



Italian Official Urges Plan For New Military Alliances

By MOTOKO RICH

ROME — Italy has called for the creation of a new European defense alliance to safeguard the continent amid growing threats from Russia and a rising reluctance by the United States to guarantee Europe's security.

The proposal, made by Italy's defense minister, **Guido Crosetto**, calls on the European Union's 27 members to form an alliance with 13 other like-minded European countries that are not part of the bloc, including Britain, Norway, Turkey and Ukraine.

"We must build a continental Europe of defense," Mr. **Crosetto** said in an interview with The New York Times.

Though the proposal is unlikely to be implemented, Mr. **Crosetto's** outreach shows how Europe is taking a more proactive approach to its defense in the wake of the war in Ukraine, following years of underinvestment in its militaries. It also highlights how seriously European leaders view President Trump's efforts to reduce America's military footprint in Europe.

The idea would significantly reshape how Europe organizes its collective defense, creating a new European-led structure alongside the current American-led NATO system. Since World War II, the United States has guaranteed the safety of its allies in Europe — until Mr. Trump challenged them to take greater responsibility for their own security.

Josephine de La Bruyère contributed reporting.

Mr. **Crosetto** first made the proposal in a letter sent in April to counterparts across the conti-

nent, as well as to E.U. and NATO leaders.

"A credible European defense policy can no longer be confined only to the member states of the Union," Mr. **Crosetto** wrote in the letter, parts of which were seen by The Times.

"The security of the continent extends beyond the confines of the E.U. and requires the full involvement of all partners who share vital interests and significant responsibilities," the letter adds. "It must therefore be conceived as a truly continental project."

In the letter, Mr. **Crosetto** emphasized the importance of including Ukraine, which is not a member of the E.U. or NATO, but is, he said, "destined to remain a frontline pillar of European security."

Several European leaders have called for similar measures. President Emmanuel Macron of France has long pushed for Europe to become more militarily autonomous. The E.U.'s top defense official, Andrius Kubilius, has suggested that it should form its own unified army.

Italy has already joined forces with Britain, France, Germany and Poland to form a new, if smaller, military partnership that does not include the United States.

Mr. **Crosetto's** effort to collaborate more with other European countries reflects how his prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, has re-oriented her approach after being elected nearly four years ago on a platform critical of inter-European cooperation and centralized oversight.

Mr. **Crosetto**, who co-founded Ms. Meloni's hard-right party,

Brothers of Italy, wrote in the letter sent to his counterparts that the new alliance should be "based on voluntary participation." He said he was not proposing an alternative to NATO but something that could "strengthen its European pillar."

Separately, Mr. **Crosetto** said in our interview at the defense ministry in Rome that NATO should seek new members beyond Europe and North America — like Australia, Brazil, India, Japan and South Korea — because the world has evolved.

"NATO was created to offer safety and stability to a part of the world," he said. "We now need an organization that can offer safety and stability to the whole world."

He added: "It can't stay a club for the elite of the global north."

Mr. **Crosetto** also said that recent tensions between Rome and Washington had not fundamentally altered their relationship. Ms. Meloni had long touted her role as a builder of bridges between Europe and Mr. Trump, but her relationship with him soured after he lashed out at Pope Leo XIV and attacked Italy for not supporting the American war effort in Iran.

"We handled it as you do when you're home and there's a family argument," Mr. **Crosetto** said. "You pretend not to listen. If someone says something that upsets you, you just keep moving on."

Mr. **Crosetto** said the Trump administration had "never" directly told the Italian government that it would withdraw U.S. troops from Italy, despite Mr. Trump's comments to several media outlets

that he might follow the withdrawal of 5,000 American troops from Germany with similar draw-downs elsewhere.

"There has never been a declaration on the political level of wanting to reduce troops or assets," Mr. **Crosetto** said.

Mr. **Crosetto** said the Trump administration has focused on demanding that Italy increase defense spending. He acknowledged that wasn't "a politically easy issue" and that there were tensions even within Ms. Meloni's governing coalition over how to balance a rise in military spending with the need to subsidize rising fuel costs caused by the war in the Middle East.

"The problem is making people understand that the world in which we live is much more troubled and much less safe than it was 10 years ago," Mr. **Crosetto** said. With voters, he said, "the usual line is, 'Do you prefer a tank or a school, a day care, a hospital?' I try to explain that those are two entirely different things which you can't compare."



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Guido Crosetto, Italy's defense minister, says the E.U. should join forces with nonmembers to build "a continental Europe of defense." Left, Italian Marines during a NATO exercise in Norway in March 2024.



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