Italian army must fight the mafia in Naples, interior minister says

Calls for action against the Camorra crime syndicate as spiral of drug-related violence leads to 10 murders in just over a month

Camorra boss Ciro Di Lauro is arrested in Naples during an army crackdown against the Mafia in 2004 Photo: Rex

By Nick Squires, Rome
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The Italian army should be deployed to Naples to combat an explosion of drug-related mafia violence, the country’s interior minister said.

There have been 10 murders in the port city since the start of the year, as clans within the Camorra fight over valuable drug-trading turfs.

The Camorra, which is based in Naples and the surrounding region of Campania, is growing in strength, making tens millions of euros a year from drug trafficking, extortion, prostitution and the illegal burning of toxic waste.

“Right now in Naples we need the army,” said Angelino Alfano, the interior minister and deputy prime minister. “We need to silence the guns.”

He was speaking after three alleged Mafiosi were gunned down on the streets of Naples in just over 24 hours in clashes over drug dealing.

There are growing fears that innocent people could be caught in shoot-outs between mob gangsters in the narrow alleyways of Naples’ historic centre, as well as in the grim, sprawling council estates on the city’s periphery, where Camorra Mafiosi use television satellite dishes for target practice.

“We have had some extraordinary successes against the Camorra in Naples, and there are entire generations who are in prison, but there is one statistic that leaves me troubled – the fact that everywhere else in Italy crimes are decreasing, but in Naples the number of murders is rising,” said Mr Alfano.
“Obviously we don’t want to militarise the city but the number of murders needs to be reduced.”

Sending troops to Naples would free up the police, allowing more officers to concentrate on fighting the mafia, the minister said.

There are already around 400 soldiers deployed around the city, guarding sensitive sites such as railway stations, the port, foreign consulates and court buildings, as part of a security initiative called “Safe Streets”.

But the government now wants to deploy hundreds more.

Luigi de Magistris, the mayor of the city, threw his support behind the idea, as did Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe, the archbishop of Naples, who said: “The messengers of death must never win.”

The authorities have managed to convict and imprison dozens of Camorra bosses, but they are swiftly replaced by younger, and in some cases more violent, lieutenants.

The new generation is “attempting, with total unscrupulousness, to occupy the territory through violence,” said Luigi Riello, the chief prosecutor of Naples.

The Camorra has never been stronger than it is now, and is second only in wealth and ruthlessness to the ‘Ndrangheta mafia of Calabria, an expert on organised crime said.

Its power is tied to the fact that Naples has become “the biggest drug-dealing space in Europe,” said Isaia Sales, a former MP and now an academic specialising in the mafia in Italy.

“There is a demand for drugs that has allowed the Camorra today to have a degree of power that it has never had before in its history,” he told La Repubblica newspaper.

There were more than 100 semi-independent clans within the Camorra, often at war with each other.

“Often the crimes that are committed are the result of the battle for control of a single street, even a single alleyway that might be strategically important for controlling an entire area. There is great fragmentation of the clans, which leads to almost continuous war.”

But the head of a business promotion organisation in Naples said sending more soldiers would make little difference.
Instead the city needed more jobs for young people, better schools and more recreational facilities, to keep bored youngsters out of the clutches of the Camorra.

“We don’t need the army,” said Raffaele Marrone. “Militarising the city is the wrong choice, even in the emergency situation that we are experiencing now. We need to dry up the Camorra’s recruitment of young people and for that we need employment and recreational centres.”