

# Ustica massacre: war in the skies and fighter jets on a mission. Paris opens operational archives; prosecutors halt case closure

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An unprecedented diplomatic and military opening could breach the **"wall of silence"** that for 46 years has concealed the aerial clash scenario in the skies over the Tyrrhenian Sea. The **French Embassy in Rome** has formally conveyed a note to the Farnesina declaring its willingness to **send Italy all military documents and records** related to the Ustica massacre. The entire dossier was immediately forwarded to the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office.

With this unexpected development, Rome prosecutors are preparing to make a decisive choice: at the **September 30** hearing before the investigating judge, the prosecution is ready to

**withdraw its request to close the case**, directly reopening the file on the **tactical operations and mission orders** that on the evening of **June 27, 1980** led to the shootdown of the civilian flight **Itavia IH870** and the deaths of **81 victims**.

## A sky under attack: the operational context of June 27, 1980

The initial narrative of **structural failure** — promoted by military leaders to conceal the presence of combat aircraft and which **drove Itavia into bankruptcy in 1981** — has been swept aside by ballistic evidence and analyses of radar tracks.On the evening of June 27, 1980, the airspace between Ponza and Ustica was the scene of a **high-intensity interception operation**:

- **Interception and Allied traffic:** From the Rome Control tapes, traces of **«American traffic»** and unidentified military aircraft operating at engagement altitudes over the southern Tyrrhenian Sea emerged from the outset.
- **The Libyan MiG-23 scenario:** The discovery, on **July 18, 1980, in the Sila**, of the wreckage of a **MiG-23 della Jamahiriya libica** confirmed an operational context in which NATO fighters were engaged in radar tracking (*shadowing*) or intercepting hostile aircraft, crossing the flight path of the civilian DC9.
- **Military shootdown action:** As early as **1989**, judicial expert reports determined that the disaster was caused by the explosion of an **air-to-air missile** launched from a military aircraft, or by a dramatic high-speed near-collision.In **1999**, the ruling-order issued by Judge Rosario Priore officially concluded that the aircraft was involved in and shot down during a **military interception operation**.

## The chain of expert analyses and operational revelations

| Date / Year | Technical and Operational Development | Conclusion of the Judiciary / Experts |
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| **June 27, 1980** | The **Itavia DC9** disappears from radar (**81 victims**). | Detection of **undeclared military fighter traffic** in the overflight area. |
| **July 18, 1980** | The wreckage of the **Libyan MiG-23** is found in Sila. | Evidence of **interception and engagement operations** involving foreign aircraft. |
| **March 16, 1989** | Bucarelli expert report submitted to the Investigating Judge. | **The presence of an air-to-air missile is certified**, fired at or near the DC9. |
| **June 17, 1997** | Expert analysis of radar tracks (Judge Priore). | The presence of a **formation of military fighter aircraft** around the civilian aircraft is confirmed. |
| **1999** | Ruling-Order by Judge **Rosario Priore**. | The disaster occurred as a result of a **military interception operation**. |
| **2008 / 2023** | Statements by **Cossiga** and **Giuliano Amato**. | The **French fighter force** and missions launched from **Solenzara** are implicated. |
| **September 2026** | Paris memorandum sent to the Farnesina. | **Operational logs made available**; prosecutors halt the case's closure. |

## From Solenzara flight logs to the truth about NATO missions

Accounts provided by former President of the Republic **Francesco Cossiga in 2008** and former Prime Minister **Giuliano Amato in 2023** directly identified the French fighter force as responsible for launching the missile, originally aimed at an aircraft carrying Libya's leadership.

Until now, attempts to identify the individual aircraft had run up against **military secrecy** and the failure to release takeoff and landing logs from French air bases in the Mediterranean—above all **Solenzara in Corsica**—as well as radar records from the **Aéronavale** fleet.

Paris's decision to **share military archives** opens an entirely new scenario: it will allow investigators from the Rome Prosecutor's Office to **cross-reference Italian ground-radar tracks with flight missions** officially covered by secrecy, finally identifying the **chain of**

**command** and the pilots involved in the aerial engagement on June 27, 1980.

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