



Ukraine and Article 5, General Bertolini: «It doesn't mean going to war»

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The conflict in Ukraine continues to raise questions about NATO's role and the possible security guarantees to offer Kyiv. Many observers draw attention to **Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty**, the provision that calls for mutual assistance among member countries in case of aggression. But, as **General Marco Bertolini** – former commander of the **Joint Operational Command** and the Paratroopers Brigade “Folgore” – reminds us, its interpretation should not be misunderstood.

What Article 5 of NATO provides

Article 5 is the cornerstone of the Atlantic Alliance: member states agree that «**an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all**». Consequently, each country is obliged to assist the attacked state «by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties, such action as it

deems necessary, including the use of armed force».

However, as Bertolini points out, this does not imply an automatic entry into war: each nation retains the ability to decide the modalities and means of its intervention.

L'ART. 5 DEL TRATTATO NATO

«Le Parti convengono che un attacco armato contro una o più di esse, in Europa o nell'America settentrionale, costituirà un attacco verso tutte, e di conseguenza convengono che se tale attacco dovesse verificarsi, ognuna di esse, nell'esercizio del diritto di legittima difesa individuale o collettiva riconosciuto dall'art. 51 dello Statuto delle Nazioni Unite, assisterà la parte o le parti così attaccate, intraprendendo immediatamente, individualmente e di concerto con le altre parti, l'azione che giudicherà necessaria, ivi compreso l'impiego della forza armata, per ristabilire e mantenere la sicurezza nella regione dell'Atlantico settentrionale».

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«Article 5 does not mean automatic war»

According to Bertolini, **«it is a public perception error to think that Article 5 implies the automatic entry into war of allies against the aggressor»**. The interpretation, the general notes, must be read carefully: **«Everyone must commit to supporting the attacked with the means they consider necessary, but not necessarily military»**.

The central point is that Ukraine is not part of NATO. «Its membership – he notes – is precisely the trigger for the Russian operation. Invoking Article 5 for Kyiv would be completely unacceptable for Moscow. Moreover, on the ground, Russia is maintaining its positions: why should it retreat?».

Why Article 5 is discussed in relation to Ukraine

Although Ukraine is not one of the 32 members of the Alliance, the debate was reignited by a proposal made by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the extraordinary European Council on March 6, suggesting the extension of NATO guarantees to Kyiv. The same hypothesis then emerged at the Anchorage summit, when Donald Trump discussed it with Vladimir Putin.

According to the American special envoy Steve Witkoff, **Moscow would have shown a willingness in principle, provided that the new borders are sanctioned**: Russia claims

the entire Donbass, which it only partially controls. A prospect difficult to accept for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In NATO's history, Article 5 has been invoked only once: after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. On October 2 of that year, it was recognized that the aggression came from abroad, and NATO decided to send troops to Afghanistan. A precedent that shows how the mechanism is not automatic but requires shared political and operational assessments.

The risks of extending to Kyiv

The potential extension of Article 5 guarantees to Ukraine raises numerous uncertainties.

- **On the legal level**, the treaty provides for integration into the NATO command structure, including the nuclear umbrella: a step that would radically change the European strategic balance.
- **On the territorial level**, the problem is the absence of stable borders: with part of Ukraine already under Russian control, it becomes difficult to establish the area of application of the provision.
- **On the operational front**, the very definition of “attack” risks creating ambiguity: just think of cyber-attacks, difficult to assess and attribute with certainty.
- **On the political level**, finally, a potential violation of guarantees without a concrete response could undermine NATO's credibility.

In light of these obstacles, the most realistic hypothesis remains a mechanism inspired by Article 5, but based on the membership of a group of “willing countries”. It would be a deterrent force that does not foresee the direct presence of NATO soldiers in Ukraine but offers political and military guarantees to strengthen Kyiv's position.

Bertolini, however, warns: «These are often the same countries that destabilized Libya before our eyes. We cannot ignore the risk of repeating already seen mistakes».



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The issue of mutual guarantees

The general emphasizes that any security architecture must be valid for both parties: «We Europeans think of guarantees as a wall against possible new Russian interventions; Russia, on the other hand, conceives them as protection from possible threats from Ukraine or NATO».

Not surprisingly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated that any future security system must also include China, signaling the now irreversible entry into a multipolar logic.

The debate remains open: on one side Kyiv demands concrete guarantees, on the other Moscow does not intend to retreat. In the middle, Europe and NATO seek a formula that combines deterrence and diplomacy without leading to a direct confrontation with Russia. **The warning from General Bertolini, in this context, is clear: avoid illusions about the automatism of Article 5 and remember that the credibility of any security guarantee depends on the balance of the parties involved.**