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Multinational Force Ukraine Series

Italy: Transatlantic Loyalty First

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Political will

The Italian government opposes, categorically, any deployment of military units on Ukrainian territory under the so-called "Coalition of the willing." As declared in September 2025, "while reaffirming Italy's unwillingness to send soldiers to Ukraine", the only contribution Rome is willing to offer concerns "support for a potential ceasefire through monitoring and training initiatives conducted outside Ukraine's borders." Therefore, Italy is open to participating in certain forms of ceasefire supervision but remains unwilling to deploy ground forces.

The government's stance has been consistent over time. As early as March 2025, when discussions on the coalition first began, Meloni's cabinet opposed the idea of deploying a European peacekeeping force in Ukraine. Instead, it proposed entrusting such activities to neutral countries better positioned to ensure impartial implementation. More broadly, this reluctance to send troops aligns with Italy's overall caution in providing military assistance to Ukraine. Indeed, in line with relevant drivers identified in the literature (such as geographic proximity, ideology, and core values), the level of Italian military aid to Ukraine has been limited, lower than that provided by smaller European countries.

Italy's reluctance to deploy troops to Ukraine rests on two main factors. The first, and most significant, is Rome's determination to act in full coordination with the United States. The Meloni government is navigating a delicate balancing act between the European Union and the United States: it seeks to remain open to European initiatives *without* crossing U.S. strategic preferences. This alignment was made explicit by Defence Minister Guido Crosetto, who stated that "we do not vote for anything that goes against the Americans." For Meloni, also the "solid and credible security guarantees" to Ukraine [should] be "defined in a spirit of sharing between the two sides of the Atlantic". Given that President Trump has not endorsed the Coalition of the Willing and has explicitly ruled out sending any US troops to Ukraine, Italy has no intention of supporting initiatives not aligned with Washington. Answering to an MP of opposition who invited Meloni not "to be afraid to stand with the Coalition of the Willing", displeasing Trump, the Prime Minister stated that she worked "for the West".

The second reason concerns domestic politics. The deployment of boots on the ground faces disapproval from both the political opposition and parts of the governing coalition, particularly far right Lega, which has adopted a pacifist stance on the issue. Intra-coalition dynamics emerge as vital to understanding domestic politics. Research shows that the decoupling between behaviour and rhetoric is a strategy adopted by some parties (especially Lega) to balance external pressures and domestic constraints. Anyway, the League's influence on foreign policy remains limited, as decisions on Ukraine are shaped mainly by the Prime Minister's Office and, to a lesser extent, by Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani (Forza Italia).

For this reason, the political conditions that could enable a more active Italian role are primarily international rather than domestic. A shift in the U.S. position toward the Coalition would likely be the decisive factor. Should Trump publicly endorse the initiative and provide firm American military backing, Italy might reconsider its stance and offer a more substantial contribution to the coalition's activities.

However, even if the political context were to change, the government's willingness to intervene would still face a major constraint: public opinion. First, public sentiment on the war remains deeply divided: many Italians are split over support for Ukraine, over who bears responsibility for the conflict, and over the obstacles to achieving peace. Second, Italian society has historically shown low tolerance for combat losses. Studies on Italy's participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that when official narratives shifted to portray a more realistic picture of combat operations, public support declined sharply. This also explains the overall "obfuscation strategy" adopted by the Meloni government on defence expenditures. Even during Draghi's cabinet, "all possible military supplies" have been "classified".

These two factors, combined, make it likely that any Italian troop deployment under the Coalition of the Willing would be politically viable only under specific military conditions—namely, the existence of a mutually agreed ceasefire guaranteed by the United States. Such a scenario would significantly reduce the risk of renewed hostilities and, consequently, of Italian forces becoming involved in active combat. In such a context, a multilateral framework, like a UN mandate, could further promote some forms of engagement, diminishing public opposition. By contrast, participation in an intervention force under conditions in which fighting could resume remains improbable, even if political circumstances were otherwise favourable. Any new mission would require formal parliamentary authorization: oversight has recently suffered delays—often with mid-year approvals—though reforms now allow faster ratification.

Military capabilities

Beyond public opinion constraints, the government's willingness to intervene is also shaped by Italy's actual military capacity to do so—something that varies depending on the type of mission envisioned. In the case of a *reassurance force* deployed after a ceasefire or peace agreement (as proposed by Macron), Italy's contribution would likely be modest. As of 2025, Italy maintains an average of around 8,000 troops deployed abroad across roughly 40 missions—primarily in Eastern Europe, Lebanon, Kosovo, and Iraq—while nearly 7,000 soldiers are assigned to domestic security operations. Senior military leaders have repeatedly warned that this level of commitment leaves the armed forces severely overstretched. Deploying a land contingent to Ukraine would therefore require scaling back some existing operations, limiting Italy's ability to make a sizeable ground contribution.

By contrast, in the case of a *partial Skyshield*—a European-led air protection zone over western Ukraine, operated from air bases within the EU—Italy's capacity would likely be greater, given that its air force maintains higher readiness levels than its ground forces. Participation in a *full Skyshield*—an air protection zone operated directly from Ukrainian territory—would, however, present greater operational and political risks, making Italian involvement less probable.

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In the *Multinational Force Ukraine series* of policy briefs leading experts from allied countries assess key factors for participation in the Multinational Force Ukraine. This includes the political willingness of allies to deploy troops—on the ground, in the air, or at sea—to establish a military presence in or around Ukraine. They also examine the conditions for such deployments to occur (before, during, or after peace negotiations), the roles these forces would be expected to perform (defensive or offensive), the red lines imposed by national governments, and the specific capabilities each country could realistically contribute.

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