



Defense belongs to the Italian People. Deserters did not make the Resistance

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There is an idea that runs through the great tradition of European political thought and today seems almost alien to public debate: **the defense of the community does not belong solely to the State** understood as an apparatus, to governments, or to a caste of professional soldiers, but **ultimately belongs to citizens**. The idea of a people's army — made up of men and women who are not separate from society but are its direct expression — does not arise from the cult of force, but rather as **the ultimate instrument through which a free community preserves its right to exist**. It is a decisive distinction between militarism and the **republican principle that a society must possess the material capacity to defend itself**.

The first to grasp the political significance of this principle with radical clarity was **Niccolò Machiavelli**. His relentless polemic against mercenary militias rests on a moral truth even before a military one: **those who fight only for money lack the deep motivation that**

binds citizens to the fate of their homeland. For Machiavelli, «arms of one's own» are not merely a tactical option, but an **indispensable component of political autonomy.** A people that entrusts its security entirely to others relinquishes its freedom, delegating to others the judgment of its own survival.

Democracy: The Homeland of Rights and Duties

This thread runs through the centuries and is reinforced in the thought of **Jean-Jacques Rousseau.** In republican democracy, the individual **is not merely the holder of passive rights, but an active part of a political body that entails duties.** From this emerges the figure of the **citizen-soldier:** one who takes up arms not because he loves violence, but because he understands that the existence of the political community is the indispensable condition for preserving its laws, affections, and freedoms. It is the foundational paradox of free societies: **one must be able to fight precisely because one deeply desires peace.**

The Risorgimento tradition of **Giuseppe Mazzini** grafts an indispensable ethical dimension onto this foundation, linking rights to duties toward the Nation, understood as a community of history, memory, and destiny. This historical-political axis finds its highest expression in the **Italian Constitution.** Article 52 defines the defense of the Nation as a «**sacred duty of the citizen**», inextricably bound to Article 11, which repudiates wars of aggression. The republican legal order thus draws a clear line: it rejects imperialism, but **does not renounce legitimate self-defense,** aware that every violation of sovereignty must be met by a community capable of resisting.



Collective responsibility and the moral value of resistance

It is within this framework that the judgment of **desertion** changes radically. In a war of aggression or conquest, refusal to obey may amount to an act of the highest moral courage. But when a community is attacked and fights for its survival, **desertion ceases to be merely a military offense and becomes a breach of civic solidarity**. Those who evade danger while others remain to defend the territory do not eliminate the threat, but **selfishly shift it onto others**. If everyone claimed the individual right to evade this ultimate duty, no free community could withstand the onslaught of tyranny.

The people's army thus reminds us of a harsh but indispensable truth: **freedom is not an entitlement guaranteed forever, but a shared responsibility**. The rights enshrined in constitutional charters survive only as long as there are generations of citizens willing, in the darkest hours, to bear their burden with courage. A democracy must always critically examine the use of force, but it must be equally capable of remembering that, in extreme circumstances, **even the defense of peace, freedom, and the Nation requires courage**.