



Extraordinary Result: In Sicily, the First F-35 Pilot School Outside the USA

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Rome, July 3, 2025 – Italy further consolidates its position of excellence in the international defense landscape. Yesterday, during a ceremony at the International Flight Training School (IFTS) in Decimomannu, Sardinia, Defense Minister Guido Crosetto announced a "historic step": Sicily will host the world's first training center dedicated to F-35 pilots outside the United States.

The announcement was made during the awarding of certificates to sixteen new pilots, in the presence of the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, highlighting the strengthening of Italy's strategic role in the F-35 program. Our country is already the only one in the world where the final assembly of these aircraft takes place, specifically in Cameri, Piedmont, for European customers.

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A Cutting-Edge Center for Global Training

The new Sicilian center will represent a significant evolution in advanced training, welcoming students from various countries in a technologically advanced context. According to Minister Crosetto, this achievement demonstrates how Defense is not only synonymous with security but also a powerful engine of economic, industrial, and scientific development for the country.

Crosetto also reiterated the importance of investments in the military sector, defining them as fundamental to ensuring peace, democratic stability, and, indirectly, essential public services. He cited virtuous examples such as Leonardo and Fincantieri, companies symbolizing Italy's ability to innovate starting precisely from the defense sector.

The IFTS of Decimomannu: An Already Recognized Excellence

The center in Sicily will complement the current International Flight Training School (IFTS) in Decimomannu, Sardinia, already considered an international excellence. A result of the strategic collaboration between the Italian Air Force and Leonardo, the IFTS boasts 22 M-346 jets, state-of-the-art simulators, and a facility spanning 130,000 square meters. Each year it trains about 80 pilots, with the goal of reaching 100, involving 11 partner nations. During the ceremony, certificates were awarded to Italian and foreign pilots also trained at the 61st Wing in Galatina (Lecce), the 72nd in Frosinone, and the Transport School in Pratica di Mare (Rome).

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According to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Antonio Conserva, the future of military training increasingly involves the integration between man and technology, with artificial intelligence becoming part of the decision-making process while leaving the final word to humans. Italy thus positions itself as a true global platform for the training of future combat pilots.

The F-35 Program Worldwide

The F-35 Lightning II is the most advanced and widespread multirole fighter globally, with over 1,100 units delivered and operational by the end of 2024. The program involves numerous **allied countries of the United States, including Australia, Norway, Israel, and Japan.**

In Europe, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Italy are among the main users. Italy currently has about 39 F-35s between the Air Force and Navy, already operational on the aircraft carrier Cavour. Other involved countries include South Korea, Denmark, Belgium, Finland, Switzerland, Poland, Greece, the Czech Republic, Canada, Singapore, and Romania.

This new development in Sicily not only strengthens national security but places Italy at the center of global aeronautical training, reaffirming its role as a leader in innovation and international cooperation in a crucial sector like defense.

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