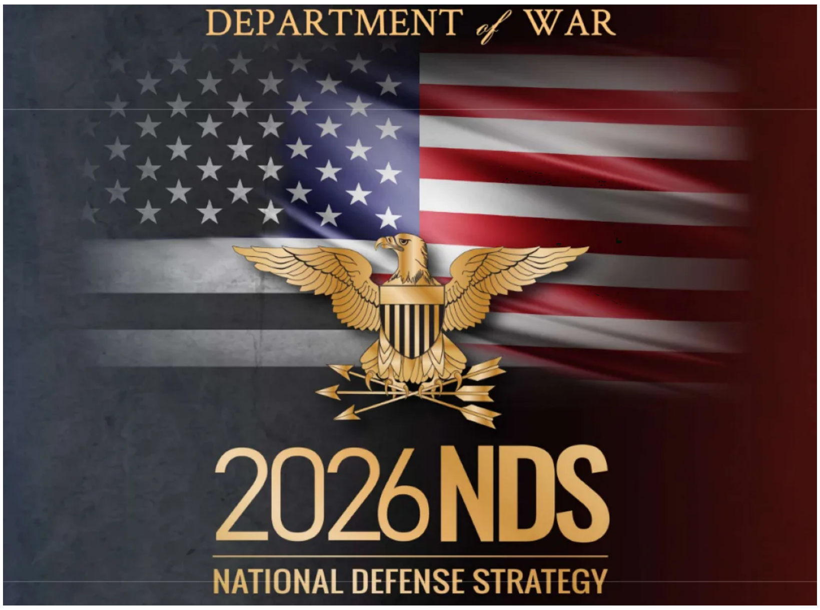

America towards the Pacific, Europe tested: USA National Defense Strategy

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Below is an analysis of the content of the PDF “2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS)” and the **main impacts on Italy and Europe**, with a conclusion on the **prospects (interpretation and possible reactions) of Russia and China**.

The NDS sets a very clear hierarchy of priorities:

1. **Defense of the USA territory and the Western Hemisphere** (borders, anti-narco-terrorism, “key terrain” like Panama/Greenland, “Golden Dome” air-missile defense, cyber, nuclear deterrence).
2. **China as the “main challenge”**: “by denial” deterrence in the Indo-Pacific along the **First Island Chain**, with more military communication channels for stability and de-escalation, but postures and capabilities aimed at making any aggression fail.
3. **Burden-sharing**: allies must assume **primary responsibility** in theaters “less severe for the USA but more severe for them”, with USA support “critical but more limited”.

4. **Strengthening the USA defense industrial base** (DIB), but also “leveraging allied and partner production” and industrial cooperation as a lever to accelerate rearmament and readiness of allies.

This architecture leads to a central message for Europe: **the USA remains in NATO**, but **prioritizes the Indo-Pacific and homeland**, and asks Europe to take charge of the continent's conventional defense.

Impacts on Europe (NATO and EU)

A. Political and financial pressure: “new standard” of spending

The NDS calls for a commitment to a **total target of 5% of GDP** (3.5% “core military” + 1.5% “security-related”). Even without delving into feasibility, the effect is clear: **the European discussion shifts from ‘how much to increase’ to ‘how quickly and with what capabilities’**.

EU/NATO implication: risk of intra-European frictions (countries with different fiscal margins) but also acceleration of:

- readiness plans, munitions, air/missile defense, and resilience (cyber, critical infrastructures);
- standardization and procurement with more emphasis on “capabilities that matter now”.

B. More European responsibility on Russia and Ukraine

The document defines Russia as a **“persistent but manageable threat”** for eastern NATO members and argues that **Europe “dwarfs” Russia** in economic capacity and latent military potential (chart: non-USA NATO GDP vs Russia).
Hence the consequence: **support for Ukraine and conventional deterrence in Europe as a “European responsibility”** with more limited USA support.

Implication: strong incentive towards a “Europeanisation” of the posture on the eastern front (forces, stocks, logistics, C2, air defense, ISR), to reduce the risk that a realignment of USA assets towards the Indo-Pacific leaves gaps.

C. Defense industry and trade barriers

The NDS insists on:

- USA industrial mobilization,
- but also **transatlantic industrial cooperation** and **reduction of barriers in defense trade** to maximize collective production and readiness.

EU implication: dual track:

- opportunities for co-production and transatlantic supply chains;
- tension with EU agendas of “industrial autonomy”/European preference: the text pushes for an “output-first” logic (munitions, systems, timelines) rather than “European origin”.

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D. NATO: “rewarding” cooperation and conditionality

The strategy declares its intention to favor “model allies” (visible spending and contributions) with incentives like arms sales, industrial collaboration, and intelligence-sharing.
Implication: access to programs/technologies/agreements may become more “performance-based”, increasing intra-allied competition.

Specific impacts on Italy

1) Spending and capabilities: not just “more”, but “different”

If the political benchmark rises (5% total), Italy risks being under pressure on:

- **readiness and stocks** (munitions, spare parts, sustainability);
- **air/missile defense and anti-drone** (consistent with the NDS emphasis on defense against air/missile and UAS attacks).

Practical effect: even without immediately reaching that level, it will be important to demonstrate a “credible trajectory” and measurable contributions (ready, deployable forces, munitions, C2).

2) Role in Europe: “focus on Europe” and posture on the eastern flank

The NDS explicitly tells Europeans that resources and energies **“are best focused on Europe”**.

For Italy, this implies:

- more demand for contributions to deterrence/defense missions in Europe (particularly east and northeast), in addition to the traditional priorities of the southern flank.

3) Industry: opportunities (and constraints) for the Italian industrial base

Given the emphasis on “supercharge DIB” and “leveraging allied production”, Italy can:

- enter **co-production programs**, maintenance, supply chain, and munitions to shorten timelines and increase volumes;
  but must manage:
- supply chain security requirements and possible USA “preferences” for re-shoring (the NDS is explicitly re-industrializing).

4) Political-diplomatic plan: balance between NATO and EU “strategic autonomy”

The NDS pushes towards a more “transactional” NATO (accountability and burden-sharing).

For Italy, which often aims for mediation and cohesion, the impact is:

- greater need to **align narrative + results** (spending, readiness, contributions) to preserve influence and access to sensitive cooperations.

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Russia's perspective: how it might interpret the NDS and what it might try to do

The NDS argues that Moscow cannot aim for European hegemony and that Europe has superior resources; therefore, the USA can **calibrate** its posture in Europe to prioritize homeland and China.

How Russia might react (plausible interpretation):

- **Testing European cohesion**: if responsibility shifts to Europe, Moscow might look for signs of political/budget hesitation, using informational pressure, cyber, and “gray zone” (the document explicitly cites Russian capabilities including cyber/space/undersea and nuclear).
- **Betting on timing**: Europe can “dwarf” Russia in potential, but converting this into ready military capabilities takes time; Russia might aim for windows of opportunity before European investments mature.
- **Emphasizing nuclear as leverage**: the NDS highlights the modernization of Russia's largest nuclear arsenal; this suggests that nuclear deterrence/coercion remains a central vector for Moscow.

China's perspective: how it might interpret the NDS and what it might try to do

China is described as a growing power and a priority target; the NDS talks about:

- wider communications with the PLA for stability and de-escalation,
- but above all building a **“strong denial defense”** along the First Island Chain to prevent regional domination.

How China might react (plausible interpretation):

- **Accelerating A2/AD countermeasures and saturation capabilities** (missiles, sensors, EW, cyber) to erode the effectiveness of a “by denial” deterrence. The NDS itself emphasizes the scale/quality of the Chinese buildup.
- **Diplomacy to divide allies**: the USA strategy wants to “urge and enable key regional allies” to do more; Beijing might aim to dissuade them through economic pressures and anti-containment narratives.
- **Courtship of Europe**: if Europe is pushed to “focus on Europe” and the USA concentrates on the Indo-Pacific, Beijing might seek more economic-political space in the European continent (not because the NDS favors it, but because the priority setup might create negotiation margins).

The NDS builds a paradigm: **USA = homeland + China**, while **Europe = primary responsibility on Russia/Ukraine**, with a NATO more conditioned to results (spending/capabilities). For Italy, this means pressure on **spending and readiness**, greater demand for contributions in Europe, and an industrial opportunity window within supply chains and co-productions, but within a more competitive and “performance-based” framework.

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