



Is the UK ready for war? The limits of UK defense and the uncomfortable mirror for Italy

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As the Russian war in Ukraine enters its fifth year and episodes of “hybrid warfare” in Europe multiply, an uncomfortable question is taking shape in the United Kingdom: **how long would London really be able to sustain a high-intensity conflict with Russia? Not months, perhaps not even many weeks**, according to the analysis reported by BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner.

In Italy, meanwhile, Defense Minister Guido Crosetto has been repeating for months that **our country would not be able to withstand a large-scale attack**: “Italy today would not be able to effectively respond to a large-scale military attack... we are not ready for a Russian attack or any other nation,” he warned, pointing to twenty years of underfunding as the main cause.

Comparing London and Rome means, in reality, looking at the same problem from two different angles: a Europe that believed for too long that war was “over forever” and now discovers it is not structurally ready to defend itself.

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United Kingdom: an army designed for short operations, not for a war of attrition

In the picture outlined by the analysis taken up by the BBC, the United Kingdom would find itself in difficulty in three key areas: duration, mass, and resilience of the system-country.

1. A war that would start in digital silence

The hypothesized scenario is not the classic one of columns of tanks, but of a hybrid attack:

- phones without signal,
- electronic payments blocked,
- food and fuel distribution in chaos,
- electric grid under stress.

The **United Kingdom is heavily dependent on submarine cables and digital infrastructures**. Russian spy ships like the Yantar would have already mapped these cables, while the Royal Navy is taking countermeasures with underwater drones to monitor them.

2. An army not configured for “the long war”

At the center of the reflection is the ability to *sustain* a conflict, not just to start it:

- experts from the RUSI think tank emphasize that there is no real planning for a conflict lasting more than a few weeks;
- **there is a lack of “second and third echelon”**: reserves of personnel, means, and logistics to quickly replace losses;
- there are **widespread shortages in ammunition, artillery, vehicles, air defense** and the ability to regenerate units and men.

On paper, the British army counts about **74,000 soldiers**, but the actually deployable force drops to about **54,000**, a figure equivalent to less than two months of Russian losses on the Ukrainian front, according to estimates reported in the analysis.

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3. The “mass” factor: Moscow in war economy mode

The war in Ukraine has shown that, alongside technology (drones, cyber, satellites), **mass still matters a lot: men, vehicles, bullets.**

- Russia produces dozens of artillery pieces, hundreds of armored vehicles, and an increasing number of drones every month, with an economy now set to war rhythms.
- The United Kingdom and European allies, on the other hand, would take years to approach these levels of production.

The issue, however, is also political: at the end of the Cold War, London spent over **4% of GDP** on defense; today it struggles to aim for **2.5% by 2027**, while Moscow is around 7%.

A society that does not want to hear about war (but must think about it)

The other **fragility highlighted for the United Kingdom is cultural:**

- former Chief of Staff Patrick Sanders had proposed preparing a “citizen army,” a sort of trained and mobilizable reserve;
- the government scrapped the idea, aware that in British public opinion the idea of conscription, even voluntary, is controversial.

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While France and Germany are reviving forms of voluntary military service for eighteen-year-olds, London is reluctant to reopen that door. The result is that, as some analysts observe, **British society is not mentally ready for the possibility of a conflict**, unlike countries like Poland, Finland, or the Baltics, which experience the Russian threat firsthand.

Italy in the mirror: Crosetto and the uncomfortable truth about our unpreparedness

If the state of British defense is worrying, the Italian one does not allow for any complacency. Guido Crosetto has been openly saying it for some time, breaking the political taboo of “everything is fine”:

- already in 2024, on TV, when asked if Italy was at an acceptable level in terms of armaments, training, and military, the answer was a blunt: “No, in my opinion, no”;
- more recently, in 2025, he stated that Italy **is not ready for a Russian attack or any other nation**, and that twenty years of lack of investment cannot be recovered in one or two years.

In the Italian debate, the same critical points highlighted for the United Kingdom emerge:

- **chronic underfunding**: years of cuts and delays on weapon systems, maintenance, and stocks;
- **structural deficiencies in air defense**: Crosetto himself acknowledged that the country is not prepared for a massive air attack;
- **poor resilience of civil and institutional infrastructures**: this was also shown by the case of the missing bunker for the highest offices of the State, a topic on which the minister has publicly complained.

On the personnel front, Italy is now discussing **voluntary military service from 2026**, which should strengthen reserves and create a minimum of “citizenship in uniform,” but the road is long and politically slippery.

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UK and Italy: same storm, different fleets but similar problems

The comparison between the British picture and Crosetto's warnings leads to three considerations:

1. **No one in Europe is really ready for a long war with a power like Russia.**

Even countries with a consolidated military tradition like the United Kingdom do not feel today capable of withstanding months of high-intensity fighting without quickly running out of ammunition, means, and men.

2. **The problem is not only “how much we spend,” but *how* and with what long-term vision.**

London pays for years of expensive and slow programs (like the Ajax armored vehicle), Rome pays for twenty years of delays and structural underfunding. In both cases, there is a lack of planning consistent with the current threat scenario.

3. **Society does not want to hear about war, but deterrence requires preparation.**

Crosetto insists on the concept of deterrence: peace is maintained when those who might attack you perceive you as capable of defending yourself. The lack of preparation – in the UK as in Italy – weakens this balance and makes miscalculations by aggressors more likely.

The Uncomfortable Honesty of Crosetto

In the Italian debate, **the words of Crosetto** are often labeled as alarmist. But read alongside the analysis on the United Kingdom, they appear less as an exaggeration and more as a **harsh return to reality.**

Crosetto meets military union representatives: "The State must give concrete attention to those who s

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If a nuclear power, former global empire, with a professional army and a long operational experience like the United Kingdom questions how long it could withstand a modern war, Italy – with reduced personnel, technology to update, and vulnerable civil infrastructures – cannot delude itself into being safe by inertia or geography.

The frankness of the minister (“we are not ready for a Russian attack or any other nation”) is not just an alarm, but an invitation to choose:

- **continue to hope that history does not knock on the door,**
- or accept that defense – as in the British case – is not a luxury, but the minimum insurance to protect freedom, rights, and prosperity.

In this sense, the question “how long could Britain fight if war broke out tomorrow?” closely concerns us too. **Because, if that day came, Crosetto's Italy certainly could not afford to find out by remaining unprepared.**

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