Fight tonight, not in 2040: Defense Needs a Serious Anglo-Saxon Business Model

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The press previews on the Defense reform — voluntary conscription of about 7,000 units per year (with possible opening to regular foreign residents), a permanent reserve of 15,000, and growth of personnel up to 275,000 in the long term — describe an ambitious project. But ambition alone does not produce capability: the difference is made by **rules**, **incentives**, and **implementation times**.

Italy's challenge today is to avoid two traps seen in the past: on one hand, the illusion that simply “increasing the numbers” is enough; on the other, the reform diluted over time, which does not improve operational readiness in the present and arrives late compared to scenarios.

Youths on the ground, well paid, and with a credible transition

If we truly want to strengthen the “boots on the ground” component, voluntary conscription must be consistent with the nature of the work: physically and psychologically demanding, with increasing risks and responsibilities.

In the most effective foreign models, two elements make the difference:

- **pay and retention**: adequately paying operational roles is not “generosity”, it is an investment in the stability of the units and the quality of recruitment;
- **certain exit**: short-term service only works if those who join see a realistic future (certified training, skills recognition, civilian employment channels).

In Italy, this can be translated sustainably by avoiding indiscriminate automatisms: not “everyone in PA”, but **a structured transition channel** after a minimum period (for example 10 years), on consistent profiles (logistics, maintenance, administration, cyber, infrastructure, civil protection), with equivalences and streamlined but transparent procedures. It is the most serious way to tell young people: “I won't use you and then leave you”.

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Permanent reserve: either it is truly ready, or it is just a title

The stable reserve of 15,000, to be credible, cannot be limited to formal creation or the “reactivation” of old structures. A reserve works if it has:

- clear (and funded) **minimum training days**,

- **equipment and standards** aligned with tasks,
- **real recallability** (times, procedures, chain of command),
- **a pact with employers and PA**, otherwise the system jams when needed.

Here the foreign lesson is simple: the reserve is a “societal” institution, not just a military one. If that side is not managed, the risk is a paper reserve: good numbers for the press release, little availability in fact.

Cyber and rare skills: open to civilian profiles without complexes

The draft, as it has been reported, hypothesizes a dedicated strengthening of cybersecurity and the employment of “high non-military specialization”. It is a crucial step: cyber is not built only with ordinary competitions and careers designed for traditional operations.

Many countries clearly distinguish:

- operational military roles (rotations, deployments, readiness),
- technical/analytical roles where **multi-year continuity** matters.

This means two very concrete things:

1. **more qualified civilians** in planning, programs, cyber, data, procurement, and knowledge management, even in significant positions;
2. possibility of **status transition** for some officers and non-commissioned officers to civilian roles (when accumulated experience is worth more than rotation), with measurable careers and objectives.

It is a cultural change: professionalism decides, not the uniform.

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“Fight tonight” and “fight tomorrow”: close deadlines, not just long horizons

A plan spread over 2040+ risks being politically easy and operationally sterile. A credible reform must say what changes:

- in the next **12–18 months** (targeted recruitment, pay/retention, training pipeline, reserve regulations),
- in the next **3–5 years** (fully operational reserve, cyber with targeted entries, transitions to civilian),
- in the medium-long term (redesign of personnel and careers).

The point is to avoid the effect of “ineffective today and uncertain tomorrow”.

International consultancy: essential for method and benchmark

The responsibility for the reform remains political and military, but to be modern, **method, benchmark, and numbers** are needed. In this sense, Italy can do as has been done for years in the US and UK: **support the decision-maker with highly specialized external support**, with multi-year experience in the Defense sector, to build a framework based on evidence (force design, recruitment/retention, reserve models, civilian workforce, cyber). The value is not “to

make the reform for us”, but to bring **credible comparisons**, simulations on costs and impacts, a roadmap with milestones, and a KPI dashboard, reducing the risk of choices driven by inertia or internal interests. In practice: spend a little more on design and measurement to spend much less on corrections and inefficiencies in the following years.

Conclusion

Voluntary conscription, permanent reserve, selective opening, cyber, and new hires: the framework can make sense. But the reform holds only if it shifts the focus from “numbers” to **personnel quality**, from “tradition” to **professionalism**, and from the distant horizon to measurable results in the short term.

Because Defense does not just need more people: it needs **ready, retained, valued people**. And a system that accompanies them in and out of uniform.

News link: https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/italy-considers-adding-100000-personnel-armed-forces-document-says-2026-02-19