

## Italian Navy And Air Force's F-35Bs Carry Out Joint Training On Pantelleria Island



The Italian Navy and Air Force F-35Bs during the exercise at Pantelleria airport. (All images: Matteo Buono)

### **The F-35Bs of the two services continue to operate together as further integration looms.**

After spending years “fighting” each other to get more F-35Bs, the “honeymoon” (as the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Gen. Luca Goretti dubbed it) between the Aeronautica Militare (Italian Air Force) and the Marina Militare (Italian Navy) continues. On Jan. 27, 2022, a joint exercise involving the two F-35B STOVL (Short Take Off Vertical Landing) assets of both services took place on Pantelleria Island.

The exercise on the tiny island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea was aimed at increasing the integration between the Air Force and Navy’s fifth generation multirole aircraft while developing the expeditionary capacity from a land-base through the use of an “austere” airfield not suitable for flight operations of conventional take-off aircraft. The Chief of Defense Staff, Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, the Chief of Staff of the Navy, Adm. Enrico Credendino and the Chief of Staff of the Air

Force, Gen. Goretti attended the event.

We were invited to take part in the event and our contributor Matteo Buono flew to Pantelleria to take the photographs you can find in this article.

The Italian Navy F-35B.

“The goal is to achieve an expeditionary capacity both from land and from sea [aircraft carrier] by using the F-35B assets of the Navy and the Air Force in an integrated and synergistic manner, in compliance with the prerogatives of the Chiefs of the Armed Forces. There will be increasingly profitable synergies that will allow a unified use of the STOVL capacity: depending on the domain, the F-35Bs will be put under the operational control of one or the other service, always responding to the Joint Chief of Staff”, Adm. Cavo Dragone said.

Italy will not adopt the British model, meaning that there won't be a Lightning Force with a joint Squadron equipped with F-35Bs jointly flown and maintained: the Italians aim at a “joint capability” with the Italian Air Force and Navy operating their own aircraft in their own units. However, when needed, the F-35Bs of both services will integrate and operate under a single chain of command from land-bases or from an aircraft carrier or landing helicopter dock (like the LHD Trieste that will be ready to accommodate the aircraft next year) by means of a TOA (Transfer Of Authority).

Overall, the Aeronautica Militare and Marina Militare will operate 15 F-35Bs each: the Air Force will use the Lightning II to replace the AMX (that is going to be retired this year), while the Navy will use the 5th generation aircraft to replace the AV-8B+ Harrier II (whose retirement is planned for 2024-2025, by the time the naval service will be equipped with at least 8 F-35Bs).

The next F-35B to be delivered to the Italian MOD will be assigned to the Italian Air Force that operates just one STOVL Lightning II at the moment.

The training event on Pantelleria last week follows the drills carried out in November 2021 that saw the first landing of an F-35B of the Italian Air Force on the Italian Navy aircraft carrier Cavour; the first integration aboard the carrier by the Italian Air Force and Navy's F-35Bs; the first landing of the Italian F-35Bs aboard the British aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth.

The Italian Navy F-35B prepares for take off after the hot pit refueling.

More in detail, the two F-35Bs landed at the “expeditionary” airfield, Pantelleria Airport, and carried out a “hot-pit” refueling taking gas from a KC-130J aircraft of the 46<sup>a</sup> Brigata Aerea (Air Brigade) from Pisa, through the ALARP system (Air Landed Aircraft Refueling Point).

The KC-130J that refueled the F-35Bs through the ALARP system ALARP (Air Landed Aircraft Refueling Point) system.

After the ground refueling, the two F-35Bs took off again and joined two Italian Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon to conduct a COMAO, Composite Air Operation. The latter included Close Air Support

(CAS) to the Surface Forces through ground JTAC (Joint Terminal Attack Controller) and aerial interdiction with strategic and tactical management carried out by the G550 CAEW (Conformal Airborne Early Warning) aircraft of the 14° Stormo (Wing). The COMAO was supported by a KC-767A aircraft.



David Cenciotti is a freelance journalist based in Rome, Italy. He is the Founder and Editor of “The Aviationist”, one of the world’s most famous and read military aviation blogs. Since 1996, he has written for major worldwide magazines, including Air Forces Monthly, Combat Aircraft, and many others, covering aviation, defense, war, industry, intelligence, crime and cyberwar. He has reported from the U.S., Europe, Australia and Syria, and flown several combat planes with different air forces. He is a former 2nd Lt. of the Italian Air Force, a private pilot and a graduate in Computer Engineering. He has written five books and contributed to many more ones.

Source: [Italian Navy And Air Force’s F-35Bs Carry Out Joint Training On Pantelleria Island](#)