



Italy's Generals: Evolution of Military Command in Republican Italy

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Over more than seventy years of republican history, the Italian Armed Forces have undergone a profound metamorphosis.

From Defenders of National Borders in a symmetric and limited conflict such as the Cold War, we moved to Military Commanders immersed in complex geopolitical crises. This evolutionary path not only redefined the operational capabilities and training of military leadership, but also reshaped the delicate boundary of relations with politics, placing at the center the fundamental principle of democratic primacy and institutional neutrality.

From the Cold War to the Andreatta reform: the end of separation

During the Cold War period, the model of military leadership was based on a tacit pact of non-interference and a clear separation between politics and the heads of the Armed Forces. Civil institutions were responsible for strategic decision and the use of military means, while military

personnel were responsible for training, discipline and internal management, protected by the concept of "military specificity". The Officer Corps served the State and not the Government of the moment, rooting a culture based on political neutrality and institutional Loyalty.

This scenario was consistent with a known threat and a strategic framework dominated almost entirely by NATO. However, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union made that model inadequate. It was no longer enough to know the modalities for conducting static territorial defense; the international crises of the Nineties, from Somalia to former Yugoslavia, imposed a projection of military means beyond national borders (expeditionary warfare).

In this context the Andreatta reform (Law no. 25/1997) was introduced, which marked an epochal turning point. The Chief of the Defense General Staff was placed directly under the authority of the Minister, assuming a preeminence over the heads of individual Armed Forces and inaugurating strong inter-service management. Planning and strategy began to require a much more direct political-military relationship, reducing that "separation" which had characterized the preceding decades.

Training and field experience as schools of strategy

With the creation, in July 1994, of the Superior Institute of Inter-service General Staff (ISSMI), and subsequently with the start of professional recruitment sanctioned by Law no. 331/2000, Officers progressively expanded their competencies well beyond the tactical dimension, deepening subjects such as geopolitics, economics, international relations, law and communication.

Complex Operational Theaters, from Afghanistan to Iraq, from Lebanon to the Balkans, transformed Commanders into true National Representatives for operational activities and support to the population. On the ground, Generals and senior Officers found themselves daily in dialogue with local authorities, international organizations, religious leaders and NGOs, managing not only security but also reconstruction, economic impacts and media consequences of operations

If on the one hand such maturation has increased the awareness and preparation of the leadership, on the other hand it has highlighted a new critical issue: the risk that political direction degenerates into techno-military micromanagement or that individuals lacking adequate competences interfere with the professional autonomy of the chain of command.

Reduced Resources, New Missions and the Return to Combat

Between 2008 and 2018, military leadership had to face a complex phase characterized by severe budgetary constraints, symbolized by law no. 244/2012 on the structural contraction of the instrument and an increase in tasks, including those on national territory such as Operation Strade Sicure. Despite formal recognition of military specificity (article 19 of Law no. 183/2010), personnel often felt the gap between increasing responsibilities and the contraction of resources.

In recent years, in response to an international landscape marked by the return of high-intensity warfare in Europe following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the focus of training and operations has decidedly returned to multi-domain combat, advanced technology and the readiness of large units, as evidenced by the preparation models promoted in the Army.

At the same time, the system has absorbed significant reforms such as the introduction of professional associations with trade union character among military personnel (Law no. 46/2022), which impose new competences on commanders in listening, negotiation and organizational well-being, while maintaining the inviolable respect of hierarchy and discipline.

Technical Competence and Institutional Neutrality

Today the contemporary Commander moves in a complex balance. His authority is based on techno-strategic competence, on the ability to clearly express the situation and related solutions to the political decision-maker and on the loyal execution of legitimately made decisions.

However, the increased public profile of some military figures and their possible direct access to the party arena raise crucial questions about the distinction between individual citizen engagement and institutional neutrality. The uniform and the prestige of the Armed Forces belong to the entire national community, not to a political party.

The challenge for the future remains the one traced over more than seventy years of evolution: to ensure a highly qualified leadership class capable of dialogue with political power, while rigorously preserving the non-partisan nature and exclusive loyalty to Republican Institutions.