NATO Defense College: 75 Years of Strategic Training in Service of the Alliance

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The **NATO Defense College (NDC)** celebrated in Rome a double anniversary of great symbolic value: **75 years since the founding of the institution** and **60 years since the relocation of its headquarters from France to the Italian capital**. A milestone that not only represents a historical recurrence but also confirms the central role of the institution in preparing the future political-military leadership of NATO. Founded in 1951 on the initiative of General **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the College was conceived as a place to develop a common strategic vision among the Allies, convinced that the strength of the Alliance depended not only on military capabilities but also on **training, cooperation, and mutual trust**.

Today, in an international scenario characterized by strategic competition, hybrid wars, new technologies, and multidomain threats, that vision seems more relevant than ever. The **NATO**

Defense College continues to represent one of the main centers of high strategic training for the Alliance, preparing civilian leaders, senior officers, and diplomats from member and partner countries to face international security challenges with a shared perspective.

The celebrations took place at the College's Roman headquarters in the presence of the main civilian and military authorities of the Alliance. The day was opened with **military honors** rendered by the Italian Armed Forces to the **Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone**, and the **Commandant of the NATO Defense College, Lieutenant General Max ALT Nielsen**, who was in his last week of duty. After the flag-raising, the **commemorative plaque for the 75th anniversary** was inaugurated, symbolizing an institution that continues to represent one of NATO's cultural pillars.

Rome, the Capital of Strategic Training for the Alliance

The ceremony brought together representatives from across the Euro-Atlantic community, confirming the international character of the institution. Among the guests were **General Aurelio Colagrande**, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, **General Markus Laubenthal**, Chief of Staff of SHAPE, ambassadors, diplomatic and military authorities, representatives from the academic world, international journalists, and the officers attending the **Senior Course 148**.

In his inaugural speech, **Lieutenant General Max ALT Nielsen**, Commandant of the **NATO Defense College**, reviewed the evolution of the College, emphasizing how the institution has adapted to geopolitical transformations over the past decades without losing its fundamental mission: **to develop a common strategic culture among the Allies**.

Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, Chairman of the Military Committee, delivers the opening speech for the 75th anniversary celebrations of the NDC. Source NATO Defense College.

Particularly significant was the speech by **Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone**, who recalled the role played by Rome over the last sixty years as the intellectual seat of the Alliance. According to the Chairman of the Military Committee, the **NATO Defense College** has helped transform thousands of officers, diplomats, and civilian officials into **strategic leaders**, building over time **a heritage of trust among the thirty-two nations of the Alliance** that no technological innovation could replace. A message that highlights one of the most important elements of modern NATO: **interoperability is born first and foremost from mutual knowledge and the sharing of the same strategic culture**.

The **NATO Secretary General, Mark Rutte**, also participated in the celebrations with a video message, along with the **Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Alexus G. Grynkewich**, the **Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT), Admiral Pierre Vandier**, and the **Italian Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto**. Rutte highlighted how the **NATO Defense College** represents **a training laboratory for the future leaders of the Alliance**, a center for strategic research, and a place where personal relationships are consolidated to last throughout the participants' careers.

From the Ankara Summit to Future Challenges

The celebrations revolved around the theme **“Today's Alliance – Tomorrow's Leaders”**, emphasizing the link between the history of the institution and NATO's new strategic needs. The program alternated solemn moments with high-level insights, confirming the vocation of the

NATO Defense College as a place for discussion on the main challenges of international security.

Among the most significant events was the dialogue **“What Would Eisenhower Say?”**, during which Dr. **Richard Hooker** and Dr. **Florence Gaub** analyzed the current relevance of General Dwight D. Eisenhower's thinking. The discussion highlighted how the principles of **strategic leadership**, international cooperation, and cultural preparation continue to represent a fundamental point of reference in a context marked by global competition, technological innovation, and multidomain conflicts.

Dr. Richard Hooker and Dr. Florence Gaub during the informal conversation on the topic “What Would Eisenhower Say?”. Source NATO Defense College.

Ample space was also dedicated to the outcomes of the recent **NATO Summit in Ankara**, explored in the panel **“Ankara Summit – What Now?”**. Ambassador **Tacan Ildem** and **General Markus Laubenthal**, moderated by journalist Gordon Repinski of *Politico*, illustrated the main decisions adopted by the Alliance and future prospects, reiterating how the training of the future leadership represents an essential element to ensure **adaptability, deterrence, and political cohesion**.

The day also highlighted the established relationship between the **NATO Defense College** and Italy thanks to collaboration with **Poste Italiane**, which created commemorative postcards and a special **celebratory stamp** dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the College. The first specimen was officially canceled by Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone and Lieutenant General Max ALT Nielsen, sealing the now historical bond between the institution and the host country.

Seventy-five years since its founding and **sixty since its relocation to Rome**, the **NATO Defense College** continues to represent one of the main tools through which the Alliance strengthens its strategic culture. By preparing future civilian and military leaders and promoting dialogue among member and partner countries, the College contributes to consolidating **unity, interoperability, and decision-making capability**, essential elements to face present and future international security challenges.

News link: https://www.ndc.nato.int/ndc-75th-anniversary/