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FEATURING

**Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone**

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CSIS EXPERTS

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Seth G. Jones: Welcome. I have the distinct honor of welcoming to the Center for Strategic and International Studies the Italian Chief of Defense Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone. He is – he's got a long and distinguished career in the Italian military, particularly Italian Navy. Or those interested in his activities in the U.S., he's been involved in flight training in the Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida and Corpus Christi, Texas. He was also carrier qualified on board the USS Lexington in January of 1990. He's done tours, including in Yuma, Arizona. He was previously – he was the chief of the Italian Navy from 2019 to 2021. And from November of 2021 until today he is the chief of defense for Italy.

So welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We are very honored to have you here. And let me just first broadly ask you a question. We've had a lot of changing in the world with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war that started at the end of February. So as you look at Italy and defense priorities, and the role and the evolution of NATO and the European Union, where are your defense priorities right now with that changing landscape?

Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone: OK. Thank you. First of all, thank you for having me here. A caveat, I mean, since I've been trained by the Marine Corps, my English is brutal. So I will –

Dr. Jones: It's better than mine, I think, though, so.

Amd. Dragone: (Laughs.) I will be – I will try to go through my stuff not to forget anything, because I think it is worth it and I don't want to miss anything, as I told you. So I'm delighted to be – to be here with you today. And thank you for inviting me, of course. About in April 26th, in the U.S. Air Base in Ramstein, Germany, the Italian minister of defense and I attended a meeting of more than 40 nations willing to help Ukraine with military and humanitarian aid. We announced the formation of what we call the Ukraine contact group, which includes the ministers of defense and the military chiefs of defense of the participating nations.

On that occasion, I had the feeling – the strong feeling that the Russian aggression to Ukraine represent really a turning point, not only for the Atlantic community but also for the international community as a whole. Indeed, the unjustified Russian attack is endangering worldwide implication and will change security priorities on a global scale. This is clear that if we want to react better and more adequately to emerging conflict and instability, and prevent wider conflicts, we must pool and share military capabilities more substantially and effectively, and create an overall better deterrence, if needed a powerful response.

Within the current allied and European frameworks, the presence of the Italian military stretches from Iceland to the Baltic, through Eastern Europe, and down to the Balkans. Along the southern border of the alliance Italian forces are deployed in Iraq, Red Sea, Mediterranean, and across North Africa, as well as in the Sahel, up to the Gulf of Guinea. Europe and the Atlantic alliance never – can never go back to the world that they knew before Russia invaded Ukraine. This is now a widening consensus that NATO needs permanent forces in Eastern Europe to deter Russia.

This challenge is about the ability of the European Union and the alliance to respond to these threats, bolster cohesion, and improve strategic reliance across domains – including cyberspace. And it is fair to say that this momentum is currently drawing the European Union and NATO closer and closer. After the Versailles Declaration, the European Union adopted the so-called Strategic Compass, an ambitious plan of action to strengthen its security and defense, and its capability to contribute to international peace and stability more effectively.

Of course, European integration and security in defense matters is not simple. Nevertheless, the Strategic Compass requires that our full support and commitment, protecting our society and freedoms, is a joint responsibility among nations. If we are to deliver on the promise of peace we have made to future generations, as it was done to us, security and defense must play a more prominent role in the European project. The tragedy unfolding in Ukraine should not overshadow the issue of NATO's southern flank.

The Mediterranean basically is at the crossroad for petroleum and gas exploitation on both land and sea. Which is all the more crucial given our need to reduce our energy reliance on Russian sources. The marked increase in unfriendly naval activity in the Mediterranean indicates that we should not lose sight of this geopolitical area. For it remains as dangerous today as it always has been, and a flashpoint of conflict and regional instability that affects us all.

The Mediterranean sea lines of communication must remain secure, especially to accommodate the growing energy needs for Europe. These very needs should not be dependent on Russia in the future. And in this context, we are developing and widening our military cooperation with other Atlantic partners, such as Turkey, France, and the U.K. This is strengthening, again, and shows the importance of acting together for the greater good of the international community as a whole.

Regarding our military environment, the Ukrainian crisis shows the clear need of Europe and the alliance to face the challenges associated with the closer integration of our forces, not only nationally but across the other

operational domain as well. The ongoing Russian offensive proves how Moscow attempts to embrace multidomain capabilities while prioritizing offensive space, cyber, and cognitive skills. For the last two decades, we have repeatedly heard about a new Russian military – a powerful joint force grounded in high technology. While that force is indeed potent, the announced leap in technology we have heard about may not have been fully developed and widely fielded as appears, nor as adequately supported as Russia has led the world to believe.

Against this background, we must not underestimate our eastern neighbor. We are also witnessing the rise of militaries in Asia and their ability to project force outside their normal sphere of influence. A good example nowadays of this was a Chinese military aircraft flying from China to the Balkans to deliver Chinese surface-to-air missile systems to a European country. And this is unprecedented, a dramatic change underway, and we must keep pace. If we are to maintain our leading edge over these near-peer adversaries, we must develop and field the technologies of tomorrow as soon as possible.

We need sixth generation capabilities to enable European Union forces to operate effectively in denied airspace. We also need to – the complementary technologies supporting either manned or unmanned aerial vehicles in the air domain. Our land forces must be able to shoot, move, and communicate easily. We must embrace the modern electromagnetic environment through such technologies, such as software-defined radars. We have daily confirmation of the devastating consequences the Russian forces suffers since they are unable to shoot, move and communicate in a coordinated fashion.

We have recently seen another case in point in the maritime domain. A subsonic cruise missile hit and sunk a major surface combatant ship – maybe two. We don't know yet, but probably. We must provide our navies with the highest technology available to detect and neutralize threats as far away as possible. These threats include ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missiles that only advance electronically scanned array radars associated with the new generation. Interceptor activators can detect and neutralize. We must also protect our undersea cables and communication networks because they are critical to our world economy and everyday lives.

Of course, with advanced weaponry and tactics come the need to secure our systems with the state-of-the-art cybersecurity systems. Therefore, we must continually seek to develop our cyber capabilities in both the defensive and offensive arenas. I would emphasize the importance of our military personnel as well. The battlefield of Ukraine shows what can happen to an army that invested in technology without effectively fielding its new system

by ensuring proper logistic support and training – two elements so crucial to a military force that relies on high technologies.

We can invest in technology, but we must also invest in our people and the relevant support infrastructure at home and in the field. Our people are our greatest assets. And without them, the technology we strive to develop will be ineffective. The geopolitical – these geopolitical and technological scenarios present challenges that our military doctrine and defense industrial base cannot fail to overcome.

Firstly, the multidomain army concept introduce a radical change in joint warfighting. The joint force commander must be able – must enable the joint forces to maneuver and prevail through all the phases of a conflict with a calibrated force posture in multidomain capabilities. The dynamic employment and posture of the joint forces during any confrontation will provide the range and depth to penetrate complex system and achieve cross-domain effects, thus creating opportunities and providing options to deter, deescalate, or promptly transition to a winning strategy.

Secondly, we should accelerate the process leading to the adaptation and evolution of our military posture, the transformation of our adoption and the building of new organizations and change the way we think and train. The current conflict has shown what can happen to an army that does not value proper training, doctrine, and professional military education. Joint formation and capability achieve their skill both physical and cognitive through an emphasis and investment in constant training. The training and doctrine lead to the decisive employment of our forces and lead us to reach a rapid decision cycle that support faster paced, distributed, and complex operating environment.

Thirdly, and last, we should consider technological superiority as a key element of effective deterrence. Research and development plays a major role in assessing relevant advanced technologies. The paradigm is not only the result of our quest for technological superiority. Through it, we can avoid the strategic surprises thanks to scientific and technological breakthroughs and innovations. The ability to preserve peace comes from the capacity to deter war. We also have to protect our technological superiority through relevant and efficient export controls to ensure that we stay one step ahead of the competition.

Finally, we need a robust industrial environment that's conducive to cooperation. Europe's defense industry cannot remain fragmented any longer. The bulk of defense capability, particularly next-generation platform, should be developed and procured globally. It will require not only an all-around revolution on how we handle military procurement, but a profound situational awareness as well. Through well-developed situational

awareness, we can adopt more diversified scientific knowledge and technology to support our aims. The Italian aerospace and defense industry ranks among the top 10 worldwide and can actively shape European and Atlantic industrial cooperation.

We have been developing technologically advanced defense capability to cope with the rapidly changing current conflict scenarios. Our experience indicate that matching the need of other forces requires an adequate level of constant investment in research and development to fulfill our technological needs. However, our budget are limited and our acquisition must be effective and efficient. Therefore, we're obliged to make sure that we spend every single euro wisely.

Let me briefly recall some of the international programs that rank high on the agenda of the Italian forces. We acquire electronic intelligence technology from L3Harris. And, of course, we are a very active member of the Lockheed Martin F-35 program. It is through well-balanced acquisition decision such as these that the Italian armed forces can operate effectively in denied airspace and across a multidomain environment, while significantly increasing our ability to predict an opponent's next moves.

Within European Union, we are working on two major capability development project of strategic importance, the MALE RPAS or Eurodrone and the ESSOR, which will boost our armed force interoperability by developing European and standard communication technologies. The devastating impact of inadequate communication and the inability to communicate across secure networks is in daily evidence in Ukraine. Italy can offer technological capabilities to strengthen Europe's next tank, the main ground combat system, MGCS.

In addition, the Italian Army has a great interest in exploring the potential of a future multinational helicopter program, the next-generation rotorcraft capability, MGRC, jointly with France, Germany, Greece, and the U.K. But we also see great potential in the future vertically, the FVL, which is generating very high interest. Italy participated in the Tempest program, with which the future sixth-generation fighter aircraft is being developed.

We often keep our focus on initiative concerning the surface of the planet, however we should not forget the other initiative and objective beyond our low-earth orbit. Humankind first set foot on the Moon over 50 years ago. And our satellite is again within sensor range. Nations are now in a race to develop lunar navigation technologies, as well as navigational technology to accommodate a routine cis-lunar travel across the space between Earth and the Moon. Italy's also taking place in efforts and initiatives concerning space-related navigation issue and seeks to expand its participation with the United States in these matters.

As we see, the aerospace and defense industry will experience a technology liftoff. And this calls for the capacity of our political, military, diplomatic and industrial institution to build up a multilateral approach based on solid partnership and international cooperation both inside and outside European Union frameworks. The same approach also dictates that we execute the long-term capacity planning in the 10 to 15 years range. We are fully aware that the current international scenario has triggered a new momentum in NATO and European defense. Beyond that, it will influence national defense budget and foster a global high-tech competition in such areas as cyber and space.

Moreover, the privileged relationship between multiple NATO and European Union institutions, the European defense industrial base, and other entities providing expert analyses, all of which compete and cooperate to shape, set, and support European Union for its agenda, also facilitate such momentum. More substantial multilateral dialogue and cooperation should be our key priorities in this respect. The time has come for our high-tech defense industry to adjust its business models and achieve more agility, supported, of course, by more streamlined national defense acquisitional relation.

Our acquisition process takes too long and, in some cases, result in the delivery of obsolete systems. At the same time, however, we can adjust to the current and future needs of our armored forces swiftly. In an uncertain world, preparing for the future requires innovative vision, entrepreneurial courage – it took me two day for entrepreneurial – courage, and streamlined acquisition policies. That is how we ensure our forces have the skill and capabilities to adapt swiftly to new challenges and unexpected circumstances. We already have the resources to set out – to set our needs in motion through European Union financial programs and the national budget.

Collectively, European countries are the second-largest military spender worldwide. Therefore, it is the right time to strengthen the concept of pooling and sharing in order to gain real traction in the European Union and NATO environments. In the light of this new era of East-West confrontation, we must be able to effectively increase and expand our capabilities in the land, maritime, air, space, cyber and cognitive domains. As a result, future conflict will manifest a more extended range across all domains, and at much greater physical and cognitive speed.

OK, concluding, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is undoubtedly the most severe conflict Europe has faced in the post-World War II era. Escalating tension between Russia and the Western countries are quite an abrupt reminder of the bad old days of the Cold War. Peace and security at home should no longer be taken for granted, and the stakes for the international community are very high.

Let me finish by reading what President Eisenhower said in the Cross of Iron speech back in 1953. And I quote, "This world in arms...is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron." Unquote. Today, these words could not be more meaningful. Thank you.

Dr. Jones:

Thank you very much. Wonderful quote at the end. Thanks for the broad overview of the implications of the changing strategic landscape and what they mean for Italy, for the U.S.-Italian relationship, and then for Europe more broadly.

Let me just begin, Admiral, by asking you about – you talked a little about deterrence. So with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the possible expansion of NATO this year to countries like Sweden and Finland, there is a lot of question about deterrence along the Eastern flank of NATO. So from your perspective, what sort of capabilities from an Italian defense perspective are important for deterring future conflict?

When we look at the current war in Ukraine, we see a lot of standoff weapons – some high precision, some not. There's a lot of use of air defense systems. We've seen strikes against ships, including the Moskva, so anti-ship capabilities. So from a deterrence standpoint, and from an Italian standpoint, what are the capabilities over the next several years that are going to be important priorities for you, from an Italian perspective?

Adm. Dragone:

Well, we have been witnessing – let me – an old-fashioned war. I mean, this event has been characterized by strong deployment of cyber in shaping the battlefield and in governing and running the battlefield. So but we still feel the noise of artillery, tanks. That was not unexpected, but sincerely it was not the frontline. So we have to review a little bit our posture. From our standpoint, from an Italian standpoint, one of the very, very first priorities get our army up to speed in these – in these new scenarios.

Though the challenge will be, OK, feed and keep up with the legacy, but look at the future because deterrence – my point of view – deterrence probably is shifting from the nuclear deterrence to the technological one. So we need to be able to product and be able to use properly very, very advanced technological system that can deter them to start a conventional war, because it's not going to be worth it anymore because of this advance in technology that we have to pursue and probably to increase. So the deterrence will be – not be anymore a nuclear one, but a technological one. And we have to strive for that.

Dr. Jones:

So is this, for example, why, along with the U.K. and Sweden, you're working on developing Tempest, for example, sixth-generation aircraft? We've seen

the Russians struggle to gain air superiority in Ukraine, but what role do you see the Tempest playing in the Italian military and the future operating environment? And how does that fit in with what you've just laid out?

Adm. Dragone: My personal wish is that – well, you know, we have Tempest going on axis north to south and FCAS going west to east. That's a duplication. Hopefully something's going to happen that, I mean, we'll try to fix it. Tempest, like – Tempest is sixth generation. Like, a fifth – we need to have a fifth-generation air system because able to talk, to communicate, to exchange data with ships and with boots on the ground. So it's something that we have to put – I mean, to synchronize and have all of them ready to exchange data very rapidly, because this is, I mean, the way we can switch to and deal with multidomain operation. That's the only way we can do it. Connectivity, same way with language, same speed, and really a strong, strong flow of – data flow that can keep the situation – the whole situational awareness of the speed ready.

Dr. Jones: Yeah, and across multiple countries quickly, and multiple different platforms and systems. I mean, we can see the need to share information that's coming off of aircraft or drones to be moved quickly, if there's a need to conduct missile strikes – the speed is important. So how do you share that across multiple countries, when we're talking Europe?

Adm. Dragone: And having multiple countries is – just referring the same – the same situation we had in this war. I mean, the fighters has been – let's say, Ukraine and Russia. But behind Ukraine there was the international community and the NATO, the alliance, which proved to be the alliance and the backbone of a military alliance. But again, on one side, we have a one-man show. Mr. Putin is who is deciding the way he wanted.

On the other side, there is a little bit more of a – (inaudible) – to get everybody, I mean, in the same idea. When he gave us a strong message back last year – at the end of last year, and he moved, I think, 5,000 paratroops from Russia, requested by Kazakhstan, in 72 hours. My question is, would NATO be able to move 5,000 troops in 72 hours? I don't have an answer. I don't have the answer. I'll just throw the answer to the audience. But, again, this is another message that we need to honor.

Dr. Jones: One issue that comes out of this, and you're in the United States at the moment in part to meet with U.S. officials, is how have exercises, operations been helpful in dealing with this? You've conducted real-world tri-carrier operations earlier this year. I think the U.S. and the Italian navies participated in exercises and activities such as Neptune Strike 2022, and assorted bilateral drills. Have those been helpful in trying to fix some of these challenges? And how do you see U.S.-Italian cooperation moving forward?

Adm. Dragone: It has been useful because, I mean, our exercises magically shifted a little bit more eastward. So the area of operation for the exercise has been moved, of course. Has been moved to be a strong signal that we are there. And I think it has been useful, because, I mean, we put the aircraft carriers at that range in which Ukraine was reachable.

And so that was something in addition to what the alliance – the alliance put on a balance to try to balance what was the overwhelming power of Russia. It is usually because magically when you train in normal peacetime, you train by the book. I think that what I hear from my side, from my part, when you train in a crisis environment, your training has a capital T on the beginning. That's something that you got just doing it. We realize that after that happened.

Dr. Jones: A couple of questions that I want to get to on defense – Italian defense planning. But let me first see if you have any thoughts. We've heard U.S. officials openly supportive of the expansion of NATO to Finland and Sweden. Any thoughts on the deliberations coming up later this year on NATO expansion?

Adm. Dragone: As far as Finland and Sweden, I think that they will submit their application, I think, in the next days. That's a typical political matter. And I'm usually – by my DNA, I stay very far away from –

Dr. Jones: Stay out of that? (Laughs.)

Adm. Dragone: Yeah, of course. And I think I'm sitting here just because I did it in my past, probably. But, no, it's something – you know, they are more than welcome. We will just take into consideration that Finland is right on the edge. I have been in Latvia recently. And even if it is an operation pretty similar to other we are conducting, when you are there and everything is very organized, everything is very set up. But you feel that the distance is very, very, very, very small. And that's the feeling of the population in that area, in the Baltic countries.

And probably Finland would be pretty much the same. So it will be delicate managing of the – whenever they will be in, it's difficult to be part of the NATO in Finland compared to be part of the NATO in Italy, for example, because of distance.

Dr. Jones: Sure. Yes. And this is where deterrence suddenly becomes critical because you certainly want to deter any kind of –

Adm. Dragone: And – sorry if I interrupt you – but being there, the danger of escalation, it's higher and higher because the mistake, the misunderstanding here has a significance. There it's very, very, very much more – very much more

delicate. So they'd have to – they have to handle not only the deterrence and the defensive posture, but also how to handle the case that could arise if they want to push the red button immediately, or just try to understand what is going on.

Dr. Jones: I wanted to shift a little bit, if I can, to Italian defense planning priorities. There's been a rise in Italian military procurement.

Adm. Dragone: There will be. There will be.

Dr. Jones: There will be. There will be. Well, according to our data, a rise from 2021 raise to 2020 – so a rise in procurement. The question, though, is really what are the key plans and focus areas? We've seen interest in DDX destroyers or amphibious vehicles. Where are the areas that are important as part of future procurement decisions?

Adm. Dragone: OK. First, speaking about the rise of the internal gross product, the famous 2 percent, that's going to happen on a six-year timeframe because, correctly, like our minister of defense said, I mean, it is not something that can happen abruptly. I mean, we need to take into consideration all the problems we are going to get from the end of pandemic, from the economical point of view, from the war. So we are also facing, I mean, a family with no income, we are facing an energy problem, alternatives that we need to find. So this is a huge equation in which our budget get in but must be put in tight conjunction with other problems we are facing – we are expecting to face in the next future.

This is why the famous 2 percent will be – I mean –

Dr. Jones: 2028, we've seen. We've seen the five-star movements come publicly.

Adm. Dragone: Yeah, 2028, right. Yeah. Yeah, it made everybody happy. Yeah, made everybody happen. On that – with that horizon, priority is our army. Even if I'm a navy guy, but I'm wearing the proper uniform of jointness. But, no, Army needs – is the minimum – the minimum required for a legacy system, and then project them in the future because they must be kept up to speed for the fifth- and sixth-generation environment, and be able to be part of the game, and play their role in the whole MDO environment.

We are looking for – looking forward for the sixth-generation aircraft. The Tempest 1, or whatever you want to call it. And of course, probably having seen – and these are probably two priorities strategically. We don't want to be any more dependent on Ukraine and Russia because they're having other problems and we need to be, I mean, autonomous on that. And we are working on that. Then also, I mean, the Mediterranean is very crowded. In the Mediterranean there are state and nonstate actors that are doing – they are coming in. In the Mediterranean we depend 92 percent on data and oil by

submarine cables and ducts. And we have to defend them. And there are a lot of submarines. And there are a lot of Russian ships.

Russia doesn't seem to move from the areas in which they are now. Libya – I mean, east Libya, now they are getting into Mali. Whenever we leave a vacuum, the private company like Wagner are jumping in. So it's something – that's why Italy speak about the wider Mediterranean area, which goes from Gulf of Guinea up to the Horn of Africa.

Dr. Jones: And we see the Russians continue to use their naval base in Tartus in Syria.

Adm. Dragone: Yeah. And they are building – they are building some in the Sudan, I think.

Dr. Jones: And Sudan as well, that's correct.

Adm. Dragone: And Tartus is just – is the metropolis. I mean, and we need to take this into consideration. Hopefully getting this – these events, unfortunately, probably would get the alliance tighter because some time in the past we had somebody from the alliance, though we were going – we were going, I mean, a little bit by themselves. And so this is something that has generated the phenomenon of getting the alliance tight together, weaking up European Union to go forward to the famous European defense, which will be complementary to the NATO, and just make it clear that there will be no duplication, no overlap. But European Union defense eventually will be the column – European column of the alliance. So we need to see that in this – in this perspective.

Dr. Jones: That's an interesting point. It's a good point. How do you see – how do you talk about the way you're thinking, Italy is thinking, about its role in NATO moving forward and the European Union? And how do you think about complementarity? Are there worries about duplication of efforts along those lines?

Adm. Dragone: You must be aware, no way – I mean, first of all, the Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that NATO is the alliance. I mean, the one who is the strong, determined, and everyone is participating with the willing of really being part of something which is operationally effective and politically heavyweight. The European Union – the path is still a long to do. Probably you have to fix a little bit the European Union foreign policy.

And on that, we can work on the European Union defense, which now is pretty much focused on capability and modularity of different countries being able to furnish, to give units which are supposed to be – I mean, already tuned up for the – I think it's the PSC is the entity who's running the European Union missions. But again, the horizon is to have forces, I mean, permanently, attached to the European Union. And mainly C2 – I mean, chain

of command strong, reliable, efficient, quick decision making. These are things that we are looking for. But no overlapping and no duplication with NATO. This is a must.

Dr. Jones: One question, just on capabilities, noticed Italian and French efforts to develop an updated version of the SAMP/T ballistic missile defense system. Can you talk about sort of broader missile defense and how you're thinking about the future evolution of missile defense? I say that in part because for any of the conflict scenarios that we look at, that adversaries – whether it's the Russian scenarios or others, Iranian threats to Europe – significant standoff capabilities from a number of countries.

Adm. Dragone: Yeah. I forgot, and thank you for telling, integrated missile defense is one of the priorities for us. We have the integrated system with the allies. And, I mean, SAMP/T is one of – a part of it. I think we use it in Kahramanmaraş, down in Turkey. It is working properly. It is really an efficient part of the whole system. On this, probably there should be a, really, step ahead strong. So the hypersonic missile – everybody says that it is not interceptable. Probably, it is at the very, very, very, very early stage. But the very, very early stage you can detect, track, and probably hit with satellites. So again, this is something that goes – breaks through the –

Dr. Jones: It just doesn't have the ballistic trajectory, so it makes it – its low flight path makes it –

Adm. Dragone: Yeah, that was another message of President Putin. But probably if we can make something – if we can do something, it would be at the very, very early stage, when it starts. And having a chance to see from above.

Dr. Jones: So you mentioned space. And I know it's something you've talked about in the past as well. You've also expressed concern about protecting satellites. We've seen ASAT, anti-satellite, tests by a number of countries, including the Russians, over the last year. So what are the key threats that you see in space? And how do you – how are you thinking about the protection of space-based assets?

Adm. Dragone: Recently, thanks to our minister, we finally changed the Italian law in which we changed the Italian law in which we emphasize, underline, and pin that the defense is going to be a crucial, primary actor in space and in cyber, because that was not clear up to the point. The defense must be probably the key player in these – in these dominions. One of the things that we have to achieve first, and we are strongly studying, is first space assets. Up to now we are asking other countries time – we take our ticket and stay in queue, waiting for our time to send satellites on the sky.

So first of all, we should have an independent assets in space. On that end, space is still a place where there is no law. So first arrive, first set up a base. We are managing that. There is still the agreement or pretty much working without any kind of rule. My personal opinion, we got the strong message from Mr. Putin in November 2021, when he shot down a 1982 satellite – which was unusual. Everybody was talking about the debris – 1,500 debris. And we thought that these would have been hitting everything – either our international –

Dr. Jones: The space station.

Adm. Dragone: Saw everybody running in the emergency shuttle, and so on. But nothing happened. The thing was that it showed us that probably we will fight. Will be that kinetic, direct fighting in space? I don't know. But space will be a ground – a common ground on which we have to try to get our – and, again, it will be on the alliance base, because we are really – our space program are very, very much triggered and look to the alliance attitude and perspective. But that's something that we have to do and move altogether with the alliance.

Dr. Jones: One question or one issue that you mentioned earlier in our discussion was issues related to Italian security and the Mediterranean. And we spent a lot of time talking about conventional issues, the nuclear, and then broader deterrence. Can you just spend a minute or so talking about the other security issues that you're dealing with that are Mediterranean and probably African-based – which are illegal migration, some continuing terrorism challenges? We've got still jihadist activity in Africa, whether it's in the Sahel, it's in Libya, Somalia, or other countries. What other concerns do you have? And how are you dealing with broader threats emanating up through the Mediterranean that you have to deal with? Drugs, maybe?

Adm. Dragone: Yeah. First, when I was in the Navy, first the thing that we tried to do was tried to disseminate the maritime thought, cautions. Because, I mean, I think that in the past we have been suffering a lot of sea-blindness, not being aware that our coastline – so, our border – our wet border are seven time the dry one – I mean, the one from the north. So that's something that the Italians in first grade school should learn. And that seems to be easy. Seems to be funny, but we need to grow this capacity to understand how dependent we are from the sea.

We also are dependent because we are transformational country. So we've got everything. I mean, materials from 95 percent from sea, and then we export a final product. So again, this is something important. And then, coming from south specifically, the threat of illegal immigration and the terrorism. Sometimes they are overlapping. You know, we have some example that they came over through that flow. This is a concern. This is a

concern that, from my point of view, when we face it in the Mediterranean it's too late. So we are really surrounded. We are under siege. And we have to react.

We should be – we should go further, where everything starts. And we are doing that in sub-Sahel. Nigeria is a demographic bomb that we expect to explode around 2035-2050. And we have to try to solve the problem that they're having in the countries over there, in taking the security under control, probably. This is our – my caution speaking. Probably we should spend better and more money there to rise the way they live, help them in building up their own economy. I mean, they have, I mean, huge amount of potential money they would own, minerals they have.

My question is, is there any country who is doing – who is having a colonial behavior still now in 2022? I would say, yes. And this is a guilty feeling we should have. So we should turn 180 degrees our policy toward that country, help them out in solving their problem, before they are knocking at our door. And of course, we have to – we have to have them on board. Cannot leave them alone. But this is – this is a problem.

And also the south flank, which we are trying to tell NATO that now we are doing a lot of effort eastward. So Italy is in – sometimes in (east land?) – in the Baltic countries, in Poland, in Hungary, and then next future in Bulgaria, in Kosovo, in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But our main threat axis is from south. And that area, that direction is also where we should try to find some alternatives in energy, and not to be totally dependent from Russia.

So that area is something that Italy, as a NATO member, is expecting, that the NATO nation will help us maybe in the second time, when Ukraine will be solved, in facing these problems. In sharing altogether the illegal immigration problem. The things that has not been done in the past. We have been left alone. And so we need to review all together our posture.

Dr. Jones: Well, we're almost done, but we have a few audience questions, folks have written in. The first one is – and we've talked a little bit about this – is on your thoughts on greater integration of EU military efforts. So how is Italy, from a defense budget, planning, procurement standpoint, thinking about deepening integration of European Union military efforts?

Adm. Dragone: Today's picture shows that probably, roughly, we have in Europe – even if we are pretty much doing and preparing for the same type of confrontational crisis, war, whatever you want to, we have more than 130 weapon systems, different. And a lot of them are doing the same stuff, I mean, are having the same – the same aim in doing – in producing effect. So probably we need to work this out. We need to push the European industry in much more collaborations. There is too much fragmentation right now. So we need to – I

mean, we spend a lot of money, as European countries, in defense, as I said. So it's time to get more international programs fulfilling more nations' needs, and try to reduce the huge, unbearable amount of weapon system that we have now. Standardized systems, standardized procedures, standardized communication. And that's the way to – that's the way to do it.

Dr. Jones: And also to improve, I think, interoperability as well as the standardization.

Adm. Dragone: Of course. This is part of the – yes, yeah. Of course.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. Well, Admiral, we really appreciate your time with us at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Thanks for your thoughts. As someone who spent many years in the U.S. Department of Defense in Afghanistan, I spent considerable time in places like Herat with Italian forces. Not only were they outstanding colleagues, but I think the best food I had with international forces was with Italian forces.

Adm. Dragone: (Laughs.) That helps. That helps, you know.

Dr. Jones: That helps. That's right. That improves morale there.

Adm. Dragone: Right.

Dr. Jones: I want you to – I want to thank you, again, for spending time with us today. Really appreciate it. And thanks for all of the collaboration and support that Italy has provided to the U.S. over the years. That relationship remains important.

Adm. Dragone: And will continue.

Dr. Jones: Great. Thank you very much.

Adm. Dragone: Thank you very much.