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Recent Developments in Italy's Security and Defence Policy

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ABSTRACT

Three main components have characterised the Renzi government's 2014-2016 security and defence policy. The first is the publication of a White Paper for International Security and Defence outlining a politico-strategic stance on the development of the military and its use to Italian foreign and defence policy ends. The second is the Armed Forces' continued and broad engagement on crisis management operations in the Euro-Mediterranean region, with a shift of resources from Afghanistan – where NATO has reduced its military presence – to Iraq within the framework of international community operations aimed at countering the so-called Islamic State. This military commitment mirrors the Renzi government's political effort to increase NATO and EU attention to the security of the Mediterranean region. After the UK referendum, Italy has also enhanced its stance in favour of greater European cooperation and integration in the defence sector. Thirdly, along the blurred boundary between external and internal security, it is essential to recall the Navy's lead of national and EU maritime operations in the Mediterranean, for search and rescue of imperilled migrants at sea and to counter people smugglers, particularly on the routes between the Libyan and Italian coasts.

Italy's military policy | Military missions | Mediterranean

keywords

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1. White Paper for International Security and Defence

Approval of the White Paper is one of the foremost results of the Renzi government's defence policy and, in particular, that of Minister of Defence Roberta Pinotti during 2014 and 2015. The elaboration of such documents to guide the orientation and evolution of the military over the medium-term is a common practice in countries such as Great Britain and France; by contrast, Italy's last significant example dates back to 1986. Therefore, the process launched in 2014 on Minister Pinotti's impetus represents an important and demanding innovation for the Armed Forces. These are in need of rationalisation in order to continue to carry out the tasks set by the political authorities with the limited and decreasing resources at their disposal. Indeed, spending for the "defence function" that amounted to 14.077 billion euro – 0.87 percent of GDP – in 2014, against a NATO commitment equal to 2 percent, will undergo a further reduction to 13.360 billion in 2016.¹

The process of preparing the White Paper began with submission of the Pinotti plan to the Supreme Defence Council, which appointed a panel of experts to draft the guidelines for the actual paper. The guidelines were presented in June 2014 and work proceeded with the drafting of the document under the Minister's supervision. Nearly a year later, Pinotti submitted the White Paper to the Supreme Defence Council on 21 April 2015, and then to the government and parliament.

¹ Italian Ministry of Defence, *Documento programmatico pluriennale per la Difesa per il triennio 2016-2018*, April 2015, <http://www.difesa.it/Amministrazionetrasparente/bilandife/Pagine/Bilanciopreventivoconsuntivo.aspx>. See also Francesco Jonas Badde, Francesca Bitondo and Paola Sartori, *Defence Budgets and Industry: Tables and Graphs*, Roma, IAI, July 2016, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/702>.

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· Translated and updated version of "La politica di sicurezza e difesa", published as chapter 2 in Ettore Greco and Natalino Ronzitti (eds.), *Rapporto sulla politica estera italiana: il governo Renzi*. Edizione 2016, Roma, Nuova Cultura, July 2016 (Quaderni IAI 17), p. 47-55, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6631>.

The White Paper outlines a medium-term strategy for Italian defence policy, correlating ends, ways and means for achieving them.² The objectives reflect a greater and more explicit commitment to the defence of national interests. Indeed, the Paper states that the ultimate end of defence policy is the protection of Italy's vital and strategic interests, and that the Armed Forces primary task is the defence of the State against all forms of aggression with a view to safeguarding the integrity of national territory, the vital interests of the nation, the security of national sovereign areas and Italian nationals abroad, and the security and integrity of the routes of communication to access to the country (point 81).

The second mission consists of the "defence of the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Mediterranean" regions, namely contributing to the NATO collective defence and to stability in areas surrounding the Mediterranean. The third mission relates to participation in crisis prevention and management operations outside priority intervention areas, for the purposes of ensuring international peace, security, stability and legality; the fourth concerns the contribution to safeguarding free national institutions and performing specific tasks in situations of public calamity.

The White Paper clearly defines the Euro-Mediterranean region as a "priority" sphere of action for national interventions (point No. 50). This region includes the EU countries, the Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Mediterranean portion of the Middle East and the Maghreb. Within this sphere, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) must be ready to assume "direct" responsibility for crisis response and be prepared for peacekeeping and stabilisation operations, including assumption of their leadership (point 71).

Explicit citation of a geopolitical priority is something new for Italian defence policy that indicates greater realism in linking objectives with the means for achieving them. In general, the paper uses realistic and explicit language, openly considering, for example, the notion of confronting "traditional conflict situations" (point 12) –a reference to war between States unusually strong to the political tradition of republican Italy. Moreover, it underscores how the "cyber domain" will have to be watched and defended (point 32). Finally, according to the White Paper the tasks of the Armed Forces include the elimination of eventual threats to the security and interests of the country (point No. 76) explicitly linking the use of force in combat operations with the defence of national interests.

To make it possible for the Armed Forces to carry out their assigned missions and achieve their objectives, the White Paper outlines an ambitious MoD reform plan. The plan addresses various aspects:

² Italian Ministry of Defence, *White Paper for International Security and Defence*, April 2015, p. 42, http://www.difesa.it/Content/Pagine/Libro_Bianco.aspx. See also Alessandro Marrone (ed.), "The White Paper: A Strategy for Italy's Defence Policy", in *Documenti IAI*, No. 15|15E (June 2015), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/4239>.

- internal organisational reform, with a rationalisation aimed at greater jointness and a clearer definition of the relationship between Ministry political authorities and the military;
- personnel and their training, with a view to encouraging generational turnover, a reduction in officer cadres and the formation of operational reserve;
- procurement and defence industrial policy, with the introduction of a six-year law to facilitate the stability of strategic acquisition programmes; and
- a new itemisation of the defence budget.

This broad-based plan is taking longer than expected to implement, due both to the complexity associated with the legislative, regulatory and administrative provisions required, as well as to internal MoD resistance to a reform that aims to eliminate privileges in the interests of a more efficient, efficacious and sustainable military.

It should also be noted that a substantial procurement programme, not linked with the strategic design of the White Paper, was decided before the Paper's approval. This ten-year "Naval Law" concerns 5.4 billion euro in financing, earmarked by the 2014 Stability Law for the Italian Navy's acquisition of six multifunctional patrol vessels (*Pattugliatori Polifunzionali d'Altura*, PPA), plus a multi-role amphibious unit and a logistical support vessel.

When it comes to military procurement, it should be mentioned Italy's participation in the American-led multinational programme for the development and production of multirole fighter aircraft F-35, since this has been a topic of pitched political debate in 2014. The government has upheld Italy's initial commitment in the programme, although the rate of acquisitions have slowed due to budget constraints. Italy expects to purchase approximately 27 to 30 F-35s, assembled at the Cameri plant, within 2020,³ with a final target of 90 aircraft to replace the 253 Air Force and Navy fighters (AMX, Tornado and Av-8B) being phased out for obsolescence over the next 15 years. The procurement programme's cancellation or suspension is highly unlikely, although the timeframe for its completion will probably continue to depend on defence budget constraints.

2. Military engagement in the Euro-Mediterranean region: from Afghanistan to Iraq and Libya

NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) concluded an 11-year span of activity in Afghanistan in 2014. It was replaced in 2015 by the Resolute Support mission charged with assisting Afghan security forces in controlling the territory and enforcing the authority of the legitimate national government. The NATO-led force was reduced from more than 87,000 troops in the summer of 2013 to

³ Pietro Batacchi, "Quattro nuovi F-35 per l'Italia", in *Rivista Italiana Difesa*, 17 March 2016.

approximately 13,000 in July 2016. Its mandate also changed. It no longer engages in combat tasks, but rather exclusively offers assistance to the Afghan forces. In line with NATO policy, the Italian government gradually reduced its Afghanistan contingent from the 4-5,000 stationed in the period 2008-2013 to the 950 present in July 2016, distributed between the capital Kabul and the city of Herat, where Italy has been responsible for Regional Command West (currently renamed Train Advise and Assist Command – TAAC) for ten years now. Previous plans for a further reduction in the allied commitment were abandoned in view of persistent Taliban insurgency, and the Warsaw Summit decided to keep NATO contingent stable at least through 2016. In this context, Italy has maintained a strong commitment in Afghanistan, where it is the largest European contributor to Resolute Support together with Germany, with twice the troops deployed by the UK in the operational theatre.⁴

As of November 2016, Italy was engaged overall in 28 international mission in 19 countries, with approximately 6,750 personnel and high-level command positions in multinational contingents. Of Italy's operations abroad, in addition to the above-mentioned Resolute Support, the largest has been in Lebanon with 1,400 troops deployed within the 11,000-strong UNIFIL mission. UNIFIL has been under Italy's uninterrupted command since 2007, with General Luciano Portolano at the helm it since 2014. Others, in order of size, have included the missions to Iraq (1,400), Kosovo (550 units), where Italy was in command of the NATO KFOR, and the Horn of Africa (110), where it headed up the EUTM Somalia mission.⁵

In the last few years, the Renzi government has sought to redirect Italy's military engagement abroad toward the Mediterranean region, and this in response to factors in the area's growing instability ranging from the migration crisis to the advance of the so-called Islamic State, as well as because of the reduced NATO presence in Afghanistan. Significant in this context was the government's decision to participate actively in the military operations of the American-led international coalition in Iraq against the Islamic State without, however, any direct involvement in the bombings. This participation began in August 2014 with the supply of military equipment to the Kurdish allies, followed immediately by the gradual employment of aircraft tasked with reconnaissance and target acquisition (four Tornado fighters, two Predator drones and KC-767 for air-to-air refuelling). At the same time, with the *Prima Parthica* and *Inherent Resolve* missions in support of Iraqi and Kurdish allies, Italy sent a total of 700 personnel – instructors, military advisors and special forces from each of the armed forces, including 90 Carabinieri – for the training of Iraqi police forces. It is in Iraq that Italy has made its main contribution to the fight against the Islamic State, in addition to other intelligence, diplomatic and financial contributions within the framework of a broader effort

⁴ NATO, *Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures*, July 2016, p. 2, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_113694.htm.

⁵ Italian Ministry of Defence, *Military Operations*, May 2016 (last updated 18 November 2016), <http://www.difesa.it/EN/Operations/Pagine/MilitaryOperations.aspx>.

that intensified after the attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016. Italy has chosen to engage militarily in Iraq, where international intervention has followed a request by the legitimate Iraqi government. In the Syrian theatre it has supported the UN-led diplomatic initiative aimed at involving all the principal local factions engaged in a civil war that has dragged on since 2011, with a view to achieving a ceasefire that would facilitate the struggle against IS.

Table 1 | Principal Italian military missions

Africa	
IPPOCRATE (Libya)	300
EUTM (Somalia)	110
Support Base (Djibuti)	52
MFO (Egypt)	80
MIADIT 6 (Somalia and Djibuti)	52
EUTM Mali	10
Europe	
Mare Sicuro (Mediterranean)	850
SOFIA (Mediterranean)	680
KFOR (Kosovo)	550
Middle East and Central Asia	
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	1,400
RSM-EUPOL (Afghanistan)	950
International Anti-Daesh Coalition (Iraq)	1,400
SAGITTA (Turkey)	125
TFA Al-Minhad (UAE)	120
MIADIT (Palestine)	30
Italy	
Strade Sicure	7,050
Other missions	
Others	300
Personnel deployed*	
International operations	6,750
National operations	7,050

Source: Law decree No. 67 of 16 May 2016.

* the number of personnel may vary depending on operational and logistical needs.

As for Libya, the MoD has been working on eventual operational engagement scenarios, placing the military on high alert. The government, however, is considering eventual robust military intervention in Libya solely within a political-strategic framework that satisfies a series of conditions, most importantly the achievement of an intra-Libyan consensus on the Government of National Unity

currently led by Fayed Al-Sarray. Having said that, Italian special forces have been regularly operating in Libya in the last months. Italy has also granted the use of its military airbases for the air operations mounted by the US in August 2016, with the British support, in order to help the Libyan militias' fight against IS-affiliated groups in the city of Sirte.

Italy's committed to implementing the Atlantic Alliance's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) agreed to at the 2014 Newport summit, aimed at ensuring NATO forces' readiness, especially along its Eastern flank, to deter Russia and reassure Eastern European members, not least in response to the Ukraine crisis. Italy, in particular, has taken the role of "framework nation" for 2018 tasked with leading the Very Rapid Joint Task Force (VJTF), which forms the spearhead of the allied rapid response forces. The VJTF, under annual rotating member country leadership, is capable of deploying 5,000 troops in the span of a few days in the case of crisis or imminent threat. In the first four months of 2015, Italy also deployed four Air Force Eurofighters to carry on the Air Policing over the Baltic Republics. It is a NATO regular operation to defend the airspace of countries lacking in the necessary capabilities to do Air Policing on their own. Yet it has become considerably more important and risky in the wake of Moscow's intensification of unannounced reconnaissance flights by their fighter aircraft along the fringes of Baltic airspace. At mission end, upon the request of the Baltic Republics and NATO, Italy extended its Air Policing for an additional four months in a concrete show of support for the collective defence of the Alliance's Eastern flank. Moreover, Italy was one of the three host nations of the NATO Trident Juncture Exercise held in October 2015, its largest since 2002, in which 30 allied and partner nations participated with a total of 36,000 personnel, 140 aircraft and 60 ships.

Thanks also to such Italy's contribution, for the first time an Italian General – Salvatore Farina – has been appointed Commander of the Joint Force Command of Brunssum, one of NATO's top military posts. On the other hand, Franco Frattini was unsuccessful in his bid for NATO Secretary General in 2014, a position that has not been filled by an Italian since 1971.

Italy's efforts to get NATO's greater attention to the Alliance's Southern flank had a limited effect, since Warsaw summit took positive and important steps in this direction but much more could be done.⁶ First, NATO has put its Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) at disposal of the coalition fighting the IS in Iraq and Syria, in order to support situational awareness and intelligence gathering. It has also decided to enhance the training of Iraqi armed forces by moving NATO training centre from Jordan to Iraq itself. Second, Warsaw Summit opened the possibility for NATO to train Libyan coast guards and navy, as well as to provide

⁶ During the preparation of the summit, Italy's efforts on the Strategic Level Guidance for the Southern flank approved in October 2015 by the Allied foreign ministries allowed to make some progress in this direction. See Paola Tessari, Paola Sartori and Alessandro Marrone, "Italian Defence Policy between NATO and the White Paper", in *Documenti IAI*, No. 15|25E (December 2015), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/5709>.

advice in the field of defence and security institution building, following a request by the Government of National Accord. Third, NATO has decided to terminate the Active Endeavour mission, initiated in 2001 in the Mediterranean Sea with a solely anti-terrorism purpose, and to launch the new operation Sea Guardian with a broader mandate in terms of maritime security. The decision to terminate Ocean Shield operation in the Gulf of Aden, giving the success in reducing the number of piracy attacks, makes available naval assets which can be deployed in the Mediterranean.

Alongside with these developments within NATO, in summer 2016 the Renzi's government has also stepped up its efforts in favour of greater European cooperation and integration in the defence field, following the results of UK referendum on the EU membership. Preceded and followed by a series of declaration by both Pinotti and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gentiloni, on 22 August the Ventotene summit among Renzi, Hollande and Merkel expressed a political endorsement for a re-launch of European defence.⁷ In the Italian view, France and Germany are the key partners of such core groups of EU members willing and able to move forward in this field. Then, on 5 September 2016, Pinotti had a meeting with French and German defence ministers to present a package of Italian proposals to re-launch a "common dimension of defence and security" and realize a "union for European defence."⁸

3. External and internal security: Mare Nostrum, Triton and Sophia

The Mare Nostrum mission managed by Italy between October 2013 and October 2014 was the greatest single example of inter-ministerial coordination along the fine line between external and internal security. Its tasks were multiple: controlling Italian territorial waters and contiguous zones, countering organised crime trafficking in illegal immigrants, and Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. Over its 12-month duration, the mission – one of the largest rescue operations in the history of the Mediterranean – saved approximately 156,000 migrants and arrested more than 360 people traffickers.⁹ The Italian Navy participated with a stable contingent of 920 military personnel and a fleet of five ships.

⁷ German Government, *Guaranteeing security - upholding European values*, 22 August 2016, https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Reiseberichte/2016/2016-08-22-ventotene-deutschland-italien-frankreich_en.html.

⁸ Italian Ministry of Defence, *Difesa e sicurezza europea: a Parigi condivisione di idee e volontà di concretezza*, 5 September 2016, http://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Pagine/20160905Pinotti_vertice_Parigi.aspx. See also Arthur Beesley, "Italy and Spain Warm to EU Defence Co-operation", in *Financial Times*, 12 October 2016.

⁹ Italian Navy, *Vigilanza Pesca / Controllo Flussi Migratori / Operazione Mare Nostrum. Riepilogo attività*, November 2014, <http://www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/operazioni-in-corso/Documents/Dati%20statistici%20Mare%20Nostrum.pdf>.

Within the framework of a broader immigration policy, the government has been working since 2014 toward the EU's greater involvement in migration management and, in particular, in SAR operations, efforts that have yielded two operational results. First, enhancement of the Frontex agency's Mediterranean operations with the launch of Triton, a mission involving the naval and air assets of another eight European countries and coordinated by Italy. Second, the launch of EUNAVFOR MED on 22 June 2015 – later renamed Sophia¹⁰ – within the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). That mission is tasked with cracking down on the criminal networks that organise migrant trafficking in the Mediterranean and reducing migration by sea, in accordance with international law. Italy is in command of the mission through the Joint Operations Headquarters, with Admiral Enrico Credendino heading the operation. After an initial intelligence gathering and high seas surveillance phase, on 7 October 2015 the mission entered "phase 2", which has made it possible to stop, inspect, seize and reroute vessels on the high seas suspected of being used for people trafficking.

A total of 25 European countries currently contribute in various measure to the operation, both financially as well as by supplying military assets and/or personnel, and the EU has earmarked 12 million euro to covering mission costs through July 2016.¹¹ Then the European Council has extended its mandate until July 2017, by adding two additional tasks: training of the Libyan coastguards and navy and contributing to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya. As of October 2016, 96 suspected smugglers and traffickers have been arrested, 337 boats have been disposed, and more than 29,300 lives were saved at sea.¹² Italy has deployed about 620 military personnel, and the Cavour aircraft carrier acts as flagship for the operation, which at currently deploy five ships and six air assets consisting of aircraft and helicopters. In view of the recent developments in the Mediterranean, it is probable that the next and more militarily robust phase will hinge on the consolidation of the Libyan national accord government. Extension of Sophia mandate to Libya's territorial waters has been ruled out for the moment pending explicit request by the Libyan government.

Finally, the Italian mission Mare Sicuro sees five ships, two submarines and 900 personnel deployed to the central Mediterranean, to enhance military presence in the area in order also to guard fishing areas and protect Italian offshore energy platforms.

Updated 30 November 2016

¹⁰ The name of a baby born on the EUNAVFOR MED vessel which saved her pregnant mother in the Mediterranean Sea.

¹¹ Alessandro Ungaro, "Eunavfor Med guarda alla Libia", in *AffarInternazionali*, 15 October 2015, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=3198>.

¹² European External Action Service, *EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia starts training of Libyan Navy Coast Guard and Libyan Navy*, 27 October 2016, <http://europa.eu/!Nn49Vt>.

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