



Luttwak: rearmament is not enough, European Armies have become useless.

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The debate on European rearmament risks being a facade exercise. While the chancelleries of the Old Continent promise record investments to modernize their defenses, Edward Luttwak, a world-renowned political scientist and economist, issues a clear warning from the pages of *Unherd*: the problem of European armed forces is not the lack of funds, but their structural uselessness.

The illusion of numbers

Luttwak starts with an unequivocal fact: the British decline. If in 1945 the United Kingdom's army had three million personnel, today the total "trained force" — among the Royal Navy, RAF, Marines, and Army — has dropped to about **126,440 units**, a number in constant decline even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

However, the political scientist warns: it is not just a numerical issue. The real drama is the inefficient management of resources. In the past, the winning strategy (exemplified by Labour minister Denis Healey between 1964 and 1970) consisted of sacrificing the superfluous — bases, ships, bureaucracy — to maximize what really matters: **training, ammunition, and constant maintenance.**



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Empty bases and golden bureaucracy

Today, according to Luttwak, the exact opposite happens. Since the end of the Cold War, European Ministries of Defense have transformed military structures into a sort of social buffer.

"We keep increasingly empty bases open often just to preserve jobs for civilian caretakers and gardeners, and housing for retired non-commissioned officers," writes the analyst.

The example cited as a paradigm of inefficiency is **Spain**: despite a drastically reduced workforce (from 280,000 to 75,000 men from 1990 to today), Madrid has kept the entire command architecture intact. Each military region has its own headquarters, with three-star generals occupying purely formal positions. A self-sabotage, the Spanish one, that Luttwak defines as an "exaggerated version" of a widespread pathology throughout Europe, including Italy, where defense often intertwines with industrial and political protection logics that have little to do with combat readiness.

The crisis of the military leadership class

Luttwak's criticism extends to the quality of leadership. The expert points the finger at a class of officers whose "field" experience is limited to missions like **UNIFIL**, often unable to translate into real deterrent or operational capability.

The historical reference to the tragedy of Srebrenica and the subsequent career of Thomas Karremans is the culmination of this bitter reflection: a system that promotes those who fail in defending their mission is a system that has lost its ethical and professional compass.

Conclusions: an army that does not fight

Luttwak's conclusion is severe: today NATO counts about **3.5 million active military personnel**. They are men and women who wear the uniform every day, but who, in fact, lack realistic training.

The contrast with the era when the British Parliament was populated by war veterans, aware of what combat readiness meant, is striking. The warning is clear: as long as European defense is conceived as a mix of welfare and bureaucratic prestige rather than as a tool for war survival, no budget increase will fill the power vacuum that threatens the continent.