



General Portolano's Strategic Vision: Modernizing Italy's Special Forces

Published on 09/10/2026

Against an increasingly fluid and complex international geopolitical backdrop, marked by conflict dynamics ranging from conventional deterrence to hybrid threats, Italy is reaffirming and strengthening its central role in the international defense landscape. At the **Global SOF Europe (GSOF)** international symposium, held in **Rome from October 6 to 8, 2026**, the Chief of the Defense Staff, **General Luciano Portolano**, outlined the course for the **transformation and modernization of Italy's Special Operations Forces (SOF)**. The Chief of the Defense Staff's address highlighted how global strategic competition has progressively shifted below the threshold of open conflict, into the so-called "**gray zone**". In this space of ambiguity and immediate responsiveness, threats emerge without warning and require a **rapid, discreet, and effective response**. Special Operations Forces therefore serve as the **essential instrument for turning political will into timely concrete action**, operating across the spectrum from **deterrence** and **countering hybrid threats** to **deep strike** and **counterterrorism**.

The Three Pillars of Reform

To respond effectively to contemporary challenges, the Italian Defense Ministry – at the direction of the Minister of Defense – has launched a major structural reform built on **three strategic pillars**:

1. Strategic Agility and Direct Command:

The reorganization of the **Comando Forze Speciali**, directly linked to the **Chief of the Defense Staff and political authority**, aims to drastically reduce response times. The ambitious goal is to **move from identifying a strategic requirement to deploying highly specialized forces within a matter of hours**.

2. Information Security and Allied Cohesion:

The introduction of **advanced protocols** and **strict compartmentalization of responsibilities** is intended to protect operational plans and intelligence information. As Gen. Portolano noted, the consequences of a leak in politically sensitive activities **jeopardize trust and cohesion among NATO Allies**, which are considered the international community's most valuable asset.

3. Dedicated Procurement and Rapid Innovation:

Addressing industry, the Defense establishment is promoting a **procurement model that is closer to the pace of innovation than to that of bureaucracy**. Based on **direct experimentation between those who develop capabilities and those who employ them**, the new system will make it possible to **rapidly adopt what works and promptly improve what does not**, strengthening the nation's readiness before a crisis emerges.

The Central Role of the Human Element

Despite the growing importance of new technologies in modern operational theaters, General Portolano strongly reaffirmed a fundamental principle: **«No algorithm can decide the outcome of a conflict in place of a human being»**.

The most strategic element of the Special Forces remains the **Operator**, a professional capable of combining **courage, ethical training, and new technological skills**. In closing, heartfelt thanks were extended to those who choose to **serve in silence, accepting extraordinary risks** for the security and defense of the wider community.