The European Strategic Anomaly: The Long-Range Challenge and Italy's Role

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While the United States operates at a rapid pace in the Middle Eastern theater and strengthens its arsenals with record orders, Europe finds itself at a critical crossroads. According to the analysis by **Fabian Hoffmann**, the continent is on an **isolated and dangerous path**: a discrepancy between the awareness of threats and the actual industrial and military capability to strike at long range. For Italy, caught between multilateral commitments and the need for modernization, the challenge is not only technological but one of pure strategic survival.

The Diagnosis: A Breathless Europe

Hoffmann's analysis is relentless: European warehouses are empty, and attempts to fill them appear fragmented. If the "period of maximum risk" identified by intelligence is the late 2020s, Europe risks being caught unprepared. This **negative singularity** compared to the rest of the world is articulated on three pillars:

1. **Long-range attack drones** (Shahed/Geran style).

2. **Cruise missiles** (Land-Attack Cruise Missiles).
3. **Ballistic missiles**.

While Poland and the Baltic States try to bypass the impasse by relying on US (JASSM-ER, ATACMS) or South Korean (Chunmoo) exports, major European powers struggle to scale up internal production.

Italy's Role: Between ELSA and the National Shield

Italy navigates this scenario through a dual strategy: participation in major European consortia and maintaining sovereign capabilities through **MBDA**.

The ELSA Initiative (European Long-Range Strike Approach)

In February 2026, Italy signed a letter of intent with France, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom for the development of the **OWE (One-Way Effector) 500 Plus**.

- **Objective:** An attack drone with a range of 500 km.
- **Cost:** The aim is for a "five-figure" price to allow mass purchases.
- **The risk:** Italy must avoid the program becoming a bureaucratic exercise. For now, the project is still in the conceptual phase, while threats move faster than paper.

The Storm Shadow Succession and STRATUS

Together with London and Paris, Rome is engaged in the development of **STRATUS**, the successor to the Storm Shadow/SCALP-EG missiles. With an expected service entry between **2028 and 2030**, this system will represent the spearhead of Italian air force projection (F-35 and Typhoon). However, as Hoffmann points out, the problem is not only quality but **quantity**: Europe can no longer afford to produce "museum pieces" in limited numbers.

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The Focus: Italy and the Defense of the Southern Flank

For Italy, the need for long-range armaments is not only in response to the logic of the eastern front but also to the stability of the **"Wider Mediterranean"**.

- **Naval Capability:** The integration of long-range ground attack systems on Navy units is a central theme to not fall behind French partners (who already use the MdCN).
- **Industrial Production:** MBDA Italy is a fundamental asset, but the "Italian way" must go through an industrial transformation. Craftsmanship excellence is no longer enough; there is a need for the capability to produce significant volumes quickly.

Conclusions: Overcoming the European Exception

Hoffmann's analysis highlights how Europe has become a **global exception**: almost every other actor preparing for a high-intensity conflict — from China to Australia, from Taiwan to Israel — is investing massively in drones and long-range missiles.

For Italy, the challenge of the next 24 months will be twofold:

1. **Accelerate ELSA timelines:** Prevent multilateral cooperation from becoming a brake rather than an accelerator.
2. **Scalability:** Move from a "few but excellent" logic to mass production, necessary for real conventional deterrence.

> *"If a high-intensity conflict broke out tomorrow, European stocks would be depleted in a few days." This warning must push Rome to correct that* ***strategic drift*** *that has so far favored the long timelines of politics over the urgent deadlines of continental security.*

Main reference: "Der europäische Sonderweg bei der weitreichenden Bewaffnung" by Fabian Hoffmann, April 2026.