

There Is No Crisis for NATO's Italian Military

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While Italy is paralyzed by the “economic crisis that the pandemic unleashed” (as Draghi defined it in his programmatic speech), there is a sector that is not affected but is in full development: the NATO Italian military sector. On February 17-18, when Italian Senate and Parliament voted their trust to Draghi’s government, the reconfirmed Minister of Defense Lorenzo Guerini (Pd, Democratic Party) was already participating in the North Atlantic Council, the first meeting with the presence of the new Biden’s Administration.

Further increase in military spending was on the agenda. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg underlined, 2021 will be the seventh consecutive year of increased military spending by European Allies, and compared to 2014 will have a 190-billion-dollar increase. USA and NATO are asking for much more. Minister Guerini conferred Italy’s commitment and the increase in military spending (in real terms) from 26 to 36 billion euros per year, adding to the Defense appropriations those expenses earmarked for military purposes by the Ministry of Economic Development: 30-billion plus 25 -billion dollars are requested from the Recovery Fund. All from public money, of course.

Italy committed to allocate at least 20% of military spending to the purchase of new armaments within NATO. For this reason, as soon as he took office, Minister Guerini signed on February 19 a new agreement with 13 NATO countries plus Finland, called *Air Battle Decisive Munition*, for the joint purchase of “missiles, rockets and bombs that have a decisive effect in air battle”. With this formula, similar to that of a solidarity buying group (not vegetables but missiles), savings are made and NATO claimed them to be the 15-20% without however saying how much the expenditure will be. The new generation missiles and bombs Italy is buying, will also be used to arm the Lockheed Martin F-35B fighters, embarked on the Cavour aircraft carrier, which arrived on February 13 at the US base in Norfolk (Virginia): here it will remain until April acquiring the operating certification with these aircraft. Italy, Minister Guerini proudly announced, will be one of the few countries in the world – together with the United States, Great Britain and Japan – to have a fifth generation aircraft carrier.

In this way, Italy – as Prime Minister Mario Draghi underlined – will strengthen its role as “protagonist of the Atlantic Alliance, in the wake of the Great Western democracies, in defense of their inalienable principles and values”, particularly increasing – focusing on “our projection towards areas of natural priority interest, such as the enlarged Mediterranean,

with special attention to Libya and Eastern Mediterranean, and to Africa". In the "enlarged Mediterranean" - which NATO geography extends from the Atlantic to the Black Sea and South to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean - NATO operates from Sigonella, with AGS RQ-4D drones supplied by the US, the NATO Force of "Ground surveillance". It became operational on February 15: the announcement was made by US General Told Walters, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (this position is always pertinent to a US general). From Sigonella (Sicily) the NATO drones "monitor" (ie spy on) this area to prepare for military actions, which are under the orders of another US General, Houston Cantwell.

Prime Minister Draghi, who considers the new US administration "more cooperative with its allies", declared to be "confident that our relations and our collaboration will only intensify". That is for sure. On February 17, the first meeting, sponsored by the Pentagon, where 40 Italian military industries and university research centers offered their products and services to the US Armed Forces, took place via videoconference. Title of the meeting was "Innovate to Win". Innovation - the Ministry of Defense explained - is "the keystone not only for a competitive advantage over current and future potential adversaries on the military level, but for the recovery of the national industrial sector at the end of the crisis period due to the Covid-19 pandemic".

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