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Italy and NATO: What Defence?

by Francesca Monaco and Tommaso De Zan

ABSTRACT

On 19 November 2015, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), with the support of the NATO Public Diplomacy Division and with the strategic partnership of Finmeccanica, organised a conference in Rome in the context of the Defence Matter project. The conference, entitled "Italia e Nato: quale difesa?" (Italy and NATO: what defence?), focused on the reorganisation of the Italian defence system in the Euro-Atlantic security context. This report presents the main themes discussed by the speakers. Starting from an overview of the current international scenario and, in particular, of the threats arising along the Eastern and Southern borders of the Atlantic Alliance, the discussants have examined how NATO, the European Union and Italy are dealing with these security issues.

Italy | Italy's military policy | NATO | CSDP



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Introduction

On 19 November 2015, the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) with the support of the NATO Public Diplomacy Division and with the strategic partnership of Finmeccanica, organised a conference in Rome within the framework of the Defence Matter project on the reorganisation of the Italian defence-system within the Euro-Atlantic framework. The conference, entitled "Italy and NATO: what defence?" has seen the participation of the following guests: gen. Heinrich Brauss (Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning), gen. Vincenzo Camporini (Vice-President of IAI), MP Francesco Garofani (Head of the Defence Committee at the Chamber of Deputy), gen. Claudio Graziano (Chief of the Italian Defence General Staff), MP Andrea Manciuilli (President of the Italian delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly), Alessandro Marrone (Senior Fellow at IAI), Mauro Moretti (CEO and General Manager of Finmeccanica), Roberta Pinotti (Minister of Defence). This report aims at giving a brief overview of the key issues discussed during the conference. By starting from the analysis of the current international scenario, with a specific focus on threats coming from the Eastern and Southern flanks, the speakers have examined how NATO, EU and Italy are going to operate within this context.

The Eastern flank

The illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, together with the Ukrainian crisis, have brought back to Europe a Cold War scenario, after several years of stability in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall. The Ukrainian crisis, besides the consequent Russian military activities along the Baltic and Scandinavian borders and the modernisation of Moscow's armed forces, has brought NATO's focus back to the "conventional challenge". Nonetheless, Russian activities include also some

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new elements linked to the concept of "hybrid war"¹ or "non-linear war."² This notion refers to the utilisation of a wide spectrum of tactics and means (from special forces and cybernetic operations to propaganda and deployment of conventional forces). The aim is to generate uncertainty among the enemies and create such an ambiguous situation, that it is difficult for the opposing forces to operate. In order to tackle this threat, all actors involved, primarily NATO Allies, had to adjust in order to arrange a new strategy and adequate means.



Roberta Pinotti

The Southern flank

On the Southern flank, the political instability in North Africa and the Middle East has had and still has significant repercussions on European security, both in terms of migration flows towards Europe and of possible new attacks by terroristic organisations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. As Paris attacks of 13 November have showed, the IS currently stands as the most dangerous and imminent threat to European security. Despite being an asymmetric threat the Al-Baghdadi organisation presents some elements of "symmetry", thus differing from Al-Qaeda. First, ISIS is fighting a conventional war both against Syrian and Iraqi military forces in order to gain territories and strengthen the "Islamic State". Secondly, the terroristic organisation is conducting also a media war, with an extensive use of modern technologies and social media, which should be tackled by adopting innovative communication policies. Lastly, the IS aims at spreading "jihad" at a global level carrying out terroristic attacks beyond the regions of conventional military operations.

At the regional level, "variable-geometry" alliances and the lack of a common political vision contribute to further complicate the situation. While on the Eastern flank the relationship between NATO and Russia is still tense, on the Southern flank some NATO allies (primarily France) are carrying out military operations in cooperation with Moscow. Nevertheless, the lack of agreement on Syria and especially on the

¹ Andreas Jacobs e Guillaume Lasconjarias, "NATO's Hybrid Flanks: Handling Unconventional Warfare in the South and the East", in *NDC Research Papers*, No. 112 (April 2015), <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news.php?icode=798>.

² Can Kasapoglu, "Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-linear Warfare and Reflexive Control", in *NDC Research Papers*, No. 121 (November 2015), <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=877>.



Heinrich Brauss

future of the President Bashar Al-Assad has frustrated negotiations efforts so far.

The application of tailored counter-measures is crucial in order to tackle such a unique and multiform threat as ISIS, which operates in the complicated Syrian-Iraqi context. Up to the present, the Western response on the Southern flank lacked coherence, and the implementation of a clear strategy is still required. A

political vision based on negotiation with regional powers and local actors could favour interventions by third actors to support the stabilisation of Libya or the implementation of most effective countermeasures against IS.

NATO

The increasing number of crises on both the Eastern and Southern flanks has led to the diversification of threat perception among NATO Allies. On the one hand, Baltic countries, Norway and Poland consider Russia as the main threat to their security and view collective defence, as the main task for NATO. On the other hand, Southern allies (among which Italy plays a fundamental role) seek to draw NATO's attention on the Southern flank. Additionally, the attenuated US leadership as a result of the Obama's administration disengagement strategy from the Middle East seems to have fostered the pursuit of national solutions.

As far as the Eastern flank is concerned, the Russian renewed aggressiveness has taken the Allies by surprise. In fact, between 1990 and 2013, Russia was perceived to be less threatening than during the Cold war period and NATO and its member states have reorganised their defence posture under this assumption. Following the Ukrainian crisis, the Allies took some important decisions at the 2014 Wales Summit, such as the adoption of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). The RAP entails an immediate increase of military forces and assurance measures in Eastern Europe, as well as long-term measures aimed at reforming the Alliance military capabilities (adaptation measures) to enable it to respond more quickly to emergency situations. Despite being conceived as a response to any kind of threats the RAP implementation has hitherto been limited to Eastern Europe and land components. In this regard, the option of an Italian-led political, diplomatic and military initiative has been suggested. This would aim at developing the RAP according to a joint perspective able to integrate a maritime dimension and ready to face crises on the Southern flank. However, according to the panellists compared to Southern allies, Eastern European member states have been more effective in influencing NATO's Agenda and drawing the Alliance's attention on Russian renewed assertiveness.

European Union

The EU has also been called into question by the recent developments in the international arena. In this regard, the discussion has underlined limits and opportunities of the European action.

The defence sector has always been a marginal issue within the EU framework, even at the institutional level, as a specific defence decision setting does not exist yet. In fact, defence issues are discussed within the Foreign Affairs Council meetings in Defence Ministers configuration. The lack of EU funding for defence-related research projects further highlights this aspect, as only research projects with a proven dual-use application (both civil and military) have hitherto been eligible for funding. Another limit of the European action relates to its tendency to adopt a reactive rather than proactive approach to crisis and emergency situations. For instance, this has been the case as regards the migration crisis in the Mediterranean and the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. In the first case, EU gave late reply to the Italian request for support, as the EU operation EUNAVFORMED has been launched only in 2015 (to note Italy has been conducting the Mare Nostrum operation since October 2013). In the second case, before the Paris attacks the focus of the European action has been limited to humanitarian relief for the Syrian population. The tragic event marked a turning point in the European approach. On the one hand, the President of the Commission Jean Claude Juncker mentioned the possibility for EU countries' spending against terrorism to be assessed outside the Growth and Stability Pact. Most importantly, the EU Defence Ministers unanimously decided to activate the mutual defence clause under art. 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty. This article implies the obligation for EU member states to lend aid and assistance whenever another member state undergoes an armed aggression on its territory. According to some panellists the adoption of art. 42.7 might represent an opportunity to strengthen EU defence policy. In addition, greater cooperation in common defence programs could also serve this purpose. A common and shared response is necessary to tackle a complex threat like terrorism. The reaction should go beyond bilateral assistance and resort to Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) missions.



From left to right: Mauro Moretti, Andrea Manciulli, Vincenzo Camporini, Francesco Garofani, Claudio Graziano

Italy

Given its geographical position as well as its membership in both NATO and the European Union, all the above-mentioned dynamics may affect Italian security. In fact, Rome is more focused on the Mediterranean and Middle East scenarios. Nonetheless, its NATO membership calls for active participation in the formulation



Mauro Moretti

of the Allied defence policies.

Italy could contribute to implement the RAP according to a greater joint force perspective, by giving more emphasis on air and maritime components and developing operational planning in the Alliance's Southern flank. On the one hand, the deployment scenarios of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force – the NATO's spearhead force – should involve others contexts than

the Eastern flank. On the other hand, the mandate of the NATO mission Active Endeavour could be enhanced in terms of maritime security in the Mediterranean.

The Italian defence budget is a key issue not only in a national perspective but also for its relevance in the international context. For instance, within the Euro-Atlantic framework, defence expenditures represent a signal of commitment to the Alliance, whose capabilities mostly rely on member's contributions. It follows that increasing defence investments stand more as a political rather than economic commitment. In this regard, a closer look to the Italian defence expenditures figures could provide a useful insight. In 2014, Italy spent 0.87 percent of its GDP in its defence budget, after a decade of stagnation or even cuts to military expenditures. In the same year, at the NATO Wales Summit, member states committed to halt any further decrease in defence expenditures aiming at a real term increase. The goal is to reach a minimum spending of 2 percent of GDP within a decade. According to some evaluations, in 2016, only four European countries out of 31 (considering both NATO and non-NATO members) will not increase their defence expenditures. More specifically: Greece, Luxembourg, Sweden, which has planned an increase between 2017 and 2019, and Italy. Thus, Rome lags behind the main European countries – France, Germany, Poland, United Kingdom and Spain – with possible implications on its bargaining power in multilateral negotiations. Furthermore, the allocation of resources within the 2014 Italian defence budget indicates a low return on investment, as 68 percent of the total budget was devoted to the personnel expenses, 23 percent to the investment category and only 9 percent to training, maintenance and operational costs. Such a situation could potentially jeopardize force projection and deployment in robust international combat operations.

The *White Paper for International Security and Defence*, adopted by Italy in April 2015, envisages a series of important reforms aimed at rationalising the Italian defence system.³ Among them, speakers recalled: the governance reform, particularly concerning the joint level and the relationship between the political

³ Italian Ministry of Defence, *White Paper for International Security and Defence*, 30 April 2015, http://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Documents/2015/07_Luglio/White%20book.pdf.

authority and the military; the budget reform for a more efficient and effective spending; the rational reorganisation of commands, offices and the logistics; the review of acquisition mechanisms; measures to reshape the personnel pyramid and recruitment procedures. The Italian White Paper constitutes a “reformist promise” made by the political and institutional leadership to both defence stakeholders and Italian public opinion. Nonetheless, according to panellists, these provisions need to be quickly implemented at the legislative level.



Conference participants

To conclude, panellists expressed some concerns about two issues: firstly, the lack of a national security culture; and secondly, the relational gap between institutions and public opinion, increased by partial, non-contextualised and often wrong information broadcasted by media (e.g. speculations about the increase in defence expenditure).

Conclusions

European security is threatened by the ongoing conflicts along its Eastern and Southern flanks. Such a situation requires a broad reflection and a long-term approach. These need to take into account the complexity of the international environment as well as the potential role that NATO, the EU and Italy might play in this context. The new challenges can and should represent an opportunity for growth for all actors involved.

As for NATO, the discussion highlighted the two main threats the Alliance is facing on both its Eastern and Southern flanks. Despite being different by nature, these threats have a point in common. While requiring different responses, they both pose the same challenge for NATO: adapting to a mutable and ever-changing threat. The key priority for the EU should be to refocus on defence. Indeed, these have long been marginalised within its policy debate. The EU can support NATO, by giving concrete and complementary responses to both the Russian hybrid threat and the transnational security challenge posed by ISIS.

In conclusion, the fully implementation of the Italian defence reform, may provide the country with more efficient and effective means to deal with all these dynamics and play a significant role in the international arena. The challenge for Italy is to build a more effective defence policy and a more solid defence culture, even through the application of these concrete measures.

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Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffariInternazionali*), two series of research papers (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Papers*) and other papers' series related to IAI research projects.

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