



Italy in Command of Baltic Air Policing: Launch of Operation Baltic Eagle III

Published on 07/08/2025

On August 1, 2025, at the Ämari air base in Estonia, the official ceremony took place marking the transfer of responsibility between the Portuguese Air Force and the Italian Air Force's Task Force Air, as part of the NATO enhanced Air Policing (eAP) mission. With this handover, Operation **Baltic Eagle III** has officially commenced, which will see Italy engaged for the next four months in protecting the airspace of the Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The Italian Task Force Air, composed of highly specialized personnel and equipped with F-35 Lightning II fighters, will operate under the coordination of the **Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC)** in Uedem, Germany. The responsible unit is the **32° Stormo**, an elite unit of the Italian Air Force with established operational experience. The mission command is entrusted to Colonel **Gaetano Farina**, already known for his previous experiences leading operational units.

Present at the Ämari ceremony was **Lieutenant General Giovanni Maria Iannucci**, commander of the Joint Operational Command (COVI), who highlighted the strategic value of the Italian commitment and the importance of cooperation among allied forces. “Your presence represents a concrete contribution to the security of the Alliance's borders,” he stated, recalling that this is the **third Italian participation** in the mission, following those in **2018** and **2021**.

Part II - Technology, Cooperation, and Deterrence: The Strategic Significance of Baltic Eagle III

Operation Baltic Eagle III is part of the **NATO Baltic Air Policing** framework, a mission active since 2004 aimed at ensuring the surveillance and defense of the airspace of the Baltic countries, which do not have their own combat aviation. In an international context characterized by increasing tensions and uncertainty on the eastern front, the rotational presence of allies reinforces the principle of collective defense enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.

The **Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto**, in an institutional message, emphasized how “Italy's assumption of command of the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission confirms the strategic commitment of Defense for collective security on the eastern flank of the Alliance, a concrete contribution to deterrence and the defense of Euro-Atlantic borders.”

Particularly significant is the **first participation of Italian F-35s** in this mission. The fifth-generation fighters represent an important leap in quality in terms of technology, stealth capability, advanced sensors, and interoperability. They are tools that not only strengthen patrolling and interception capabilities but also enhance integration into NATO's multilateral air defense systems.

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Baltic Eagle III, as General Iannucci emphasized, is also a “tangible sign of the professionalism and reliability that our Armed Forces continue to demonstrate within NATO.” Each rotation, each national contribution, is a piece that strengthens the collective defense architecture of the Alliance.

Part III - Strategic Projection and Credibility: Italy's Role on NATO's Eastern Flank

Italy's participation in Operation Baltic Eagle III represents not only an operational commitment but also a **strategic projection of our country** in a region of growing geopolitical relevance. While the Mediterranean remains the historical area of reference for Italy's Defense projection, it is evident that involvement in the Baltic indicates a willingness to also oversee the **eastern flank of the Alliance**, where the pressure exerted by the Russian presence is most felt.

Italy thus confirms its **central role in the deterrence strategy** and in building shared security, which goes well beyond its geographical borders. Cooperation with the Baltic allies is not only military but also symbolic: it testifies to the unity of the Alliance at a time when cohesion represents the true instrument of stability.

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The deployment of F-35s in this mission also strengthens Italy's image as a **reliable technological partner**. In an Alliance that bases its effectiveness on interoperability and excellence, the presence of the 32° Stormo with cutting-edge equipment marks a point in favor of our Air Force.

Finally, it is important to view Baltic Eagle III also as a testing ground for Italy's **rapid response capability** in a complex multilateral scenario, and for the enhancement of Italian military personnel, who operate daily in demanding and high-intensity strategic environments.

Italy, today as in the past, demonstrates with actions that it is a **credible, ready, and determined ally**, capable of taking on operational responsibilities at the forefront for Europe's security.

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