Meloni-Trump

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The once-solid partnership between Giorgia Meloni and Donald Trump is facing a profound and unexpected diplomatic crisis. This shift raises critical questions about the future of Atlanticism and Italy's strategic role within the Western alliance.

The recent events involving Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and US President Donald Trump have threatened the idea of a strong bilateral relationship, one that Meloni has vigorously cultivated from 2024 until only a few weeks ago. Since December 2024, when the two leaders met in Paris for the reopening ceremony of Notre Dame Cathedral, the bond between Meloni and Trump had become one of the closest and most meaningful transatlantic relationships in recent years. However, this partnership is now

undergoing a significant crisis. What elements have led to this breakdown, and how does this situation pose crucial risks for Meloni's vision of Atlanticism?

The Foundations of a Shared Security Community

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Atlanticism was conceived as a vital alliance to rebuild and maintain cohesion within the Western world. Although the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was the primary and most concrete expression of this community, the link between the US and Europe extended far beyond the military sphere. It was rooted in a shared set of values, such as democracy and the rule of law, alongside a communitarian vision of global challenges as the cornerstone of a security community. However, recognising this original ideal of the Western bloc is becoming increasingly difficult. Even though Meloni has attempted to act as a bridge between Europe and Washington, positioning herself as Trump's key European partner, the US President's view on the role of Europe, and consequently Italy, is now clearer than ever.

The Sigonella Dispute and the Papal Friction

On 31 March 2026, a turning point occurred when Italy denied the use of the Sigonella naval air base in Sicily to American bombers en route to the Middle East to support the conflict in Iran. Italy's Minister of Defence, Guido Crosetto, stated: "Relations with the United States are solid and based on full and loyal collaboration because they know the rules governing their presence in Italy since 1954 as well as we do." Indeed, while American military bases on Italian soil remain active, international agreements explicitly require government approval for specific actions.

Following this decision, which Trump initially left unmentioned, the US President openly turned against Pope Leo XIV. Trump harshly criticised the Pontiff's words of condemnation regarding Israeli-US military actions in Iran, labelling them as "wrong". This direct attack on the Pope shattered the neutrality Meloni had previously maintained regarding the President's actions. Aware of the cultural distance between the US and Italy, a country deeply tied to the papacy and the public role of Catholicism, Meloni declared the attack unacceptable. She stated she would not feel comfortable in a world where religious leaders are told what to do by political leaders.

From Allies to Tools: A Changing Paradigm

Trump's counter-attack was immediate. He accused Meloni of lacking the courage to fully support the United States against what he termed the "Iranian nuclear threat". Furthermore, sharing a *Guardian* article regarding the Sigonella incident on Truth Social, Trump wrote: "Italy wasn't there for us, we won't be there for them."

Preserving Diplomacy in an Era of "America First"

Beyond the hollowing out of the traditional meaning of Atlanticism, we must ask to what extent diplomatic relations should be preserved when facing a President who prioritises domestic interests above all else. A comparison with other leaders is revealing. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez denied the use of Andalusian bases from the start of the Iran conflict. In contrast, Meloni initially attempted a middle ground, stating after the US-Israeli attack on 28 February 2026 that she neither shared nor condemned the action.

Ultimately, even Meloni has been forced to distance herself from a leader she worked tirelessly to court, a leader for whom, on 23 January 2026, she had even expressed hope for a Nobel Peace Prize. It is now evident that when domestic interests and core cultural values are threatened, the special relationship gives way to a harsh geopolitical reality.

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