

# *Security and Defence Days 2024*

THE SEMINARS

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# **SECURITY AND DEFENCE DAYS 2024**

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## *Summary*

### 9 Introduction

*Hon. Angelino Alfano*

### 15 Session 1

Russia's war in Ukraine and insecurity in the  
Mediterranean: NATO between two fronts

*Amb. Andrea Romussi*

*Hon. Mikuláš Dzurinda*

*Amb. Tacan Ildem*

### 31 Session 2

The Euro-Atlantic agenda after the Washington  
summit and the U.S. presidential elections

*Hon. Paolo Alli*

*Amb. Francesco Talò*

*Dr. Valbona Zeneli*

### 51 Session 3

The need for a European defence, from De Gasperi  
to today

*Vice Adm. Giacinto Ottaviani*

*Hon. Lorenzo Cesa*

63 Session 4

China, the Indo-Pacific region and the role  
of NATO partners

*Amb. Marco Della Seta*

*Amb. Antonio Bartoli*

*Dr. Pietro De Matteis*



# Introduction

Hon. Angelino Alfano

*President, De Gasperi Foundation*

The «Security and Defence Days» conference is taking place this year for the fourth time, and it stands today as an element of «continuity» in the national, European, Transatlantic reflection and debate. This «continuity» evinces in the collaboration with the NATO Public Diplomacy Division, to which I am thankful for being a point of reference for the De Gasperi Foundation in organizing the event one more time this year.

The 2024 edition of «Security and Defence Days» is part of the «De Gasperi's Year», the program launched by the Foundation to celebrate the figure of Alcide De Gasperi on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death on August the 19<sup>th</sup> 1954.

The reference to the «De Gasperi's Year» gives me the opportunity to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Indeed, the Ministry has granted its free patronage to the celebrations, mindful of De Gasperi's enlightened leadership of the «Farnesina». In the initial stages of the European integration

project, De Gasperi exercised this role alongside that of Prime Minister, and he took part in the Paris peace negotiations that ended World War II.

Last October the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Foundation celebrated the central event of the «De Gasperi's Year» at the Chamber of Deputies – before the Head of State Sergio Mattarella, and with speeches by, among others, the Speaker of the Chamber, Lorenzo Fontana, and the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola.

On the following day, October the 26<sup>th</sup>, the Foundation continued its efforts for the «Degasperian Year» in Washington, D.C., where a workshop with a specific focus on De Gasperi's role as the founding father of the «special relationship» between Italy and the United States of America after World War II was held.

Among the outcomes of the extraordinary diplomatic work carried out by De Gasperi with the United States, we need to mention Italy's entry into the Atlantic Alliance, which secured our country's placement in the cluster of free Western democracies. The choice was originally made by De Gasperi, and it has been the unbroken thread of Italy's foreign, security and defence policies up to this day – 75 years after the North Atlantic Treaty was signed on April the 4<sup>th</sup> 1949.

NATO's founding act overlaps with the celebrations for the «Degasperian Year» and with the «Security and Defence Days», witnessing a history that continues to live in the present, and that projects into the future. Italy has been part of this story from the very beginning and it still is a leading actor in the wake of

Alcide De Gasperi's work – as confirmed by yesterday's meeting between NATO's new Secretary General, Mark Rutte, and the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, which took place on the same day as the U.S. presidential elections.

«Continuity» can thus be seen as the hallmark of «Security and Defence Days». The «continuity» of Transatlantic relations, the «continuity» of the collective defence system of Western democracies, the «continuity» of the essential role exercised by Italy for the safety of the Euro-Atlantic community – from De Gasperi's times to the present.

The hot topics on the table for decision-makers, experts and analysts who will speak at the conference are various, and they shall cover the ongoing conflicts on the «eastern» and «southern» sides of the Alliance, the prospects for cooperation between Europe and the United States, the role of women in the promotion of peace and security processes, the growing role of private actors in contemporary wars, the emerging geopolitical hotspots of the Arctic and Indo-Pacific, the NATO partnerships.

The key priorities for the Alliance are deterrence and defence. These were identified at the last summit of the member countries held in Washington in July. The work of the conference must therefore devote ample space to the long-standing issue of «European defence» too. De Gasperi, with his prophetic vision, was a forerunner of it, even strenuously promoting the creation of EDC, the «European Defence Community».

Despite being an outstanding man of peace, in his speech at the London Conference on November the 26<sup>th</sup> 1951, De Gasperi stated that «defensive alliances and, above all, the armaments that come with them, are a hard preliminary necessity».

Although reluctant toward rearmament, in light of the tragic events of World War II, De Gasperi was aware of the necessity to build alliances and prepare responsibly in order to ensure security and prevent new conflicts. That is why he worked, up to the very end of his life, in order to grant Europe a common defence system, integrated within NATO.

In his last days, the pain caused by his illness was exacerbated by the «thorn in the side» represented by the failure of this project, which would be certified shortly after his death by the failure of the French parliament to ratify the founding treaty.

The vacuum left by the CED in the process of European integration is still very much present today, and it appears stronger than ever in the face of the winds of war insisting on the «eastern flank» and the «southern flank» of the Alliance – and thus of Europe itself – with the continuing conflict in Ukraine provoked by Russian aggression and the widening conflict in the Middle East, from the Gaza Strip to Lebanon and potentially to the entire region.

The connection between the «eastern flank» and the «southern flank» gives form to an entire scenario of insecurity and instability which directly abuts «our homeland Europe», as it was defined by De Gasperi.

The magnitude of this scenario makes the strengthening of integration, in the area of defence, a compulsory way forward for the European Union, not least to escape its irrelevance in the game of the great powers, and to fulfill instead the leading role required of it, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For this reason, the De Gasperi Foundation continues to promote the cause of «European defence», within the broader framework of the Transatlantic defence system, by training the new generations on security issues through the annual «EuPeople» School of Politics. Its 10<sup>th</sup> edition will take place in late November.

Still, for what pertains to the challenges and prospects that NATO and the European Union are facing in an increasingly complex and heated international scenario, the «Security and Defence Days» we are inaugurating today are confirmed as the ideal venue for reflection and debate among decision makers, experts and analysts.



## SESSION 1

Russia's war in Ukraine and  
insecurity in the Mediterranean:  
NATO between two fronts





Amb. Andrea Romussi  
*Head of the NATO Policy Office*  
*Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation*

Russian aggression in Ukraine has put the whole of Europe in a state of alarm, exacerbating the insecurity scenario on the Atlantic Alliance's eastern flank. At the same time, Europe is also facing challenges and threats from the southern flank, which is characterized by regional conflicts, terrorism, and the destabilizing role of state and non-state actors. Just think of the situation in Israel and in the Gaza Strip, the fragility of Lebanon, Iran's involvement and the rising tensions in Yemen.

All this requires a different approach to collective security. The key question is therefore: how can NATO deal with such a strategic environment?

In response, it is first of all necessary to remember that NATO leaders are guided by the Washington Treaty, the Strategic Concept, and the declarations adopted at the annual summits. In particular, at the last Washington Summit the Atlantic Alliance has clearly identified its main threats: the Russian operation against Ukraine and transnational terrorism.

The need for a 360-degree approach, using well-defined tools including crisis management, security cooperation, and strengthening deterrence and defence, was strongly reiterated.

In addition, there is a need to understand the inter-connection between what is happening on the eastern flank and other threats coming from the south and other geopolitical quadrants. What happens in Sahel, for example, has ripple effects that transcend borders.

Today, in the area, we observe with particular concern the destabilizing influence of Russia, China and Iran, for they do not support transition processes in crisis countries and keep the rule of anti-democratic military juntas. Phenomena such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and socio-economic instability, endemically afflicting local populations, makes the situation even more complex. This affects not only Africa or the northern shore of the Mediterranean, but the security of the Euro-Atlantic community as a whole.

NATO has active partnerships in the area, and it is crucial to strengthen these relationships in order to counter the hybrid and transnational threats. Precisely for this reason, at the Washington summit, and thanks to Italy's strong impetus, the Southern NATO Action Plan (SNAP) was adopted – an essential strategic tool for dealing with the challenges coming from the southern flank.

Geography makes Italy a major player in the Mediterranean. It was therefore essential to recognize and formalize the need for an active presence and constant

vigilance on the part of the Alliance in the macro-region as well, where it is necessary to be prepared to deal with new developments and new crises.

The Mediterranean is in fact an enclosed sea, with a sole access through the Strait of Gibraltar, besides the Suez Canal. Any crisis involving these routes, such as the Suez blockade, has an immediate impact on international trade.

In addition, the situation in Libya, and especially in Cyrenaica, is of growing concern.

The Mediterranean is also a bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa, directly connected to the Indo-Pacific quadrant. Keeping this in mind, Italy has participated in strategic exercises such as the Pitch Black in Australia.

However, the conflict in Ukraine keeps a pivotal position on the Italian, European and Transatlantic agenda. It is a matter of urgency for the new Secretary General and all allies. NATO has guaranteed broad support for Kiev, also in light of the future reconstruction of the country. Although it is not formally called «mission», it is clear that the ongoing action will become fully operational by the end of the year, and Italy will actively participate in it.

Another key point concerns the financial contribution: we have pledged, together with allies, 40 billion euros a year to support Ukraine. In addition, the «open door» principle has been reaffirmed: those who aspire to join NATO must share our values and contribute to collective security. That is why we are

supporting Ukraine in its reform process – which became a key prerequisite for membership.

Italy maintains a leading role Within the NATO framework. With more than 3,000 troops deployed in various operations, such as in Bulgaria, and with major investments in new air and ground capabilities, Italy significantly contributes to the alliance's commitments, in accordance with the criterion of the three «Cs»: cash, capabilities and contribution. Financially, Italy stands between 2.5 percent and 3 percent of its GDP, while some allies exceed 3 percent. This is a concrete and continuous effort, evidenced by Italy's long history of commitment to NATO.

However, spending more is not enough – we need to spend better. It is crucial to create more synergies between NATO and the European Union, enhancing European regulatory standards along with NATO's command structure. Ninety-seven percent of EU citizens live in NATO countries. This figure shows how interdependent the two organizations are. The Secretary General rightly emphasized how much of a priority this strategic convergence is.

Therefore, we need to find new common financing instruments, such as defence Eurobonds, and support shared infrastructure projects. The most urgent security dossiers cannot be addressed without adequate resources.

Hon. Mikuláš Dzurinda  
*President, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies*  
*Former Prime Minister, Slovakia*

Looking back to the early 2000s, I would like to recall the three reasons that motivated me to push for Slovakia's accession to NATO, which was finally achieved in 2004. Although the geopolitical context was different, I remember the discussions with Presidents Bush and Putin very well. My decision was guided by:

- Personal experience. I lived through the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. I was only 13, but the consequences of that occupation left a deep mark on my thinking.
- Geopolitical awareness. I always believed that Slovakia, and the European Union in general, had to reckon with two imperial powers at our borders: Russia and China.
- Instinct for security. I have always felt that safety is the foundation of prosperity. During the pandemic, I was in Sweden discussing European defence. Some diplomats challenged me, saying:

«Why invest in European defence if you already are a NATO member?». My instinct told me that prosperity and security must go hand in hand, and today Sweden is a NATO member too.

Although my country does not lack challenges, I take comfort in knowing that Slovakia lies under the best security umbrella the world has to offer: NATO. As a neighbor of Ukraine, we are indirectly affected by the war. We hear echoes of the conflict, we witness the flow of refugees and understand the human suffering. In this context, Slovakia's security and future matter more than ever.

However, security alone is not enough. I fully support defence spending. We already allocate a significant share of GDP to it, but we also need a stronger European defence within NATO.

Recent developments show that Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not just a regional crisis; it is a defining event that will impact EU-NATO relations with Russia and shape the future world order. It is increasingly understood by both political leaders and analysts that this war cannot end in a complete victory for either side. We are no longer dealing with Russia alone, but with an emerging axis of authoritarian powers – Russia, China, North Korea and Iran – supported, to varying degrees, by members of the BRICS. These actors do not want to see Russia defeated and are willing to provide various forms of support.

At the same time, the risks of seeking victory over a nuclear-armed state such as Russia are obvious: escalation

could spiral into a global conflict. The central question for the international community turns out to be: how do we end the war? How do we reach a compromise for restoring peace and establishing a new global balance?

In seeking answers, we must never lose sight of a fundamental axiom: only Ukraine can decide when and under what terms the war will end. Ukraine is a sovereign nation, unjustly attacked by Russia, which has forcibly annexed part of its territory. Yet, those who support Ukraine – militarily, financially and politically – must also look at their own strategic interests; and this is also true for the European Union.

To this end, I would like to offer a six-point plan for achieving a lasting ceasefire and sustainable peace:

- Stop the Russian advance. Ukraine must be empowered to defend its territory and impose sufficient military costs on the aggressors, so to force them to the negotiating table.
- Clarify the West's strategy. The West seeks future cooperation with Russia, but only after the end of the aggression, and negotiating in good faith. In the meantime, military and economic support to Ukraine must continue, including long-range weaponry.
- Foster domestic consensus in Ukraine. A political consensus is needed within Ukraine on the necessity of compromise. Given the difficulty of reclaiming annexed territories by force, political leadership – across government and opposition

- must prepare the population for difficult but necessary decisions.
- Provide Western security guarantees. Ukraine needs long-term security assurances. Options include NATO membership or the presence of a multinational coalition on Ukrainian territory.
- Keep a freeze in relations with Russia. Until Russia returns the annexed territory and pays reparations, political isolation and sanctions must continue.
- Build a European army, as an equal and complementary pillar within NATO. This step must be taken in a resolute way and in partnership with the UK, Switzerland, and other non-EU European states. At the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES), we have developed a comprehensive framework for building a European Army. This is illustrated by our concept of the «Defence Pyramid», which consists of ten interlinked pillars:
  - The rationale for European defence;
  - Armaments production capabilities through a functioning internal market;
  - Military mobility and upgraded infrastructure;
  - A European «Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency» (DARPA) for advanced technological innovation;



- Filling strategic capabilities gaps;
- A European civil protection service;
- A unified European military model;
- Joint military operations;
- Institutional reform;
- Nuclear deterrence strategy.

Each pillar is accompanied by specific programs and action points. In total, we outlined 27 programs, with three concrete measures each, amounting to 81 targeted and relatively independent projects.

As the war in Ukraine evolves and global tensions rise, we must not fall into complacency. The time has come for Europe to step up – not in competition with NATO, but as a stronger pillar within it. As Europeans, we should be aware of our historical responsibility – not only to preserve prosperity, but to guarantee peace and security for future generations.



Amb. Tacan Ildem  
*Chairman, EDAM*  
*Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies*  
*Fmr. NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy*

On the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO, it must be acknowledged that we stand in front of the most successful political-military alliance in contemporary history. NATO is founded on a pivotal principle: consensus. All decisions are made at a political level, and consensus remains the essential core, the DNA of the alliance. It is precisely because of this principle that NATO, over time, has been able to adapt to changing geopolitical conditions.

During my tenure as Turkey's Permanent Representative to NATO, my focus was on crisis management rather than collective defence. At that time, we hoped to benefit from the "peace dividends" of the post-World War II era by promoting partnerships in various geographical areas for the purpose of strengthening shared security.

After Russia's illegitimate annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the destabilization of the Donbass, the paradigm changed dramatically. At the first NATO summit

I attended in Warsaw, in 2016, important decisions were taken to strengthen the Alliance's deterrence capability – decisions that have since been consolidated over subsequent summits.

Since 2020, I have had the honor of serving on a group of independent experts tasked with contributing to thinking within the NATO 2030 initiative. This initiative is aimed at outlining a strategic vision for the future of the Alliance. In this context, we discussed current and potential threats, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach.

The challenges, in facts, come not only from the east, but also from the south. In the past, some allies tended to focus exclusively on the eastern flank, while we – I mean Turkey – pointed out early on that Russia's militarization of Crimea represented an attempt to project power onto the Mediterranean as well, and particularly in Syria and Libya. Consequently, compartmentalizing the analysis is a mistake: eastern security and southern security are clearly interdependent.

NATO has correctly addressed these threats in the broader context of global strategic competition. Russia, China, North Korea and Iran are actors who, through coordinated actions, intend to undermine stability and interests of the West. It is therefore imperative for the Alliance to keep a broad and dynamic vision, ready to adapt and recalibrate its priorities.

I am pleased that the Secretary General established a group of experts dedicated to the Southern Dimension, culminating in an action plan. However, it must

be frankly said that NATO sometimes tends to limit itself to bureaucratic approaches: set up a group, write a report, approve a plan. The real test is what happens next: the action plan must be constantly updated and translated into real actions.

As for domestic political challenges in the United States, we cannot ignore the impact of former President Trump's statements during his first term – when he criticized allies for their lack of commitment to burden and responsibility sharing. However, this political pressure is not unheard of: back in 2011, the Secretary of Defence Robert Gates issued a harsh warning to European allies. Fortunately, there are strong institutional guarantees today: the U.S. Congress overwhelmingly passed a law preventing the president from unilaterally withdrawing the United States from NATO.

However, it remains essential for Europe to intensify its contribution to collective defence. NATO must remain the cornerstone of European security. In this sense, the debate on European strategic autonomy is useful, but it must be compatible with the consolidation of the «European pillar» within the Alliance. There are NATO member countries that do not belong to the EU, but whose contribution to European security is crucial. It is therefore suitable for the EU to involve also these allies in its defence instruments such as the European Defence Fund or PESCO.

Finally, I would like to address Turkey's role in NATO and the BRICS. The BRICS is first and foremost an economic cooperation initiative. Turkey, for strategic reasons,

seeks to expand its economic relations beyond the Euro-Atlantic dimension. This is not contradictory to our commitment to NATO. Turkey has supported – through consensus – all major strategic decisions of the Alliance, contributed to many operations and promoted regional initiatives with countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, in order to strengthen collective security.

In the initial phase of the war in Ukraine, Turkey unambiguously defined Russian action as an act of war, promptly applying the Montreux Convention to restrict Russian fleet access to the Black Sea. This is a concrete example of how Ankara continues to be a responsible and strategically relevant actor for Euro-Atlantic security.

## SESSION 2

The Euro-Atlantic agenda  
after the Washington summit  
and the U.S. presidential elections





Hon. Paolo Alli  
*Secretary General, De Gasperi Foundation*

When we chose the date for this event, we knew that we would be gathering, without knowing, who the next President of the United States would be, as election results in the U.S. often take several days to become official. Unexpectedly, the timing turned out to be perfectly aligned with the announcement of Donald Trump's re-election. This circumstance asks for a broader reflection.

The President of the De Gasperi Foundation, Angelino Alfano, already recalled Alcide De Gasperi's strategic vision of the security and defence policy. It was through that vision that Italy not only joined NATO but also re-entered the international community. Before addressing the reconstruction of a war-torn country, De Gasperi understood the need to reposition Italy in the global landscape. By participating in the peace conference held in Paris, he laid the foundations of his foreign policy.

What is most striking about De Gasperi is how profoundly shaped he was by a deep longing for peace,

arising from a life marked by war. From his youth in Trentino under foreign rule to the years of fascist persecution and imprisonment, De Gasperi was a man forged in hardship. He saw European Integration and the Transatlantic alliance as historical necessities and not as ideological constructs. He was a realist as well as an idealist: he thought alliances for security and détente to be difficult, but indispensable.

The topic of sovereignty continues to be perceived as an obstacle to collective action, especially in security matters. Yet, De Gasperi did not see sovereignty as something absolute to be defended at all costs. He viewed it as a responsibility to be shared. If we spoke more often of “shared sovereignty” instead of «loss of sovereignty», we would better understand projects like the Euro. Yes, we gave up monetary sovereignty, but in return we gained one of the world’s most stable and respected currencies. Countries that share sovereignty wisely do not weaken, rather they grow stronger.

If Trump’s re-election is confirmed, he will likely have substantial control over the Senate. The outcome in the House of Representatives remains to be seen, but the traditional system of checks and balances in the United States may be less constraining than before. In this new context, Europe must remain alert and strategically aware.

Europe is geographically surrounded by crises. From Northern Europe to the Sahel region, the continent is adjacent to the highest concentration of active conflicts on the planet: Ukraine, the Middle East, parts

of Africa. This geographic reality places increasing responsibility on Europe.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which many feared would divide the West, especially through energy blackmail, has strengthened Transatlantic and European unity. Regimes hostile to the West have sought new dividing lines in public opinion and the attack by Hamas, with its devastating consequences, has opened such a fissure. Unlike Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict deeply divides public opinion in the West. In the United States, public support for Ukraine remains broad and bipartisan, limiting any potential shift in U.S. policy. However, for what pertains to Israel and Palestine, internal divisions run deep and they complicate the ability of the West to act as a unity.

Another element that has gone largely unnoticed in this debate is India. This demographic and economic giant has now surpassed China in population and is growing at a faster pace than any other major economy. Its foreign policy remains intentionally flexible and fosters relationships with all major actors. India is not historically aligned with China and firmly defends its independence. Europe and NATO must consider India as a strategic interlocutor. If we do not engage with India, others certainly will.

Finally, let us look at Italy. Over the past two years, Italy has demonstrated a renewed diplomatic vitality. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is well positioned to play a significant role in strengthening the Transatlantic relationship, all the more under a second Trump

administration. Italy has one of the most respected diplomatic services in the world. This heritage is an invaluable resource, especially in an increasingly unstable international context.

Amb. Francesco Talò  
*Special Advisor, Italian Minister of Defence*  
*Frm. Permanent Representative of Italy to NATO*

The timing for the organization of a panel on the future of the Euro-Atlantic agenda has turned out to be ideal, and to coincide with the announcement of the U.S. election results. This marks a new beginning and every beginning requires optimism, even when the road ahead is complex. At the start of any journey, it is essential to closely consider not only the direction, but also the crew that will take us forward. In the case of Europe, we do not move alone. Individual member states matter, but we move further and more effectively when we move jointly.

It is essential to act with and through Europe. Only through unity can we speak with strength to our American counterparts, who are not opponents but allies. The United States is not a foreign or contrasting force; it remains part of our shared Western identity. Therefore, we must resist the temptation to frame Europe as a third pole when considering the U.S. and China. Politically, that is not our role, while economically or technologically it is simply not viable.

We should remember that we are not just a single vessel navigating these uncertain waters, as we are part of a fleet. Together, we form the Western world. This must be the message to Washington: that the U.S. cannot go alone. This is no longer the era of the Sputnik generation, when America could singlehandedly reach the moon. Today, the U.S. needs Europe, and Europe needs the U.S. We succeed together, or not at all.

Today we are starting a new phase with a new captain: NATO's next Secretary General. That's the right person at the right time: a continental European from one of the most Atlantic-minded countries in Europe, the Netherlands. His political experience and leadership, in a complex coalition-based system, make him uniquely suited to lead. He has already shown his ability to build teams, as seen with «Team Europe» on the issue of migration, working alongside Ursula von der Leyen and Giorgia Meloni.

Now, von der Leyen will face an even greater responsibility, particularly in maintaining strong Transatlantic economic relations. As the U.S. seeks to correct trade imbalances, we must avoid drifting into a tariff war. European exporters have legitimate interests to defend. But we must do so while maintaining dialogue and reaffirming that, for what pertains to security, we have done and shall continue to do our part.

This is another reason to reaffirm our European security pillar, not one that merely buys from the U.S., but one that produces more. Mark Rutte's yesterday visit to a major defence plant near Rome – a German-Italian joint

facility of Rheinmetall – was symbolically significant. It highlights a crucial shift: Europe must contribute not only by spending, but also by building capabilities.

At the same time, our cooperation with the U.S. on China must deepen. We must innovate together, realistically engage in joint de-risking strategies in the awareness that full decoupling is neither possible nor desirable. That is why acting as a united Europe is not just strategic, it is necessary. Alone, we go nowhere. This echoes De Gasperi's vision.

Today, we face not just isolated crises but clusters of conflict. The full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine continues, tensions in the Middle East remain volatile, and in East Asia we see rising risks around the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. These scenarios are interconnected. NATO must go beyond the talk of a "Southern flank" or an "Eastern flank". We need a truly global 360-degree vision. The notion of the «Southern flank» is outdated and even counterproductive. Italy did well to insist instead on this comprehensive view.

This global scope must now include all regions, from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. In this context, Iran is a key destabilizing actor. Its ties to Russia and its regional role must be addressed. Yet, Europe must also overcome its psychological fixation with «stability». In some cases, change is better than preserving a broken status quo. Without change, there is no progress.

On the other hand, Israel must understand – together with the U.S. – that resolving or confronting

Iran's threat does not eliminate the Palestinian question. This issue, long marginalized by Netanyahu, remains central and cannot be ignored. Biden's administration had continued the Abraham Accords strategy and even convened the Negev Summit, demonstrating that bipartisan consensus in Washington does exist. Yet no durable progress will occur without addressing Palestinian realities.

Internally, Israeli politics remain turbulent. The dismissal of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, replaced just before the U.S. election, reflects both domestic calculations and deeper institutional tensions. These developments matter for us all: they affect government stability, coalition dynamics, and the security calculus in the broader region. Europe must continue to engage with both the U.S. and Israel constructively and realistically. The region remains the hinge between the Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific. Italy's role here is not marginal. Within both NATO and the EU, Italy should affirm a strategic concept of the «Indo-Mediterranean». Just as «Indo-Pacific» has replaced «Asia-Pacific» as a global maritime concept, coined successfully by Japan's Shinzo Abe, Italy as a maritime nation should assume a leading role in shaping this narrative.

This forms a strategic continuum – Indo-Pacific, Indo-Mediterranean and Mediterranean-Atlantic – naturally converging within the NATO framework, and highlighting the strategic centrality of Europe, of the Mediterranean, and of Italy in particular. Let us consider, for example, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic



Corridor (IMEC) – a connectivity corridor going from India through the Gulf and all the way to the Mediterranean. It makes strategic sense for it to terminate in Trieste, the Mediterranean northernmost port.

To promote this vision, we must use the momentum that did begin with the Abraham Accords, but we will not succeed if the Palestinian issue is ignored. It is a delicate but essential balancing act.

India is central to this equation. Italy has made great strides in its bilateral relations with India over the past two years. From a difficult position we have moved to a strategic partnership, promoted by the Prime Minister's visit to New Delhi in March 2023, and sealed by the a strategic agreement and by her keynote address at the Raisina Dialogue conference. The G20 summit followed soon after, alongside the announcement of the IMEC corridor.

NATO is not the right forum for India's strategic engagement. India maintains its leadership of the Global South and its commitment to strategic autonomy. India prefers «non-alignment» in principle and «dual engagement» in practice, with both Russia and the West. Our task is to make sure our partnership will stay attractive and credible, so that, when India will «bake its bread», it will choose our oven more often than others'. We must pursue this path without illusions. The West and India are different, but we are natural interlocutors. We share democratic values, and India is a master of diversification. That is the watchword. Until not long ago, we depended on Russia for energy, on

China for trade and tech, on the U.S. for security. We have made significant progress on energy: Italy has, especially. Now we must do more on security, not by weakening the U.S. relationship, but by reinforcing it.

On innovation, value chains, and high-tech, China remains key, but we must diversify by partnering more with Southeast Asian nations, with Japan, with Australia. In this context, Italy is already playing a leadership role. The Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), for instance, is not just a next-generation defence initiative. It is the first truly global project of its kind. The «G» in GCAP stands for «Global» and rightly so. And we are not alone: Turkey, the UK – that is, countries that are not in the EU, but are deeply Transatlantic and European – are also part of these dynamics. Together, we can do even more with India: in regard to connectivity, to military cooperation and beyond. Without illusions, but with ambition.

Turning to the Global South. The «Mattei Plan» launched by Prime Minister Meloni is a signal of long-overdue attention to Africa. This axis must not end at the Mediterranean, but continue southward, ensuring Africa is not left to the combined influence of terrorism, Russia (in the security field), and China (in the economic and political spheres). Africa has not just a history of crises, but also a history of hope. Italy is stepping up.

We must also acknowledge the critical role of Taiwan. Two-thirds of the world's semiconductors are produced there. Any talk of securing global supply chains must

include a serious strategic reflection on Taiwan. Italy is playing its part, and shall continue to do so.

As for Giorgia Meloni's potential ties with Trump: personal chemistry matters. She entertained a strong relationship with Joe Biden and is well-positioned to do the same with Trump. Her relationships with Mark Rutte and Ursula von der Leyen further reinforce her ability to operate effectively on the international stage. This is anchored by one fact: Italy currently has one of the most stable and forward-looking governments in the European Union and this stability is a rare and valuable asset in today's world.



Dr. Valbona Zeneli  
*Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Europe Center  
and Transatlantic Security Initiative, Atlantic Council  
of the United States*

I would like to address what I believe are the three most pressing priorities for the future of the Transatlantic agenda, namely economy, China and defence, without losing sight of the broader political context. This very moment is indeed a true turning point for our alliances and our strategic positioning in the world.

The Transatlantic economy is, first and foremost, extremely strong. We are not only talking about trade – which is a sensitive and complex issue to deal with nowadays –but about investments. What truly connects Europe and the United States today are the immense volumes of mutual investments: over 6 trillion dollars across both sides of the Atlantic. That is the real connective tissue of our relationship. The question we must now ask ourselves is what practical steps the European Union can take – particularly with key partners – to deepen and future-proof this economic partnership. This is where our efforts must begin.

Alongside the economy, China remains a defining strategic issue. Whether under a second Trump presidency or under new leadership, China will be central to U.S. global posture. In the United States, we have already seen the emergence of a bipartisan consensus regarding the challenge posed by China, not just to U.S. interests but to the rules-based international order as a whole. This is not yet the case in Europe. Our Union is still fragmented, not only among member states but also within them. There are gaps between policymakers, the defence and security sectors, the private sector, and civil society. Public opinion remains divided. And yet, we urgently need stronger and more coherent political and economic responses from Europe, in order to define a coordinated Transatlantic approach to de-risking, rethinking supply chains and developing common standards in technology and innovation.

At the same time, we must confront a renewed discussion on defence responsibility. This will likely become the most sensitive issue in Transatlantic relations under a second Trump administration, although it is far from new. The latest NATO summit in Washington reaffirmed the urgency for all allies to meet their defence spending commitments, first agreed in the 2014 Wales Summit. But numbers alone are not enough. While 23 NATO members have now reached or exceeded the target of the 2% of the GDP, the real debate lies in what these numbers translate to in terms of usable capabilities. What can Europe concretely offer in terms of readiness, resilience and operational support?

This question goes back to the very origins of NATO and has long been raised, since Dwight Eisenhower, long before Robert Gates. The U.S. has historically carried a disproportionate share of the burden. However, today the weight of the change is shifting more rapidly on the European side.

Europe is undergoing a deeper transformation than the United States. While U.S. politics may fluctuate, its institutional system of checks and balances remains solid. In contrast, Europe's post-Cold War security architecture – built on cheap Russian energy, access to Chinese markets, and reliance on American military protection – has been fundamentally altered by Russia's aggressions against Ukraine, first in 2014 and again in 2022. It is time for Europe to look inward and chart its own strategic course. We have spent months speculating about what the next U.S. president might do, but we have not sufficiently asked ourselves what *we* intend to do as Europeans.

The role of NATO in European security has grown in significance. This renewed relevance has, in many ways, quieted the debates over an independent EU army or vague concepts of «strategic autonomy». What we now need is not autonomy, but strategic responsibility. A vision in which Europe stands as a stronger, more reliable pillar within the Alliance. This includes playing a more active role in regions where U.S. focus is shifting, particularly the Indo-Pacific. Europe must be able to contribute meaningfully to stability and security in that area as well.

When discussing Donald Trump, it is essential to separate electoral rhetoric from actual policy. Having worked within U.S. defence institutions, I can say with confidence that during Trump's first term, support for Ukraine did not decrease. Actually, it increased. The U.S. provided not only financial and military aid but also long-term capacity-building in the defence and security sectors. Therefore, we must remain attentive to substance over narrative.

Still, we are not living in ordinary times. When we developed our recommendations for NATO's new Strategic Concept, we spoke of an «Age of Disruption», as a period defined by global instability, strategic fragmentation, and accelerating change. This is not business as usual. And I am not sure we have fully understood the magnitude of this shift, even within the European Union. Our current moment demands greater clarity of vision, more strategic communication, and above all, unity of purpose.

The war in Ukraine, the rebalancing of global power, and the fragility of multilateral institutions are all symptoms of a deeper transition. The Western alliance finds itself at a crossroads and the real question is whether we will face this moment together, or fragmented. Europe is no longer surrounded by friends, it is encircled by crises. We must act accordingly with greater coordination, closer ties with the United States, and a renewed understanding that our economic, security and technological futures are deeply intertwined.

One area where we must do much more is innovation. Europe has fallen behind, not only in absolute terms but



in strategic competitiveness. The data is clear: our global economic weight has declined while China's has risen. We cannot afford to fall further behind. And yet the choice is clear. If Europe is to remain a global actor, it must double down on its alliances, not just internally but *transatlantically*.

This is also why diversification and de-risking must be priorities. Let us not forget: these efforts did not begin in Washington or Brussels, but in Beijing. Through its «Made in China 2025» and «China Standards 2035» initiatives, China was the first to launch a strategy to reduce its dependence on Western technology and markets. Today, the West is merely reacting, while a credible and sustained response requires a coordinated approach between the U.S. and Europe.

Another strategic front where we can and must do more is the so-called «Global South», a term that does not fully capture the complexity of the countries it refers to. In multilateral institutions, especially the UN, we are already seeing China and its partners gaining influence. Europe and the United States must respond and not with rhetoric, but with meaningful engagement, investment and partnership.

In this decisive time, the fundamental divide will not be East or South versus West, but democracy versus autocracy. And Europe must stand firmly on the side of democratic resilience. That begins by standing together, *transatlantically*, and by investing in the economic, technological and military capabilities that will define the next generation of global leadership.



## SESSION 3

The need for a European defence,  
from De Gasperi to today



Vice Admiral Giacinto Ottaviani  
*Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff*  
*Italian Armed Forces*

My contribution within this session is intended to offer some insights from a strategic-military perspective. There is an urgent need to reflect today on issues of primary importance. Among them, the common European defence is one more time at the center of the debate, requiring the attention of the continent's key leaderships, diplomacies and institutions, especially in light of the conflict in Ukraine.

In the context of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Alcide De Gasperi's passing, in addition to paying tribute to his memory, I would like to highlight the relevance of his vision. Universally recognized as one of the founding fathers of European integration, De Gasperi was also a staunch advocate of the idea of a common European defence. During his long term as Prime Minister (1945-1953), he worked tirelessly to promote structured co-operation among European states – not only in the economic sphere, but also in the political and military ones. In those difficult years, marked by the horrors of

World War II, De Gasperi believed that a stable and lasting peace could simply not come from the isolated action of individual states, but only from a process of integration and solidarity. He was firmly convinced that individual country security was inseparable from collective security, and that the creation of a European Defence Community (EDC) was a mandatory step in order to avert new world tragedies.

However, the CED project foundered in 1954, due to internal political resistance exerted by some countries, particularly in relation to West Germany's rearmament in an anti-Soviet key. Then since, the security of Europe was *de facto* delegated to the United States of America, which strengthened military and political leadership through NATO. The European states, no longer directly responsible for their own defence, diverted their resources almost exclusively to the economic reconstruction initiated by the Marshall Plan.

It was, in a sense, a moral hazard: the United States would take charge of European security, while Europe would focus on economic growth. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union, the widespread belief was that the danger was over. It was mistakenly thought that global economic interactions would mitigate any aggressive impulses, stabilizing the international system. Recent history shows us how illusory this view was.

For decades Europe has neglected the issue of defence, consequently abdicating a common foreign policy. This inattention left us unprepared when war broke

out in the heart of Europe in 2022. The same needs for security and cooperation that De Gasperi had identified in the aftermath of World War II come back relevant and with great force.

The European Union, in facing the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, has shown signs of unity, for example in supporting Ukraine, but remains far from achieving true strategic autonomy. European states are unable to defend themselves independently and realizes that they can no longer unconditionally rely on external protection. NATO's priorities do not always coincide with European priorities.

Moreover, contemporary conflict scenarios are not limited to the traditional military dimension, but extend to the cyber domain, disinformation, cognitive warfare and terrorism. All this requires targeted investment, widespread awareness and a multidimensional approach to security.

If Europe wants to continue to be a global player and guardian of its founding values – freedom, democracy, peace – it must adopt a common defence instrument. In this perspective, the NATO Strategic Concept approved in 2022, which recognizes the EU as a unique and essential partner, is relevant. This concept is not trivial, but represents an invitation to build a European defence complementary to NATO.

Virtuous examples of integration already exist: just think of the *Aspides* mission in the Red Sea, where an Italian crew operates under the command of a Greek admiral. These are promising signs that, although

limited at the tactical level, point to the possibility of a structured cooperation.

The European Union has taken some important steps, such as the development of the European Union Rapid Deployment Capacity envisioned by the Strategic Compass. This is an initial force of 5,000, capable of operating in non-permissive environments. However, in addition to operational aspects, it is crucial to define effective governance, and to focus on joint training to ensure interoperability among member states' armed forces.

The human resource is a key element: shared training and educational activities are essential for the purpose of building a European defence culture, fostering osmosis between systems and strengthening common capabilities.

At the industrial level, initiatives such as the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Industrial Program (EDIP) aim to integrate the manufacturing capabilities of member states, enhancing national excellence with a vision of cooperation and shared technological competitiveness.

An important signal in this direction is the establishment of the European Commissioner for Defence and Space: a figure who will be able to coordinate and harmonize the process toward a true European defence integration.

Russian aggression in Ukraine represented a rude awakening after decades of illusory stability. It brought back the pivotal issue of security as a common good,



not only military but also political and civilian. Europe, to ensure its own freedom and well-being, must take responsibility for its own defence by providing an appropriate supranational governance.

De Gasperi, in his speech to the Council of Europe on September 15, 1952, stated that «a union of states requires a preliminary act of political will». This act is now more necessary than ever: no state can face global challenges alone, but by joining forces it is possible to achieve concrete results.

There is a long way to go and it requires an integrated approach: both idealistic and pragmatic. Only by having a common military structure will Europe have a credible foreign policy tool, consistent with its values and capable of meeting the challenges of our time.



Hon. Lorenzo Cesa  
*Chairman of the Italian Delegation*  
*NATO Parliamentary Assembly*

Building a true Europe of Defence is a crucial challenge that must be addressed without any further delay. This challenge is rooted in the original project of European integration, in the dream of a community of nations finally united not only economically, but also politically and strategically. Such a dream had among its first and most lucid interpreters Alcide De Gasperi.

In the midst of the postwar period, on a continent wounded by destruction, De Gasperi understood that peace could not simply be entrusted to the goodwill of individual states. It was necessary to build a supranational structure, able of ensuring collective security, cohesion and vision. His action was decisive in the birth of the ECSC, the European Coal and Steel Community, which united – not coincidentally – the very resources crucial to war, transforming them into instruments of cooperation.

But De Gasperi went further on. He was among the main supporters of the European Defence Community,

a bold proposal aimed at creating a common European army as early as the early 1950s. The project, as we know, foundered in 1954 because of France's failure to ratify it. That was one of the biggest disappointments, for De Gasperi. As his daughter Maria Romana recalled, he lived with sorrow the failure of that attempt, for he was convinced that without a common dimension relating to security, European unity would remain unfinished.

Today, more than seventy years later, history proves him right. The return of war on the European continent, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has dramatically shown how far-sighted that vision was. After years of guilty inattention, we realize that there is no freedom without security; that there is no prosperity without defence; and that there can be no European sovereignty without an autonomous capacity for protection.

For too long it has been said – often as an alibi – that a European defence would weaken NATO. But the opposite is true: strengthening the Europe of Defence means strengthening the Atlantic Alliance, making it more balanced, more resilient, more capable of responding to complex and interconnected threats. European strategic autonomy is not a whim; it is a necessity.

We live in a context where war is no longer just a military affair. It is hybrid, cognitive, economic, cyber. It is also fought in the digital skies, in satellites, in markets, in media. That is why building an autonomous defence capability also means strengthening our

industry, innovating technologies and training new generations. It means having soldiers, of course, but also engineers, analysts, researchers. All called to contribute to a security system that is both civilian and military, national and supranational.

The appointment of the European Commissioner for Defence is a significant step. And the presentation of the White Paper on European Defence announced in the first hundred days of the next Commission, will also be of great importance. Clear objectives should emerge from that document: enhancing European Rapid Deployment Capacity, strengthening the common industrial base, creating a true single defence market, supporting research, training and standardization of military systems and doctrines.

Italy, for its part, is called upon to do more. It is true that we are the leading country in terms of personnel contribution in NATO and UN missions, but our level of defence spending remains below the required standards. The time has come to clearly explain to citizens that defence is not a cost, it is an investment. An investment aimed at peace, stability, freedom.

And there is no contradiction between faith and deterrence. Pope Francis recalled this when he condemned war as an act of folly, but also recognized that peace must be built with responsibility and truth. De Gasperi, a man of faith and government, left us with words that are still relevant today. He wrote:

«There are times when you are alone with God and with your conscience. Then all that you are and have

been surfaces toward the surface. [...] the will grabs you and you set out on the path, which may be rough or winding, but it is your path».

Today that path is before us. A difficult path, but necessary. We owe it to the ones that came before us and to the ones who will come after. We owe it to history – that wants us, once again, to choose between inertia and responsibility, between isolation and integration, between ambiguity and truth.

If we really want to deliver a free, strong and democratic Europe to future generations, we must move from words to deeds. Building the Europe of Defence is not just a political goal. It is a moral duty.

## SESSION 4

China, the Indo-Pacific region  
and the role of NATO partners





Amb. Marco Della Seta  
*Ambassador of Italy to Vietnam*

Vietnam deserves a deeper look. We need to go beyond the economic/commercial dimension and take into account its geostrategic significance and its growing role in the Indo-Pacific.

Let us start with a historical premise. Vietnam's placement during the Cold War, at the center of the US-USSR-China triangle, came at a very high cost to the country. Out of this experience came the so-called «four no» doctrine, which still guides Vietnamese defence and security policy today: no to joining military alliances, no to siding with one side against another, no to foreign military presence on one's territory, and no to the use of force or the threat of force in international relations.

This might sound like a neutral or unaligned position. In facts, Vietnam today is in a pivotal position for the security of the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the highly sensitive South China Sea chessboard. This area is of vital importance: about 30 percent of the

world's trade flows pass through it, it contains significant fishery resources and hydrocarbons and, through the Strait of Malacca, it is a gateway to European markets.

Vietnam's geographical location makes it a key player but also extremely vulnerable. The country is aware of the threat posed by its unwieldy northern neighbor, China. China is a historical threat, characterized by ancient conflicts but also by recent tensions, such as those over the delimitation of maritime borders and disputes over the Paracel and Spratly islands. Incidents are on the rise and Chinese claims to Vietnam's exclusive economic zone are a constant source of instability.

In this context, Vietnam has chosen a strategy based on two pillars: multilateral diplomacy and the gradual strengthening of its defensive capacity. On the diplomatic level, Hanoi aims to internationalize the South China Sea issue, seeking a shared code of conduct with China within the ASEAN framework and prioritizing dialogue at the party level – a key for managing bilateral relations.

Militarily, Vietnam is in the process of transforming its defence model: from a massed, presidential army to a modern, flexible, interagency force – capable of interoperability in complex scenarios. A prominent role belongs to the navy, which is now, according to various analyses, the main area of technological investment and renewal.

Traditionally dependent on Russia for military supplies, Vietnam began a process of diversification that

was accelerated by the conflict in Ukraine as the limitations of Russia's industrial apparatus became apparent. This also led the country to open up to nontraditional suppliers, such as the United States.

This openness has taken the form of what Vietnam itself calls «bamboo diplomacy»: a foreign policy based on sound principles of independence and national interest, nonetheless extremely flexible and multilateral. Let us consider the path of rapprochement with the United States: from the first Memorandum of Understanding, dated 2011, to the visit of U.S. naval vessels, to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed in 2023 – that is, the same level of partnership reserved for China and Russia.

In addition to the United States, Vietnam has strengthened ties with «like-minded» partners such as Australia, South Korea, Japan, India, Indonesia and, most recently, France.

These reports highlight Hanoi's desire to find its place in a strategic network capable of balancing Chinese influence without breaking its historical and economic ties.

However, it is worth noting that relations with China remain crucial. China is the leading trading partner, the leading supplier and probably also the leading investor. Institutional and party-level relations are steady and deep. However, in Vietnamese public opinion, China is still perceived as a historical adversary.

As a major strategic player in the Indo-Pacific, Vietnam has demonstrated to be capable of navigating

major regional balances with caution, autonomy and increasing assertiveness. For Italy and Europe, understanding this complexity and relating to Hanoi in strategic – and not just economic – terms, means acknowledging the key role Vietnam can play in the stability and security of the region.

Amb. Antonio Bartoli  
*Ambassador of Italy to India*

Offering a realistic and strategic look at the Indo-Pacific quadrant inevitably means dwelling on the role of India, an indispensable player in the region's security, stability and development. The very title of our meeting, juxtaposing India and China, is revealing: these two Asian giants share a thousand-year history and growing competition, but also a common desire to avoid direct confrontation and not to be pigeonholed into rigid or pre-established alliances.

India sees China's growing assertiveness as a central strategic challenge. This rivalry is evident in many sensitive areas of the region – from Sri Lanka to the Maldives, Bangladesh to Nepal and even the small but significant Bhutan. All of these countries, historically within India's sphere of influence, now oscillate between New Delhi and Beijing and are forced to balance divergent interests. One example above all is the recent visit of the Maldivian leadership to India, aimed at restoring relations with New Delhi after a period of intense diplomatic tension.

The South China Sea, the control of sea lanes and technological competition are just some of the areas where India and China are facing each other in terms of influence and projective capacity. The agreement reached in Kazan on the line of control patrolling provides a positive signal, but it still does not represent a breakthrough. As Indian authorities often remind us, defining borders precedes deepening cooperation. «First border, then brother».

On a global level, India has developed a foreign policy that we might call «multi-alignment»: agile, flexible and based on national interest, rather than rigid ideological affiliations. A line that rejects isolationism as much as the automaticity of alliances and that is also reflected in a complex relationship with Russia, a historical and still central partner for India, for both energy and defence.

In this regard, I want to mention the book by Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, who offers a lucid and original reading of India's strategic choices, also drawing on the epic tradition of the Ramayana. Jaishankar criticizes past choices, and in particular an idealistic internationalism that led India to positions of appeasement toward Pakistan and China; he stresses the need for a policy based on national interest.

This vision is also reflected in a growing understanding with Italy. It is not just about hashtags or effective communication. «Melody», as the harmony between the two countries is called, is now a solid reality. Our two

prime ministers have met several times in less than two years, testifying to the common will to build a structured, stable and deep strategic partnership. This partnership will touch many areas: from mobility to culture, science to innovation, trade to defence, and even Space.

Italy is now substantially present in the Indo-Pacific. The joint naval exercises between our Navy and the Indian Navy, the participation of the aircraft carrier *Cavour* and the frigate *Alpino*, as well as the arrival of the training ship *Vespucci* in Mumbai, are concrete signs of a growing commitment. This is not a symbolic act, but a precise strategic choice.

The «Blue-Raman» project – a high-speed submarine cable for data transmission linking Mumbai to Genoa – represents the other side of our cooperation: that of digital security, economic and technological interconnection. Port cooperation, with the possible signing of a memorandum of understanding between our two countries, is also part of this vision: simplifying logistics flows, facilitating container handling, accelerating the movement of goods and data.

Geopolitically, India rejects the idea of an «Asian NATO» and does not wish to turn the Quad into an anti-China military alliance. Quite the reverse: it wishes to maintain a balance and contribute to a positive agenda of cooperation, stability and development. Even in multilateral formats such as BRICS or SCO, India is committed to ensuring that they do not become instruments of opposition to the West, but platforms meant for dialogue and shared growth.

The IMEC corridor, also launched as an alternative to Chinese routes, represents a real opportunity to revitalize the Eurasian interconnection. India has a vital interest in stable trade flows and freedom of navigation. That is why it patrols the Red Sea and engages in international peacekeeping missions, such as the one in Lebanon, which involves more than 900 military personnel.

Looking ahead, India's demographics, economic growth and industrial dynamism are an asset to the entire multilateral system. The country invests in infrastructure, railways and energy and needs reliable partners. Italy can be one of them.

But beware: in the defence sector, you don't just build GDP. You need to build political trust. The willingness of Italian industry to co-develop and co-produce with India is an essential step for a mutual and lasting trust.

India is today a global player. A responsible power, assertive and though cautious, interested in a multipolar vision based on strategic autonomy. Cultivating the relationship with New Delhi is a forward-thinking choice. It means not only keeping up with history, but contributing to write it.



Dr. Pietro De Matteis  
*NATO Program Officer for Indo-Pacific and China*

«What is NATO doing in the Indo-Pacific?». It is a legitimate question, often distorted by uninformative narratives, particularly on the Chinese and Russian side, that portray NATO as an aggressive expanding actor. The reality is quite different. NATO is not expanding in the Indo-Pacific: instead, it is strengthening partnerships, not alliances, with countries that share common challenges and core values – that is, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand (the so-called IP4) – but do not fall under the umbrella of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, dealing with collective defence.

NATO does not seek therefore to export models, but to listen, learn, share capabilities, build mutual trust and improve interoperability.

Second, I would like to emphasize the constitutive nature of NATO. Like the United Nations (1945) and the European Union, NATO was founded in 1949 with the goal of ensuring stability and peace, while respecting the principles of international law and the UN

Charter. Since its founding, NATO has promoted deterrence as a means of preventing conflict, a principle that is still valid today.

Obviously, the world has changed. Today we also talk about defence in space and cyberspace. We face new threats: climate change, terrorism, hybrid threats, critical infrastructure protection. These are global, borderless challenges that require cooperation. The concept of security has evolved, and so has NATO's collective response.

This is precisely where the concept of "cooperative security" comes into play. Today, NATO has more than 40 partners globally, organized in different regional formats: from the Mediterranean to the Middle East, from Eastern Europe to the Indo-Pacific. With the IP4s, cooperation is particularly advanced and it is based on real equality between interlocutors. Just think of the contribution made by these countries to missions in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Collaborations now extend to domains such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, quantum technologies and critical infrastructure protection.

To those who claim that NATO is trying to expand, we respond with facts: these partnerships are not new. They go back many years and contribute to regional and global stability. Let us also recall that, in the past, Russia was also a NATO partner, in a spirit of openness and dialogue that unfortunately broke down after the aggression against Ukraine.

Cooperation with the IP4 has also strengthened in light of the conflict in Ukraine. These countries have

condemned Russian aggression – they have applied sanctions and initiated new forms of cooperation with NATO. The Washington summit sanctioned four key initiatives (flagships) on topics such as artificial intelligence, support for Ukraine, countering disinformation and emerging technologies.

Yet the war in Ukraine has also revealed new geopolitics of authoritarian cooperation. The so-called «unlimited partnership» between Russia and China has strengthened the interconnection between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters. China provides Russia with political, diplomatic and technological support – often through dual-use technologies – and it fuels disinformation campaigns that undermine international efforts to isolate Moscow.

Added to this is the strengthening of ties between Russia and North Korea, now the subject of military cooperation that has led to the transfer of armaments and the mobilization of personnel along the Russian border. As Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said, «What happens in Ukraine today could happen tomorrow in the Indo-Pacific». The strategic consequences of any escalation in this region must be addressed with lucidity and readiness.

China, unlike Russia, is not defined by NATO as a threat, but as a systemic challenge. It is an actor that is expanding its military capacity in a non-transparent way, that uses economic coercion to influence third countries, that invests in strategic infrastructure in Europe as well – ports, communication networks – and

that can jeopardize the resilience of our democratic systems. Its coercive policies and strategic investments have direct implications for European security.

A recent RAND Corporation study raised concerns about the use of platforms such as TikTok, which could be exploited for targeted disinformation campaigns. This, too, is part of broader strategic thinking. Social networks, emerging technologies and artificial intelligence are today crucial arenas of geopolitical confrontation.

Finally, why does all this concern us so closely? We are in Italy, a G7 country, the manufacturing and trading heart of Europe. The stability of the Indo-Pacific directly impacts our economy: 20 percent of the world's maritime trade passes through the Taiwan Strait and Taiwan produces two-thirds of global semiconductors. A conflict there would hit us hard as well.

In addition, Italy has economic dependencies linked to China, especially in key sectors such as semiconductors, rare metals, technological components and digital infrastructure. Economic security is now an integral part of collective security. And resilience – the ability to absorb and respond to shocks – has become a strategic priority for all allied countries.

This is why the security of the Indo-Pacific Front is today inseparable from that of the Euro-Atlantic area. Cooperating with like-minded partners, sharing knowledge, strengthening resilience, investing in common defence – this is the way forward to defend our values, our security and our future together.







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This booklet summarizes the proceedings of the fourth edition of the «Security and Defence Days», the annual conference organized in Rome by the De Gasperi Foundation on European and Transatlantic security. Published in partnership with the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the volume features a selection of the remarks delivered by the distinguished speakers who joined the event, including decision-makers, senior officials, experts and media professionals. The proceedings primarily addressed the following topics: Russia's war in Ukraine and insecurity in the Mediterranean; NATO between two fronts; the Euro-Atlantic agenda after the Washington summit and the U.S. presidential elections; the need for a European defense, from De Gasperi to today; China, the Indo-Pacific region and the role of NATO partners. The conference took place on November 6-7, 2024.

The **De Gasperi Foundation** is a cultural institute based in Rome that has been preserving and promoting since 1982 the historical legacy of Alcide De Gasperi, the father of democratic Italy and the European Union. The Foundation conveys the views and the teachings of De Gasperi through a wide range of activities, from research and editorial projects to conferences, exhibitions, podcasts and youth education, at the national, European, and international level. The topics dealt with reflect De Gasperi's main areas of engagement as a statesman and political leader: democratic institutions and the rule of law, geopolitics and security, economy and social justice.

The **Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies** was established in 2007 as the official think tank of the European People's Party (EPP). Headquartered in Brussels, the Martens Centre fosters innovative ideas for action and shapes responses to European challenges, supporting decision-makers and opinion leaders in formulating effective policies. Through a network of over 50 affiliated institutes across Europe, including the De Gasperi Foundation, the Martens Centre provides a forum for exchange, dialogue and strategic thinking on key issues such as European integration, democracy, security and transatlantic relations.



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