approvate dal Consiglio dell'Autorità con deliberazione n. 1096 del 26 ottobre 2016 e aggiornate al D.lgs. 19 aprile 2017 n. 56 con deliberazione del Consiglio n. 1007 dell'11 ottobre 2017;

VISTO: il Decreto del Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei trasporti 7 marzo 2018, n.49 – Regolamento recante: «Approvazione delle linee guida sulle modalità di svolgimento delle funzioni del direttore dei lavori e del direttore dell'esecuzione», pubblicato sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale n.111 del 15 maggio 2018;

NOMINA

ai sensi del comma 4 dell'articolo 15 del 31 marzo 2023, n. 36, il Ten.Col. Daniele CORTEGIANI, Comandante del 4° Gruppo Squadroni Sostegno AVES "Scorpione", quale Direttore dell'esecuzione del citato contratto, attribuendogli i compiti disciplinati dalla normativa vigente.

IL DIRETTORE in s.v.
IL VICE DIRETTORE TECNICO
(Gen. Isp. GA TRAVERSO ing. Pietro Paolo)

Digitally signed by PIETRO PAOLO TRAVERSO
Date: 2026.02.06 14:58:00 CET

Official Ministry of Defense order of February 6, 2026, confirming the signing on September 29, 2025, of the €696.2 million contract with Leonardo Helicopters for technical, logistical and maintenance support for the Esercito Italiano CH-47F Chinook fleet. Source: https://www.difesa.it/assets/allegati/87336/dd21del06022026.pdf

How much is allocated annually to the CH-47F fleet?

Supplementary note No. 2, dated November 4, 2025, specifies the allocation of funding across the individual fiscal years.

Year	Planned funding
2025	56.000.000 €
2026	145.000.000 €
2027	82.176.644,60 €

2028	83.208.907,64 €
2029	82.654.447,76 €
2030	68.000.000 €
2031	90.000.000 €
2032	90.500.000 €
Total	**697.540.000 €**

The largest allocation is planned for 2026, with **€145 million**.

Across the eight fiscal years, the program equates to an arithmetic average of approximately **€87.19 million per year** for the entire fleet.

When this sum is divided among the sixteen aircraft nominally in service, it produces a theoretical average of **€5.45 million per helicopter per year**.

This is an accounting allocation for the multiyear program, not the actual annual maintenance cost of each aircraft.

The figure includes a range of services beyond routine inspections and repairs, including engineering support, spare parts, equipment, and specialist activities.

Moreover, the annual distribution of resources is not uniform: planned funding varies significantly from one fiscal year to the next.

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How much does the United Kingdom spend on its Chinooks?

A particularly interesting international comparison can be made with the United Kingdom.

On **May 17, 2024**, in response to a parliamentary question, the British Ministry of Defence stated that the routine annual support costs for its Chinook fleet amounted to approximately **£160 million**.

British program documentation indicates a departmental fleet of sixty aircraft, which is expected to be progressively reduced.

Using the fleet of sixty aircraft as the basis for calculation, the theoretical average cost of routine support is approximately **£2.67 million per helicopter per year (equivalent to approximately €3.20 million) per helicopter per year**.

The comparison with Italy therefore yields the following figures.

Parameter	Italy	United Kingdom
Reference fleet	16	60
Annual support considered	87,19 million €	160 million £
Theoretical annual average per aircraft	5,45 million €	2,67 million £
Time frame	2025–2032 plan	2024 annual figure

Although they do not represent a perfectly like-for-like comparison, **the figures highlight Italy's substantial financial investment in maintaining the operational readiness of its CH-47F Chinook fleet**.

With nearly **700 million euros in planned funding over eight years for a fleet of just 16 helicopters**, the Esercito Italiano is allocating particularly significant resources to logistical support for its Chinooks, amounting to a theoretical average of approximately **5,45 million euros per aircraft per year**.

This financial commitment becomes even more significant when compared with that of the United Kingdom.

Although the two programs include different categories of expenditure and do not allow for a direct comparison of maintenance costs, **the Italian figure demonstrates the significance of the resources allocated to technical support, maintenance, spare-parts availability, and engineering support**.

These are therefore not marginal investments, but rather multi-year financial planning that assigns a leading role to maintaining the operational readiness of the CH-47F fleet.

This documented reality deserves to be considered in the debate over the "alleged maintenance shortcomings," without, of course, prejudging the conclusions of the investigation into the causes of the accident in Bosnia.

Italian maintenance investments began well before 2025

The nearly 700 million euro funding package is not the Esercito Italiano's first intervention in the field of logistical support for the Chinooks.

An official response from the Ministry of Defense to the **Chamber of Deputies Defense Committee on April 29, 2021**, in fact, documents earlier programs.

In September 2019, the multi-year **SMD 32/2019** program was approved to fund engine maintenance activities for the CH-47F fleet.

In the same parliamentary response, the Ministry referred to additional resources to maintain the operational capabilities of the rotary-wing component, with further funding measures also planned for subsequent fiscal years.

This point is particularly relevant to the current debate: **financial and programmatic attention to Chinook logistical support has been documented for years and does not represent a response introduced after the tragedy in Bosnia**.

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Flight safety in the Aviazione dell'Esercito

The Aviazione dell'Esercito is a highly specialized component of the Italian Armed Forces.

Crews carry out operational activities requiring particularly high levels of technical expertise, from tactical navigation and night operations to operating in complex environmental conditions.

The training of aircrew and specialists follows a structured program that includes the Centro Addestrativo Aviazione dell'Esercito di Viterbo and, for certain qualifications, international training facilities.

Flight safety encompasses every phase of aviation activity: mission planning, crew preparation, aircraft inspections, risk management, flight execution, and subsequent analysis of any anomalies.

The maintenance system is an integral part of this organization.

Documentation concerning Italian CH-47Fs describes configuration control activities, incident analysis, manual updates, and engineering support.

These are all elements of a complex aviation system, in which prevention does not end with the inspection immediately preceding takeoff.

The professionalism of the AVES is also demonstrated by its ability to sustain prolonged overseas missions.

A concrete example is the **Airmobile Task Group “Griffon” dell'Aviazione dell'Esercito**, operational in Iraq since March 30, 2016, as part of Operation Prima Parthica. By December 2024, the unit's UH-90A helicopters had reached **6,500 operational flight hours**, carrying out missions to transport personnel, supplies, and equipment in support of the Italian contingent and the multinational coalition engaged against Daesh.

This result relates to a specific mission and a different helicopter type, but it helps illustrate the sustained commitment required of crews and technical organizations within the Aviazione dell'Esercito.

The Bosnia crash: investigations will determine the causes

The October 29 tragedy requires a full and rigorous investigation.

Rome's military prosecutor's office has opened an inquiry, and a Defense technical commission has intervened to reconstruct the sequence of events surrounding the crash.

The investigation will have to clarify the aircraft's condition, any malfunctions, the operational circumstances, and every other relevant factor.

At present, there are no official findings that would allow the accident to be attributed to maintenance shortcomings.

The search for the truth about the causes of the accident must be rigorous and free of prejudice.

A military excellence that deserves respect and fact-based analysis

The documents reviewed portray an aviation component integrated into a structured system of training, maintenance, and logistical support.

Italy's fleet of sixteen CH-47Fs represents a strategic capability, supported by dedicated investment programs and specialized facilities.

The multi-year funding package worth **€697.54 million**, previous measures to support the engines, the role of technical facilities, and industrial cooperation with Leonardo demonstrate a significant commitment to keeping this capability operational.

It can therefore be stated that **maintenance of Italy's CH-47F helicopters is not an unplanned activity, but a function to which the Defence Ministry devotes dedicated resources, expertise, and facilities**.

The tragedy in Bosnia cannot and must not be exploited through premature accusations that, at present, lack objective evidence.

Four service members lost their lives while serving their country. Their families and colleagues deserve truth, respect, and support.

At the same time, a single incident, however dramatic, cannot by itself be the yardstick by which to judge the professionalism of an entire branch.

Aviazione dell'Esercito continues to represent a fundamental component of Italy's operational capabilities, supported by the daily work of pilots, specialists, technicians, and logistics personnel.

Establishing the causes of the tragedy is a duty. It is equally important to recognize the value and professionalism of those who work every day to ensure flight safety, as well as the State's considerable financial and organizational commitment to ensuring the efficiency and safety of its equipment.

Public debate should develop with respect for these responsibilities, away from premature accusations and close to the reality of one of the most specialized components of the Esercito Italiano.

Sources

1. Ministry of Defence – Official statement on the CH-47 incident in Bosnia, October 29, 2026
2. ANSA – Investigation into the Chinook incident and political controversy, October 31, 2026
3. Ministry of Defence – Contracting determination of July 10, 2025, CH-47F logistics support
4. Ministry of Defence – Supplementary note no. 2, CH-47F funding 2025–2032
5. Chamber of Deputies – Defence Committee, response to the parliamentary question of April 29, 2021
6. Boeing Italia – CH-47F programs and Italian fleet
7. UK Parliament – Annual Chinook support costs, response of May 17, 2024
8. UK Ministry of Defence – Chinook Program and fleet strength