



Italian Defense Industry: Radical Transformation or Inevitable Unpreparedness

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The emergency meeting convened by the Minister of Defense with the Chief of Defense Staff, General Luciano Portolano, the National Armaments Director, Admiral Giacinto Ottaviani, and representatives of the national industry, **cannot be dismissed as a routine coordination step**. If the situation in the Middle East can worsen to the point of affecting the Gulf, Europe, and Italian interests, then the conclusion is clear: **we are no longer in a position to think with the automatic responses, slowness, and caution of peacetime**.

During the meeting, it was rightly emphasized that it is necessary to gather operational availability, programs in the finalization phase, and any initiative useful to strengthen the country's defense in the shortest possible time, particularly the air defense. But this precisely highlights the central issue: **if the threat accelerates, the State must also accelerate**. Yet, the Italian system too often continues to move with structures, mindsets, and tools that slow

down the response instead of making it more effective.

Modern warfare does not wait for the times of our bureaucracy, and it does not allow room for those who confuse administrative caution with strategic responsibility. If the national system truly needs to operate in close synergy and with speed, then we must admit that **speed today does not exist**, or exists too little, and almost always against the system, not thanks to the system.

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The first issue to address is the legal framework: without regulatory revision, there will be no reform

Any serious discussion on the reform of the Italian defense industry must start here: without a robust revision of the legal framework and procurement, **any call for speed will remain rhetoric**. The problem is not only industrial. It is regulatory, administrative, contractual, cultural. The acquisition, authorization, validation, and experimentation system is often too slow, too fragmented, too defensive towards itself.

A profound revision of the regulatory framework governing defense and the connected industrial base is needed. **It is necessary to drastically reduce unnecessary steps, compress decision times, introduce emergency channels for immediate operational acquisitions, facilitate testing, experimentation, integration, and adoption of mature technologies**. A country that takes excessive time to decide whether to buy, test, or integrate a capability is a country that risks arriving late.

Procurement, in particular, must be rethought not as a mechanism of mere formal correctness, but as a **national security tool**. This means introducing procedures capable of distinguishing between long-term programs and urgent needs, between national development and immediate acquisition, between industrial objectives and operational necessities. **Not everything can be treated with the same timelines, the same paperwork, the same precautions, the same filters.**

It is also necessary to consistently promote **joint ventures with foreign industries**, shared programs, licensed production, real technology transfer, and rapid access to already available components and subsystems. It is not about weakening national sovereignty, but about strengthening it intelligently. **Sovereignty today does not consist in closing oneself off; it consists in knowing how to integrate, adapt, produce, and improve what is needed before the threat matures.**

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The Army is the weakest, most delicate, and most rigid point: it is there that intervention is needed first

If we want to tell the whole truth, we must recognize that **the most delicate and rigid part of the system is the land component**, the one linked to the Army and its operational-industrial ecosystem. It is there that rigidity, slowness, difficulties in updating, procedural complexity, and a still too large gap between real operational needs and the system's response times become most evident.

However, it is precisely the land dimension that contemporary conflicts have taught the hardest lessons. **Tactical drones, anti-drone systems, electronic warfare, close protection, smart logistics, distributed sensing, resilient communications, low-cost ammunition, and rapid adaptation capabilities are no longer accessories: they are the basis of survival in the field.** Yet, in this area, Italy often appears slower, more rigid, more exposed to inertia.

For this [the reform must urgently focus on the Army component](#), not only in terms of major platforms and programs, but on the **overall architecture of tactical and operational response**. A much faster chain is needed between department, requirement, testing, selection, and adoption. Units must be allowed to participate in defining requirements much more directly. Above all, it is necessary to stop thinking that every operational need must be absorbed by the system with long industrial times and standardized administrative processes.

The Army cannot remain the most exposed segment of the system while it is the one that, in a scenario of widespread crisis, would be called upon to withstand some of

the most concrete and immediate impacts. If there is a sector to unlock first, it is this one.

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UAS and C-UAS: if there is an immediate vulnerability, mature products are needed immediately, even foreign ones

The UAS and C-UAS sector represents the clearest example of what we can no longer afford to get wrong. If there are immediate critical issues today, **it is not acceptable to respond with announcements, working groups, or promises of future capabilities.** Immediate action is needed, also resorting to already mature foreign systems, especially where solutions have been developed and validated in a real operational context, such as Ukraine.

This choice should not be seen as a defeat of the national industry, but as proof of strategic maturity. **First, the gap is filled, then the national capacity to integrate, produce, adapt, and surpass that solution is built.** Thinking that we must always wait for the ideal national product means exposing ourselves to a concrete vulnerability in the present.

Tactical drones, loitering munitions, jammers, light radars, soft-kill and hard-kill systems, widespread sensors, short-range alert networks, and classification and response software must be acquired through extraordinary channels and tested quickly. **The difference between a credible defense and a merely declared defense also lies in this ability to choose what is already available instead of what is only theoretically desirable.**

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The big groups must focus on what they really know how to do, not oversee everything

The major players in national defense remain essential. No one questions their role in major programs, naval mechanics, aerospace, advanced electronics, air defense, integrated systems. Precisely for this reason, however, **they must be called upon to rigorously do what they do best**, not to occupy every possible space as a system reflex.

The reform must unleash the potential of the big groups without turning them into a bottleneck. They must act as prime contractors, integrators, supply chain catalysts, investors in innovation, buyers of startups, promoters of joint ventures, not as a total filter through which every solution must necessarily pass. **A strong industrial giant is not one that blocks everything around it, but one that organizes and enhances the ecosystem.**

In this framework, the big groups are also asked to abandon **hyperbolic slogans, generic statements, and self-celebratory narratives** that do not produce any operational capability. In a historical phase like this, industrial credibility is measured by what is delivered, integrated, tested, and made available in a timely manner. The rest is noise.

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Without a culture of defense, there is no serious industrial reform

At the base of everything, however, there is an even deeper problem. **The majority of the industry, politics, and largely the entire nation does not have a true culture of defense.** It does not have it in language, it does not have it in priorities, it does not have it in decision-making times, it does not have it in understanding the relationship between military innovation, national security, industry, and citizen protection.

This means that defense continues to be perceived by too many as a specialized subject, distant, almost separate from the life of the country. In reality, in a scenario of strategic deterioration, **defense concerns energy, transportation, infrastructure, economy, cybersecurity, state continuity, and population protection.** A country that does not internalize this truth will continue to treat defense as an accessory chapter, only to brutally discover its centrality when it is too late.

For this reason, the industrial and organizational revolution of the sector must be based on **a true culture of defense**, widespread, concrete, technically founded. A culture that can distinguish between propaganda and capability, between relationship and merit, between abstract study and applied innovation, between conference and prototype. **Without this cultural foundation, even the best regulatory reforms risk being absorbed and**

neutralized by the old system.

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At the center of the reform: prepared veterans, called to do serious advising

If we want to build a credible bridge between armed forces, industry, and innovation, then we must systematically value prepared, competent, technically updated veterans, who can perform real advising work in the defense industry. This is a decisive point.

Companies need to truly understand the operational perspective, the reality on the ground, the problems of the department, the limits of overly theoretical solutions, the difference between an elegant system on paper and a useful system in real conditions. **This type of knowledge is not improvised in boards, lounges, or institutional relations: it is built with experience, study, professionalism, and operational credibility.**

For this reason, competent veterans must become an integral part of the new defense ecosystem: as industrial advisors, operational validation managers, liaison figures between departments and designers, mentors for startups and SMEs, participants in the requirements definition processes and solution verification. But they must be chosen for quality, experience, seriousness, and updating. **If this space also becomes a ground for co-optation, the reform would already be compromised.**

Serious advising means bringing into companies a mindset oriented towards effectiveness, timing, usability, robustness, maintenance, adaptability. It means reminding every day that the defense product is not a narrative exercise, but a tool that can decide the survival of military and civilians. **This is where we need to start again: from true competence, not from relationality disguised as a system.**

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Nepotism, bureaucracy, and cliques: the rubber wall that weakens national security

The most uncomfortable part remains also the most necessary. **Bureaucracy, nepotism, cliques, parallel relations, mutual protection, and environmental logics continue to slow down the system.** This is not just an ethical problem; it is an operational and strategic problem. In normal times it produces inefficiency. In times of crisis, it can produce vulnerability.

It is true that similar dynamics exist in many nations, from the United States to Ukraine. But this justifies nothing. On the contrary, it requires even more vigilance. **Every choice slowed down for non-technical reasons, every program protected by inertia, every figure selected for proximity instead of quality takes away real security from the country.**

Therefore, an organizational clean slate is needed: clear responsibilities, traceability of decisions, transparent access to experimentation paths, rapid comparative evaluations, external verification of results, rewards for those who deliver capabilities and not just documents. **The defense system cannot continue to function as a rubber wall that absorbs everything, slows everything down, and never fully responds to anything.**

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War concerns citizens: this is why the reform can no longer be postponed

The final point is the most important. War does not only concern the lives of the few professionals in uniform whom we have the duty to equip and protect better. It also and above all concerns the security of citizens, the resilience of the economy, the resilience of infrastructures, the continuity of the vital functions of the state, social stability.

For this reason, the meeting convened by the minister can only make sense if it marks the beginning of a true transformation. It is not enough to ask the industry to commit beyond normal commercial standards. The legal framework, procurement, defense culture, the relationship between the Army and industry, openness to mature foreign technologies, selection of advisors, valorization of veterans, and the fight against rents and cooptations must be addressed.

There is no longer room for a defense that is talked about but not built, evoked but not made available, celebrated but not made efficient. Either Italy now starts a serious

revolution in the defense sector, both industrial and cultural, or it will continue to chase crises with slow structures, old mindsets, and new vulnerabilities.

And this time, if the international situation worsens, **it will not be an abstraction called the system that pays the price: the Nation will pay it.**

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