COFS the pivot of the Special Forces reform desired by General Portolano

Published on 10/01/2026

In military jargon, "precious assets" means rare, costly, and decisive capabilities: elite units, dedicated platforms, sensors, protected communications, and those "enablers" that transform a tactical action into a strategic effect. It is precisely in this area that the revision of the Special Forces sector initiated by the Chief of Defense Staff, General Luciano Portolano, is situated: a plan aimed at making the COFS – in its evolution towards a "new Special Forces Command" – the predominant pivot of the command and control chain when national strategic interests and high-sensitivity operations are at stake.

From the 2004 COFS to the "multi-domain": why a further leap is needed

The COFS was established in 2004 as a joint command dedicated to special operations, under the authority of the Chief of Defense Staff, with competence over operations conducted by the Special Forces of the four Armed Forces (and, for Defense needs, also over the GIS of the

Carabinieri).

In 2021, the Italian Defense reorganized its operational architecture with the creation of the COVI, heir to the COI, designed for conducting operations in a “multi-domain” perspective (land, sea, air, space, and cyber) and as a unique and privileged interlocutor for planning and conduct. In that framework, the COFS is embedded in the chain headed by the COVI.

The point, however, is that the scenarios of recent years – widespread dronization, sensor saturation, information warfare, and “below-threshold competition” – have increased the political-strategic value of special operations. Portolano, in an interview with RID, insists on a key concept: Special Forces are not “elite infantry” to be employed en masse, but a surgical tool that, if well integrated with technology and intelligence, can generate strategic effects with reduced numbers.

COFS the pivot of the Special Forces reform desired by General Portolano

The choice: short decision-making chain and “direct” command towards military leadership and political authority

The heart of the reform lies in governance: Portolano declares that he has initiated, on the indication and under the supervision of the Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto, an “urgent process of revision of the Special Forces Sector” with a threefold objective: reduce preparation times, accelerate technological adoption, and refine employment models to protect national interests.

In the short term, the reform provides for “readiness measures” that include:

- rationalization of units according to employment specificity;
- more agile activation procedures;
- a **streamlined decision-making chain** that connects **directly** the top of the new “Special Forces Command” (evolution of the current COFS) to the Chief of Defense Staff and the Political Authority;
- a **dedicated procurement process** to accelerate the introduction of critical technologies.

Translated: when the stakes are strategic, the COFS (in its evolution) would become the “highest” and fastest control room to employ and coordinate the most sensitive assets, reducing steps and decision times.

COFS the pivot of the Special Forces reform desired by General Portolano

“Precious assets” under operational control: the enablers that make the difference

The second leg of the reform is even more concrete: in the medium term, the Special Forces sector should be able to rely on operational and logistical enablers “directly functional” to special operations, explicitly mentioned by Portolano:

- **rotary wing and fixed wing** assets for insertion, support, and exfiltration;
- **drones and remotely piloted systems**;
- **PSYOPS units** and **cyber-intel teams** integrated into the operational design.

Here lies the “preeminence” in command and control: not only coordinating the raiders but having more direct availability (and unified planning) on the enablers that make modern special operations possible, especially in contested and multi-domain environments.

The strategic logic: speed, secrecy, integration (and fewer duplications)

Portolano ties the reform to three operational promises.

1) Speed of projection. The idea is to move “from identifying a strategic need to projecting highly specialized forces in a few hours,” thanks to a short chain and adequate control systems.

2) Integration of enablers and technological vision units. Centralized planning should avoid duplications, maximize investments, and concentrate development on key technologies (advanced drones, special insertion assets, cyber capabilities).

3) Protection of information. In high-value political operations, information security becomes part of the maneuver: Portolano calls for advanced protocols and compartmentalization of skills to protect operational plans and intelligence.

COFS the pivot of the Special Forces reform desired by General Portolano

Impact on the “Defense system”: what remains with the Armed Forces, what changes at the top

The reform does not “empty” the individual Armed Forces: Portolano emphasizes that they will continue to play a central role in preparation, personnel influx, and logistical support to domain

platforms, while the new operational command center for special operations (and related enablers) would be made more direct and coherent.

On a broader level, this trajectory fits into the multi-domain logic already mentioned with the creation of the COVI as a unique and privileged interlocutor for planning and conducting operations. The novelty here is the further specialization of the C2 chain for the “most sensitive” missions and for assets with greater strategic value.

In the parliamentary setting, Portolano linked the modernization of the tool also to programs and funding, citing – within the framework of maritime means – the modernization and maintenance in efficiency of assets “in use in the Special Forces sector and information gathering,” within a broader agenda of resilience and multi-domain capability.

The endpoint: a “projectable” command for below-threshold crises and high-intensity scenarios

If the COFS becomes (and is reconfigured as) “Special Forces Command” with a direct line to military leadership and political authority, and with enablers assigned more functionally to the conduct of special operations, the message is clear: when Italy must protect vital interests – **evacuations, counter-hybrid threats, discreet operations in gray areas, below-threshold deterrence** – a short, ready command chain equipped with dedicated tools is needed. It is “preeminence” not as a symbolic status, but as the ability to decide and act faster, with more integration and greater information protection.