



“Strade Sicure” turns 18: security for citizens and a necessary reflection on the future

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On August 4, 2008, Operation “Strade Sicure” began. Eighteen years later, the soldiers of the Italian Army continue to be present in cities, stations, airports, and in front of targets considered most exposed, working in cooperation with the Police Forces to contribute to the security of the national territory.

Initially born as a temporary response to specific public order and security needs, the operation has progressively transformed into one of the most continuous and visible commitments of the Armed Forces on the national territory.

About 6,800 soldiers engaged in 58 provinces

The current deployment involves about 6,800 soldiers, distributed across 58 provinces and tasked with guarding over a thousand sites and sensitive areas.

The targets under surveillance include institutional and diplomatic headquarters, places of worship, airports, ports, railway and metro stations, transport infrastructures, and areas with particular security needs.

The presence of the soldiers primarily guarantees a deterrent function. The availability of trained, armed, and rapidly deployable personnel also allows for the strengthening of Police Forces' devices, freeing up resources to be allocated to investigative activities, dynamic territorial control, and crime prevention.

Over the years, “Strade Sicure” has been reshaped to respond to national emergencies, major events, terrorist threats, migratory flows, and new infrastructure protection needs.

Over 61 million checks

The data collected over eighteen years of activity reflect the scale of the commitment sustained.

Since the start of the operation, over 61 million checks on people and vehicles have been carried out. More than 100,000 individuals have been stopped, arrested, or reported, while about 2,000 weapons, over 17,000 vehicles, and more than four tons of drugs have been seized.

Numbers that demonstrate how the presence of soldiers not only has a symbolic or representative value but also produces concrete effects in preventing illegal activities, monitoring sensitive targets, and supporting public security authorities.

The capillarity of the device also allows for rapid intervention in the face of assaults, brawls, theft attempts, acts of vandalism, dangerous situations, and requests for help from the population.

A point of reference for citizens

For millions of Italians, the soldiers of “Strade Sicure” now represent a familiar presence.

The soldier employed in front of a station, an embassy, or a place of worship not only performs a surveillance function. They represent the State, reassure citizens, and constitute an immediately recognizable point of reference in case of need.

The operation has also consolidated the cooperation capacity between the Army and Police Forces, developing common procedures, operational links, and an in-depth knowledge of urban environments.

These are undeniable advantages, especially in a period characterized by terrorist threats, international instability, and an increasing need to protect critical infrastructures and large concentrations of people.

The issue raised by General Masiello

Alongside the positive results, however, there is a critical issue that cannot be ignored: the burden of the operation on the overall preparation of the Army.

In July 2024, during a parliamentary hearing dedicated precisely to “Strade Sicure”, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General of the Army Corps Carmine Masiello, recalled that the operation was conceived to employ a limited number of soldiers and for a circumscribed period. Its transformation into a permanent commitment has instead resulted in an increasing absorption of personnel, means, and resources.

According to what the general illustrated, the employment in “Strade Sicure” constantly diverted from combat training the equivalent of 12-14 maneuver regiments. Additional units, destined to take over in the device, had to focus their preparation on internal security tasks, rather than on the tactical and operational activities typical of military units.

Added to this were the periods of psychophysical recovery and reconditioning necessary at the end of the six-month deployment cycles. Masiello explained that, at the end of the six months, each soldier could accumulate an average of about 55 days of recovery, derived from service performed on holidays and overtime hours not fully compensated.

The soldier must also prepare for high-intensity warfare

The issue does not concern the value of the operation or the professionalism of the soldiers participating in it.

The point is to understand what the primary function of the Army should be in a profoundly changed international scenario.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the strengthening of NATO's devices, and the return of the threat of high-intensity conflicts require military units to constantly train for combat, maneuver, the use of weapon systems, anti-aircraft defense, operations with drones, and activities conducted in technologically advanced environments.

In January 2025, Masiello reiterated the need to have resources, spaces, and training opportunities to rebuild the Army's fundamental combat capabilities and prepare the forces to operate, if required by the country, even in high-intensity conflicts.

A soldier employed for long periods in predominantly static services maintains discipline, vigilance, and reaction capacity, but cannot fully develop all the skills necessary to fight within an organic unit.

Training at a checkpoint or guarding a sensitive target cannot replace live-fire exercises, unit activities, combined maneuvers, integration with artillery, aviation, engineering, communications, and unmanned systems.

The need for a new balance

The eighteenth anniversary of “Strade Sicure” should therefore not only be an occasion to thank the soldiers engaged daily in Italian cities but also a moment of reflection on the future of the operation.

Reducing it without first strengthening the Police Forces' personnel could create gaps in territorial security. However, maintaining it indefinitely at its current size risks depriving the Army of a significant portion of its training and operational capacity.

The solution does not lie in opposing city security to military preparation but in finding a sustainable balance.

Among the possible responses are a greater selection of targets to be guarded, wider use of surveillance technologies, a gradual return of ordinary tasks to the Police Forces, and the establishment of reserve forces or specific capabilities dedicated to emergencies on the national territory.

In this way, the Army could continue to ensure its contribution in places and times where its presence is truly indispensable, without compromising the preparation of units destined for national defense and international commitments.

Eighteen years in the service of the community

“Strade Sicure” remains one of the most important and recognizable operations carried out by the Italian Army on the national territory.

In eighteen years, it has contributed to the protection of citizens, the security of infrastructures, and the guarding of particularly exposed areas, once again demonstrating the Armed Forces' willingness to intervene alongside institutions.

Precisely because its value is indisputable, it is necessary to realistically address its consequences.

Soldiers must continue to be present when the country needs them, but they must also have the time, space, and resources to train for their fundamental function: defending Italy and preparing to face the military threats of the present and future.

Celebrating the eighteen years of “Strade Sicure” therefore means recognizing the service performed by thousands of men and women of the Army, but also ensuring that this commitment remains compatible with the efficiency, readiness, and combat capability of the Armed Forces.

News link: <https://www.esercito.difesa.it/comunicazione/l-esercito-italiano-al-servizio-della-collettivita-18-anni-dell-operazione-strade-sicure/202164.html>