



Prudence or Courage? How to Choose Future Military Leaders in Italy

Published on 07/09/2025

In recent years, the term "leadership" has invaded the military debate, often leading to a flattening towards business models unsuitable for the challenges of war. In a context like Italy, where military employment has a more political-defensive than offensive profile, there is an urgent need to rethink the criteria for selecting military leaders — especially in a scenario where **prudence is placed before courage**, and there is a tendency to appreciate those who conform ("yes-man") rather than those who dare to take responsibility in the field.

Language and concepts: leader vs. condottiero

The adoption of Anglo-Saxon terminology such as "leader" or "manager" has contributed to uprooting concepts deeply rooted in the Italian military tradition, such as the "capo" or the "condottiero". These terms represent not only command figures but also bearers of **charisma, honor, sense of duty, and responsibility**. Reducing the commander to a mere human resources manager risks emptying him of authority and meaning — a dangerous reductionism

when, in extreme conditions, life is what counts. The commander is not an administrator: he is **the ethical, military, and human point of reference** for the troops.



Innate qualities and professional development

Commanding requires **innate qualities** — such as **tactical intuition, courage, moral consistency** — but also solid training, professional field experiences, and progressive consolidation of skills. Authority is not decreed: it is earned over time, through an **ethical and consistent personality**, and a shared sense of belonging.

The strength of the commander is similar to an athletic talent: it must be cultivated through training, experience, and continuous reflection. The formality of rank serves little if it is not supported by **a recognized and desired moral leadership** by those who serve under that command.

Italian context: prudence and hierarchical structures

In Italy, where military operations have a predominantly defensive or civil support profile, prudence is often considered a virtue superior to reckless courage. In this context, the chain of command — and particularly the General Staff — tends to value loyalty and alignment ("yes-man") rather than innovative proposals or constructive criticism from field commanders.

This leads to a climate where **diversity of thought**, although potentially vital in terrain assessment, is discouraged in favor of institutional conformity and consistency. The result is

often a conservative leadership, careful not to expose itself, more attentive to internal consensus than to the desire to lead.



The risk of uncritical security

An excessively prudent military culture risks **turning into immobility**. When only what pleases the top is reevaluated, the **ability to adapt**, readiness in decision-making under pressure, and courage — also understood as responsibility — to act when the stakes require it, are lost.

It is essential **not to sacrifice critical judgment on the altar of consistency**. Even in caution, a commander must be able to be **autonomous in thought**, capable of raising doubts and proposing alternative paths, and acting when necessary.

Historical context and final reflections

Historically, figures like Napoleon recognized the importance of courage, talent, intuition, and yes, even luck in choosing their generals. In real situations, the ability to adapt, to make quick but considered decisions, the solitude of command, and the need to act consistently remain central.

Today more than ever, those who command in the military field should be selected based on:

1. **Moral integrity** and personal authority.
2. **Tactical-operational experience and competence**, honed in the field.

3. Critical capacity and **intellectual autonomy**, even in the face of collegial pressures.
4. **Responsible courage**, not unconscious recklessness, and the ability to decide in uncertainty.
5. Connection with **ethical and institutional values**, consistency between words and actions.

Conclusion

In summary, the selection of military leaders in a nation like Italy requires a conscious balance between **prudence and courage**, between respect for hierarchy and critical autonomy, between institutional loyalty and personal responsibility. Resisting the temptation of uncritical command is essential to prevent a defensive institution from becoming an apparatus of conformity.