Catania and the Silent War: NATO trains Anti-Submarine Warfare under Italian leadership

Published on 05/03/2026

In the Gulf of Catania, the Mediterranean "sounds" different: variable seabeds, background noise, and irregular acoustic conditions challenge sensors, crews, and procedures. This is where **Dynamic Manta 2026** has kicked off, NATO's main annual exercise in the field of **anti-submarine warfare (ASW)**, scheduled until **March 6** and developed in the central Mediterranean with a multinational surface, underwater, and air device.

The 2026 edition stands out for a clear political-operational element: **the direction from the sea is entrusted to the Standing NATO Maritime Group Two (SNMG2), currently under Italian leadership**. In other words, it is not just about "participating" with national assets, but about **conducting** the activity, coordinating units and missions in a complex and highly realistic scenario.

According to what was disclosed in the initial briefings and public communications related to the exercise, **ten allied countries** are engaged between sea and sky: **Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States, Spain, and Turkey**. The goal is to refine "multi-domain" interoperability (surface-underwater-air), verifying command and control chains and reaction times in a multinational context.

Catania and the Silent War: NATO trains Anti-Submarine Warfare under Italian leadership

The national device: frigates, supply ship, and two submarines

The Italian device highlights the naval component: the **frigate ITS *Virginio Fasan*** (flagship of the group), the **frigate ITS *Spartaco Schergat*** and the logistical supply ship **ITS *Vulcano***. On the underwater front, the submarines **ITS *Pietro Venuti*** and **ITS *Romeo Romei*** operate, called to both "opposing force" roles (target/training adversary) and integrated missions with surface units.

It is precisely the integration between platforms at different "altitudes" – hull and towed sonars, ASW helicopters, sonar buoys, maritime patrol aircraft, submarines – that constitutes the technical hallmark of the exercise: **discover**, **classify**, **track** and, if required by the scenario, **neutralize** an underwater threat while maintaining navigation safety and de-confliction among allied assets.

The Gulf of Catania and, more generally, the waters east of Sicily offer a useful combination for ASW: different bathymetries at short distances, variable weather-marine conditions, and a

sound environment not always "clean". In these contexts, the differences between a real contact and a false echo become subtle, and the training mainly serves to **standardize procedures and languages** among different navies.

Not by chance, the Sicilian setting has been associated with Dynamic Manta for years also due to the availability of infrastructure and naval-air support in the area.

The voices of the command chain

At the start of activities, from the command unit's deck, **SNMG2 Commander, Rear Admiral Cristian Nardone**, emphasized the importance of joint training to consolidate **trust, cohesion, and readiness** of the Alliance at sea. At the same time, the leaders of the NATO and Italian underwater component highlighted how cooperation between surface units, submarines, and air assets is crucial for the effectiveness of anti-submarine warfare, at a time when attention to the underwater dimension remains high.

Catania and the Silent War: NATO trains Anti-Submarine Warfare under Italian leadership

Why anti-submarine warfare matters (even in "peace" time)

ASW is not a "naval" duel of bygone times: today it means protecting **maritime communication lines**, naval groups, ports, energy routes, and, more generally, freedom of maneuver at sea. Dynamic Manta is part of the training cycle led by the NATO Allied Maritime Command to maintain high-specialization skills, complementary to other ASW appointments in

different theaters (North Atlantic, Baltic).

In the overall framework, **the Italian leadership of SNMG2** during Dynamic Manta 2026 strengthens the national posture in the allied maritime device and recalls the centrality of the Mediterranean as an operational space where the underwater dimension weighs as much (and sometimes more than) the visible one. It is a signal of continuity: presence, integration with allies, and command capability in a complex scenario – from the **Gulf of Catania** to the broader routes of the Euro-Atlantic area.

News link: https://www.difesa.it/operazionimilitari/op-intern-corso/nato-snfs/notizie-teatro/dynamic-manta-2026-litalia-guida-dal-mare-lesercitazione-antisommergibile-della-nato/90294.html