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What strategy for Italy in the Mediterranean basin: rethinking the Italian approach to foreign, security and defence policy

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ABSTRACT

The strategic culture of Italy, as it came out after the end of World War II, constitutes a crucial factor in understanding the Italian approach to foreign, security and defence policy. The pillars of pacifism, multilateralism and internationalism are crucial elements for comprehending the external action of Rome. These elements have influenced the Italian posture in the current Libyan crisis, where several and important Italian national interests are at stake. The Libyan scenario is characterized by the overlapping of domestic and foreign dynamics, by the coexistence of a civil conflict between the two major national factions and a proxy war between several regional and global powers. It is also part of a broader arc of instability and insecurity that embraces the entire southeastern flank of the Mediterranean basin, where emerging powers are assuming a more active and assertive posture, looking to advance their interests. Thus, a new strategy for Italy is needed, both at the national and international levels. On the one hand, it is necessary to develop a solid culture in Italy on the importance of foreign, security and defence policy, starting to think international affairs in a more strategic way: on the other, it is necessary to implement concrete, pragmatic and realistic steps in the international arena. In particular, it is necessary to identify the real interests and priorities for the country and to assume an integrated approach, combining multilateralism, bilateralism and unilateralism. Finally, all the instruments at Italy's disposal should be wisely used, finding the right mixt between more and less traditional tools, in order to rethink the overall Italian foreign, security and defence policy in the Mediterranean basin.

Ai miei genitori

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

- A&D Aerospace and Defence
- AISE Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Esterna
- AISI Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Interna
- BRI Belt and Road Initiative
- CASD Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa
- CISR Comitato Interministeriale per la Sicurezza della Repubblica
- DC Democrazia Cristiana
- DGSE Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure
- DIS Dipartimento delle Informazioni per la Sicurezza
- ECSC European Coal and Steel Community
- EEC European Economic Community
- EEZ Exclusive Economic Zone
- EU European Union
- FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation
- GDP Gross Domestic Product
- GNA Government of National Accord
- GNC General National Congress
- HoR House of Representatives
- IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali
- IR International Relations
- IRBM Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile
- ISIS Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- ISPI Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale
- LNA Libyan National Army
- MA Military Assistance
- MENA Middle East and North Africa
- MIASIT Missione bilaterale di assistenza e supporto in Libia
- MIDs Militarized Interstate Disputes
- NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

- NOC National Oil Corporation
- NSC National Security Council
- NSG National Salvation Government
- NTC National Transitional Council
- PCI Partito Comunista Italiano
- PCI Project of Common Interest
- R&D Research and Development
- S&R Stabilization and Reconstruction
- SFA Security Force Assistance
- SIPRI Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
- SLOC Sea Lines of Communication
- SMEs Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
- SP Stability Policing
- SSR Security Sector Reform
- TCF Trillion Cubic Feet
- TEU Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit
- UAE United Arab Emirates
- UN United Nations
- UNIFIL United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
- UNSMIL United Nations Support Mission in Libya
- US United States
- USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Mediterranean basin has acquired a new centrality at the international level, becoming one of the most dynamic regions in the world. Its location as a crossroad between three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia, places it at the core of the political and economic relationships between the numerous countries of the area, willing to exploit the opportunities it presents, as well as to defend and advance their interests in the area. Italy, probably more than any other State in the region, occupies a crucial and central position in the Mediterranean, not only geographically, but also geopolitically. Indeed, the Italian peninsula, with more than 8,000 km of coastline¹, has a natural projection in the Mediterranean Sea, up to the point that sometimes it is defined as a “natural aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean”, talking in military terms.

However, over the last years, the Mediterranean Sea, a basin full of economic opportunities, trade relationships and cultural exchange, has become also one of the most unstable regions in the world, being characterized by several socio-economic and political crises, long-lasting civil wars and harsh military confrontations. Being partially a local reflection of a global trend, and partially an autonomous and indigenous phenomenon, such general trend of instability and insecurity has paved the way, and at the same time has been fueled by, an increased geopolitical competition between the States of the area, in conjunction with many global actors. Italy is at the core of such storm, which more than ever represents a crucial challenge for the Italian foreign, security and defence policy.

¹ “Piattaforma Tecnologica Nazionale Marittima”, Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti, http://www.mit.gov.it/mit/mop_all.php?p_id=06441

The aim of the present thesis is thus to analyze the role played by Italy in the Mediterranean basin, with a specific focus on the Libyan crisis. The idea of focusing the work on this topic emerged from the awareness of the importance of foreign, security and defence policy for every country, and from the parallel consciousness that in Italy there is scarce interest for these issues, despite their great importance.

Chapter 1 will deal with the Italian approach to foreign, security and defence policy, focusing on the so-called strategic culture of Italy. It will provide a brief overview of the literature on the strategic culture of countries, presenting the most important research conducted on this topic over the years, moving then forward to the study of the main characteristics and peculiarities of the aforementioned Italian strategic culture. Historical, constitutional and cultural factors will be considered. In particular, the differences between the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy on the one hand, and the Italian Republic on the other, will be discussed, in order to better understand the historical developments that have led to the current strategic culture of Italy. Moreover, the work will dedicate particular emphasis to the defence and security aspects, outlining the role, functions and historical evolution of the Italian Armed Forces, as well as of the military missions conducted by Italy at the international level.

Chapter 2 will briefly describe the global strategic scenario, with special reference to the international confrontation between the United States and China. It will then deal with the geopolitical panorama of the Mediterranean basin, focusing in particular on four macro-trends that will be discussed in the study: the American posture in the region; the growing presence of China; the naval arms race in the Mediterranean basin; the competition over energetic resources. Finally, the third part of the chapter will be dedicated to one of the most complex and serious crises in progress in the region: the one in Libya. Indeed, the Libyan crisis constitutes a crucial dossier for the Italian foreign, security and defence policy: it is one the most important, delicate and problematic issues that Italy is facing at the international level. In fact, the Libyan crisis is characterized by the intersection of internal dynamics and external interference, thus the analysis will be carried out on three levels: the civil conflict; the domestic relations and dynamics between clans, tribes, militias and other local Libyan actors; the role played by external powers, with a special attention paid to Italy. The aim of the chapter is to briefly describe the enormous complexity of the Mediterranean basin with a special focus on Libyan crisis, in order to outline the role played by Rome in such a complicated context.

Lastly, Chapter 3 will put together the main findings of the first two parts, trying to propose some policy guidelines for Italy, at both the national and international levels, in order to better deal with the complexity of the current international geopolitical scenario. At the domestic level, the work will give particular emphasis on the necessity to develop and to fuel a solid security culture in Italy, trying to outline its importance in setting the ground for a better comprehension of the international phenomena and for a more dynamic and effective action of Italy at the international level. In discussing the cultural implications of this approach, the 2007 Italian Intelligence reform and the role of security services will be addressed as well. At the international level, an in-depth analysis will be carried out on the role played by Italy in Libya over the last year and a half, and possible future scenarios and evolutions of the crisis will be considered as well. Mentions will be made of the recent developments of the conflict, and of the possible strategy that Italy should adopt in order to preserve and defend its interests in the country. The aim of the chapter is to outline a possible overall strategy for Italy in the Mediterranean basin, moving from the assumption that domestic factors regarding the Italian strategic culture are as important as the international ones.

Finally, two clarifications should be made. First of all, in carrying out the analysis of the geopolitical scenarios of the Libyan crisis and the Mediterranean region, I relied entirely on open source data and information (what in the context of intelligence activities is called OSINT – Open Source Intelligence). Second, this thesis has been written between June and August 2020. Treating dynamics still in progress, I tried to update the events described and the analyses carried out as much as possible. It is not an easy task to write about a topic, such as the Libyan crisis, which is characterized by continuous events, updates and even surprises. Indeed, the aim of the thesis is not to present a tactical analysis of the Libyan situation, but rather an overview of the main trends and dynamics of the conflict, especially in the light of the role, priorities and interests of Italy.

STRATEGIC CULTURE IN ITALY: THE ITALIAN APPROACH TO FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

1.1 Introduction

In International Relations (IR) theory, the realist approach, with its diverse and multiple variations, has traditionally been the dominant paradigm, even becoming to some extent the hegemonic doctrine in the field between the end of World War II and the 1970s².

The main assumptions of the realist theory are:

1. States are the most important actors in the international arena (for some realists, even the only relevant actors). States are characterized by territorial sovereignty and political integrity, recognizing no superior authority within their borders.
2. States are unitary and rational actors. Their actions are based on the pursuit of national interests, conceived mainly in military and political terms. States act according to a cost/benefit analysis and their domestic characteristics (political and institutional system, socio-economic structure, cultural traditions, etc.) do not influence their behavior at the international level. Thus, classical realists theorize a complete separation between foreign policy and domestic policy.
3. The international system in which all States are situated is anarchic in its nature, meaning that there is no superior entity or authority at the international level ruling over all the States.

² F. Mazzei, R. Marchetti, F. Petito, "Manuale di politica internazionale", EGEA, 2010, p. 32.

4. The relations between States are based on their mutual political strength, thus putting security and military issues at the top of States' agenda.

In the neorealist approach, as its most important representative, Kenneth Waltz, argues, the international system, with its anarchic structure and the power relations between the States that form it, is the most important factor influencing international politics and the behavior of States. Neorealism is also called "structural realism", since the anarchic structure of the international arena is the main variable explaining the dynamics and relations between States. Given the structure of the system, it is possible, according to Waltz, to study, understand, and even predict the actions and the behavior of States³.

In this sense, one could argue that the behavior of the States seems to be almost completely determined by the international constraints, leaving few to zero room for maneuver to States, and limiting their actual capacity to choose what to do and not to do among different options. Indeed, this has traditionally been one of the most criticized aspects of the realist theory: considering all the States as monolithic blocks, with their actions driven mostly, if not only, by international factors, thus completely dividing foreign policy from domestic policy and annulling the importance of the political, social and cultural domestic characteristics of the single States.

Actually, this view could turn into a form of determinism, a critique often made to realists, for instance just to Kenneth Waltz⁴. Waltz, by highlighting how the anarchic structure of the international system is the main and most important factor influencing the action of States, seems to embrace the idea that the system not simply influences, but actually completely determines States' behavior.

This argument is part of a broader debate centered on the dichotomy between determinism and voluntarism and between agent and structure. The issue was raised in the IR debate by Alexander Wendt, the most important representative of the social constructivism, a new perspective that came up as a response and an attempt to overcome neorealist theories⁵. The main question is the following: is it the structure that influences and, to some extent, determines the behavior of the single agent? Or on the contrary, is the agent more or less autonomous from the system in which is located and thus free to

³ Ivi, p. 68.

⁴ Ivi, p. 69.

⁵ Ivi, p. 13.

choose its actions? The issue at stake is whether to put more emphasis on the structural factors that condition the behavior of agents (determinism), or on the capacity of actors to make their own decisions almost independently from the system in which they are (voluntarism).

The social constructivist approach, theorized by Alexander Wendt, considers the international system as composed by social structures which are produced by intersubjective practices, namely the relationships between the different actors. These practices have an impact on the way in which the identities and the interests of the actors are shaped: what the states are and how they behave is the product of these intersubjective practices and thus the result of the relationships between States themselves. Anarchy is what states make of it, Wendt argues in one of his famous writings⁶, it is the social construct resulting from a process, hence denying that anarchy is a natural, intrinsic feature of the international system, as realists believe⁷. In the end, States “construct” each other through the relationships they establish among them⁸. International structures are basically social phenomena: they are shaped by the way in which States perceive each other and create mutual expectations about their behavior⁹. As a consequence, the role of ideas is crucial. They are the base upon which social structures are constructed: it is the ideational factor that shapes the behavior of States by constructing their identities and interests. Indeed, Wendt’s constructivism has also been called “structural idealism”¹⁰.

Within the theory of constructivism in IR, a specific area of research emerged with regard to foreign policy studies, namely the analysis of the security cultures of States. The study of security cultures is aimed at explaining how the approach of States towards security issues is not purely determined by the structural conditions of the international system, such as anarchy and the distribution of power. On the contrary, it is also influenced by ideational and cultural factors. These factors shape the way in which policymakers see and interpret international events, thus leading to different decisions and strategies adopted by the actors involved when it comes to security and defence¹¹.

⁶ A. Wendt, “Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics”, *International Organization*, March 1992, p. 395.

⁷ L. Zambarnardi, “Wendt: la costruzione sociale della politica internazionale”, in F. Andreatta, “Le grandi opere delle relazioni internazionali”, Il Mulino, 2011, p. 228.

⁸ F. Mazzei, R. Marchetti, F. Petito, “Manuale di politica internazionale”, EGEA, 2010, p. 174.

⁹ P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 31.

¹⁰ L. Zambarnardi, “Wendt: la costruzione sociale della politica internazionale”, in F. Andreatta, “Le grandi opere delle relazioni internazionali”, Il Mulino, 2011, p. 227.

¹¹ P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 33.

More specifically, within the broader category of security cultures, an interesting, original and peculiar field of research has developed, namely the one of strategic cultures¹². The study of strategic cultures of States focuses on the major strategic issues a country has to deal with in the international arena. Generally speaking, a strategic culture influences the way in which the recourse to war, the use of military force and the pursuit of national interests are perceived by States. The following paragraph will provide an overview of the studies conducted over the years on strategic cultures, while the subsequent paragraph will focus on the peculiarities and characteristics of the strategic culture of Italy.

1.2 Strategic culture: definition and methodological considerations¹³

The notion of strategic culture has no clear and universally accepted definition. Over the last years, several thinkers, scholars and intellectuals have discussed about strategic cultures of States, and in general how culture can have an impact on national security policies and decision-making processes. As Jeffrey Lantis points out, “the argument that culture could influence national security policy was grounded in classic works”¹⁴, such as the writings of Thucydides, Sun Tzu and Machiavelli, but also in the well-known Carl von Clausewitz’s “On War”¹⁵.

Probably, the first to use the terms “strategic culture” in a more specific and organic reasoning was Jack Snyder, who in 1977 wrote a report for the United States Air Force, which was then published by the Rand Corporation. The title of Snyder’s work was “The Soviet Strategic Culture: implications for limited nuclear operations” and it was born as a response to the principles expressed by the so-called “Schlesinger Doctrine”.

In 1974, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger announced a new strategic doctrine regarding the use of nuclear armaments by the United States (US). The core concept of the new strategic thinking was that of “limited nuclear options”. The new American policy provided for the use of nuclear weapons not only as means of deterrence through a massive nuclear retaliation, but also for the possibility of

¹² Ivi, p. 45.

¹³ The goal of this paragraph is to provide a general and quick overview of the main research on strategic culture in order to set the framework before moving on to study the strategic culture of Italy. Thus, the purpose is not to furnish an organic, comprehensive and in-depth review of all the studies and theories on strategic culture, since this is not the right place to properly address these issues.

¹⁴ J. S. Lantis, “Strategic Culture: from Clausewitz to Constructivism”, in *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 10, October 2005, p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

limited and selected nuclear strikes against sparsely inhabited cities or conventional military targets of the Warsaw Pact¹⁶. According to Schlesinger's reasoning, the new strategic thinking of the US would have made the American use of nuclear armaments more flexible and would have limited the chance of uncontrolled escalation if deterrence had failed¹⁷. One important assumption of this doctrine was that the new American strategic thinking would have been met by an analogous strategic doctrine elaborated by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), thus implying that the Soviets used to think and conceptualize strategic matters in the same way as the Americans did.

Contrary to this assumption, Snyder pointed out the fact that "Soviet leaders and strategists are not culture-free, preconception-free game theorists"¹⁸. They should not be considered as men perfectly following the logic of game theory, but instead as "politicians and bureaucrats who have developed and have been socialized into a strategic culture that is in many ways unique"¹⁹.

According to Snyder, the strategic culture can be defined as "the sum total of ideas, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy"²⁰. He believed that the USSR possessed a unique strategic culture, which was quite different from the American one. Soviet leaders and decision-makers were socialized into a specific set of ideals, beliefs, attitudes and patterns of behavior and consequently, according to Snyder, they saw and interpreted strategic problems through the lens of their own strategic culture.

In particular, the Soviet strategic culture was the result of the combination of three factors: a unique historical experience, the predominant role of the military in the elaboration of strategic doctrines and the Soviet Union's unique strategic situation. Snyder made it clear that the Soviet strategic culture was not a monolith: indeed, he found the presence of two subcultures, meaning two subsections of the

¹⁶ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 54.

¹⁷ J. L. Snyder, "The Soviet Strategic Culture: implications for limited nuclear operations", The Rand Corporation, September 1977, p. 1.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 8.

overall strategic thinking, which on the one hand were partially different from each other²¹, but on the other coexisted and were part of the same broader strategic culture.

Moreover, Snyder pointed out that strategic cultures are characterized by a certain degree of continuity, thus evolving and changing only marginally over time²². Adjustments may actually occur within a strategic culture, but they “would most likely be evolutionary, not revolutionary”²³.

Snyder’s work paved the way for a number of research and studies on the strategic cultures of States over the following years, to such an extent that it is possible to find three different generations of studies on this field, according to a classification made by Alastair Johnson in 1995²⁴. However, before moving forward and briefly describing the thinking of the next authors, two clarifications are to be made with regard to Snyder.

The first one is that the notion of “strategy” in Snyder’s work is mainly referred to nuclear strategy only. As it has been said before, Snyder wrote his report as a response to the new strategic, meaning nuclear, doctrine elaborated by the US. Even if his considerations on strategic cultures can be applied to the use of force in general and to the overall way in which a State conceptualizes its foreign and security policy, he made specific reference to nuclear strategy only. Besides, he was in the midst of the Cold War, and the main security issues at that time were related to the use of nuclear armaments.

The second point to highlight is that, just because of the aforementioned peculiarities, it could be debatable whether to fully include Snyder in the first generation of studies on strategic culture (as it is often done) or not. His purpose was probably not that of elaborating an organic study on strategic cultures, but perhaps that of better comprehending Soviet decision-making processes with regard to a very specific situation, namely nuclear doctrines. In fact, as Alastair Johnston will later underline, “Snyder has distanced himself from the first generation of literature”²⁵.

²¹ Ivi, p. 10.

²² Ivi, p. 9.

²³ Ivi, p. 39.

²⁴ A. I. Johnston, “Thinking about strategic culture”, *International Security*, Volume 19, Number 4, Spring 1995, p. 36. In the following pages, the first and third generations of studies will be discussed, for their importance in respectively bringing out the debate and conceptualizing it with a more rigorous methodology.

²⁵ A. I. Johnston, “Thinking about strategic culture”, *International Security*, Volume 19, Number 4, Spring 1995, p. 36.

Following Snyder's work, in the 1980s Colin Gray compared the US and USSR strategic cultures, finding what he called different "national styles" in dealing with military affairs between the two superpowers. Gray defined strategic culture as "referring to modes and thought of action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience, from aspirations for responsible behavior in national terms and from the civic culture and way of life"²⁶. In these terms, the strategic culture provides the context within which security issues, in particular those related to nuclear armaments, are debated, and policy options are elaborated²⁷. Thus, understanding the strategic culture of a country helps decision-makers to better comprehend why specific choices are made by the ruling class of that country. Moreover, strategic culture has a "semi-permanent influence" upon policy makers since it is grounded in the national historical experience of the States: only a new historical experience could challenge existing modes of thought and action, thus changing the national style of the country²⁸.

However, Gray was also aware of the weaknesses of the concept. Strategic cultures could be seen as totally determining strategic choices, limiting the behavior of States and thus resulting into analytically useless tools because of their tautology: separating the independent variables from the dependent ones would be impossible in a reliable way²⁹.

The end of the Cold War brought new attention to the broader role of culture in security studies. This was in part due to the rise of constructivism as a new IR theory, with its emphasis on the role of ideas and culture in socially constructing the identities and interests of States. Indeed, in the 1990s the so-called third generation of studies emerged with regard to strategic cultures of States, trying to overcome the determinism of the first-generation literature³⁰.

One of the most relevant representatives of the third generation is Thomas Berger, who in 1998 conducted a comparative study on the strategic cultures of Germany and Japan. Rather than the concept of strategic culture, Berger used the one of "political-military culture", trying to explain how the latter impacts on national defence and the policies adopted in the security realm. Analyzing (West) Germany

²⁶ C. Gray, "National Style in Strategy": the American Example", *International Security*, 6, no. 2, Fall 1981, p. 35.

²⁷ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 65.

²⁸ J. S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: from Clausewitz to Constructivism", in *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 10, October 2005, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ A. I. Johnston, "Thinking about strategic culture", *International Security*, Volume 19, Number 4, Spring 1995, p. 41.

foreign and security policy before and after the end of the Cold War, Thomas Berger found some events, periods and opportunities where Germany (but also Japan) could have pursued a more active and autonomous military policy, but it chose not to do that³¹. The main reason explaining the international behavior of Germany lies in its “culture of antimilitarism”, as Berger calls it. This culture is mainly the product of the historical process of confrontation with the country’s past, characterized by Nazism and the atrocities of World War II. As a result of this process, a new national German identity emerged, whose main characteristics are the limitation to the use of military force and a strong antimilitary sentiment prevailing in the German society. Furthermore, in trying to prevent his theory from being tautological, Berger believes that the political-military culture directly influences the policy-making process in different ways. In brief, he thinks that it conditions the overall way in which actors see and perceive the international system, the challenges posed by it, the domestic political environment and the goals and norms of political actors themselves³². In this sense, the political-military culture directly shapes the national interest of a State, which is not taken as given or predetermined.

Another important author is John Duffield. Focusing again the attention on Germany, in 1998 Duffield tried to elaborate a framework for explaining the impact on German foreign policy of the combination of both external influences and domestic political factors. Indeed, according to Duffield, it is the combination of institutional factors at the international level and cultural factors at the domestic one that have shaped German foreign and security policy during and after the Cold War. Generally speaking, Duffield believes that the main impact that national security cultures, as he called them, have on societies and decision-makers is to make them more predisposed towards certain actions or policies and less prone towards others³³. According to Duffield, the German security culture is characterized by an inclination to multilateralism, an aversion for assuming a leading role at the international level in security matters, and a skeptical attitude about the utility and use of the military instrument³⁴.

When dealing with the impact of culture on the strategic behavior of States, it is necessary to mention the cultural studies conducted by Peter Katzenstein. Working in a pure constructivist

³¹ K. Longhurst, “On strategic culture”, in “Germany and the use of force”, 2018, p. 12.

³² Ivi, p. 13.

³³ J. S. Lantis, “Strategic Culture: from Clausewitz to Constructivism”, in *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 10, October 2005, p. 5.

³⁴ K. Longhurst, “On strategic culture”, in “Germany and the use of force”, 2018, p. 14.

perspective, Katzenstein argues that the choices and the behaviors of States at the international level are culturally determined, and this aspect explains how in similar situations States act in different ways³⁵. In particular, according to Katzenstein, there are two aspects that are fundamental in determining the foreign and security policy of States: the cultural-institutional context and the national identity. Together they influence the process of formation of the national interests of a given State and the way in which the country tries to pursue them in the international arena. In this sense, interests are not exogenous and independent from the State, but instead a variable that has to be explained by domestic cultural factors of the State itself.³⁶

Within the third-generation studies on strategic cultures, Alastair Johnson's work is considered to be one of the most important and influential ones. In his "Cultural Realism: strategic culture and grand strategy in Chinese history", published in 1995, he made an organic, comprehensive and rigorous study of the Chinese approach to the use of military force, the strategic culture of China and the way in which it influences Chinese strategic behavior. Indeed, one of Johnson's aims was to formulate a definition of strategic culture that was falsifiable, or, as he says, "distinguishable from non-strategic culture variables"³⁷. He defines strategic culture as "an ideational milieu which limits behavioral choices", and as "a system of symbols" that establishes strategic preferences "by formulating concepts on the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs"³⁸. The "system of symbols" is constituted by basic assumptions on three key elements:

- the role and frequency of conflicts in human affairs (whether war is inevitable or can be avoided);
- the nature of the conflict as well as of the adversaries and threats (whether it is perceived as a zero-sum game or variable sum);
- the efficacy of violence.

Taken together, these three components form the central paradigm of a strategic culture³⁹. Then, in order to understand how strategic culture affects behavioral choices, from the answers to the three core

³⁵ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 34.

³⁶ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 35.

³⁷ A. I. Johnston, "Thinking about strategic culture", *International Security*, Volume 19, Number 4, Spring 1995, p. 45.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 46.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 47.

elements of a strategic culture Johnson derives some strategic options at the operational level. Indeed, depending on where along a spectrum a strategic culture is placed, the behavioral choices of actors change accordingly. For instance, at the high end of the spectrum (war considered as inevitable, conflict seen as a zero-sum game, violence believed to be highly effective against adversaries and threats), offensive strategies and a hard realpolitik model are likely to be pursued. Vice versa, at the low end of the continuum (war considered as neither necessary nor unavoidable, possibility for win-win solutions in conflicts, low level of effectiveness in the use of military force against enemies), diplomatic tools and a more accommodationist approach are more likely to be preferred by actors⁴⁰. In this way, Johnson seeks to explain how strategic culture impacts on the strategic behavior of States, trying to avoid the tautological conclusions of the first generation scholars by clearly distinguishing between the cultural factors (the so-called central paradigm) and the operational ones (the behavioral choices).

With regard to the differences between the first and third generations of studies on strategic cultures, several considerations can be made. First of all, it is possible to see how the reasoning of many authors in the third generation literature was not totally or even partially focused on the nuclear strategy of States; instead, the spectrum of research covers the overall approach of countries to foreign, security and military policy, concerning not only nuclear issues but also more conventional problems. Moreover, the research agenda itself expanded, and indeed the strategic culture of countries without nuclear armaments started to be analyzed, such as in the cases of Germany or Japan.

This was a direct consequence of the end of the Cold War, which brought new attention to other States rather than the “usual” US and (former) USSR and consequently a new perspective on strategy, now conceived with a broader scope (not only the traditional nuclear strategy which in fact dominated the Cold War). It can be said that the post-Cold War research agenda reflects the post-Cold War international system, where single States started to gradually reacquire some margins for maneuver lost during the Cold War and several national and regional crises as well as armed conflicts broke out all over the world. The national identities of States, of all the States, reemerged as key variables influencing the new dynamics of the international systems and cultural studies of national identities and security cultures of States emerged with them (it is not by coincidence that in the 1990s Samuel Huntington published his famous work “The clash of civilizations”).

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

In the next paragraph, I will provide an overview of the Italian strategic culture. In doing so, I will refer to Paolo Rosa's study, which in turn borrowed the definition of strategic culture from Johnson, who probably elaborated one of the most complete, organic and methodologically rigorous analyses on strategic culture.

1.3 The Italian strategic culture

The current Italian strategic culture is the product of the historical process of formation of a new national identity as it came out after the end of World War II. As Berger highlights the fact that the German strategic culture is the result of the confrontation of the German country with the atrocities of its past, so the Italian strategic culture was born after the Second World War, in parallel to the construction and consolidation of the new Italian State.

It is possible to argue that as the Italian Republic was born out of the ashes of World War II, so was the new Italian strategic culture, which is deeply embedded into the new political and institutional system. For this reason, the Italian strategic culture is characterized by a profound change compared to the pre-World War II period. Indeed, it is possible to find two different strategic cultures in Italy before and after the Second World War, which can be considered a turning point that produced a "paradigm shift". Thus, to better understand the current Italian strategic culture, namely the strategic culture of the Italian Republic, it is necessary to have a brief look at the main characteristics of the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy.

1.3.1 The Italian strategic culture during the Kingdom of Italy

The history of Italy, from the unification of the country in 1861 onward, is traditionally divided into three parts: the "Italia liberale", from the unification until 1922; the "Italia fascista", from 1922 until World War II; the "Italia repubblicana", from the end of the Second World War until today. Generally speaking, it is possible to argue that the Kingdom of Italy, comprising both the "Italia liberale" and the "Italia fascista", had one unique and specific strategic culture, and that World War II and its consequences caused a whole "paradigm shift" in Italy, leading to a completely new strategic culture for the newborn Italian Republic.

Following the three categories elaborated by Johnson and mentioned in the previous paragraph, it can be said that the Italian strategic culture during the Kingdom of Italy was characterized by the following features⁴¹:

- a conception of war as a regular and inevitable dynamic in the international relations between States;
- a perception of adversaries and enemies as actors posing serious and dangerous threats to the State, and thus a zero-sum game conception of the relations with them;
- the belief that the use of military force could be effective in pursuing the interests of the State and in defeating the enemies.

To these three points, I would add a fourth: namely, the perception of yourself and of your role and place in the international system. In this regard, the different ruling classes which alternated in power during the Kingdom of Italy had more or less the same vision, considering the country as a great power and placing it at the same level of its European neighbors. At least, this was the dominant thought, which however was in contrast with the Italian reality: after the unification, Italy was not a country as modern, developed and powerful as its main European neighbors. The liberal ruling class was thus caught in the middle of the contradiction between the real capabilities of the country on the one hand and its aspirations, or better the international aspirations of the governing elite itself on the other⁴². This contradiction led to the pursuit of foreign policy goals and aims that were probably above the real capacities of the country: Italy seemed to continuously seek international ranking, status and prestige that were higher than the ones it actually had.

This set of characteristics determined a strong inclination for adopting offensive military actions against other States, preferring this type of strategic option to more accommodationist solutions, such as pure defensive actions or diplomatic negotiations. As Rosa points out⁴³, it was quite natural for the liberal ruling class to think and conceive international affairs in terms of security issues and power relations between States. Moreover, when the circumstances required it and when it was deemed necessary, there were no problems or restrictions in recurring to military force in order to solve disputes with other States.

⁴¹ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 104.

⁴² A. Aresu, L. Gori, "L'interesse nazionale: la bussola dell'Italia", Il Mulino, 2018, p. 24.

⁴³ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 96.

The “natural” enemy of Italy was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, against which the three independence wars were fought. Indeed, to describe the relationships between the two countries, the word “Erbfeindschaft”, meaning “traditional enmity” (in Italian, “inimicizia secolare”) was used⁴⁴. In this perspective, the alliance treaty signed with Germany and Austria in 1882 could be seen as a temporary guarantee aimed at giving Italy the necessary time to develop the country and prepare herself for the future confrontation, which eventually arrived during the First World War, when Rome, despite the alliance treaty, went to war just against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The strategic culture of the “Italia fascista” shows a high degree of continuity with the strategic culture of the liberal phase of Italian history. Mussolini and the Fascist regime had a zero-sum game conception of international affairs⁴⁵: the pursuit of Italy’s security and national interests in the Mediterranean area was in contrast to the agenda of other States, in particular France and Great Britain, which were the main adversaries of the Kingdom of Italy, according to the Italian Prime Minister⁴⁶. War was thus conceived as inevitable, not only because it was the best tool to achieve the national goals, but also because Mussolini believed it was a way to test the determination and the strength of peoples: only the most powerful nations can aspire to the highest positions in the global hierarchies⁴⁷. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Italian fascist regime put great emphasis on the build-up of the military apparatus: military expenditures increased from 2,6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1923 to 18,4% in 1936⁴⁸.

Finally, following the same idea and the same perception of the country that the liberal ruling class had, the Fascist regime was even more determined in making Italy a great power, not only at the European level, but in the world arena as well. Mussolini promoted a vast military campaign to give Italy its colonial empire, like all the other major European powers. Indeed, the search for the international status and prestige and the will to make Italy a world power were among the reasons that underpinned the colonial conquests during the Fascist regime⁴⁹.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p.100.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 103.

⁴⁹ A. Aresu, L. Gori, “L’interesse nazionale: la bussola dell’Italia”, Il Mulino, 2018, p. 31.

1.3.2 The strategic culture of the Italian Republic

The Second World War represented a watershed moment in the Italian history. The defeat in the conflict, the civil war that broke out in Italy after the 1943 armistice and the division of the country in two parts for almost two years produced dramatic consequences. Not only Italy experienced the transition from dictatorship to democracy and from a monarchical to a republican institutional setting: World War II had radically changed the strategic culture of the newborn Italian Republic, which became totally different from the one of the Kingdom of Italy⁵⁰.

Italy came out of the war completely broken. The country was defeated both morally and militarily, it was occupied by foreign powers, losing part of its sovereignty, and it suffered a reduction in the national identity and international status and prestige⁵¹. The negotiations for the peace treaty which occurred between 1945 and 1947 marked the new state of affairs for Italy, which was treated as an enemy, together with Germany and Japan. Italy lost its colonial empire, keeping only a temporary protectorate in Somalia, and was obliged to give up to several contested territories in the northern part of the country, to the advantage of France on the western side and Yugoslavia on the eastern one (only the city of Trieste was to remain within Italian territory and under Italian sovereignty). Moreover, Italy was subject to several war reparations and military restrictions, with important limitations with regard to the future role, dimension and organization of the Armed Forces⁵².

The new Italian ruling class (guided in the first years after the war by the leader of Democrazia Cristiana, - DC – Alcide De Gasperi) developed new values and attitudes with regard to foreign and security policy: pacifism, internationalism, multilateralism. There was a complete reversal of the characteristics of the strategic culture of the previous liberal and fascist elites, shifting from aggressive, offensive and pure realpolitik policies to more accommodationist and pacifist ones. The clauses of the peace treaty mentioned above further reinforced these beliefs. The new elite in power, as well as the public opinion, considered the power politics adopted by the Fascist regime as one of the causes that led to the decline of Italy and the terrible situation in which it was after the war. Therefore, the new ruling class tried to avoid the possibility of a return to the previous militarism and power politics by institutionalizing the values and features of the new strategic culture, namely pacifism, internationalism,

⁵⁰ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 104.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 109.

⁵² Ivi, p. 112.

multilateralism. Indeed, as Rosa points out, a strategic culture tends to stabilize over time not only through socialization processes, but also by means of its institutionalization⁵³.

This process of institutionalization was carried out through three main steps: the participation in international multilateral organizations; the adoption of a pacifist constitution; the downsizing of the role played by military policy and the Armed Forces.

1.3.2.1 The Italian participation in international multilateral organizations

After the end of World War II, Italy had to rebuild its status and reputation as a member of the international community, deleting the image of a country morally, politically and militarily defeated with the war. The choice of participating in international multilateral organization was part of this precise and ambitious plan. Indeed, the membership in several organizations, the most important ones being the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, 1949), the United Nations (UN, 1955), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1951) and the European Economic Community (EEC, 1957), was aimed at three main goals. First, the pursuit of specific interests related to the specific role and functions of the organizations themselves, from the military (NATO), political (UN) or economic perspectives (ECSC, EEC). Second, reacquiring and consolidating over the time the international status lost with the war, overcoming the legacy of World War II and making the country a full, active and legitimate member of the international community⁵⁴, with a strong relationship with its western European neighbors and the United States. Third, anchoring Italy to the multilateral international framework that was being created during those years, thus ensuring the respect of international norms and principles and placing the conduct of the external action of the State under international law. These aspects marked a sharp contrast with the past behavior of Italy, characterized by unilateralism, militarism and the pursuit of national interest regardless the respect of international rules and norms⁵⁵.

1.3.2.2 The Italian Constitution

The characteristics of the Italian strategic culture, as it was born out of the Second World War, are reflected in the new Italian Constitution, which was drafted by the Constituent Assembly between 1946 and 1947, and officially entered into force on 1st January 1948.

⁵³ Ivi, p. 106.

⁵⁴ A. Aresu, L. Gori, "L'interesse nazionale: la bussola dell'Italia", Il Mulino, 2018, p. 37.

⁵⁵ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 113.

The vocation for pacifism and multilateralism is clearly present in the 1948 Constitution. The most important and clear example of this fact is Article 11, one of the so-called “fundamental principles” (namely, the first twelve articles of the Constitution). Article 11 states that “Italy rejects war as an instrument of aggression against the freedom of other peoples and as a mean for the settlement of international disputes”⁵⁶. In this way, the Constituent Assembly wanted to explicitly affirm that the new Italian Republic was fully devoted to the promotion of peaceful relations with all the other States of the international community, thus marking a sharp discontinuity with the recent past of the Fascist period, characterized by hostility and aggressiveness towards other countries. Moreover, the second part of Article 11 also states that “Italy agrees, on conditions of equality with other States, to the limitations of sovereignty that may be necessary to a world order ensuring peace and justice among the Nations. Italy promotes and encourages international organizations furthering such ends”⁵⁷. The limitations of sovereignty have to be read with regard to the aspiration of Italy to be fully reintegrated into the international community after the defeat, both practical and moral, of World War II and to the will of being part of the newborn United Nations⁵⁸. In addition, Article 52 affirms that “the defence of the country is a sacred duty for every citizen” and that “the organization of the armed forces shall be based on the democratic spirit of the Republic”⁵⁹. These two provisions, Articles 11 and 52, read in conjunction, clearly prohibit from a constitutional point of view the possibility of declaring a war of aggression against another State, maintaining instead the constitutionality of a self-defense war, conducted either individually or collectively, the latter in the framework of an international alliance, such as the NATO⁶⁰.

In this regard, a comparison can be made with the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Germany and of Japan, the other two countries that were defeated in the Second World War and that came out of it in a condition that was similar, if not worst, than the one of Italy.

In the first case, Article 26 of the German Basic Law, which came into effect in 1949, states that “acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially

⁵⁶ Constitution of the Italian Republic, english version, Senato della Repubblica, https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ The United Nations was established in 1945 but Italy was admitted as a member only in 1955.

⁵⁹ Constitution of the Italian Republic, english version, Senato della Repubblica, https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf.

⁶⁰ G. Dottori, “Questioni di pace e di guerra”, Aracne, 2006, p. 270.

to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional. They shall be criminalized”⁶¹. Moreover, Article 24 affirms, among the other things, that “the Federation may, by a law, transfer sovereign powers to international organizations” and that “with a view to maintaining peace, the Federation may enter into a system of mutual collective security; in doing so it shall consent to such limitations upon its sovereign powers as will bring about and secure a lasting peace in Europe and among the nations of the world”⁶². It is possible to see the astonishing similarities between the German Basic Law and Article 11 of the Italian Constitution, in particular about rejecting wars of aggression and limiting national sovereignty in favor of international organizations aimed at ensuring peace.

The provisions of the Japanese Constitution, which was promulgated in 1946 and came into effect in May 1947, are even more “extreme”. In order to highlight the principle of the renunciation of war, a single and independent chapter of the Constitutional Chart is dedicated to it. Indeed, Chapter II, corresponding to just one article, namely Article 9, states that “aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized”⁶³. Not only Japan declares of forever rejecting war as a mean of solving international disputes, but it also renounces to maintain armed forces. However, a profound debate has always accompanied this disposition. Anyway, in the 1950s, the Japan Self-Defense Forces were established, and nowadays a complex process and a controversial discussion are underway in order to allow a more active and interventionist foreign policy, as well as to possibly amend Article 9 of the Constitution⁶⁴.

Coming back to the Italian Constitution, it is necessary to briefly examine two more dispositions with regard to the recourse to war, namely Articles 78 and 87. The first states that “Parliament has the authority to declare a state of war and vest the necessary powers into the Government”, while the second affirms, among other things, that “The President (of the Republic) is the commander-in-chief of the

⁶¹ Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, english version, Deutscher Bundestag, <https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/pdf/80201000.pdf>.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ The Constitution of Japan, english version, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

⁶⁴ G. Dottori, “Questioni di pace e di guerra”, Aracne, 2006, p. 271.

armed forces, shall preside over the Supreme Council of Defence established by law, and shall make declarations of war as have been agreed by Parliament”⁶⁵. Thus, from these two dispositions it emerges that the state of war is decided by the Parliament and then officially declared by the President of the Republic.

The goal of the Constituent Assembly was twofold. On the one hand, the aim was to provide the Parliament with the authority to decide on the state of war, not the Government. This was part of the broader constitutional architecture according to which the balance of power between the Legislative and the Executive was designed in order to be in favor of the first, trying to limit the powers and functions of the Government. On the other, since the President of the Republic is also the Head of State and the guarantor of the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly wanted to add a further step in the process of deciding and declaring a war. According to this view, the President would have not only supervised the respect of the formal procedures required by the Constitution, but he would have also conducted an analysis on the merit of the declaration, with the (hypothetical) possibility to refuse to officially make the declaration of war⁶⁶.

Taken together, these articles show the institutional architecture of the Constitution of the Italian Republic with regard to one of the fundamental elements of the strategic culture of a country, the recourse to war. It can be argued that the Constitution institutionalized the strategic culture of the Republic. Indeed, if on the one hand the Italian Constitution was the product of the new Italian strategic culture (the behavior of State influenced by the strategic culture, that is the independent variable), on the other it further reinforced over the years the pillars of internationalism, pacifism and multilateralism upon which the foreign and security policy of the Italian Republic was, and still is, based.

1.3.2.3 The downsizing of the role of the military policy and the Armed Forces

The organization of the role, functions and structure of the Italian Armed Forces after the end of World War II was influenced by two factors: the limitations imposed by the peace treaty and the membership in the NATO military alliance. Indeed, as we have seen before, the clauses of the peace treaty heavily limited the possibilities for Italy to develop and maintain a huge, efficient and

⁶⁵ Constitution of the Italian Republic, english version, Senato della Repubblica, https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf.

⁶⁶ G. Dottori, “Questioni di pace e di guerra”, Aracne, 2006, p. 269.

technologically advanced military. Moreover, the fragile post-war economic situation prevented the country from investing extensively in military expenditures. In addition, since the defence of the country from a possible invasion was in practice delegated to NATO and the American forces stationed in Italy and Europe, the main role for the army was not that of fighting high-intensity wars on a vast scale. On the contrary, the main concerns were those of keeping and maintaining the domestic order in case of internal uprisings. At the beginning, the Italian Armed Force were thus organized in order to carry out tasks related to public order and domestic security⁶⁷, providing support, if needed, for the Italian police. In case of combat missions, they were supposed to be employed only for small-scale clashes along the border with Yugoslavia, not to stop a direct aggression, but just to resist and buy time until the arrival of the allied troops. The actual defence of Italy, as already said, was totally delegated to NATO. This in turn allowed the Italian governments to focus more on domestic issues, freeing resources for the economic reconstruction of the country. However, this approach produced another important long-term effect on the Italian strategic culture. Indeed, the total reliance on NATO for the defence of the country resulted in the loss, in Italy more than in other countries, of the culture of security and defence in its “national dimensions”⁶⁸. Italy became a “security consumer”, being almost completely dependent on others for its national defence, and thus producing the “deresponsabilizzazione” of both the political class and public opinion in matters of security and defence⁶⁹.

1.3.3 The public debate in Italy on security and defence issues

The public opinion and the political debate in Italy on security and defence issues are two key elements for better comprehending the characteristics of the strategic culture of the Italian Republic. Both the ruling class on the one hand and the civil society on the other are carriers of the system of values, beliefs and ideas with regard to security and defence described before. It is thus necessary to look at the role played by political elites and public opinion in the socialization process that cemented the new Italian strategic culture over the years.

For what concerns the Italian political class, there are two main forces that have influenced the development of the Italian strategic culture over the years: the catholic parties and the left-wing ones.

⁶⁷ P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 117.

⁶⁸ C. Jean, “Studi strategici”, Franco Angeli, 1990, p. 146.

⁶⁹ P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 119.

The influence of the Catholic Church in the political life of the Italian Republic has been a steady element: indeed, the party that dominated the political scene from the end of the Second World War until the early 1990s, the Democrazia Cristiana, was a center-right party of Catholic inspiration, with a close relationship with the Holy Church. The position of the DC on the recourse to war and its vision of the international affairs was partly influenced by the catholic doctrine of “just war”. According to this doctrine of medieval origin, only in few cases the recourse to war can be considered legitimate and thus just: the main assumption of the theory is that the use of force aimed at solving international disputes should be only a measure of last resort and should be adopted only for defensive purposes, not to deliberately attack another State. Accordingly, the position assumed by the Italian Church in the XX century was a middle ground between the refusal of both the militarism on the one hand and the absolute pacifism on the other⁷⁰. However, the real impact of this doctrine, and of the overall thinking of the Catholic Church on the DC, is difficult to assess, especially for the presence within the Catholic party of several visions, some more linked to a pure ideological perspective, others more realistic, pragmatic and sensitive to the real world dynamics⁷¹. In fact, it is not a coincidence that the very Italian participation in the Atlantic Alliance, one of De Gasperi’s main pillars for his foreign and security policy, was greeted with some resistance by several of his party colleagues⁷².

The left-wing thinking about war and the conception of international affairs was in part similar to the one of DC. Historically speaking, the Italian socialism was characterized by a strong anti-militarist character⁷³, a refuse of the bourgeois conflicts and an acceptance of the revolutionary war, namely the one fought by the working classes against the oppression of capitalists⁷⁴. The Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI), the main political adversary of DC, strongly opposed the membership in NATO, considered as a militarist organization, calling instead for disarmament and international peace. The political line of the PCI was not (or better, not only) a mere ideological position: it was influenced by its close relationship with the Communist Soviet Union. Indeed, it can be said that the PCI maintained a unilateral pacifist political line in the first years of the Italian Republic, since its anti-militarist claims were made only with regard to NATO and the United States. Only after the Soviet

⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 123.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 124.

⁷² Ivi, p. 114.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 129.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 130.

repression of the Hungarian Revolution (1956) and, above all, of the so-called “Prague Spring” (1968), the PCI started to distance itself from Moscow, arriving in the 1970s at the formal acceptance of the Italian membership in NATO, an event that was unthinkable in 1949. This (geo)political shift also led to the emergence of an absolute pacifism and the total repudiation of the use of military force by the Italian Communists, and more in general by radical left-wing political forces.

For what regards the Italian public opinion, according to a study conducted in 2013 by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), there are five structural factors that influence the way in which the public debate on security and defence issues takes place in Italy⁷⁵.

First of all, there is a widespread low level of interest with regard to foreign, security and defence policy in Italy. This aspect is also linked to the political culture of the main parties of the Italian Republic described before. Traditionally, there has always been a limited space for the discussion, both at the political level and in the public opinion, of issues related to national security, the protection and the pursuit of national interests and the role played by the Armed Forces. The lack of a serious, organic and comprehensive public and political debate in Italy on the theme of the national interests makes in turn more difficult the definition of all the security and defence issues, as well as the consequent use and development of the Armed Forces⁷⁶.

Second, the limited experience of Italy as a colonial power, compared to other countries such as France or the United Kingdom, has produced weak cultural, demographic, economic and political ties with the former colonies. In addition, the attention of the public opinion towards the current events in these countries, as well as in the international scenario in general, is more limited, changing and intermittent, especially in the case of the possible outbreak of crises or emergencies and the consequent possibility of a military intervention by Italian troops (as it is happening in Italy with regard to the ongoing crisis in Libya, on which chapter 2 will focus).

Third, there is the perception by the public opinion of absence of threats to the Italian national security in the post-Cold War period. In this sense, the end of the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War,

⁷⁵ A. Marrone, P. Tessari, “Il dibattito italiano sulle questioni di difesa: questa sera si recita a soggetto?”, in Documenti IAI, September 2013.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 3.

the European Union (EU) enlargement process and the absence in Italy of large-scale terrorist attacks (contrary to France, United Kingdom or Spain) have created a sense of relative security, tranquility and stability, without any kind of military menace threatening the country, at least in the eyes of public opinion. This fact is confirmed by a series of polls conducted by IPSOS for the Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) between 2014 and 2019 regarding the Italians and international politics⁷⁷. When asked the question “What is the most serious threat to Italy?”, 56% of those interviewed in 2019 answered the economic crisis, 12% the immigration, 8% the clash between Italy and the EU and 7% the climate change. The economic crisis is thus perceived to be the main menace to Italy by the Italian people, and this is the trend of the last six years. In fact, since the first poll conducted in 2014, in every single year the bad economic situation of the country and more in general the economic crisis was considered the biggest concern by the Italians, while for instance the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism was perceived as a menace by an average of less than 10% of those interviewed, with a peak of 26% in 2015 and a minimum of only 2% in 2019. These results further reinforce the argument that, generally speaking, the Italian public opinion does not perceive the existence of serious military or security threats to the country, being more concerned instead by its socio-economic conditions. In turn, this perception feeds a huge and continuous debate on socio-economic issues on the one hand, and a very scarce level of consideration for international affairs, national security and foreign and defence policy on the other.

Fourth, the political and institutional architecture of the Italian State provides for the involvement of several actors in the decision-making process regarding foreign policy and defence issues. In particular, in addition to the Parliament and the Government, with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence, there is also the President of the Republic, who is the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and presides over the Supreme Council of Defence. Moreover, the power relationships between the executive and the legislative are in favor of the latter, with a growing role and autonomy played also by the parliamentary commissions and the single deputies and senators. This institutional framework has a significant impact on the decision-making process and the public debate on security and defence since there is such a vast plurality of voices giving their own opinions on the issues discussed from time to time, not to mention the fact that quite often all the different visions are in sharp contrast each other, thus further complicating the decision-making process.

⁷⁷ “Gli Italiani e la politica internazionale”, Sondaggio ISPI, 20 dicembre 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/gli-italiani-e-la-politica-internazionale-24646>

Lastly, given the close participation and membership of Italy in international multilateral organizations, most of the times the national debate has evolved as a reaction to the broader and earlier discussion of the international fora and alliances. In particular, the strong European and transatlantic alignments of Italy have always influenced the public debate on international issues, sometimes resulting in almost blind and reactive, rather than proactive, decisions to follow a path already undertaken at the international level by Italy's allies, without a real, sound and autonomous analysis and discussion at the domestic level.

1.3.4 Summing up the characteristics of the Italian strategic culture

In order to complete the overall framework of the strategic culture of the Italian Republic, it is necessary to have a brief look to the strategic preferences.

The orientation towards internationalism, multilateralism and pacifism with regard to the conception of international affairs and the use of military force can in fact be translated into specific preferences for different strategic options. Indeed, the strategic culture of the Italian Republic puts at the first place of the possible means to solve international disputes the tools provided by international law and multilateral diplomacy. An accommodationist attitude is preferred to a more assertive one, and this aspect also results in preferring defensive military actions rather than offensive operations, contrary to the liberal and fascist periods⁷⁸.

The following table offers a summary and at the same time a comparison of the main features of the strategic culture of both the Kingdom of Italy and the Italian Republic⁷⁹.

	Kingdom of Italy	Italian Republic
Conception of war	Natural and inevitable	Not a natural, unavoidable feature of the international relations
Relations with the adversaries	Zero-sum game	Positive sum game

⁷⁸ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 133.

⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 104 and p. 138.

Use of military force	Effective	Effective only in few and limited cases
Strategic preferences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offensive actions 2. Defensive actions 3. Diplomacy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diplomacy 2. Defensive actions 3. Offensive actions

1.4 The management and use of the military instrument

As previously said in paragraph 1.3.2.3, the birth of the Italian Republic was accompanied by a downsizing of the role, functions and importance of the Italian Armed Forces. The Italian participation in the Atlantic Alliance, ever since its foundation in 1949, was in this sense an important moment for the Italian foreign, security and defence policy. It was a precise choice with an important military and diplomatic significance⁸⁰: in a moment where two international and opposite blocks were emerging, one led by Washington, the other by Moscow, Italy decided to join a military alliance whose leader was the United States. This decision, in spite of the recent defeat in the Second World War and the heavy clauses of the peace treaty, allowed Italy to gradually rebuild its Armed Forces, overcoming the limits imposed by the peace accords and updating its military assets. However, in the framework of NATO comprehensive strategy for countering the Soviet Red Army (and from 1955 onward, the Warsaw Pact), Italy was assigned a limited role, at least at the beginning. Its importance within the Alliance increased between the 1970s and 1980s, when new tensions between the two superpowers arose. Indeed, the role of Italy became quite important in the early 1980s, when the Pershing-II ballistic missiles were installed in Comiso, Sicily, as part of NATO response to the Soviet deployment of nuclear intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) in Europe⁸¹.

Apart from the role played within NATO, of which it is not my purpose here to provide a broad and organic picture, it is interesting to look at the Italian management and use of its armed forces in a more “national” perspective, in particular for what regards the recourse to war. Following what has been said so far, one would expect a very limited, scarce and almost absent use of the military instrument by

⁸⁰ A. Ungari, “La Nato compie 70 anni. Per l’Italia è tempo di bilanci (non solo militari)”, LUISS Open, 17 April 2019, <https://open.luiss.it/2019/04/17/la-nato-compie-70-anni-per-litalia-e-tempo-di-bilanci-non-solo-militari/>.

⁸¹ Ibidem.

the Italian Republic, especially for what concerns the use of military forces for offensive purposes or operations.

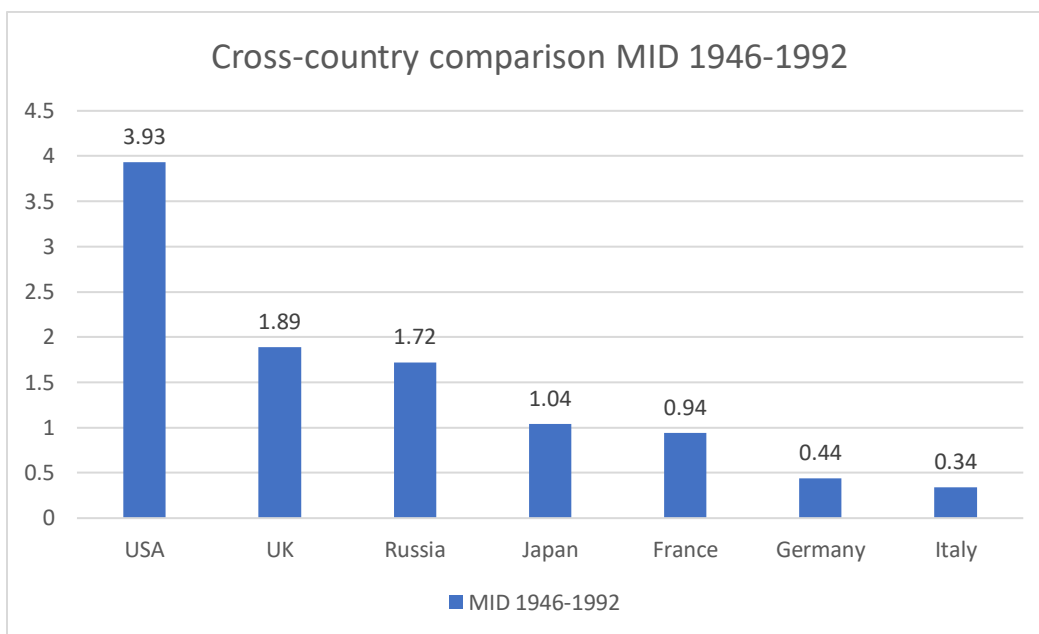
1.4.1 A quantitative analysis: the MID index and the military expenditures

In this regard, a very interesting quantitative analysis is carried out by Rosa, using the data provided by the project “Correlates of War” on the so-called Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs). A MID is defined as a historical case of conflict in which the threat, display or use of military force by one state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state⁸². The time period covered by Rosa is 1861-2001: although the last 20 years are not taken into consideration, it is quite a huge time frame (140 years) that can provide useful insights on the Italian military behavior.

First of all, focusing the attention on the period 1946-1992, namely the Italian Republic, it is possible to see that Italy has an average MID index of 0,34, meaning the participation of the country in one military dispute every three years. It is the lowest level when compared to other States: Germany has a MID of 0,44, France of 0,94, Japan of 1,04, Russia of 1,72, the United Kingdom of 1,89, the US the highest index with a MID of 3,93, implying the participation of Washington in almost four disputes every single year⁸³.

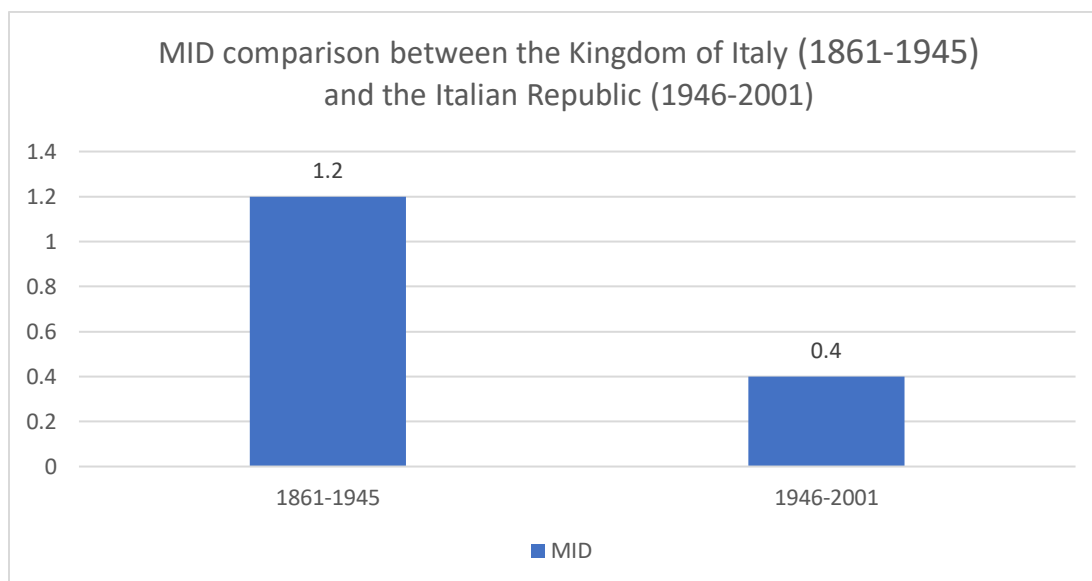
⁸² “Militarized Interstate Disputes”, The Correlates of War Project, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/MIDs>.

⁸³ P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 141.



A second comparison is worth to be made with regard the MID index of Italy during the Kingdom of Italy and the Italian Republic. Between 1861 and 1945, the Italian MID index is 1,2 (meaning more than one military dispute per year). On the contrary, for the period 1946-2001 the MID index is 0,4, just three times lower⁸⁴. This sharp contrast between the two time periods confirms the totally different features of the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy (1861-1945) and the Italian Republic (1946-2001): the first being characterized by a cult of the offensive and a pronounced militarism, the second being based on pacifism and a more accommodationist behavior.

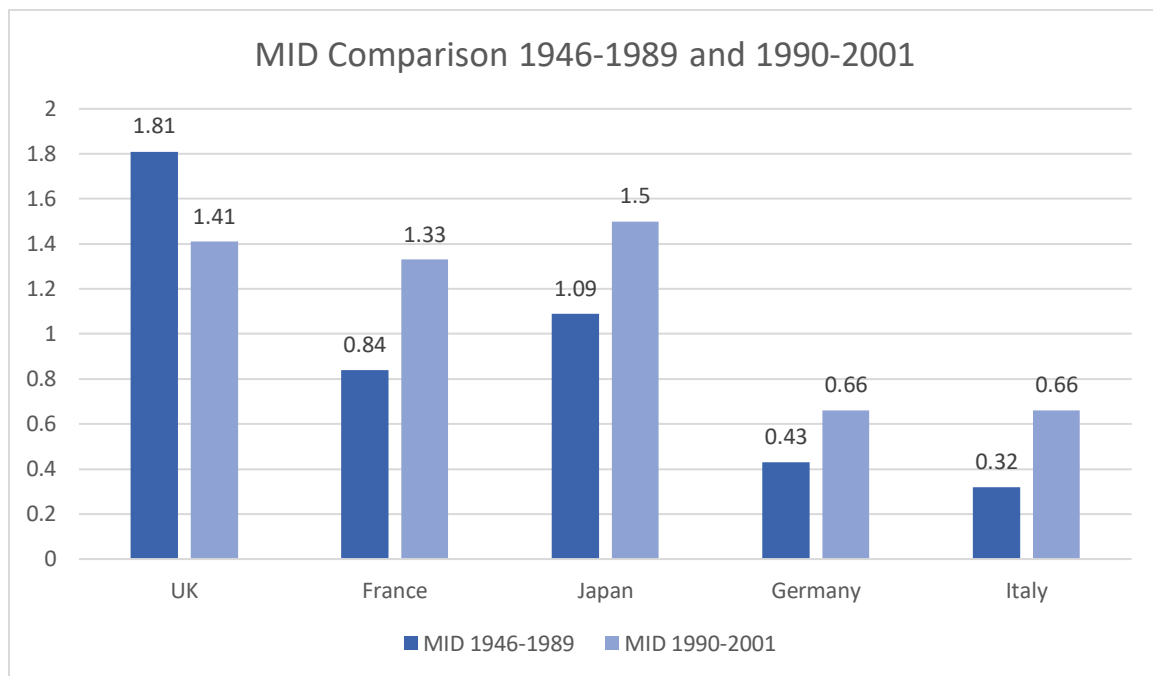
⁸⁴ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 143.



Finally, another useful comparison is the one between the MID index in the years 1946-1989 and 1990-2001. Following a realist perspective, one could argue that after the end of the Cold War, the world became more unstable, with several local, national and regional conflicts that broke out, and with more space for maneuver for medium and small powers, not anymore constrained by the logic and limits of the superpower confrontation. This would result in a rise in the total number of militarized disputes between States.

Indeed, comparing the MID index of middle powers, namely those that are expected to become more involved in military terms, three factors emerge. The first one is that, in absolute terms, Italy still has the lowest MID index of all the States. The second is that there is a general and slight increase of the MID index of almost all the countries under investigation (the only exception being the United Kingdom), meaning that there actually was an increase in militarized disputes between States after the end of the Cold War (at least, militarized disputes involving the middle powers under investigation). The third one is that, in relative terms, Italy experienced the highest MID growth between the two periods (from 0,32 to 0,66, +106%). The results are showed in the table below⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ P. Rosa, "Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia", Rubettino, 2012, p. 141.



Do these findings imply that Italy changed its attitude in the use of the military instrument, from a pacifist posture towards a more assertive one, and so that the theory based on cultural explanations is no longer valid? In my opinion, the answer is no. First of all, it is necessary to remind that, in the count of the military disputes, it is also included the simple threat or display of the military force, not only its real use on the field. The MID index is a quantitative indicator, not a qualitative one and thus it can not show the actual degree and level of the force used. Second, in absolute terms not only Italy still has the lowest MID index (together with Germany), but it is necessary to take into account the fact that the starting point was even lower (0,32), thus making the increase more conspicuous in relative terms.

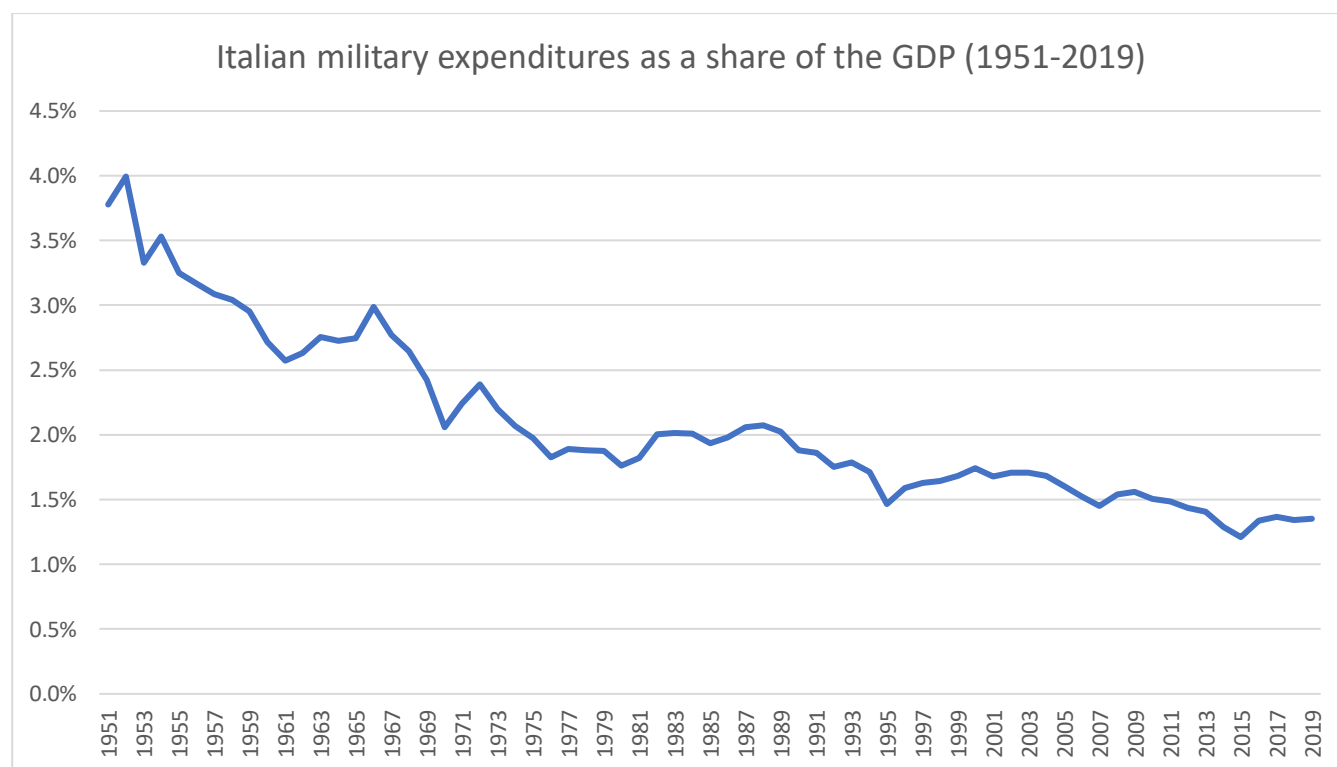
In order to complete the quantitative analysis and in particular to better evaluate a possible shift in the Italian strategic culture after the end of the Cold War, it is necessary to have a brief look at the level of military expenditures.

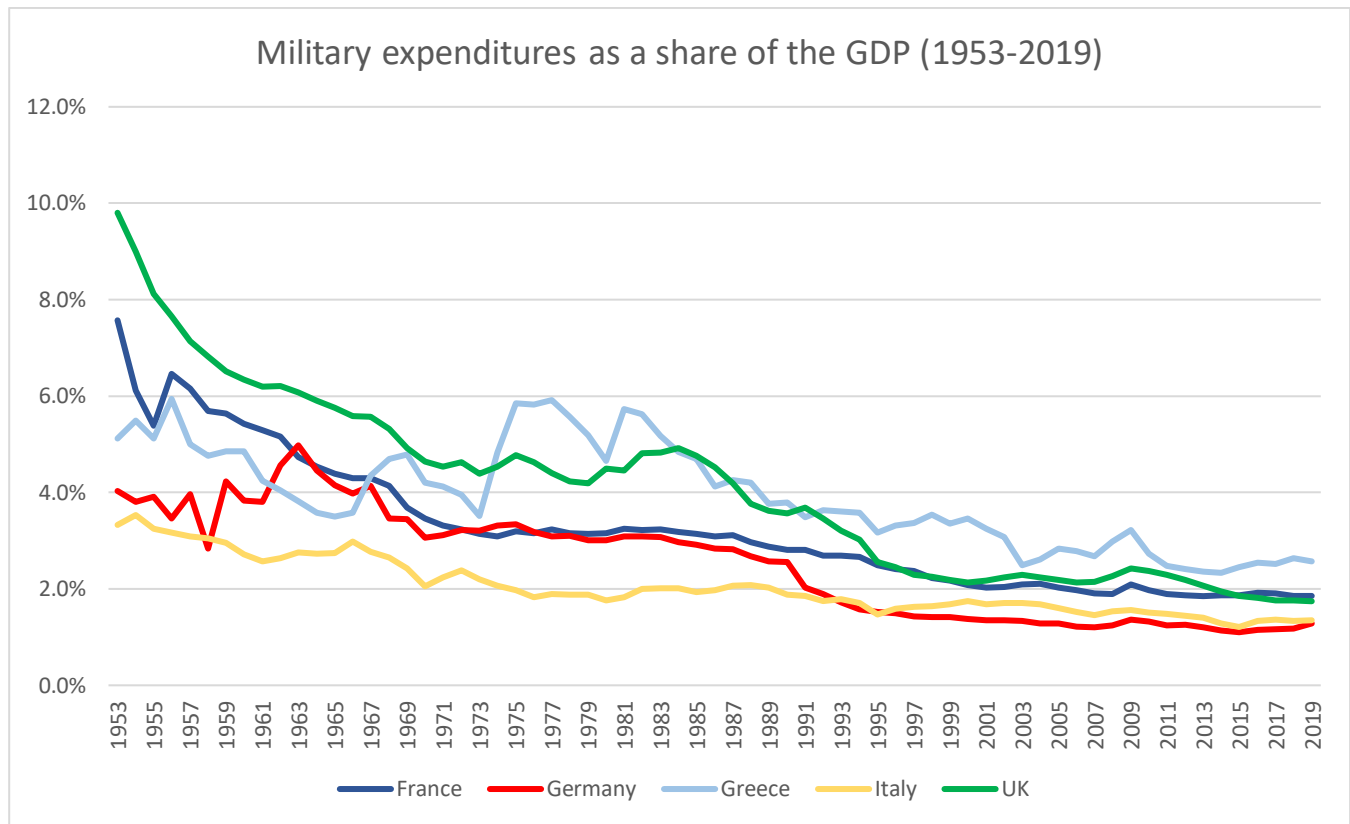
Following the data provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)⁸⁶, it is possible to compare the level of military spending of the Italian Republic during and after the Cold War. In the period 1951⁸⁷-1989, the average level of military expenditures as a share of the GDP is 2,5%,

⁸⁶ "Military Expenditure Database", SIPRI, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

⁸⁷ 1951 is the first year with available data.

while in the years 1990-2019 is 1,6%. Thus, it is possible to see a conspicuous decrease in the level of military expenditures in the post-Cold War era. This fact can be explained by the perception of the absence, after the fall of the Soviet Union, of a real military threat to the country and its national security, in spite of the aforementioned increase in the level of engagement in militarized interstate disputes by Italy. Furthermore, the comparison of the level of military expenditures between Italy and other European countries provides a useful and clear picture for better understanding the pacifist and anti-militarist features of the Italian strategic culture. For the time period 1953-2019, the average level of military expenditures as a share of the GDP is 2,0% for Italy (the lowest level), 2,5% for Germany, 3,2% for France, 3,9% for Greece and 4,1% for the United Kingdom (the highest level, among the countries considered).





To conclude, it is possible to argue that, after the end of the Cold War, on the one hand Italy witnessed an increase in the inclination to use, or menace to use, the military force, most likely as a consequence of the new and more unstable geopolitical scenario. However, on the other, this fact does not result neither into an increase in the level of military expenditures nor in a sharp and clear shift in its overall approach towards the use of the armed forces. The following paragraph will provide an overview of the military operations abroad conducted by the Italian Armed Forces over the years, with a special focus on the post-Cold War period.

1.4.2 A qualitative analysis: a brief assessment of the Italian military operations abroad

In March 2020, Italy deployed a maximum of 7.343 soldiers in military operations abroad, split across 35 international operations in 24 different countries⁸⁸, stretching from Europe to the Middle East,

⁸⁸ A. Marrone, M. Nones, “Le forze italiane in missione all’estero: trend e rischi”, in Documenti IAI, March 2020, p.2.

from Africa to Central Asia, including also a military ship deployed in the Arctic Region for scientific research purposes in June 2020⁸⁹.

How was the international military commitment of Italy born and how has it developed over the years? In spite of the aforementioned limitations in the organization, equipment and functions of the Italian Armed Forces after the end of World War II and the peace treaties, the first deployments of small contingents of Italian troops abroad dates back to the end of the 1950s. Indeed, in 1958 (thus only ten years after the foundation of the new Republic) Italy decided to participate in two UN operations in the Middle East: UNTSO – United Nations Truce Supervision Organization – and UNOGIL – United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon –⁹⁰. Other international missions followed in the ensuing years, with in particular the participation in the ONUC mission – Operation des Nations Unies au Congo, United Nations Operation in Congo – between 1960 and 1962 which was characterized by the lost of 21 Italian soldiers⁹¹.

The first major operation conducted abroad by the Italian Armed Forces was however the UNIFIL mission – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon – between 1982 and 1984. It was the first military operation that involved a considerable and complex military apparatus, and that represented a major upgrade in the Italian participation in military operations abroad compared to the ones conducted until that moment⁹². It was an important mission for Italy at both the international and national levels. On the one hand, Rome was trying to improve its international status; on the other, the Armed Forces were recovering a positive role within the Italian society and public opinion⁹³. From that moment onward, the Italian commitment in military operations abroad increased over the years, also as a consequence of the end of the Cold War and the outbreak of several crises and conflicts in Europe (especially the Balkans), Africa and the Middle East. Indeed, as said in the previous paragraph, the MID index for Italy saw a +106% increase in the period 1990-2001, compared to the years 1946-1989.

⁸⁹ “Destinazione Artico - parte da La Spezia nave Alliance”, comunicato stampa n° 26, Marina Militare, 21 June 2020, https://www.marina.difesa.it/media-cultura/press-room/comunicati/Pagine/2020_26_Destinazione_Artico_-_Parte_da_La_Spezia_nave_Alliance.aspx

⁹⁰ P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 161.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ivi, p. 153.

In the post-Cold War years, Italy took part in several major international military operations, where the Armed Forces also suffered important losses in terms of human lives. The most relevant military operations abroad conducted after the end of the Cold War are⁹⁴:

- First Gulf War (1991);
- Mozambique (1992);
- Somalia (1993);
- Bosnia (1995);
- Kosovo (1999 – present day);
- Afghanistan (2001 – present day);
- Second Gulf War (2003 – 2006);
- Lebanon (2006 – present day);
- Libya (2011);
- Iraq (2014 – present day).

Together with the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon in 1982, the Italian participation in the First Gulf War in 1991 represented the other watershed moment for the Italian Armed Forces deployed in military missions abroad. It was an unprecedented effort in terms of number of troops and assets involved, including air and naval forces, and for the intensity of the conflict. Moreover, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, Italy participated with its warplanes in air strikes against the military forces of a sovereign country⁹⁵, also suffering the shooting down of a Tornado fighter jet⁹⁶.

The most striking, recurring and important feature of the Italian military operations abroad is that, most of the times, they are carried out only in a multilateral framework. As already said, multilateralism and internationalism are two key elements of the Italian strategic culture. Indeed, the participation in the very first military missions abroad was justified and legitimized by the multilateral framework they were

⁹⁴ Elaboration of the author based on:

- P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 165.
- F. Coticchia, F. N. Moro, “From enthusiasm to retreat: Italy and military missions abroad after the Cold War”, Italian Political Science, Volume 15 Issue 1, May 2020, p. 13.

⁹⁵ F. Coticchia, F. N. Moro, “From enthusiasm to retreat: Italy and military missions abroad after the Cold War”, Italian Political Science, Volume 15 Issue 1, May 2020, p. 3.

⁹⁶ “Venticinque anni fa veniva abbattuto l'aereo di Maurizio Cocciolone: «Felice di non essere dimenticato»”, in Il Messaggero, 19 January 2016, <https://www.ilmessaggero.it/abruzzo/venticinque-anni-fa-veniva-abbattuto-aereo-di-cocciolone-1491893.html>

part of: it was considered (actually, still is) a necessary and essential element, without which the Italian involvement would had not occurred at all. An official document released by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009 confirms these findings:

“Il multilateralismo, centrato sul ruolo delle Nazioni Unite, quale massima istanza dotata di legittimazione politica per affrontare le sfide globali del mondo contemporaneo, è sempre stato per l’Italia un obiettivo prioritario della propria politica estera⁹⁷”.

“Multilateralism, centered on the role of the United Nations, as the highest instance endowed with political legitimacy to face the global challenges of the contemporary world, has always been a priority for Italy in its foreign policy”.

As a matter of fact, looking at the 35 Italian military international operations currently in progress, 29 are carried out in a multilateral framework (UN, NATO, EU or other international organizations or institutions, such as the “Global Coalition to defeat Daesh/ISIS”), thus amounting to the 83%. Only 6 missions out of 35, namely the 17%, are based solely on a bilateral agreement with the hosting part.

Another relevant element is the fact that the international missions became over the years a constant and important tool for the Italian foreign, security and defence policy⁹⁸. Italy used its commitment and effort in the military operations abroad to gradually reinforce its international status and prestige, to strengthen its relationships with allied countries and partners, to project its influence in areas and regions of interest, to earn “credits” that could be spent on the negotiation table of other international issues. Indeed, it can be argued that the overall Italian participation in international military operations follows two patterns: on the one hand, there is the participation in operations where the national interests are directly at stake; on the other, the joining of international alliances and coalitions in conducting a mission abroad where, even if the Italian interests are not directly involved, it is still important for Italy to show itself as a full member of the international community, playing an active role and reinforcing its credibility as a reliable partner and ally in the eyes of other States (especially, the US).

⁹⁷ “L’Italia e l’impegno multilaterale”, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, May 2009.

⁹⁸ M. Nones, E. Sabatino, “Difesa: missioni internazionali come strumento di politica estera”, Osservatorio ISPI-IAI sulla politica estera italiana n.7, December 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/difesa-missioni-internazionali-come-strumento-di-politica-estera-24557>

In this way, Italy was also able to transform its role in foreign policy from a “security consumer” during the post-World War II years, to a “security provider” since the end of the Cold War, becoming an “international peacekeeper”⁹⁹.

Finally, another factor worth to be mentioned is the bipartisan consensus at the domestic political level that the military missions abroad have received over the years. This is a significant signal of maturity and awareness of the political class about the importance of the military operations and the role played by the Armed Forces. However, this consensus is also built on the rhetoric of the “peace missions”, as the military operations abroad are very often labelled¹⁰⁰. The narrative of the Italian “peace missions” has always been used to describe the military operations abroad. It is a tool adopted by the political class to make them more acceptable in the eyes of the public opinion, especially in the case of “politically contested missions”, such as Iraq in 2003¹⁰¹. If this tactic, on the one hand, has been somehow successful in limiting the political and public costs of the participation in these operations, on the other it depicts the reality of the missions in a distorted and untrue way, for two reasons. First, because the label “peace missions” is used for all the military operations abroad, regardless their important differences in terms of context, types of activity carried out, equipment used, actual level of risk for the soldiers on then ground: indeed, Italian military operations abroad range from basic support and assistance missions (low-intensity operational theater) to real combat operations (high-intensity operational theater). Second, because labelling all of them as “peace missions” prevents a real, serious and comprehensive debate from emerging since the beginning, thus resulting in huge surprise and harsh criticism by the public opinion when unfortunate events occur, such as ambushes, attacks or clashes involving the Italian soldiers, with wounded and sometimes also dead. Instead, calling them as they actually are, namely military operations abroad aimed at restoring peace and stability but implying the use of force, could be more costly in political terms in a first phase, but it would avoid strong criticism in a second moment and would deal with these important issues in a mature and proper way.

⁹⁹ F. Coticchia, F. N. Moro, “From enthusiasm to retreat: Italy and military missions abroad after the Cold War”, *Italian Political Science*, Volume 15 Issue 1, May 2020, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ivi*, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

1.5 Conclusion

After having analyzed the literature debate on strategic cultures, the characteristics and the evolution over time of the strategic culture of Italy, and the Italian approach to the management and use of its Armed Forces, one final remark is to be made, concerning the issue of change. Can strategic cultures change and evolve over time?

In outlining the evolution of the concept and theories on strategic cultures in the previous paragraphs, it has been said that the strategic culture of a State is quite stable and persistent in time. It possesses a “semi-permanent” character and a strong degree of continuity, thus making it difficult for a strategic culture to modify itself and change in the course of time. However, this fact does not mean that no transformation can not occur at all: indeed, all the scholars, authors and thinkers recognized the possibility, albeit minimum and remote, for a strategic culture to evolve and mutate in the long run.

Italy is a paramount example in this sense, with a full “paradigm shift” between the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy and the Italian Republic. As already said before, the two strategic cultures possess diverse and sometimes quite opposite features, and this fact is due to the historical and cultural impact of a dramatic event such as World War II, which represented a watershed moment, causing the end of the Kingdom of Italy and the creation of the Italian Republic. Thus, the new strategic culture was born together with the new State: it is the uniqueness of the historical and cultural caesura of both the Second World War and the birth of the Republic (two events deeply connected each other) that led to the replacement of the previous strategic culture with a new one. As a result, does this imply that the Italian strategic culture will not change anymore in the future? It is very difficult to answer this question. For sure, a new paradigm shift in the Italian strategic culture would require a new watershed moment as important and dramatic as the years from 1940 (when Italy joined World War II) to 1948 (when the new Constitution officially entered into force). Those years constitute a unicum in the Italian history. Their importance is matched only by the time period that led to the unification of the country in 1861, and it is quite unlikely – tough, not impossible! – that in the future new events of similar reach and importance will happen again.

Nevertheless, small changes in the overall strategic culture could take place, or at least they are more likely to happen rather than another full paradigm shift. It can be said that modest adjustments

could occur to a strategic culture in general, and to the Italian one in particular. The years since the Italian military participation in the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon (1982), and above all since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, saw an increase in the number of military operations abroad conducted by the Italian Armed Forces, in spite of a decrease in the level of military spending. To some extent, it can be said that small adjustments have occurred in the Italian strategic culture, remaining however within its boundaries and never overcoming its limitations. Multilateralism and internationalism still remain two strong pillars of the Italian foreign and security policy, being further reinforced by the participation in the military missions abroad. The pacifist character of the Italian strategic culture seems to be called into question by the participation in such military operations, but in the end Italy has always acted under multilateral frameworks (mainly UN, NATO, EU) and the respect of international rules and norms.

To conclude, it can be said that all the interventions and adjustments to the overall foreign, security and defence policy in Italy over the last three decades have respected the pillars of the Italian strategic culture, sometimes forcing its limits, but never exceeding them. They have been “domesticated” by the Italian strategic culture, which has not changed in real substance¹⁰².

Consequently, Chapter 3 of this work will be dedicated to the future prospects of the Italian strategic culture, and starting from the basis of what has been described in this section, will focus on how some small adjustments and changes could possibly occur in the future.

¹⁰² P. Rosa, “Tra pacifismo e realpolitik. Cultura strategica e politica estera in Italia”, Rubettino, 2012, p. 159.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GEOPOLITICAL SCENARIO IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN AND THE LIBYAN CASE STUDY

2.1 Introduction: the current global strategic scenario and its dynamics

For what regards the international relations between States, the current global strategic scenario seems to be characterized by two dominant trends, which are deeply interconnected each other: the (apparent) declining role in world affairs of the United States and the parallel ascent of the People's Republic of China (from now on, China). According to several thinkers and analysts, the trajectories of the two superpowers are destined to collide, resulting in war. As the American Harvard Professor Graham Allison points out, over the last 500 years, in 12 of the 16 cases when a rising power challenged the dominant one, the result has been war. When war did not break out, there were still huge and painful adjustments in the relations and dynamics between the two powers, leading to a sharp change in the attitudes and actions of both the challenger and the challenged¹⁰³. Thus, the possibility of a conflict between Washington and Beijing does not seem so remote and unlikely: on the contrary, it could be a serious and dramatic possibility. On the other hand, other authors and intellectuals argue instead that an armed confrontation between the US and China will not actually occur, saying that Beijing has neither the intention, nor the capacity, to replace Washington as the dominant global power in military, political

¹⁰³ G. Allison, "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?", *The Atlantic*, 24 September 2015.

and economic terms¹⁰⁴. On the contrary, the deep economic interdependence between the two States, the role of public opinion and the nature of the international system will guide the two countries towards increased cooperation in the long-run, thus overcoming the “Thucydides Trap”¹⁰⁵. In this regard, George Friedman, one of the most prominent geopolitical analysts in the US, recently wrote that China does not represent an existential threat to America, because actually it is not a rising power willing to challenge American hegemony. He argues that, since 20% of Chinese GDP depends on exports (5% of which are bought by Washington), Beijing simply can not afford neither to go to war with the US directly, nor to endanger the international trade system, on which its economy heavily depends¹⁰⁶. From the military perspective, he also affirms that, in spite of the growing Chinese military, which is building technologically advanced forces, Beijing has neither the necessary combat experience in naval and air warfare, nor a strong network of regional alliances that are required to effectively challenge American superiority¹⁰⁷.

The question whether or not the US and China will go to war in the next decades is for sure one of the most important, debated and crucial issues of the XXI century, a question that is very difficult to answer. The most important finding in this sense is that a great part of future international dynamics between States will be probably determined by the relations between Washington and Beijing, which will further consolidate their role as the two main global powers, at the expense of other States such as the Russian Federation (from now on Russia) and the European countries. An evidence of this phenomenon is already in place with regard to the pandemic which broke out in 2019 and which was caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. Indeed, among the consequences of the pandemic, there is an increase in the level of the geopolitical tensions between Washington and Beijing, with mutual accusations about the origin of the virus, and with many European countries (Italy in primis) caught in the middle of this new wave of frictions between the two powers, asking and receiving assistance from both countries during the peak of the crisis¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁴ M. Beckley, “Stop Obsessing About China: Why Beijing Will Not Imperil U.S. Hegemony”, *Foreign Affairs*, 21 September 2018.

¹⁰⁵ L. Shengli, L. Huiyi, “Why Are China and the U.S. Not Destined to Fall into the Thucydides’ Trap?”, *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2018, p. 495–514.

¹⁰⁶ G. Friedman, “The Truth About the US-China Thucydides Trap”, *Geopolitical Futures*, 14 July 2020, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ivi, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ V. Mazza, “Coronavirus, il diplomatico Usa Haass: «Se accetta gli aiuti l’Italia si lega alla Cina. Prima o poi dovrà pagarne il conto»”, *Corriere della Sera*, 29 April 2020, https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_aprile_29/coronavirus-diplomatico-usa-haass-se-accetta-aiuti-l-italia-si-lega-cina-prima-o-poi-paghera-44e5138e-8a4a-11ea-94d3-9879860c12b6.shtml

In this regard, the growing attention towards China by the US is confirmed by several strategic documents released by the American Government. In the National Security Strategy published by the White House in 2017, it is explicitly said that “China and Russia challenge American power, influence and interests”¹⁰⁹, that the world will be more and more characterized by the competitions between the US on the one hand and its rival countries on the other, and that, although competition does not always lead to direct confrontation or war, America will prepare to win such competitions, which are seen as long-term challenges to US security. Moreover, the document highlights four vital US national interests that must be protected in the current competitive world: protecting the American people and the American way of life; promoting American prosperity; preserving peace through strength; advancing American influence. In addition, it is relevant to point out the fact that, at the regional level, the Indo-Pacific region is placed at the top of the agenda, with the aim by the US, among the others, to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia and India in an anti-Chinese perspective, since “Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific region risks diminishing the sovereignty of many States, which are calling for sustained US leadership in a collective response”¹¹⁰. The forging and strengthening of this quadrilateral partnership (the so-called “Quad”) is confirmed by the possibility that Canberra could join, for the first time, Washington, Tokyo and New Delhi in the annual naval military drill “Malabar”, which is scheduled to take place in the Gulf of Bengal at the end of 2020¹¹¹.

The most relevant American document in dealing with China is probably the United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China, released in May 2020 by the Trump Administration. It is basically an implementation of the 2017 National Security Strategy with specific regard to the People’s Republic of China¹¹². Indeed, in the report, it is mentioned how China poses several challenges to the US national interests, in particular economic ones, but also challenges to the US values and security. However, the most striking element of the report is the fact that the US officially considers the relationship with China as a great power competition between the two States, recognizing “the long-term strategic competition between the two systems”¹¹³. Whether or not this competition will turn into an actual war, it is probably the million-dollar question of the XXI century.

¹⁰⁹ National Security Strategy of the United States of America, The White House, 2017, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Ivi, p. 46.

¹¹¹ S. R. Sen and A. Chaudhary, “India to Invite Australia for Naval Drill, Risking Beijing’s Ire”, Bloomberg, 9 July 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-09/india-to-invite-australia-for-naval-drill-risking-beijing-s-ire>

¹¹² United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China, The White House, May 2020, p.2.

¹¹³ Ivi, p. 16.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the view that considers China as the main competitor of the US at the global level is rooted not only in the White House, but also in other American institutions. For instance, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) stated in July 2020 that, in the long run, China represents the greatest threat to the United States. Talking about counter-espionage operations, he said that the FBI opens a new case related to Chinese espionage activities every 10 hours, and that out of a total of 5.000 such cases, half of them is related to Beijing¹¹⁴.

Having said that, the purpose of this chapter is not that of analyzing the US-China relations or the global strategic dynamics in general, but instead that of focusing on the geopolitical panorama of the Mediterranean Sea and in particular the Libyan crisis. However, it is important to understand the main trends at the global level, both because it is crucial to know and have in mind the broader picture and because many of such trends are present in the Mediterranean region as well. In fact, a comprehensive analysis of the Libyan geopolitical scenario has to take into account the ongoing trends at the global and systemic levels, since, as Gabriele Natalizia argues, the Libyan crisis can be explained also as a consequence of the crisis of the international order, and in particular of the changing attitude of the US¹¹⁵ (on this point, I will argument more in detail in the following paragraph).

Indeed, generally speaking, it can be argued that the world is currently characterized by three key dynamics, which are velocity, interdependence, and complexity¹¹⁶. New technologies in communication and transportation have made the world faster than ever before; the phenomenon of globalization has created an unprecedented level of interconnection and interdependence, but it has also made the world more complex and difficult to manage. As Giannulli points out, the world is more united than ever before, but also more unstable and ungovernable¹¹⁷. The mix of velocity, interdependence and complexity produces unpredictable chain reactions, often resulting in consequences which are very different and sometimes completely opposite to those expected¹¹⁸, since a key feature of complexity is the non-linear relationship between cause and effect¹¹⁹. More than in any other field, these dynamics appear in their

¹¹⁴ M. Meloni, "Usa e Cina, si infiamma lo scontro", Eastwest, 9 July 2020, <https://eastwest.eu/it/per-lfbi-la-cina-e-il-piu-grave-pericolo-a-lungo-termine/>

¹¹⁵ G. Natalizia, "Il conflitto in Libia e la crisi dell'ordine internazionale", in "Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell'ordine internazionale", a cura di A. Folco Biagini, Castelveccchi, 2020, p. 136.

¹¹⁶ A. Giannulli, "Come i servizi segreti stanno cambiando il mondo", Ponte alle Grazie, 2018, p. 36.

¹¹⁷ Ivi, p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Ivi, p. 39.

¹¹⁹ Ivi, p. 40.

entirety during crises. In fact, a recurrent phenomenon of the current world is the dichotomy between the complexity of the decision-making process on the one hand, which, especially during crises, requires time, study and a deep understanding of the phenomena, and the velocity at which decisions should be taken on the other. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic offers again a clear example: all over the world, governments had to act quickly and resolutely in order to contain the spread of the virus at the beginning of the year, but they also had to do that by relying on scarce information and a very limited knowledge of the disease. The future could thus be characterized by recurring crises of several types and intensities, whose complexity, velocity and interdependence will further increase and whose response in terms of timing and effectiveness will be even more crucial but also hard to find.

Having briefly outlined the global geostrategic scenario and the main trends at the world level, the chapter will now concentrate on the Mediterranean region, illustrating first the overall geopolitical situation of the Mediterranean basin, and turning then the attention on the Libyan crisis, describing and analyzing the Libyan scenario at both the national and international levels.

2.2 The geopolitical panorama in the Mediterranean region¹²⁰

The Mediterranean Sea has always been one of the most populated, dynamic and important regions in the world. Homeland to some of the greatest civilizations in history, such as the Greeks, the Phoenicians, the Romans and the Byzantines, it lost its role as center of the world from the XVI century onward, due to the discovery of America and the so-called “New World”. Consequently, it was replaced by the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean as core regions for the new international trade routes, thus falling in a profound political and economic decay. The Mediterranean Sea was in fact excluded from the rich maritime traffics with the new American colonies, experiencing a decline in the harbor and infrastructural system¹²¹ as well. Since 1869, with the opening of the Suez Canal in Egypt and the consequent shortening of the maritime routes from Asia to Europe, the Mediterranean basin started to gradually reacquire the importance lost over the previous centuries. After the end of World War II, and in particular between the end of the 1970s and the mid-1990s, the Mediterranean basin experienced an

¹²⁰ Providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the geopolitical scenario of the Mediterranean region, as well as of the Libyan crisis, would require a very long and extensive discussion, which can not be limited to few pages. This work will try to outline instead the most important characteristics and dynamics, focusing on those factors, events and trends that can be considered the most relevant and crucial ones.

¹²¹ P. Sellari, “Il Mediterraneo nella geopolitica dei traffici marittimi”, GNOSIS – Rivista Italiana di Intelligence, 3/2014, p. 96.

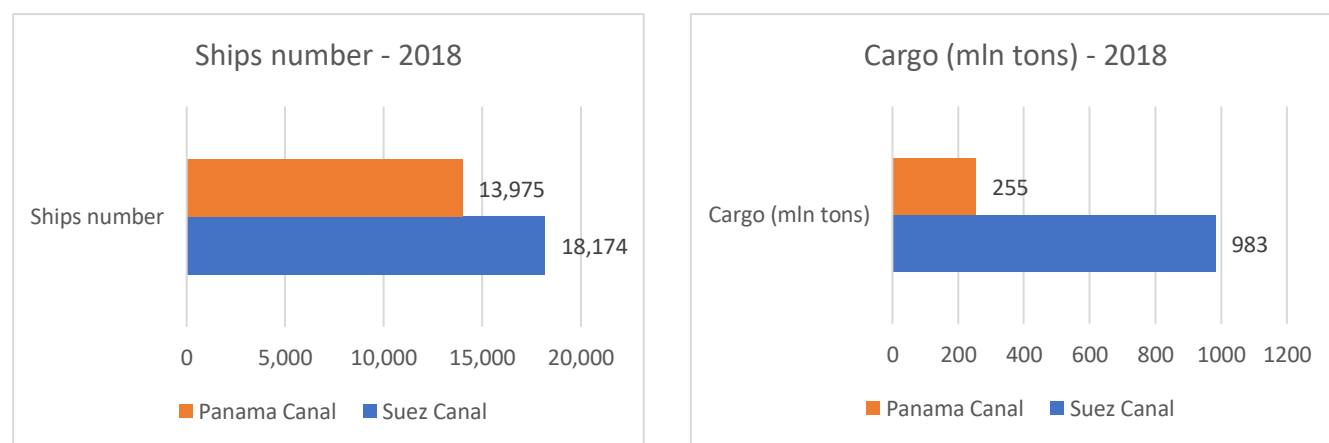
increase in its geopolitical and geoeconomic importance, due respectively to the Cold War confrontation, of which the Mediterranean region was one of the core theaters, and to the affirmation and consolidation of new trade routes, regarding in particular the energy supplies going from the Middle East to several European countries¹²². However, at the European level, the logistic, infrastructural and economic gap with the Northern Sea, the so-called Northern Range, is still important and remains unbridgeable in the short- and medium-run¹²³.

Nevertheless, over the last years, the Mediterranean Sea, and more in general, the Mediterranean region, seems to have gained a new centrality in international affairs. Several events and factors have contributed to give new importance to the region at both the political and economic levels, but they have also increased geopolitical tensions, political instability and security concerns all across the Mediterranean area. The most important and relevant events of the last decade that contributed to give new life and centrality to the Mediterranean basin are the following: the so-called “Arab Springs” which broke out in 2011 in several countries in North Africa and the Middle East (and which have produced social unrests, political upheavals and economic uncertainty); the 2011 NATO military operation in Libya, followed by a dramatic civil conflict still unresolved; the ongoing civil war in Syria, characterized by the intervention of many foreign powers; the phenomenon of international terrorism, with many terrorist attacks that hit several European cities, as well as Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and other countries of the region; the war against DAESH or ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), which took control of some territories across Syria and Iraq, taking advantage of the civil conflicts and the political and institutional instability; the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean over energetic resources and territorial disputes; the new Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its implications for the Mediterranean ports and logistic hubs; the 2008 and 2011 economic crises, that hit Europe heavily and destabilized domestic political institutions as well as the European integration project; the phenomenon of international migration, in particular the migration routes going from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East to Europe, contributing to further destabilize the already fragile socio-economic and political landscape of many European States; the doubling of the Suez Canal in 2015, which contributed to the increase in the volume and traffic of commercial shipping in the Mediterranean basin.

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ Ivi, p.98.

Indeed, from a geoeconomic perspective, the Mediterranean Sea has gained new importance over the last years. Although its area covers less than 1% of the global maritime surface¹²⁴, through the Mediterranean Sea transit several crucial economic flows, in particular: 20% of the world shipping¹²⁵, 30% of the oil flows and 65% of non-oil energy supplies¹²⁶, thus making this basin a crucial crossroad of the global maritime commerce. In addition, the economic importance of the Suez Canal continues to grow: 9% of the global trade flows transit through this important chokepoint. In 2018, three years after the doubling of the canal, a double record was achieved, in terms of ships number (18.174, +3,6% on 2017) and cargo (983,4 million tons, +8,2% on 2017). To have an idea of the size and dimension of these numbers, the Panama Canal, another crucial chokepoint for global trade flows, registered the passage of 13.975 ships and 255 million tons of cargo in the same year¹²⁷, as it is possible to see in the following tables.



This brief and general overview of the main recent events, figures and dynamics of the region is necessary to understand two crucial factors: the first one is that there is a general trend of political instability, caused by different factors, that is embracing the southern and eastern flanks of the Mediterranean Sea, and political instability has always been one of the most important and challenging security issues for States and human communities. The second factor is that this political instability has been facilitated, and at the same time has facilitated, the intervention in the region of many State and non-State actors, whose interests converge and more often diverge.

¹²⁴ “Marina Militare – Linee di indirizzo strategico 2019-2034”, Marina Militare, April 2019, p. 15.

¹²⁵ “Italian Maritime Economy”, 6th Annual Report, SRM, 2019, p. 38.

¹²⁶ “Marina Militare – Linee di indirizzo strategico 2019-2034”, Marina Militare, April 2019, p. 15.

¹²⁷ “Italian Maritime Economy”, 6th Annual Report, SRM, 2019, p. 39.

In fact, it is possible to argue that from a geopolitical and international security perspective, the Mediterranean region is one of the few areas in the world where all the major global powers are present and active, trying to advance their own strategic interests at the expense of the others. Indeed, in the Mediterranean region it is possible to see the simultaneous presence and convergence (or better divergence) of the interests of:

- the United States, the global superpower;
- China, who is being more and more active in the Mediterranean Sea over the recent years;
- Russia, who has increased its presence and influence;
- several European countries, especially Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, whose coasts are directly washed by the sea, but also the UK and Germany, all involved at different levels, with different interests and on different issues in the dynamics of the region;
- Turkey, whose leader, Erdogan, is playing a growing role in the international arena as well;
- several Middle Eastern States, including Israel, Lebanon and Syria, but also Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE);
- the North African countries, namely Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt;
- the Balkan States, some of which are washed by the sea (namely Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, but also Serbia, Kosovo and North Macedonia in the inland) and that have always been the source of conflicts and instability;
- transnational criminal organizations, since the Mediterranean region is the center of many illicit trafficking, including people, drugs and weapons;
- transnational terrorist groups, who benefit from the instability in some areas of the region in order to prosper, carry out their activities and advance their interests and influence as well.

Probably, in no other place of the world there is such a concentration of actors, powers and interests (with the only exception maybe being the Persian Gulf). This is the result of the unique geographical position of the Mediterranean basin, being the meeting point of three continents (Europe, Africa and Asia), and also being at the center of the attention of the three world powers – US, China, Russia – despite the fact that they are not geographically washed by his waters (but they are geopolitically). It is important to keep in mind this factor, since the presence of so many actors involved in the dynamics of the region is a simple yet crucial variable in explaining the interdependence and complexity of the dynamics of the Mediterranean area.

Among all the numerous and important general trends currently ongoing in the Mediterranean region, this work will now focus on four ones, which can be considered crucial in a medium- and long-term perspective: the less active role played by the US; the increasing Chinese activities; the naval arms race; the territorial and energetic disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean.

2.2.1 The American “selective engagement”¹²⁸

As Gabriele Natalizia points out¹²⁹, in times of systemic instability and of structural crisis of the international order, the geopolitical competition between States tends to increase, both in terms of frequency and intensity. The Mediterranean region is a clear example of this phenomenon.

Indeed, the crisis of the international liberal order and the American strategy of retrenchment, or selective engagement, have been the consequences of a shift in the geopolitical priorities of Washington, which attributes less importance to the Mediterranean basin and redirects its attention on the Chinese expansion in the Pacific region with the so-called “Pivot to Asia”¹³⁰. This fact has in turn led to the opening of a power vacuum in the Mediterranean region, increasing instability (like in the Libyan and Syrian cases) and paving the way for the geopolitical competition between several State actors in the area, resulting in the current proxy wars in progress in Libya and Syria. Therefore, the Mediterranean basin is not a geopolitical priority for Washington anymore, and this trend has been already in place for almost a decade. Indeed, the first signs of a new stance in foreign policy by the US were already present during the Obama Administration and his “leading from behind” approach¹³¹. According to this view, the superpower had to limit its global commitment, focusing energy and resources on more limited and strategic scenarios on the one hand, and following and managing the events in secondary theaters on the other, without intervening directly and thus avoiding an “imperial overstretch”¹³². This in turn implies that local States and actors are supposed to take care of maintaining stability in the region, worrying about their own security and keeping in mind that they cannot rely anymore on the US like in the past.

¹²⁸ G. Natalizia, “Il conflitto in Libia e la crisi dell’ordine internazionale”, in “Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell’ordine internazionale”, a cura di A. Folco Biagini, Castelvechi, 2020, p. 151.

¹²⁹ Ivi, p. 156.

¹³⁰ Ivi, p. 152.

¹³¹ M. Laruffa, “Il disimpegno di Washington”, *Eastwest*, n° 87, January-February 2020, p. 61.

¹³² G. Natalizia, “Il conflitto in Libia e la crisi dell’ordine internazionale”, in “Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell’ordine internazionale”, a cura di A. Folco Biagini, Castelvechi, 2020, p. 139.

Yet, this does not mean that Washington is not interested at all in what happens in the Mediterranean area: the US keeps monitoring the dynamics of the region on a constant basis, in particular for what regards Russian activity and terrorist groups¹³³. However, the number one priority for America is Asia and in particular China, and the American Administrations (not only Trump, but also Obama before him) do not want to use and waste too many political, military, economic and diplomatic resources in controlling a region that is not considered a top priority anymore, leaving instead such responsibility to local actors and partners, in particular the European ones. In this perspective, the repeated request by Trump to the European NATO members to increase their defence budget should not come as a surprise, as well as the recent decision to withdraw part of the American troops stationed in Germany. On the one hand, these moves should be interpreted as domestic political choices made in order to catch part of the American votes in view of the forthcoming 2020 elections; on the other, they are part of a precise strategy that comprises the partial relocation of US assets from Europe and the Middle East to Asia.

Once again, a clarification should be made. Washington has no intention at all to abandon these areas. It is still committed, in spite of the public rhetoric, to defend the European countries, as well as its Middle Eastern allies, and to maintain an important military presence in these regions, in order to keep monitoring the situation, in particular Russian and Chinese growing presence, and to prevent a local player (i.e. Iran, but also Germany) from achieving regional hegemony. The US will not retire completely or totally decrease its attention from Europe or the Middle East (the “enlarged Mediterranean”, as it is called). It will keep the capacity to influence the events of the region and to directly strike if deemed necessary, as the recent raid that killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in Iraq have demonstrated. However, as long as no imminent, vital and strategic threats emerge, it will partially redirect its attention towards Asia, opening, as already said, some room for maneuver for other local, regional and global actors with interests in the area.

2.2.2 The growing Chinese presence

Over the last years, the scale of Chinese presence and activities in the Mediterranean region has constantly increased. As mentioned before, the Mediterranean basin is part of the Chinese project called Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious program launched in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The

¹³³ “New evidence of Russian aircraft active in Libyan airspace”, Press Release, US AFRICOM, 18 June 2020, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/32941/new-evidence-of-russian-aircraft-active-in-li>

aim of the project is to build a dense logistic, infrastructural, energetic, commercial and digital network connecting China to the rest of Asia, the Middle East and Europe. This plan, which brings to mind the ancient silk road that connected China to Europe through Central Asia and the Middle East, has not only an economic and commercial dimension: it is a way to link all the countries to China, expanding its influence and advancing its strategic interests. It is a tool aimed at further integrating the States embraced by the plan into Chinese orbit, making China the center of a new system and consolidating its leading position. It provides for the investment of \$1.400 billion¹³⁴ on two axes: one links China to Europe by land, the other by sea.

The maritime dimension is particularly crucial for its impact on the Mediterranean area. Indeed, over the last years, the scope and dimension of Chinese investments in the region have augmented, in particular with regard to the participation of Chinese enterprises in the share of several major ports of the Mediterranean basin. Probably, the most famous case is the port of Piraeus, in Athens, the biggest port in Greece, in which Chinese companies have spent around €1,5 billion since 2008 in several projects¹³⁵. Generally speaking, the three major Chinese shipping companies hold shares in 16 different ports in the entire Mediterranean area, including, among the others, the ports of Valencia, Marseille and Vado Ligure in Europe, Casablanca, Tanger Med and Port Said in North Africa, and the Israelis hubs of Ashdod and Haifa¹³⁶. The main reason for such enormous interest by China to the Mediterranean logistic and infrastructural ports is explained by two factors. The first one is that the Chinese economy heavily depends on foreign trade and especially maritime shipping. In 2017, the maritime economy accounted for about 10% of the Chinese GDP, with growth forecasts arriving to 15% by 2035. Moreover, in 2017 China was the first country in the world for movement of goods, with 213 million of TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit, the unit of cargo capacity used to describe the capacity of container ships) transported¹³⁷. The second factor is that the main trade partner of China is the EU, thus Beijing has an enormous interest in further enhancing and stabilizing its trade relationships with Europe, as well as the commercial routes and the infrastructural system (it is not a coincidence that the BRI has its origin in China and the ending point in the Old Continent, connecting at the same time all the transit countries).

¹³⁴ F. Manenti, “La presenza cinese nel Mar Mediterraneo”, in “Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo – 2019”, edited by F. Anghelone and A. Ungari, Istituto di Studi Politici “S. Pio V”, Roma, 2019, p. 25,

¹³⁵ Ivi, p. 26.

¹³⁶ Ivi, p. 27.

¹³⁷ Ibidem.

Another relevant aspect of the growing Chinese presence and penetration in the region is related to the telecommunication system. The BRI is not only about connecting ports and physical infrastructures, it is also a project aimed at creating and connecting digital hubs. Chinese telecommunication companies, such as Huawei, China Telecom and China Unicom have increased their investments in the Mediterranean region as well, also with regard to the laying of submarine cables. As an example, in 2008 Huawei Marine Networks began to build the connection system between Italy and Tunisia, which officially became operational in 2013, as well as the MedNautilus submarine telecommunications cable system, owned by Telecom Italia Sparkle, which connects Italy, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon and Israel¹³⁸.

At the political level, the approach of the Chinese government towards the Mediterranean area seems to be fragmented and heterogeneous. Indeed, at the moment, the attention for the Mediterranean basin is mainly based on economic, commercial and infrastructural interests and is included in the broader framework of the BRI, without providing a comprehensive and autonomous political strategy for the region. Given a certain level of skepticism in Europe towards the geopolitical and security implications of the BRI, China prefers to deal with single States on a bilateral basis, where it can exert more influence, rather than adopting a solely multilateral framework for dialogue and diplomacy, trying to smooth the EU attitude towards the BRI from within¹³⁹. The Memorandum of Understanding signed in March 2019 between the Chinese and the Italian Governments clearly reflects this approach: China is looking for political interlocutors in the Mediterranean region, and especially in Europe, to further create new opportunities and openings for the BRI. The constant and progressive consolidation of economic, commercial, logistic, infrastructural and communication relationships with many partners in the area could possibly lead in the future to a more active role played by Beijing also at the political level. Moreover, as far as Chinese interests will grow and will require some forms of protection by the government, it can not be excluded that there will be occasional visits of Chinese naval military vessels in the Mediterranean region, another sign of the growing Chinese presence in the area.

¹³⁸ Ivi, p. 31.

¹³⁹ Ivi, p. 33.

2.2.3 The arms race

The overall trend of geopolitical competition in the Mediterranean region is confirmed by an arms race that is currently in place in the area. Indeed, several countries are investing huge economic resources in modernizing, expanding and strengthening their militaries, especially the naval forces. The recent deal signed between Egypt and Fincantieri¹⁴⁰, according to which the Italian firm will sell to Cairo two FREMM class frigates, originally built for the Italian Navy, is only the last of a series of military deals and arms programmes undertaken by several Mediterranean States, in particular the North African countries, with the aim of enhancing the military capabilities of their fleets up to “blue water” ambitions¹⁴¹. To mention just the most relevant cases, Egypt, which has a distinctive tradition of buying armaments from different nations, in order to diversify its military arsenal and avoid being dependent on a single supplier, has become the third largest arms importer in the world¹⁴², investing heavily in modernizing its land, naval and air forces. Algeria is another State who is spending a lot in its armed forces. In 2019, Algeria’s military spending was the highest in Africa, both in absolute terms (\$10.3 billion) and as a share of the GDP (6%). Moreover, Algeria’s military spending saw a constant increase since 2000, reaching an all-time high in 2016¹⁴³. Another State which has increased its military spending in the region is Turkey: indeed, Turkish military expenditure has risen by 86% in the decade 2010-2019, reaching \$20.4 billion in 2019¹⁴⁴.

Apart from the numbers, one relevant aspect of the arms race currently ongoing in the Mediterranean basin is the fact that almost all the countries are investing in upgrading and expanding their submarine capabilities. In fact, submarines are key military assets used for carrying out covert and secret operations, including patrolling waters, performing ISR missions (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance), carrying, deploying and recovering special forces in enemy territories, as well as for traditional naval warfare operations and for projecting and advancing national influence. A brief overlook of the main programs for expanding and modernizing the underwater fleets of the Mediterranean Sea countries is necessary in order to give the proper idea of the dimension and importance of this trend.

¹⁴⁰ A. Lanzetta, “Le armi all’Egitto? Nel Mediterraneo c’è la guerra, l’Italia non può fare finta di nulla”, TPI, 23 June 2020, <https://www.tpi.it/esteri/armi-egitto-italia-mediterraneo-guerra-bertolotti-intervista-20200623625598/>

¹⁴¹ “Marina Militare – Linee di indirizzo strategico 2019-2034”, Marina Militare, April 2019, p. 59. A “blue water navy” is a navy capable of effectively operating far from the national waters and of exercising and maintaining sea control.

¹⁴² “SIPRI Yearbook 2020 - Armaments, Disarmament and International Security”, Summary, SIPRI, 2020, p. 13.

¹⁴³ “Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019”, SIPRI Fact Sheet, 2020, p.5.

¹⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 11.

Starting from the fact that there are about 46 total conventional submarines currently operative in the region¹⁴⁵, belonging to the several States whose shores are directly washed by the Mediterranean Sea, new and more modern and advanced vessels are being built for many of the navies of the area. To mention the most important actors, Turkey, which already owns 12 Type-209 boats of German origin, plans to build 6 new Type-214 submarines, always of German origin but produced under license in Turkey, in order to replace some of the most obsolete vessels. In addition, in October 2019 the "MILDEN" program was launched, for the production of new boats completely "made in Turkey". After the Turkish navy, in terms of number of units, there is the Greek fleet, which operates a total of 11 vessels of different versions between Type 209/1100, Type 209/1200 and Type-214, all of German origin. Another important protagonist is Egypt, which in May 2019 received the third submarine Type 209/1400 produced in Germany, out of a total order of 4 boats. Other important players are Algeria, which owns Russian-produced Kilo class submarines, Israel, which operates Dolphin class submarines capable of launching missiles equipped with nuclear warheads¹⁴⁶, Spain, which plans to build four new boats from 2022, and France, the only nation possessing nuclear-powered submarines in the Mediterranean Sea. Finally, there is the Italian Navy, which operates 8 vessels between the Sauro class (4 units) and the Todaro class (4 units, the most modern ones and based on the German project Type-212). The 4 submarines of the Sauro class will be replaced in the next years with as many boats called U-212A NFS (Near Future Submarine), that will be constructed by Italian firm Fincantieri and will enhance the already advanced Italian underwater capabilities.

2.2.4 The struggle over energy resources

Another crucial dynamic currently ongoing in the Mediterranean region, in particular in the eastern part, is the struggle over energy resources. Over the last years, several important offshore gas fields have been discovered in the area of the Mediterranean Sea comprised between Egypt, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel and the Gaza Strip. The so-called "Levant Basin" is estimated to contain 122,4 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of technically recoverable gas¹⁴⁷, making it an invaluable source of gas, and thus energy, for the countries of the area, as they seek to secure their energy supplies as well as to boost economic

¹⁴⁵ "Marina Militare – Linee di indirizzo strategico 2019-2034", Marina Militare, April 2019, p. 60.

¹⁴⁶ R. Bergman, "Report: Dolphin subs equipped with nuclear weapons", Ynetnews, 6 March 2012, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4237408,00.html>

¹⁴⁷ J. V. Bowlus, "Eastern Mediterranean gas: Testing the field", ECFR, May 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/eastern_med/gas_fields

development. The first discoveries of gas fields date back to 2009, when the Tamar gas field (10,8 tcf) was discovered in Israel's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This was followed in 2010 by the discovery of the Leviathan gas field (22 tcf), always in Israel's EEZ, and the Aphrodite gas field (8 tcf) in the EEZ of Cyprus in 2011. However, the most important gas field was found in Egypt's EEZ in 2015 by the Italian energy company ENI (which holds 50% of its shares): it is called Zohr, it is estimated to contain 30 tcf of gas (thus being the biggest gas field ever discovered in the area) and it became operational in 2017¹⁴⁸. In the following map it is possible to see the geographic distribution of the main gas fields off the coasts of Egypt, Cyprus and Israel.



Figure 1. (Source: Bruegel.com, 2015)

The discoveries of such huge and important offshore gas fields in the area have led several countries to cooperate in order to create and strengthen economic, industrial, commercial, infrastructural and energetic partnerships. For instance, in 2018 Israel and Egypt signed a deal for gas export from the Israelis fields of Leviathan and Tamar towards Egypt. The pumping of the gas, which officially started

¹⁴⁸ "Deep sea rivals: Europe, Turkey, and new Eastern Mediterranean conflict lines - Timeline", ECFR, May 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/eastern_med/timeline

in January 2020¹⁴⁹, is seen as a crucial step in strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries since the peace deal signed in 1979. Moreover, the total economic value of the deal is estimated to amount to around \$19.5 billion over 15 years. According to some sources, the gas, which is exported through a subsea pipeline, will be mainly exported again to Europe, while a small part should be used for Egyptian domestic energy consumption¹⁵⁰.

Another crucial step in regional cooperation between several countries of the area is represented by the so-called EastMed Project, a pipeline that should bring the gas of the Israelis and Cypriot basins to Italy and thus Europe, passing also through Greece. Due to its potential importance in diversifying European gas supplies, it has been considered a Project of Common Interest (PCI) by the EU since 2015¹⁵¹. It is a very ambitious and important infrastructural and energetic program and, if completed, it will be composed by one of the longest subsea pipelines in the world (more than 1300 km)¹⁵², as it is possible to see in the following picture.

¹⁴⁹ O. Coren, "In Major Development, Israel Starts Pumping Gas to Egypt". Haaretz, 16 January 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-starts-gas-egypt-major-middle-east-development-jordan-leviathan-1.8403305>

¹⁵⁰ A. Rabinovitch, T. Cohen, "Israel to increase gas exports to Egypt, companies say", Reuters, 2 October 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-egypt-natgas-idUSKBN1WH016>

¹⁵¹ Regulation (EU) 2016/89 18 November 2015.

¹⁵² M. Bresolin, "L'opposizione di Roma blocca a Bruxelles il gasdotto dei record", Il Secolo XIX, 6 March 2019, <https://www.ilsecoloxix.it/economia/2019/03/06/news/l-opposizione-di-roma-blocca-a-bruxelles-il-gasdotto-dei-record-1.30260060>

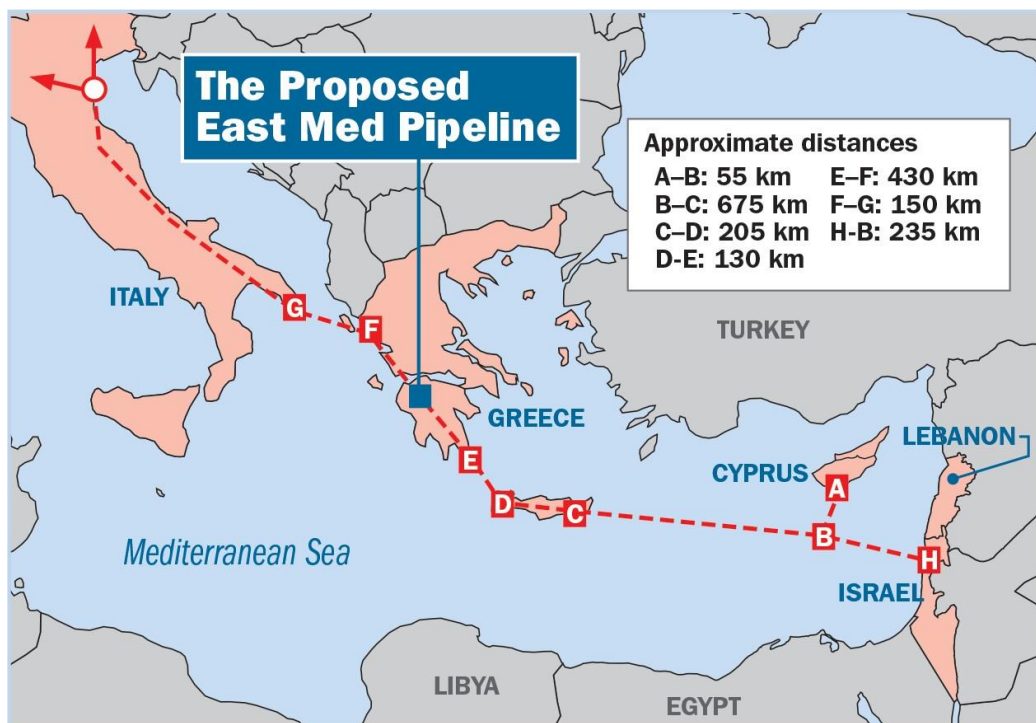


Figure 2. (Source: The Weekly Standard, 2018)

An official agreement on the development and construction of the pipeline was signed in January 2020 between the Governments of Greece, Cyprus and Israel, with the official support of Italy¹⁵³. Finally, in 2019, Egypt, Israel, Jordan Cyprus, Greece, Italy and the Palestinians created the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, aimed at creating an integrated regional gas market and enhancing cooperation in this filed¹⁵⁴.

However, these gas discoveries and infrastructural projects have also created some tensions in the area, in particular between Turkey on the one hand and Greece and Cyprus on the other. In fact, Ankara has been excluded from the regional cooperation framework (such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum), as well as from the energetic and infrastructural programs (such as the EastMed pipeline). Turkey is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), since it claims that the provisions regarding the EEZ and the rights to exploit the maritime resources, as they are

¹⁵³ F. De Palo, “Parte Eastmed. Cosa c’è dietro la più grande partita geopolitica del Mediterraneo”, Formiche, 2 January 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/01/parte-eastmed-cosa-dietro-piu-grande-partita-geopolitica-mediterraneo/>

¹⁵⁴ “Eastern Mediterranean countries to form regional gas market”, Reuters, 14 January 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-energy-gas/eastern-mediterranean-countries-to-form-regional-gas-market-idUSKCN1P81FG>

formulated in the UNCLOS, are disadvantageous for its interests in the area, going instead only to the advantage of Greece in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean¹⁵⁵. Thus, Turkey has claimed some areas belonging to the Greek and Cypriot EEZs, rising the level of tensions with its neighbors over the last years.

Moreover, Ankara has blocked several times the drilling activities of some ships off the coasts of Cyprus, claiming that such activities are illegitimate and pose a threat to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and to Turkey itself¹⁵⁶. One of the most relevant cases in this sense was that of the ship Saipem 12000, operating on behalf of ENI. In February 2018, it was blocked by Turkish military ships and prevented from entering the zone within Cypriot EEZ where it was supposed to conduct drilling activities with Cyprus' authorization, and it was forced to go back¹⁵⁷.

In addition, Turkey has conducted several times drilling activities on its own within Cypriot territorial waters and without any authorization by Cypriot authorities. For these reasons, in July 2019 the European Council has imposed sanctions on Ankara¹⁵⁸, while calling for diplomatic negotiations between Turkey and Cyprus to solve the disputes. The following picture offers an overview of the disputed maritime areas between Greece, Turkey and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, of the main gas fields discovered in the region, as well as of main the activities of Turkish drilling ships off the coasts of the island of Cyprus.

¹⁵⁵ N. Tsafos, "East Med tensions rise (again)", CSIS Critical Question, 29 July 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/east-med-tensions-rise-again>

¹⁵⁶ "Ecco perché la Turchia ha bloccato la nave Saipem 12000 di Eni", Energia Oltre, 12 February 2018, <https://energiaoltre.it/turchia-saipem12000-eni-gas/>

¹⁵⁷ V. Nigro, "Cipro, Eni rinuncia: la nave Saipem fa dietrofront", Repubblica, 23 February 2018, https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2018/02/23/news/eni_cipro_saipem_nave_piattaforma_turchia_speronamento-189577201/

¹⁵⁸ "Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council adopts conclusions", Press release, Council of the EU, 15 July 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/07/15/turkish-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-conclusions/>

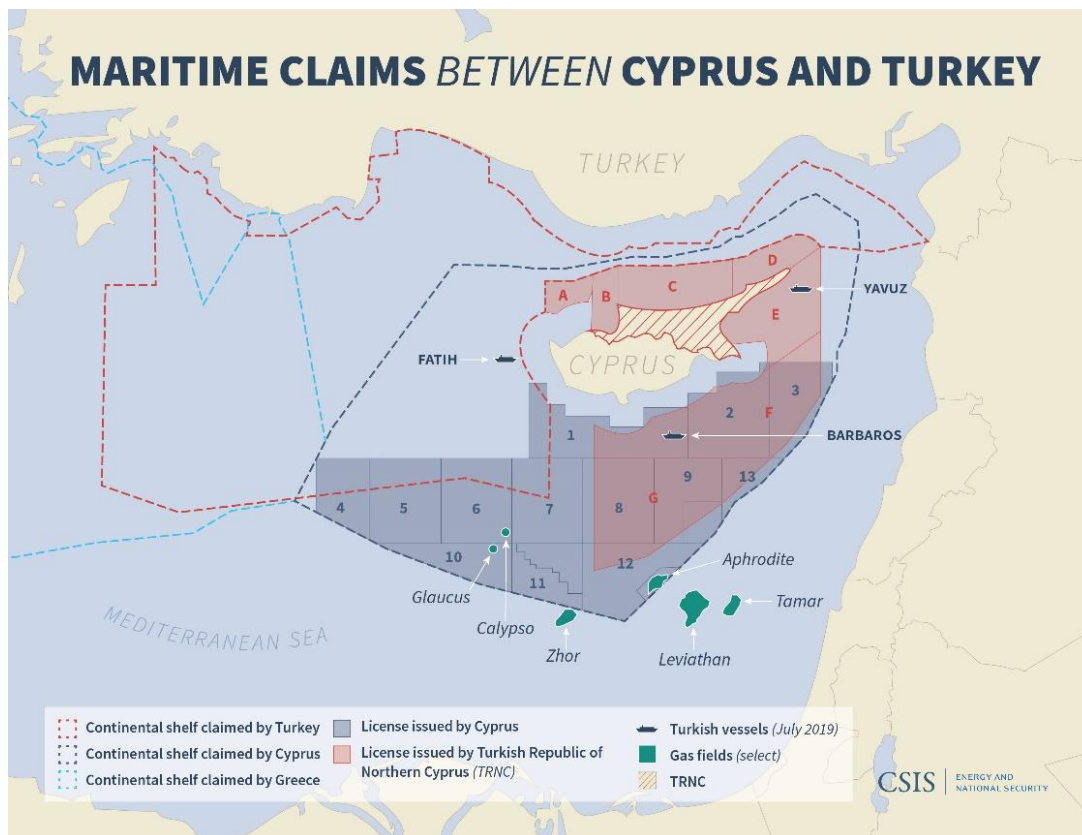


Figure 3. (Source: CSIS, 2019)

To sum up, the recent gas discoveries (and the possible new ones) in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea represent both an opportunity for economic development, energy diplomacy and political cooperation, but also a source of maritime disputes, political tensions and geopolitical competition. In spite of the assertive and sometimes aggressive attitude of Turkey, a fully regional multilateral cooperation is necessary, if the possibilities for a real and comprehensive economic development are to be implemented. A more accommodationist approach by Ankara could possibly make Cyprus, Greece and other regional players more inclined to include Turkey in the cooperation frameworks. However, even though they are two different dossiers, the lowering of regional tensions passes also through the solution of the Libyan crisis, where Turkey is actively involved and where it is opposed to other regional actors, such as Egypt. The following paragraph will thus focus on the Libyan case, which constitutes the most important, crucial and complex issue and crisis currently in progress in the Mediterranean region (probably together with the endless Syrian civil war).

2.3 The Libyan crisis

With a total geographical area of 1,759,540 square kilometers, Libya is the 4th largest country in Africa and the 18th in the world¹⁵⁹. Given the fact that 90% of the country is desert or semidesert, more than 90% of its 6,890,535¹⁶⁰ citizens live along the Mediterranean coast, in particular in and between the cities of Tripoli (the capital) and Misrata on the west, and Benghazi and Al Bayda on the east.

Previously under Ottoman rule for many centuries, the regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were conquered by the Kingdom of Italy after the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912), and officially passed under Italian sovereignty with the 1912 Treaty of Lausanne. In 1934, with the establishment of the new General Government of Libya (and with Italo Balbo as the first General Governor), the two regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were united for the first time under the common name of Libya¹⁶¹.

Given the Italian defeat in World War II, Libya became an independent country in 1951, after a short transition phase under UN administration. The new State had a federal structure, with the three historical provinces (Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan) governed by a single king representing the whole Libyan population: King Idris I. However, following a military coup, Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi took the power in 1969, establishing over the years a strong and brutal authoritarian regime, promoting a political system that was a sort of mix between Arab nationalism, Islamism and socialism.

Given the strong authoritarian and personal rule of Qadhafi, his regime was not spared from the wave of the so-called “Arab Springs” that broke out in several Middle East and North African countries in 2011. Started in February, the revolts in Libya grew in intensity and importance, and led to the formation of a National Transitional Council (NTC), composed by anti-Qadhafi political and military figures. Moreover, in March 2011, UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorized air and naval military operations in Libya in order to protect the civilian population from Qadhafi’s repression: the NATO military intervention eventually favored the killing of Qadhafi and the end of its regime in October 2011. This phase (February-October 2011) is also known as the first Libyan civil war.

¹⁵⁹ “Libya”, The World Factbook, CIA.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem, (July 2020 estimate).

¹⁶¹ A. Ungari, “Libia – La storia”, in “Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo – 2019”, edited by F. Anghelone and A. Ungari, Istituto di Studi Politici “S. Pio V”, Roma, 2019, p. 159.

After the elimination of Qadhafi, new general elections were held in 2012, and the newly elected General National Congress (GNC) replaced the NTC, with the aim, among the others, to write a new constitution for the Libyan country¹⁶². However, tribal rivalries, the proliferation of armed militias and the presence of forces still loyal to the previous regime made the political, social and institutional landscape highly unstable. New elections were held in June 2014, that led to a secular majority in the new Parliament, the House of Representatives (HoR). However, some former members of the GNC did not recognize the electoral results, as well as the legitimacy of the new HoR. They conquered Tripoli and proclaimed a National Salvation Government (NSG). This fact led to the creation of two power centers in Libya: Tripoli, with the GNC and the newly established NSG, and Tobruk, where the new HoR moved after the contestation of the electoral results¹⁶³. It also marked the starting point of the so-called second Libyan civil war, a conflict that is still in progress.

With the UN mediation and diplomatic efforts, the Libyan Political Agreement was signed in Skhirat in December 2015 between 90 members of the Tobruk-based HoR and 69 members of the Tripoli-based GNC¹⁶⁴. The agreement provided for the creation of a single and unified Government of National Accord (GNA) guided by Fajez al-Serraj and with a nine-member Presidency Council, supported by a single House of Representatives and a High Council of State with advisory functions, whose members were mainly former GNC figures¹⁶⁵. The main goal of the so-called Skhirat Accords was to try to overcome the political division of the country in two separate entities, reinforcing instead the national and institutional unity.

Nevertheless, the GNA had to deal with many difficulties ever since the beginning of its activities. The first proposal made by al-Serraj for the cabinet members was rejected by the Tobruk-based HoR in January 2016. A second proposal, made in February, was accepted by the majority of the deputies of the HoR, which stated their support in a declaration. Even though it was not an official vote by the assembly, on the basis of such declaration al-Serraj worked for forming the government, relying also on the official UN support¹⁶⁶. However, the first phases of the political life of the GNA were made even more difficult

¹⁶² Ivi, p. 169.

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 170.

¹⁶⁵ "Libya", The World Factbook, CIA.

¹⁶⁶ A. Ungari, "Libia – La storia", in "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo – 2019", edited by F. Anghelone and A. Ungari, Istituto di Studi Politici "S. Pio V", Roma, 2019, p. 171.

by the fact that it operated from Tunis. Only in March 2016, after several negotiations with the local militias of Tripoli, as well as those of Misrata, al-Serraj was finally able to enter the Libyan capital onboard a ship, making the Abu Sitta Naval Base the provisional headquarter of the GNA¹⁶⁷.

In the meantime, in Cyrenaica, general Haftar, leader of the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA), reinforced its role after its troops conquered the city of Benghazi. Together with several members of the Tobruk-based HoR, in particular its president Aguila Saleh, he strongly opposed the role and actions undertaken by al-Serraj and the GNA in Tripoli¹⁶⁸. In practice, the political division of Libya that the Skhirat Accords were supposed to eliminate never ended: on the contrary, it was further reinforced over the years between 2016 and 2019, due to the fact that Haftar occupied the oil installations in Ras Lanuf, Sidra, Zuwetina and Brega¹⁶⁹, located on the coast of the Gulf of Sidra, one of the richest oil regions of the country. With this move, he consolidated his role and position in Cyrenaica, and then moved southward, launching the “Fezzan campaign” in January 2019¹⁷⁰, for conquering the southern region of Libya. The second Libya’s civil war and the de facto division of the country culminated in the military offensive launched in April 2019 by general Haftar and the LNA against Tripoli, with the explicit aim of taking control of the city.

The current Libyan scenario features three levels of conflictuality¹⁷¹, being at the same time different and separated from each other, but also overlapped and interconnected:

- the domestic conflict, at the military, political and ideological levels, between the Tripoli-based GNA, supported by Misrata, and the LNA, whose main centers are Benghazi and Tobruk;
- the rivalries between the countless tribes, clans and militias that constitute the Libyan socio-political landscape, continuously looking for new opportunities, both within and outside the limits imposed by the GNA-LNA confrontation;

¹⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 172.

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁰ J. Pack, “Kingdom of militias. Libya’s second war of post-Qadhafi succession”, ISPI, May 2019, p. 13.

¹⁷¹ “Relazione sulla politica dell’informazione per la sicurezza – 2019”, Sicurezza Nazionale, February 2020, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/relazione-annuale/relazione-2019.html>, p. 23.

- the proxy war between several regional and international foreign actors, which has gradually become the dominant element over the last year and a half¹⁷².

2.3.1 The Libyan civil war: the GNA-LNA confrontation

On April 4th, 2019, Khalifa Haftar and the LNA launched an armed offensive against the city of Tripoli, with the official aim to liberate the Libyan capital from the Islamist and terrorist groups that control it. This was the public reason used to justify his real objective: taking control of Tripoli with brute force and thus becoming the sole ruler of Libya, trying to unify the country under his military strength. Indeed, Haftar's campaign was the third and last step of a broader plan aimed at conquering the entire Libya. The first stage was the expansion in Cyrenaica, terminated with the capture of Derna in February 2019¹⁷³, and the second one the advance in Fezzan, in the southern part of Libya, started in January 2019. After having consolidated his position in those areas, only Tripoli, the political capital as well as the headquarter of the powerful Libyan Central Bank and National Oil Corporation (NOC), remained to be conquered.

Haftar's attack on Tripoli acquires a strong political and symbolic meaning since only ten days after the beginning of the offensive (between April 14th and April 16th) the Libyan National Conference was scheduled to take place. It was an intra-Libyan meeting organized with the mediation of the UN. It aimed at gathering all the main domestic actors of the Libyan conflict in the city of Ghadames in order to organize new general elections in the country. The conference represented a crucial step in the framework of the peace process on which the UN, in particular the head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Ghassan Salamé, had been working over the previous months (it took one year and a half of consultations with dozens of groups to organize the conference¹⁷⁴). In this sense, it is perfectly clear that Khalifa Haftar did not want to take part in the peace process and that he refused any diplomatic and political solution: on the contrary, he made clear his intention to conquer the capital, Tripoli, and unify Libya with the military force under his personal rule. He probably hoped for a quick

¹⁷² Ibidem.

¹⁷³ Ivi, p.12.

¹⁷⁴ "Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Libya, Ghassan Salamé, on the national conference", UNSMIL, 9 April 2019, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-special-representative-secretary-general-libya-ghassan-salam%C3%A9-national-conference>

victory, relying on the external support he received from many countries, as well as on some possible defections among the several armed militias that supported the GNA.

Haftar's military offensive against Tripoli has been the most decisive moment over the last years in the Libyan crisis, since it has determined the failure of any possible political and diplomatic solution of the conflict, as well as the de facto division of the country into two separate and conflicting entities. It has been crucial both on the domestic and international levels. On the domestic side, it has made public Haftar's intention to conquer Tripoli by military force. This move, as already said, meant the end of the Libyan National Conference and thus the end of any possible political agreement between the domestic actors in Libya. Moreover, on the side of the GNA, it would be difficult (and also understandable) to refuse to negotiate in the future with the very man that has launched a massive military offensive against the capital. Indeed, al-Serraj has recently declared that there would be no negotiations with Haftar¹⁷⁵. This news does not come as a surprise, especially after the failure of Haftar's attack and the new balance of power in Libya, with the GNA that has reinforced its role and positions over the last months. On the other hand, Haftar bet everything on the success of his operation, which instead in the end has turned into a failure. Several times Haftar had announced the "zero hour" of the Tripoli's assault¹⁷⁶, without being ever able to conquer it. In a desperate and last attempt, in April 2020 he also proclaimed himself "the ruler of Libya" with a "mandate" by people¹⁷⁷, a move that actually confirmed his precarious and weak position. Now, with the failure of his offensive and the advance of the GNA forces¹⁷⁸, Haftar will also have to face the possibility of the development of domestic discontent and internal unrests, with even potential defections within his forces.

On the international side, the offensive has produced two consequences: the increased presence and intervention of foreign powers in Libya, that has turned the crisis into a proxy war, and the failure of any international and UN-led peace process. The international community, rather than supporting Haftar,

¹⁷⁵ A. Assad, "Al-Sarraj: No more negotiations with Haftar", The Libya Observer, 15 April 2020, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/al-sarraj-no-more-negotiations-haftar>

¹⁷⁶ "For the fourth time. Haftar announces zero hour to storm Tripoli", Revolution Map, 13 December 2019, <https://revolutionmap.com/2019/12/13/for-the-fourth-time-haftar-announces-zero-hour-to-storm-tripoli/#:~:text=Haftar%20said%20in%20a%20televised%20speech%20at%20the,it%20and%20settled%20there%20by%20force%20of%20arms.%E2%80%9D>

¹⁷⁷ "Khalifa Haftar declares himself ruler of Libya with 'mandate' from the people", Middle East Eye, 28 April 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/khalifa-haftar-declares-himself-ruler-libya-mandate-people>

¹⁷⁸ M. Chulov, "End of Tripoli siege raises fears of full-scale proxy war in Libya", The Guardian, 26 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/26/libyan-standoff-risks-dragging-egyptian-military-into-regions-cold-war>

should have strongly criticized and opposed his military assault since the beginning. On the contrary, driven by national interests and maybe also by the hope that Haftar would have been strong enough to conquer Tripoli and unify the country, many States directly (but slightly) criticized him in word, but indirectly (and strongly) supported his campaign in practice.

At the time of writing (July 2020), it seems that the GNA forces are preparing a counteroffensive aimed at conquering Sirte and al-Jufra, supported by Turkey. Egypt, alarmed by such moves, is considering the possibility of directly intervening in support of the LNA forces, while diplomatic efforts are being made in order to avoid a new military battle and the consequent further escalation of the conflict¹⁷⁹. The mix of all these factors, events and dynamics, both at the national and international levels, has made simply impossible to solve the Libyan crisis and pacify the country in the short and maybe also medium run (the third chapter will indeed focus on the future prospects for solving the Libyan crisis and the possible role that Italy could play in this sense).

2.3.2 Between socio-economic insecurity and institutional fragility: the role of militias

In spite of the presence of an official and internationally recognized Government in Libya, local militias and armed groups continue to play a crucial role. According to some sources, there are up to 2.000 different groups¹⁸⁰, from the smallest to the biggest and most powerful ones. At different levels and in different ways they all play a role in the complex Libyan situation, participating in the intricate partition of power, money and resources that constitutes a key feature of the Libyan domestic scenario.

One recurrent and important dynamic of such scenario is the mixture between institutional figures and authorities, armed groups and criminal networks¹⁸¹. In fact, several of the local militias that proliferate in the Libyan territories and that have their origins in the tribal structure of Libyan society take often part in both the official political institutions and the illicit criminal organizations, in particular those active in the field of human and oil smuggling. The important and influential role and the practical relevance of armed militias are based on their military capabilities as well as on their local legitimacy. The latter comes from their capacity to manage the illicit traffics at the local level and redistribute the economic gains to the population. Indeed, the local economy, given the perpetual state of conflictuality

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁰ “Guide to key Libyan militias”, BBC News, 11 January 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19744533>

¹⁸¹ L. Marinone, “Il ruolo delle milizie libiche nel traffico di esseri umani”, Ce.S.I., June 2018, p. 1.

and of political instability of the country, is mainly based on the revenues made from the illicit activities. This should not come as a surprise, also because such revenues are often higher than the official and legal economic resources provided by the national institutions¹⁸². Thus, in a sort of vicious circle, local militias use their power, influence and military capacity to manage the illicit traffics (either directly or by collaborating with the actual criminal networks), in order to increase their legitimacy both at the local and national levels, and thereby further reinforcing their role and status in the eyes of the local population and the political institutions.

The case of Abd al-Rahman al-Milad, also known as “al-Bija”, is one of the most relevant and clear examples of this dynamic. In 2011, when the revolts against Qadhafi broke out, al-Bija left the naval military academy and joined the rebels on the battlefield. After being wounded, he went to Germany to be cured¹⁸³. Thanks to the political instability that followed the anti-Qadhafi movements, al-Bija and his tribe – Awlad Bu Hmeira – were able to take control of the port and the oil refinery of the city of Zawiya, a coastal town in northwestern Libya. The control of these strategic infrastructures allowed him to become a central figure in the local district. Al-Bija started to oversee all the movements of oil, goods, arms and people to and from the port, making also new contacts with other local tribes and clans¹⁸⁴. Later on, he self-proclaimed head of the local Coast Guard, a role that was then confirmed by the GNA¹⁸⁵. This fact in turn allowed al-Bija to institutionalize his role and activities, further reinforcing his legitimacy, his influence and his control on local traffics. Indeed, he has become over time an indispensable point of reference for all those criminal organizations that operate in the area, widening its range beyond the town of Zawiya¹⁸⁶. In March 2017, he was selected by the International Organization for Migration to take part in a “study trip” to Italy, where, as an officer of the Libyan Coast Guard, he operated together with figures of the Italian Coast Guard, learning tactics and procedures and making new contacts. Later on, in the summer of 2018, he was put by the UN in a list of people involved in the illicit traffics of migrants in Libya and consequently sanctioned. He was then relieved of his duties, but in a second moment he received the official letter from the Coast Guard of Tripoli to resume his post as

¹⁸² Ivi, p. 6.

¹⁸³ “Chi è Bija, tra petrolio e schiavi un uomo al centro del sistema”, L’Espresso, 25 October 2019, <https://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2019/10/25/news/chi-e-bija-1.340267>

¹⁸⁴ L. Marinone, “Il ruolo delle milizie libiche nel traffico di esseri umani”, Ce.S.I., June 2018, p. 1.

¹⁸⁵ Ivi, p.2.

¹⁸⁶ Ibidem.

the head of the Coast Guard of Zawiya¹⁸⁷. As Lorenzo Marinone from Ce.S.I has pointed out, this process of progressive institutionalization of local tribes and criminal networks is not a peculiarity of the “al-Bija case”, but instead a recurrent and transversal characteristic of several actors involved in local illicit traffics¹⁸⁸, in particular migrants and arms, but also oil.

Besides, the capital Tripoli is not exempt from such dynamics. The proliferation of numerous militias and armed groups in the most important and most populated city of Libya makes the managing of the relationships with such groups quite complex for the Tripoli-based GNA. It is not a coincidence that several weeks passed between the creation of the GNA (December 2015) and its official arrival in Tripoli (March 2016). Before making port to Tripoli safely, al-Serraj had to find the support of a certain number of militias, and the assurance they would not kick him out. In addition, over the time, the militia cartel that controls Tripoli has gradually been integrated into the official organization chart of the Ministries of Interior and of Defence of the GNA, but at the same time maintained a widespread and pervasive control over any illegal activity in the area, from which these groups continue to derive a huge part of their economic revenues. In substance, the absence of strong central institutions and, above all, the deep (and also legal) infiltrations of militias within the security apparatus, nullify in practice the effectiveness of any attempt to combat illicit phenomena¹⁸⁹. The already fragile and weak institutions of the State, by “recruiting” the local armed groups in order to form the police and armed forces, actually confirm their dependence on them, and thus their institutional fragility and political weakness.

According to Jason Pack, such intricate, complex and fragmented militia landscape came into being gradually as the consequence of a number of factors¹⁹⁰: the power vacuum at the national level and the institutional fragility, which prevented official authorities from effectively providing security and services; the payments offered to those claiming to be militiamen, in the attempt to institutionalize such militias; the opportunities to exploit subsidies as well as smuggling-trafficking networks; the vast supplies of arms which were available in Libya after the fall of Qadhafi’s regime; the strength of local, tribal and regional identities in contraposition to the weakness of national institutions and narrative; the

¹⁸⁷ “Chi è Bija, tra petrolio e schiavi un uomo al centro del sistema”, L’Espresso, 25 October 2019, <https://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2019/10/25/news/chi-e-bija-1.340267>

¹⁸⁸ L. Marinone, “Il ruolo delle milizie libiche nel traffico di esseri umani”, Ce.S.I., June 2018, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ J. Pack, “Kingdom of militias. Libya’s second war of post-Qadhafi succession”, ISPI, May 2019, p. 5.

high level of youth unemployment, the need for personal and community protection and the social status that being part of a militia confers. In Pack's opinion, only a massive and coordinated international economic support could provide an exit strategy from such complex and fragmented scenario¹⁹¹.

2.3.3 The Libyan proxy war: the role of foreign powers

As already said before, the Libyan crisis has also become a proxy war between several regional and international foreign powers. The support of foreign actors to the diverse factions involved in the Libyan conflict has been a constant feature ever since the fall of Qadhafi in 2011. However, it has greatly intensified over the last year and a half, up to the point that it has become a fundamental factor, maybe the most relevant one, for the solution of the conflict.

2.3.3.1 France

France has traditionally been one of the most active European States in the Libyan scenario. Indeed, in 2011 it was one of the most dynamic countries in calling for the intervention of the international community against the repression of the popular revolts by Qadhafi's regime. It was also one of the most active States in implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 for establishing a no-fly zone over Libya, with the very first airstrikes conducted by French warplanes over Benghazi¹⁹².

In 2016 three undercover French soldiers died in a helicopter accident in Libya, proving the secret presence of French special forces operators¹⁹³, as well as DGSE agents¹⁹⁴, on the field. According to some sources, the first French military and intelligence officers arrived in Libya in November 2014, and from that moment onward their presence slowly but gradually increased¹⁹⁵. In particular, the task of the DGSE agents was twofold: on the one hand, establishing closer links with Haftar and the LNA; on the other, providing logistical, technical and intelligence support, as well as training the soldiers and militiamen. It is also believed that they were in charge of assuring Haftar's personal safety and

¹⁹¹ Ivi, p. 6.

¹⁹² "France fires first shots against Libya after Gaddafi's forces enter Benghazi", The Washington Post, 19 March 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-allies-prepare-military-action-against-libya-as-gaddafi-forces-continue-attacks/2011/03/18/ABLAOfs_story.html

¹⁹³ P. Taylor, "France's double game in Libya", Politico, 17 April 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/frances-double-game-in-libya-nato-un-khalifa-haftar/>

¹⁹⁴ The DGSE – Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure – is the French external intelligence agency.

¹⁹⁵ A. Meddi, "Révélations : comment Le Drian et la DGSE ont soutenu Haftar en Libye », Middle East Eye, 25 June 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actu-et-enquetes/libye-france-le-drian-haftar-dgse-revelations>

protection¹⁹⁶. Their support was important for the occupation of the major oil infrastructures of the Gulf of Sidra by Haftar's forces between 2016 and 2019.

In July 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron invited both al-Serraj and Haftar in France in order to try to broker a deal between the two parties. His goal was also to get an agreement that was favorable to Paris, thus trying to impose its leading role in Libya¹⁹⁷ and to capitalize the efforts France had made until that moment. France's strong relationship with Haftar was also confirmed by the fact that in April 2018 the Libyan warlord went to Paris in order to be cured after having suffered a stroke or another serious illness¹⁹⁸. Moreover, after launching the offensive against Tripoli in April 2019, Haftar continued to receive French support, as proved by the fact that American-made anti-tank Javelin missiles were found in Libya in the summer of 2019. France admitted they were French armaments, purchased from the US, and tried to justify their presence in Libya by saying they were not destined to Haftar's forces, but instead were part of a defective cargo meant to be destroyed¹⁹⁹. With the failure of the military assault on Tripoli, the political and practical support Paris has given to Haftar seems now to be shrinking²⁰⁰.

France's commitment in Libya and the support for Haftar could be explained by three factors. First of all, the French willingness to play an active role and increase its political influence in North Africa, a region that France historically considers important and where it has always been present and active. Second, the protection of specific French interests, mainly economic and energetic interests, as well as security interests regarding the fight against terrorism²⁰¹. France was probably the European country hit the most by the wave of terrorist attacks of 2015-2016 in Europe. Since 2014, it is present in the Sahel with a military operation, called "Barkhane"²⁰², aimed at providing support for local

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁷ P. Taylor, "France's double game in Libya", Politico, 17 April 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/frances-double-game-in-libya-nato-un-khalifa-haftar/>

¹⁹⁸ A. Ungari, "Libia – La storia", in "Atlante Geopolitico del Mediterraneo – 2019", edited by F. Anghelone and A. Ungari, Istituto di Studi Politici "S. Pio V", Roma, 2019, p. 174.

¹⁹⁹ "Missiles found at base of Libyan warlord are ours, France admits", The Guardian, 10 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/10/missiles-found-at-base-of-libyan-warlord-are-ours-france-admits>

²⁰⁰ "France abandons Haftar, attacks Wagner", Middle East Monitor, 4 July 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200704-france-abandons-haftar-attacks-wagner/>

²⁰¹ J. Fenton-Harvey, "Libya crisis: How France is thwarting peace", Middle East Eye, 14 July 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/libya-crisis-how-france-thwarting-peace>

²⁰² Opération Barkhane, Ministère de la Défense, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/barkhane/dossier-de-reference/operation-barkhane>

governments (Mali in particular) and combating local jihadist groups and terrorist organizations. In 2019, such operation involved the deployment of more than 5.000 French soldiers. Thus, it is important for France to secure the connections between the Sahelian countries and the North African ones, at both the operational and political levels. Finally, geopolitical calculations regarding the possibility of reducing the historical Italian influence in Libya, as well as of undermining its economic, energetic and security interests in the country, could have been made by the French political elite as well.

2.3.3.2 Russia

The Libyan crisis offers the perfect scenario for Russia for increasing its influence in the Mediterranean region. Taking advantage of the less active role of the Washington in the area, Moscow has increased its activities and presence in the Mediterranean basin over the last years. The most relevant example of this dynamic is offered by the Syrian civil war, where Russia has played a crucial role in supporting Assad's regime and in avoiding its fall. The Libyan crisis now offers another opportunity to advance its influence in the region.

Moscow has been supporting Haftar and the LNA for several years: the most remarkable event in this regard was Haftar's visit onboard the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov in January 2017²⁰³, when the Russian ship was deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean for combat operations in Syria. Russian support for Haftar has increased over time, in particular after the LNA offensive to take Tripoli that started in April 2019. There have been several reports mentioning the presence of up to 1,200 mercenaries belonging to the famous Wagner Group, a Russian private military company²⁰⁴, although the exact number of fighters is difficult to assess (the US Africa Command estimates the presence of 2,000 combatants²⁰⁵ in total). Despite the official denial by Putin of the presence of Russian troops on Libyan soil, the Wagner mercenaries are believed to indirectly operate for Moscow. Indeed, it seems that the Wagner company, run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a former Russian intelligence officer with close connections with the Kremlin, acts as a Russian proxy force in several areas of the world, including Syria,

²⁰³ "East Libya strongman visits Russian aircraft carrier in Mediterranean", Reuters, 11 January 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-russia-haftar/east-libya-strongman-visits-russian-aircraft-carrier-in-mediterranean-ria-idUSKBN14V1T2>

²⁰⁴ S. Magdy, "US Africa Command: Russian mercenaries planted land mines in Libya", Military Times, 16 July 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/07/15/us-africa-command-russian-mercenaries-planted-land-mines-in-libya/>

²⁰⁵ "Russia, Wagner Group complicating Libyan ceasefire efforts", US Africa Command Press Release, 15 July 2020, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/33008/russia-wagner-group-complicating-libyan-cease>

Ukraine and Libya²⁰⁶, as well as in many other African States. The on-the-ground support provided by the Wagner mercenaries to Haftar forces was fundamental over the course of the offensive aimed at taking Tripoli, but in the end it was non decisive as the military assault failed. However, Russia seems to have increased its influence over Haftar, thanks also to some funding worth \$3 billion provided to his forces²⁰⁷. It was counterfeit money printed in Russia and then shipped to Cyrenaica. Moreover, according to the US Africa Command, 14 Mig-29s were deployed from Syria to Libya by Moscow in late May 2020. Their Russian markings were painted over in order to camouflage their Russian origin, and they are being actively flown in Libyan airspace²⁰⁸, further increasing the level of foreign military presence in the conflict.

Having said that, it is complex to assess the actual level of influence that Moscow exercises over Haftar. The important effort made in terms of mercenaries, equipment, money and now also military aircrafts certainly gives Russia the opportunity to actively express its voice on the negotiation table and to influence the decisions and the events to a certain level. However, the very fact that Putin was not able to make Haftar accept the ceasefire negotiated with Turkey in January – immediately before the Berlin Conference – is “a sign that it does not have as much leverage over the warlord as it seems or, frankly, that it isn’t trying that hard”, as the American specialized journal Foreign Policy has pointed out²⁰⁹.

Finally, a last remark should be made with regard to Russian aims in Libya. Moscow’s strategy seems to be quite simple, for certain aspects: filling the vacuum left by Washington and increasing its influence in the region. With a moderate commitment in terms of money, men and military assets, Putin has become one of the fundamental actors of the Libyan civil conflict. His long-term goals could be the possibility of establishing a military base in Cyrenaica, in order to consolidate the projection of Russian influence in the Mediterranean region and in particular in North Africa, and from there further penetrating southward in the Sahelian region. Moscow could also use the Libyan crisis as a bargaining chip for negotiating the end of the sanctions by the European States, or other issues with the EU in general.

²⁰⁶ K. Rempfer, “Why this US general says Russian Wagner mercenaries in Africa ‘concern me greatly’”, Military Times, 4 April 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/04/why-this-us-general-says-russian-wagner-mercenaries-in-africa-concern-me-greatly/>

²⁰⁷ A. El Gomati, “Russia’s Role in the Libyan Civil War Gives It Leverage Over Europe”, Foreign Policy, 18 January 2020.

²⁰⁸ “Russia, Wagner Group complicating Libyan ceasefire efforts”, US Africa Command Press Release, 15 July 2020, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/33008/russia-wagner-group-complicating-libyan-cease>

²⁰⁹ A. El Gomati, “Russia’s Role in the Libyan Civil War Gives It Leverage Over Europe”, Foreign Policy, 18 January 2020.

If the Libyan conflict is increasingly resembling the Syrian one, as a proxy war between regional and international State actors, it is unlikely that Russia will dedicate to Libya as many energies and resources as it had done in Syria, for two reasons. First of all, Libya is not as important as Syria in the global geopolitical strategy of Moscow. Second, Russia may not have enough economic resources to engage itself in Libya as it did in Syria, especially after the economic consequences of the current pandemic and the shock in the energy market. The Ukrainian and Syrian scenarios remain more important than the Libyan one. Unless there is a gradual redeployment of assets from Syria to Libya, Moscow will continue to play an active role in the Libyan crisis, without however achieving the same level of engagement of the Syrian conflict. Still, Putin has surely become one of the most important foreign actors of the Libyan crisis, exploiting the window of opportunity it had and reinforcing Russian role in the Mediterranean basin.

2.3.3.3 United Arab Emirates (and Saudi Arabia)

The United Arab Emirates is one of the most dynamic States of the Persian Gulf region at the international level. Directly involved in the conflict in Yemen, it is also one of the most active foreign actors in the Libyan crisis as well. Indeed, Abu Dhabi has been providing logistical, technical and military support to Haftar ever since the beginning of his offensive against Tripoli. According to some sources, the UAE (together with Saudi Arabia) has given Haftar and the LNA a huge economic aid (some \$200 million) to finance his military assault on Tripoli. This amount of money would be used to pay militias and foreign mercenaries, as well as to buy weapons and military equipment of different kind²¹⁰. It is believed that air assets of the UAE (Wing Loong II drones, but also some manned fighter jets, such as Mirage 2000, F-16 or Rafale) are based in the al-Khadim air base, in the province of al-Marj, in eastern Libya. The air support provided by Abu Dhabi to Haftar has been crucial, not only during Tripoli's assault, but also before²¹¹, in expanding and consolidating the influence of the LNA in Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

²¹⁰ "UAE and Saudi Arabia grant warlord Haftar \$200 million to cover his offensive on Tripoli", The Libya Observer, 6 May 2019, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/uae-and-saudi-arabia-grant-warlord-haftar-200-million-cover-his-offensive-tripoli>

²¹¹ A. Lewis, "Covert Emirati support gave East Libyan air power key boost: U.N. report", Reuters, 9 June 2017, <https://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN1902K0-OCATP>

As Lorenzo Marinone from Ce.S.I. has argued, the UAE considers Libya as one of the battlefields of the confrontation for the regional hegemony with Turkey²¹². Such confrontation sees on the one hand the UAE, but also Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and on the other Turkey and Qatar. It is thus an intra-Sunni conflict²¹³, and Ankara is perceived by Abu Dhabi, as well as by Riyadh, as an emerging power trying to expand its influence in the so-called MENA region – Middle East and North Africa. Such expansionist policy is based on the political support furnished by Turkey (and also by Qatar) to the Muslim Brotherhood, a political organization within the Islamic world that is opposed by the Gulf Monarchies, as well as by the current leadership in Egypt. The UAE involvement in Libya seems thus to be guided by the political and ideological considerations of the broader regional contraposition with Ankara. Such ideological dimension makes the posture of the actors very rigid and rigorous, thus leaving little space for compromise and for a win-win solution of the conflict, which instead becomes a zero-sum game²¹⁴.

2.3.3.4 Egypt

Egypt has always looked at the Libyan domestic situation with particular attention. Given its 1,115 km of border with the Libyan region of Cyrenaica, one of Egypt's main interests is to maintain such border secure and under continuous control and surveillance. Moreover, ever since the 2013 military coup d'état which deposed the then President Mohammed Morsi, politically affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt, and especially the current President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has tried to limit the political influence of the Muslim Brothers, both within and outside the country. In this sense, Cairo happily welcomed the results of the 2014 elections in Libya, which produced a Parliament with a secular majority, and marked the parallel defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated political parties²¹⁵. Furthermore, in the same year, al-Sisi immediately declared his support for Haftar and his "Operation Dignity"²¹⁶, officially launched for combating Islamist and terrorist groups, but actually aimed at the military conquest of Cyrenaica. This support remained constant over the years, as the stability and security of the border with Libya remains a top priority for the Egyptian Government.

²¹² L. Marinone, "Libia: gli interessi strategici degli Emirati", Ce.S.I., January 2020, p. 3.

²¹³ "Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza – 2019", Sicurezza Nazionale, February 2020, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/relazione-annuale/relazione-2019.html>, p. 23.

²¹⁴ L. Marinone, "Libia: gli interessi strategici degli Emirati", Ce.S.I., January 2020, p. 5.

²¹⁵ Z. A. Akl, "Al-Sisi's Second Term: The Libya Question", ISPI, 15 March 2018.

²¹⁶ Ibidem.

Unlike other countries, such as Russia, France or the UAE, whose support for Haftar is partly driven by the will to increase their geopolitical influence in Libya and in the broader North Africa, Egyptian involvement in the Libyan crisis is more linked to the direct protection of specific national interests, without a real will to spread its political influence in Cyrenaica or Tripolitania. Cairo has genuine concerns about the instability and insecurity of his neighbor, as well as the possible proliferation of terrorist organizations and their infiltration in Egypt through Libya. In this regard, one could mention the 2015 Egyptian air raids in the cities of Derna and Sirte against jihadist groups affiliated to ISIS, conducted as a response to the kidnapping and killing of 21 Egyptian Copts²¹⁷. To sum up, it can be argued that political stability, domestic security and the fight against terrorism have been the main factors driving Cairo's policy towards Libya.

However, something seems to have changed recently. In fact, the huge Turkish involvement over the last year in support of the GNA have captured Egypt's attention. As said before, one of al-Sisi's main concerns is to prevent the expansion of the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, to which Turkey has strong political links (as well as Qatar). Cairo has become increasingly worried by the growing Turkish presence and activities in Libya, especially in the last weeks, after the failure of Haftar's assault on Tripoli and the subsequent advance of the GNA forces, directly supported by Ankara's military advisors. Indeed, al-Sisi publicly contemplated the possibility of a military intervention by the Egyptian Armed Forces already in December²¹⁸, when the situation on the field was more balanced. However, now that the GNA forces seem to be preparing a counteroffensive against the LNA-controlled sites of Sirte and al-Jufra²¹⁹ (one of Haftar's most important military airfields), with the support of Turkey, the possible military intervention of the Egyptian Army certainly appears more likely than in the past.

At the time of writing (July 2020), the possibility of a direct armed intervention by the Egyptian Armed Forces in Libya is under discussion by the Egyptian Parliament and the Egyptian Government. Considered the recent public declarations made by President al-Sisi and other prominent political

²¹⁷ G. Dentice, "Egypt's Security and Haftar: al-Sisi's strategy in Libya", ISPI, 2 February 2017.

²¹⁸ "Libia: Tripoli accusa, «Sisi minaccia un intervento», ANSA, 16 December 2019, <http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/it/notizie/rubriche/politica/2019/12/16/libia-tripoli-accusa-sisi-minaccia-un-intervento-dee712f6-061e-4674-9543-7b42508c03c3.html>

²¹⁹ G. Gaiani, "Libia: le opzioni negoziali per scongiurare la battaglia di Sirte e al-Jufra", Analisi Difesa, 16 July 2020, <https://www.analisdifesa.it/2020/07/libia-le-opzioni-negoziali-per-scongiurare-la-battaglia-di-sirte-e-al-jufra/>

figures²²⁰, the possibility of a more direct involvement of Cairo in the Libyan conflict does not seem so unlikely anymore. If such possibility actually materializes, it will determine a further military escalation of the crisis, with the official, not more covert, participation not only of Turkey (on the GNA side), but also of Egypt (on the LNA side). Moreover, this move will reinforce the proxy war currently in progress in Libya, further jeopardizing the already minimal chances of reaching a ceasefire and a political agreement between all the parties in conflict.

2.3.3.5 Turkey (and Qatar)

Turkey has probably been the most active foreign power in the Libyan crisis over the last year and a half. It has provided support to the GNA since the beginning of the LNA offensive, sending arms and military equipment (in particular, among the others, the armored vehicles BMC Kirpi²²¹ and the Bayraktar TB2 armed drones). Ankara's support has increased over time, furnishing more and more military assistance as the conflict intensified. In particular, there has been an extensive use of the Bayraktar TB2 drones by the GNA forces, while the LNA has been using Chinese military drones provided by the UAE. According to some sources, Ankara has lost at least 20 Bayraktar TB2 drones in Libya up to June 2020²²². In addition, since January 2020, Turkey has also sent to Libya an unspecified number of foreign mercenaries, mostly Syrian fighters (around 4,000 according to the Pentagon, more than 15,000 according to other sources²²³), as well as some regular Turkish troops. The former fight on the ground side by side with the GNA forces; the latter provide training and mentoring to Libyan combatants as well as indications and advice in better planning and managing the conflict at the strategic and tactical levels. However, the fact that two Turkish soldiers were killed in February seems to indicate that they also take part in some military actions on the battlefield²²⁴. Finally, Ankara has also deployed some frigates off the Libyan coasts, which are used to escort the cargo arriving in Tripolitania from the

²²⁰ "Libia, il presidente egiziano al-Sisi: «Pronti a qualsiasi missione dentro e fuori il Paese»", Repubblica, 20 June 2020, https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2020/06/20/news/libia_il_presidente_egiziano_al-sisi_pronti_a_qualsiasi_missione_dentro_e_fuori_il_paese_-259747897/

²²¹ "Cargo ship loaded with Turkish military vehicles arrives in Tripoli", Al Arabiya, 19 May 2019, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2019/05/19/Cargo-ship-loaded-with-Turkish-military-vehicles-arrives-in-Tripoli>

²²² "Lost Armour", <https://lostarmour.info/libya/item.php?id=23673>

²²³ G. Gaiani, "Quanti sono i mercenari e i contractors in Libia?", Analisi Difesa, 21 July 2020, <https://www.analisedifesa.it/2020/07/quanti-sono-i-mercenari-e-contractors-in-libia/>

²²⁴ "Erdogan says two Turkish troops killed in Libya conflict", Reuters, 25 February 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-turkey/erdogan-says-two-turkish-troops-killed-in-libya-conflict-idUSKCN20J0ST>

Turkish ports. According to some sources, Turkish ships have also taken part in combat operations, launching some missiles probably aimed at neutralizing hostile drones²²⁵.

The Turkish intervention has been crucial in helping the GNA in pushing back the LNA troops. The on-the-ground support provided by the mercenaries, the advice of Turkish military officers, the air support provided by armed drones, as well as the political and financial support of Qatar, were all crucial factors in stopping Haftar's offensive aimed at conquering Tripoli. As a consequence of such huge assistance to the Government led by al-Serraj, Turkey has become the main partner of the GNA at the international level. Turkey has used its involvement in the Libyan crisis to increase its presence and influence in the area. Some reports suggest that Ankara may use the al-Watiya air base in the northwestern part of Tripolitania as a permanent military hub for its forces in Libya, and thus a new base from which it can project its influence in the Mediterranean Sea.

Indeed, in order to fully comprehend the Turkish intervention in Libya, it is necessary to look at the broader picture. The new assertive posture undertaken by Ankara in Libya and more in general in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean is part of Erdogan's strategy to increase the geopolitical role and influence of Turkey in the region. The Libyan crisis and the energetic and territorial claims in the Eastern Mediterranean are two dossiers strongly interconnected for Ankara, as demonstrated by the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the GNA on the mutual recognition of the EEZs and maritime borders between Turkey and Libya in November 2019. Such agreement was aimed on the one hand at consolidating and securing Turkey's position in Libya, and on the other at furnishing the legal basis on which Ankara could advance future claims for exploiting the maritime resources of the area. In fact, the agreement was condemned by all the main States of the region, which consider it illegal and in contrast to international law.

Moreover, the recent decision to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque should be interpreted in the light of the new geopolitical ambitions of Turkey as well. Indeed, on the one hand it was a domestic political move, aimed at conquering new electoral consensus in a difficult time for Erdogan²²⁶; on the

²²⁵ "Libya: Turkey warship fires missiles on sites controlled by Haftar militias", Middle East Monitor, 1 April 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200401-libya-turkey-warship-fires-missiles-on-sites-controlled-by-haftar-militias/>

²²⁶ "Santa Sofia: come cambiano i rapporti con l'Ue", Eastwest, 13 July 2020, <https://eastwest.eu/it/turchia-riconversione-santa-sofia-in-moschea/>

other, it exemplifies the new role and ambitions of Turkey at the international level. Since the decision to turn the mosque into a museum dates back to the Treaty of Lausanne, thus symbolizing the fall of the Ottoman Empire and a period of decay for Turkey, the new choice is the perfect example of the opposite dynamic: overcoming the clauses of the Treaty of Lausanne, and sending an open message about the new role that Turkey is willing to play at the international level (in this regard, also the date of the first worship is symbolic: 24th of July, the same day that the Treaty of Lausanne was signed by Turkey in 1923).

2.3.3.6 UN and EU: the role of multilateral organizations

The United Nations has played a constant political role in Libya ever since the beginning of the crisis in 2011. Indeed, the UNSMIL was established in September 2011 with the mandate of helping to restore public security, promoting rule of law and undertaking inclusive political dialogue aimed at national reconciliation²²⁷. The most relevant and important goal achieved by the UN in Libya has been the Libyan Political Agreement, also known as the Skhirat Accords, signed in December 2015 and which led to the creation of the GNA, the only official government still recognized by the United Nations. However, the concrete implementation of the Skhirat Accords has been difficult, for both the GNA and the UNSMIL. The UN-sponsored Libyan National Conference, which was supposed to take place in April 2019 and that should have paved the way for new elections, never occurred, as Haftar launched his military assault on Tripoli. In particular, the last year and a half, characterized by a new military escalation of the Libyan crisis, marked the failure of the inclusive political dialogue and mediation process promoted by the UNSMIL and by its head, Ghassan Salamé. In fact, Salamé resigned from his position on 3 March 2020, officially for health reasons, possibly because of the collapse of his work of mediation undertaken since his appointment as head of the UNSMIL in June 2017. The fact that his successor has not yet been chosen exemplifies the crisis that the UN is witnessing in trying to resolve the Libyan conflict. At the moment, there is no space for political dialogue and diplomatic negotiations; on the contrary, the power relationships between the actors involved are being shaped only by the use of military force.

For what regards the EU, on 31 March 2020, Operation EUNAVFOR MED – IRINI has been officially launched in the Mediterranean Sea. The primary task of the mission is to implement the arms embargo imposed to Libya by the UN Security Council Resolution 1970 (2011) and 2292 (2016). The

²²⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2009 (2011).

military operation involves the deployment of air, naval and satellite assets and the operation command has been assigned to the Italian Navy. However, the mission has received several critiques, since it can intercept and stop only the arms arriving by sea, not those transported by air and land, which constitute a significant amount of the military supplies arriving to the LNA. For this reason, IRINI has been criticized by the GNA, which instead receives most of its supplies by sea. Thus, the mission can only monitor and track the air and land traffic headed towards Libya, using the so-called “naming and shaming” mechanism, that is reporting the country that has violated the embargo and signaling it to the UN Sanctions Committee within the Security Council²²⁸. At that point, however, with the possible veto of Russia and China but also France, there is the concrete possibility that the entire process could end into a stalemate, making the whole IRINI operation, as it is intended today, almost void if not counterproductive.

2.4 The role of Italy

Italy has an important historical relationship with Libya. This is due to the past relations between the two countries: in fact, Libya was probably the most important colonial possession of the Kingdom of Italy. Since the beginning of the crisis and the collapse of the central State in Libya in 2011, Italy has always supported by diplomatic means a political process aimed at stabilizing and pacifying the country, often working under the umbrella and in close coordination with the UN. Italy was one of the States that supported the process that led to the Skhirat Accords in 2015 and the creation of the GNA, helping also al-Serraj to make port in Tripoli in 2016. In September of the same year, Italy launched a military operation called “Ippocrate” in Misrata. The mission provided for the construction of a field hospital aimed at furnishing health assistance to the Libyan soldiers involved in the fight against ISIS in the country²²⁹.

Since January 2018, the “Ippocrate” operation was reconfigured within the military mission MIASIT – Missione bilaterale di assistenza e supporto in Libia. Such operation is aimed at increasing the capacities of local institutions, in coordination with the lines of intervention decided by the UN, through health and humanitarian support, security force assistance, stability policing and training

²²⁸ G. Pelosi, “Libia: la missione IRINI un boomerang per l’UE”, Eastwest, 9 May 2020, <https://eastwest.eu/it/libia-la-nuova-missione-europea-irini-e-diventata-operativa-il-4-maggio/>

²²⁹ “Libia - Operazione Ippocrate - Schieramento di un ospedale da campo in Libia”, Esercito Italiano, http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Libia-Operazione-Ippocrate.aspx

activities both in Italy and in Libya²³⁰. In practice, the new military operation has incorporated the previous mission “Ippocrate”, with the military field hospital still located in Misrata, but has put it in the broader framework of supporting the GNA, with the headquarter of the operation based in Tripoli. In particular, the MIASIT operation has the following tasks:

- providing assistance and health support;
- conducting humanitarian support activities;
- providing training, advice, assistance, support and mentoring to Libyan security forces and government institutions;
- providing training and mentoring assistance and support to the Libyan security forces for the control and fight against illegal immigration, trafficking and other threats to Libya’s security;
- stimulating and collaborating for the development of capacity building in Libya;
- carrying out reconnaissance activities in Libyan territory;
- ensuring an adequate security/force protection framework for the personnel employed in carrying out the other initiatives in Libya.

The mission could provide for the deployment of maximum 400 soldiers, 142 ground vehicles and 2 air assets²³¹. Moreover, a new integration has been done recently to the mission, with the employment of Italian counter-mine operators. In fact, after Haftar’s withdrawal from the outskirts of Tripoli, the GNA issued an official request to the Italian Government to provide assistance in mine clearance operations, to be conducted in conjunction with the Libyan mine action and the Libyan security forces²³².

In addition, the Italian Navy has deployed a Horizon class destroyer with advanced air-warfare capabilities off the coast of Misrata, between May and June 2020²³³. This move is probably aimed at

²³⁰ “Missione bilaterale di assistenza e supporto in Libia (MIASIT)”, Ministero della Difesa, http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/Libia_Missione_bilaterale_di_supporto_e_assistenza/Pagine/default.aspx

²³¹ “Contributo nazionale – MIASIT”, Ministero della Difesa, http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/Libia_Missione_bilaterale_di_supporto_e_assistenza/Pagine/Contributo_nazionale.aspx

²³² V. Nigro, “Libia, l’Italia inizia lo sminamento. Haftar ha piazzato trappole esplosive”, Repubblica, 15 June 2020, https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2020/06/15/news/libia_l_italia_inizia_lo_sminamento_haftar_ha_piazzato_trappole_explosive_-259254780/

²³³ “OSINT Editor”, <https://twitter.com/osinteditor/status/1264804493541158912>

providing an air defence umbrella to the Italian soldiers operating there, given the recent escalation of the conflict, the increased use of drones and combat aircrafts by both the GNA and the LNA, and the recent arrival of Russian Migs on Libyan soil. This action should not come as a surprise. Italy has been constantly monitoring the evolution of the conflict in Libya, and has probably sent several times Italian warships off the Libyan coast, with the double aim of providing defence and support and acquiring intelligence data on the situation (the powerful radar onboard Italian military ships can track and monitor the flying objects in the Libyan air space). Furthermore, the shooting down of an Italian military drone in Libya in November 2019²³⁴ is another relevant event in this sense. Whether it was hit deliberately by Haftar forces (maybe with the will of sending a message), or by mistake, it is still unclear. However, it confirms the fact that Rome closely monitors the situation on the ground and in the air, both for protecting the Italian soldiers deployed in Tripoli and Misrata and for having a more precise and clear picture of the actual evolution of the conflict.

At the political level, ever since the beginning of the Libyan crisis in 2011, Italy has acted in order to restore the unity of the country and stabilize the State institutions. In 2015, Rome strongly favored the signing of the Skhirat Agreements and the creation of the GNA, led by al-Serraj. This support is in line with the main Italian interests in Libya, concentrated in the region of Tripolitania. Indeed, the Italian international action was driven by the need to ensure the energetic supplies arriving in Italy from Libya, especially through the “Greenstream” gas pipeline, connecting the fields of Wafa and Mellitah to Sicily. The Italian energy company ENI has been operating in Libya since 1959 and maintains a strong presence in the country, providing energy not only to Italy, but also to the Libyan people as well²³⁵. Moreover, Italian Governments had the priority, for both domestic and international political reasons, to control the migration flows which used the Libyan coasts, especially those of Tripolitania, as starting points of their journey across the Mediterranean Sea and whose destination was Italy. Thus, the management of the migration flows coming from Libya has been a central and recurrent theme in the

²³⁴ T. Kington, “Italy confirms military drone crashed in Libya”, Defense News, 20 November 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/11/21/italy-confirms-military-drone-crashed-in-libya/>

²³⁵ A. Sperandio, “Che cosa fa Eni in Libia. Tutti i numeri su petrolio e gas”, Start Magazine, 9 April 2019, <https://www.startmag.it/energia/eni-libia-numeri-petrolio-gas/>

Italian political action in Libya²³⁶. Finally, Italy has been the only Western country to keep the embassy open and functioning in Tripoli²³⁷.

However, between 2017 and 2018, the Italian position in Libya slightly changed. If until that moment only the GNA had full Italian support, Rome started to gradually recognize also the figure of Haftar, who was consolidating his position in Cyrenaica. Such recognition became official when he was invited to take part, together with al-Serraj, in the Palermo Conference, held in November 2018²³⁸. In this sense the role of foreign powers has been a crucial variable, since without their support Haftar would have not been able to increase his influence in Cyrenaica, expand in Fezzan and launch the assault on Tripoli. The fact that the LNA had become a powerful actor in the Libyan scenario, and the possibility that it could have conquered even Tripoli, led Rome to consolidate the contacts with Haftar, still maintaining its support for al-Serraj and the GNA. However, in the course of the last year, the combination of the actions of foreign powers and of Italy's policy of playing with both sides (the "equidistanza") has resulted in a gradual but important loss of influence of Rome in Libya, and especially in Tripolitania, where Ankara has become the most important and close ally of the GNA, replacing Italy²³⁹. Al-Serraj desperately needed and looked for Italian support at the beginning of Haftar's assault. In this sense, his interview with the Italian journal "Corriere della Sera" held on 16 April 2019, less than two weeks after the beginning of Tripoli's siege, is significant and illustrative. He strongly asked for more support by Italy and Europe in general, highlighting the possible threat for the Italian Government represented by 800.000 migrants ready to leave Libya for Italy, as well as of possible terrorist infiltration among them²⁴⁰. Apart from the numbers, clearly exaggerated, it was a move aimed at capturing the attention of the Italian public opinion, in order to press the Italian Government for a more direct support to the GNA. However, Italy, even if it continued to work with al-Serraj, did not provide to him the assistance and concrete help he needed or expected, starting instead to move closer to Haftar. In the end,

²³⁶ M. Gianpaolo, "Gli interessi Italiani in Libia: un panorama molto variegato", in "Le relazioni tra Italia e Libia: interessi e rischi", edited by Eugenio Dacrema and Arturo Varvelli, ISPI, July 2020, p. 44.

²³⁷ Ivi, p. 48.

²³⁸ Ivi, p. 46.

²³⁹ A. Varvelli, "Interessi mutanti: alcune ipotesi di policy per il Governo Italiano", in "Le relazioni tra Italia e Libia: interessi e rischi", edited by Eugenio Dacrema and Arturo Varvelli, ISPI, July 2020, p. 56.

²⁴⁰ L. Cremonesi, "Serraj: dalla Libia 800 mila in partenza per l'Italia", Corriere della Sera, 16 April 2019.

this moved resulted in a loss of influence on one side (the GNA), without a compensation on the other (the LNA). The consequent risk was, and still is, to be condemned to complete marginality²⁴¹.

A final remark should be made with regard to the Italian attempt to receive an official and concrete support by the US in the Libyan crisis and to try to directly involve it in the Libyan scenario. During a trip to Washington in July 2018, the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte asked for the establishment of a joint US-Italy “cabina di regia” in Libya and more in general in the Mediterranean Sea, in order to both stabilize the Libyan country and reduce the French influence in the area²⁴². Such diplomatic initiative was confirmed by a phone call between Conte and Trump held in April 2019²⁴³, immediately after the launch of Haftar’s attack on Tripoli, and by a bilateral meeting between the two leaders during the NATO summit held in London in December 2019²⁴⁴. However, such attempt did not result in a more active and direct involvement of the US in the Libyan affair, despite the public support given by Trump to the Italian political action in the African country. Rome tried to use the leverage of the proliferation of ISIS and other terrorist groups to catch the American attention, but in the end this move did not produce the desired results, given the already mentioned American focus on the Indo-Pacific scenario and China. However, the recent increase of Russian activity in Libya, as well as Trump’s decision to relocate in Italy part of the soldiers previously based in Germany²⁴⁵, could open up a new window of opportunity for Italy in order to try to get a more direct and active support by the US.

Therefore, the third and last chapter will try to point out some possible policy suggestions for Italy, in order to play a more active role in Libya, avoiding to be relegated to total irrelevance in the great geopolitical games currently in progress in the Mediterranean region.

²⁴¹ M. Dell’Aguzzo, “Libia, l’Italia ci prova, ma con armi spuntate”, 9 January 2020, Eastwest, <https://eastwest.eu/it/conte-serraj-haftar-dialogo-con-libia/>

²⁴² G. Sarcina, “La sponda di Trump sulla Libia: sfida di Conte all’attivismo di Macron”, Corriere della Sera, 30 July 2018, https://www.corriere.it/esteri/18_luglio_31/retroscena-conte-trump-libia-f378efa6-9433-11e8-827e-24bcb32092b.shtml

²⁴³ “Telefonata Conte-Trump - Per la crisi libica serve una soluzione diplomatica”, 17 Aprile 2019, https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/04/17/news/conte_trump_telefonata-224302677/

²⁴⁴ A. Carli, “Bilaterale Conte-Trump al vertice Nato: la Libia torna sotto la lente del Governo”, Il Sole 24 Ore, 4 December 2019, https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/bilaterale-conte-trump-vertice-nato-libia-torna-sotto-lente-governo-ACa1JJ3?refresh_ce=1

²⁴⁵ F. Anfossi, “Trump, l’Italia e la nuova Guerra Fredda”, Eastwest, 30 July 2020, <https://eastwest.eu/it/trump-litalia-e-la-nuova-guerra-fredda/>

WHAT STRATEGY FOR ITALY?

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, the focus of the study has been on the Italian strategic culture: characteristics, dynamics, historical evolution and possible changes. Chapter 2 has provided a brief overview of the geopolitical panorama of the Mediterranean basin and of the Libyan crisis. The aim of the third and last chapter of this work is now to try to put together the main findings of the first two parts in order to outline a possible strategy for Italy, at both the domestic and international levels, in order to better approach the current complex and competitive geopolitical scenario. In fact, as already pointed out, we live in very turbulent times, which are characterized by systemic instability, recurrent crises and increased geopolitical competition at the international level.

Thus, what strategy for Italy? How could the Italian strategic culture evolve and adapt to the new challenges posed by the current geopolitical panorama? What practical steps and actions could (and/or should) be undertaken by Italy? A possible and feasible strategy for Italy in the Mediterranean basin should be guided by a very precise assumption: namely, the need to intervene at both the domestic and foreign levels, developing a solid culture in Italy on the importance of foreign, security and defence policy on the one hand, and implementing concrete, pragmatic and realistic steps in the international arena on the other. For this reason, this section will be divided into two parts: one underlining the strategy for Italy at the national level, the other offering some policy suggestions at the international one.

3.2. What strategy for Italy: what to do at the national level

At a first sight, the domestic component of the Italian strategy could look like the easiest and fastest one to be implemented. It regards only Italy, its domestic institutions, actors and rules, its strategic culture, and it depends only on Italy itself. However, just because of this reason, it actually poses enormous challenges. Indeed, the ultimate goal of this part is to slightly change some aspects of the Italian strategic culture, while remaining within its founding limits. It is about making the Italian political class, the civil society and the public opinion more conscious of the current geopolitical dynamics at the international level and of the role of Italy in such dynamics; it is also about providing the necessary tools to properly deal with such situation and to make Italy in the position to be an active player, and not a merely passive observer, of the geopolitical games currently in progress. In order to do so, it is necessary to develop a solid, shared and collective culture in the country on the importance of foreign, security and defence policy: only by providing the proper cultural, cognitive and institutional tools to interpret, analyze and understand the international phenomena at the domestic level, Italy could then play an active and dynamic role in the international arena as well.

3.2.1 In search of the notorious national interest

One of the first step that should be undertaken in Italy at the domestic level is to recover the notion of national interest, upon which a comprehensive and coherent long-term strategy can (and should) be developed with regard to the Italian foreign, security and defence policy. Indeed, the concept of national interest has been completely removed from the new Italian strategic culture after the end of the Second World War. The pillars of pacifism, multilateralism and internationalism, upon which the new Italian strategic culture came to be based, did not allow for the possibility of developing in Italy a coherent and structural reasoning on the Italian national interest and on the best ways to pursue it. The notion of national interest was associated with the nationalist sentiment of the Fascist era, with a pure *realpolitik* view of the international relations between States and with the militarist character of Mussolini's regime. On the contrary, it is necessary to recover the concept of national interest, to liberate it from the ideological legacy of the past and to reintroduce it in the overall equation of the Italian strategic culture and the Italian approach to foreign, security and defence policy.

3.2.1.1 Defining the national interest

First of all, it is necessary to define and clarify the notion of national interest, which is not however an easy task. As Alessandro Aresu and Luca Gori point out, the concept of national interest reflects the culture and priorities of the foreign and security policy of a given country. It is based on the myths, values and tradition of a people. It is strictly linked to the idea that a country has of itself, of the notions of State and Nation, as well as of its role and place in the world. It is composed by two different parts: one is static, fixed and long-term (the product of culture, history and geography), the other is dynamic, fluid and short-term (the product of the concrete political choices)²⁴⁶. Indeed, the national interest does not move in a vacuum: on the contrary, it has a solid historic and geographic consciousness. The static part of the national interest is deeply rooted in the history, geography and culture of a country, constituting its pillars; at the same time, it has to adapt to the present time and to the challenges that the current world poses, guiding the foreign political agenda of the governments that alternate in power²⁴⁷.

Historically speaking, there has been a recurrent trend in Italian history ever since the unification in 1861: the association between international status and national interest. Indeed, Italy has always tried to become a “great power”, to have a seat in the main international tables next to the most powerful States. Such a desire was strong in particular during the Kingdom of Italy, with the liberal ruling class first, and the fascist one later, that tried to create a colonial empire for Italy and to raise its international rank to the one of the other European powers. In this way, a misleading coincidence between national interest and international status came into being, up to the point that that first concept (the national interest) became subordinate to the second one (the international status)²⁴⁸. However, as the former President of the Italian Republic Francesco Cossiga used to say, “there is no more dangerous thing for the national interest than the will to overdo”²⁴⁹. After the defeat in World War II, the search for international status and prestige was scaled back, with Italy trying to actively pursue the role of a “middle regional power”. However, the “politics of chair”, that is the will to be present in all the most important and relevant diplomatic tables and negotiations, despite the actual capacity to play an active role and to

²⁴⁶ A. Aresu, L. Gori, “L’interesse nazionale: la bussola dell’Italia”, *Il Mulino*, 2018, p. 15.

²⁴⁷ *Ivi*, p. 113.

²⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. 26.

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

positively influence the political process, has still remained a constant feature of the Italian foreign policy²⁵⁰.

Thus, the first operation that Italy should do in order to fully and genuinely recover the notion of national interest is to liberate it from the legacies of the past: the ideological association with an exacerbated nationalism and the Fascist regime on the one hand, and the fallacious coincidence between national interest and international status on the other. A realistic and pragmatic reflection should be carried out in Italy with regard to the actual Italian role and status in the world, as well as to the real capabilities and resources Italy possesses. In addition, it is necessary to acquire awareness of Italy's strengths and weaknesses, as well as of its true ties and power relations with the major regional and global powers (Washington, Berlin, Paris and Brussels, but also Moscow, Beijing and Ankara); to limit the scope of action and to reduce the open fronts of the Italian external projection, focusing human and material resources on more limited and important tables, thus scaling back the "politics of chair"; to understand that in the current geopolitical scenario allied and friend States could sometimes turn into competitors and adversaries; when the national interest is at stake, to openly recognize that other States could not be friends, but actually enemies, in order not to let other actors exchange the traditional Italian gentleness in international affairs with surrender²⁵¹; to use the power, leverages and force Italy has to defend and advance its national interests, even occasionally at the expense of other States, as they do against Rome²⁵².

This is a process that has already started in Italy. However, it is necessary to further fuel it and to promote a public debate in Italy on the national interest, involving not only the political class, but the public opinion and the media as well. In this sense, the national interest could really become the compass of the Italian foreign, security and defence policy, the factor guiding the perception of itself and the foreign action of the country²⁵³ in the global arena.

²⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 74.

²⁵¹ Ivi, p. 167.

²⁵² Ivi, p. 175.

²⁵³ Ivi, p. 80.

3.2.1.2 The Italian national interest(s)

“Oggi non c’è più il bipolarismo né l’illusione degli anni ‘90 di un mondo omologato. C’è una grande instabilità, noi ne siamo al centro perché ci troviamo in mezzo al Mediterraneo. In questo nuovo contesto dobbiamo recuperare senza vergognarcene un concetto semplicissimo: l’interesse nazionale. Siamo europei e alleati degli americani, ma abbiamo un nostro occhio sulla geopolitica”²⁵⁴.

“Today there is no longer the bipolarism nor the illusion of the 90s of a homologated world. There is great instability, we are at the center of it because we are in the middle of the Mediterranean. In this new context we must recover without shame a very simple concept: the national interest. We are Europeans and allies of the Americans, but we have our eye on geopolitics”.

The following declaration was made by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paolo Gentiloni, in 2014. It is a perfect example of the process of partial rediscovery of the notion of national interest in Italy over the last years. Yet, what actually is the Italian national interest (or interests)?

In their work on the Italian national interest, Alessandro Aresu and Luca Gori identify four power dimensions upon which the national interest can be built: demography, economy, military power, scientific research and technology. They represent four basic pillars from which a set of ten specific guidelines is developed with regard to the national interest of Italy.

Demography is a fundamental element of the life of any country in the world. Quantitatively speaking, the more people a country has, the bigger the domestic market and the economy can be, and the bigger and more powerful the army can be as well. With specific regard to Italy, a structural demographic problem is present: not only the Italian population is not growing anymore, but it is ageing at a high rate. In 2015, for the first time in history, the resident population in Italy declined, and this negative trend has not changed ever since. Moreover, with 46,3 years, Italy has the highest median age in the EU (meaning that half of the population is under 46,3 years, the other half is over 46,3 years)²⁵⁵. Another negative demographic trend is the loss of young people who move abroad and do not return in

²⁵⁴ P. Gentiloni, “Dalla Russia alla Libia privilegiare l’interesse nazionale”, *Il Messaggero*, 12 February 2014, https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/interviste/2014/12/20141202_gentiloni_messaggero.html

²⁵⁵ “Struttura e invecchiamento della popolazione”, Eurostat, July 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing/it#L.27et.C3.A0_mediana_.C3.A8_pi.C3.B9_elevata_in_Italia

the country: over the last decade, 1,1 million people in the age 18-34 had fled Italy²⁵⁶. All these dynamics have enormous consequences for Italy at the levels of the economy, labor market, employment, productivity, social and welfare systems. It is thus imperative to properly address such issues, implementing long-term structural policies aimed at promoting the birth rate, managing the legal immigration flows and preventing further young Italian people from permanently moving abroad.

The Italian economy is considered the most important (though not unique) factor of projection of Italian influence and power, given the international vocation of the Italian enterprises and the huge volumes of the Italian exports. However, structural problems affect the Italian economy, preventing it from unleashing its full potential: high level of public debt (even though it is owned mostly by national investors), sluggish productivity and low level of economic growth²⁵⁷. It is necessary to develop an organic and comprehensive geoeconomic strategy for Italy, taking into account the importance of promoting investments in specific and strategic sectors (and then preserving and protecting them), with a special attention to be paid to international trade, finance and energy supplies. A last remark should be made with regard to the industrial policy. Italy is usually considered to be the second manufacturing power in Europe after Germany, relying on its strong industrial fabric mainly composed by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). If on the one hand they are important in producing new value and wealth, on the other it is necessary to remember that over the last decades the global economy has moved towards the competition between big and huge business units, and that in the end 80% of the total manufacturing added value in Italy is produced by only 20% of the Italian enterprises²⁵⁸. Thus, new policies for promoting the big industry, which is better equipped for competing in the global markets and projecting the Italian economic influence in the world, should be implemented as well.

Over the course of this work, the complex relationship between Italy and the management and use of the military instrument has already been discussed, and it will be further analyzed in the following paragraphs. In this section it is necessary to say that the military power cannot be exempted from the fundamental dimensions which drive the national interest of a country. It is important for protecting and advancing the interests and influence of Italy in the enlarged Mediterranean area (even though it should

²⁵⁶ A. Aresu, L. Gori, "L'interesse nazionale: la bussola dell'Italia", Il Mulino, 2018, p. 119.

²⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 124.

²⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 131.

be used as part of a broader strategy, and not as a tool per se), as well as for the important implications in terms of defence industry and technological innovation.

The last dimension is represented by the scientific and technological power of Italy, which constitutes the frontier with the most important potential for the future development of the country. The current international geopolitical competition is indeed characterized by technological innovation and scientific research. The very world supremacy of the US is strictly linked to its superior industrial, scientific and technological innovation capacity that is then applied to military and geopolitical purposes²⁵⁹. Italy has a first-level historical tradition in scientific and technological research, as well as a brilliant human capital²⁶⁰, but it lacks the economic resources as well as the proper institutional and cultural environment to allow the scientific and technological research to flourish and prosper. Thus, it should focus the limited resources it has on a narrow set of areas where it already possesses a solid starting point and in which it could become one of the main actors at the international level: space, robotics, life sciences (biomedicine, biotechnologies and pharmaceutical industry)²⁶¹.

As already said, starting from these four power dimensions, a decalogue of the Italian national interest can then be established, according to Aresu and Gori. It is a set of ten political and cultural guidelines, useful to better frame the priorities of Italy in the pursuit of the national interest. They are:

1. *National interest and interests*: defining the plurality and hierarchy of the Italian interests, in the name of one, coherent and superior national interest.
2. *National interest and nationalism*: making definitely peace with the past of Italy and the fascist period, pursuing the national interest in a pragmatic way and separating it from the ideological and radical contaminations, thus fully “integrating” it in the strategic culture of the Italian Republic.
3. *National interest and security*: being aware of and promoting the culture of security in all its aspects, tangible and intangible.

²⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 145.

²⁶⁰ It is often forgotten that in 1964 Italy became the third country in the world to autonomously launch a satellite in orbit, after the United States and the Soviet Union. See: G. Caprara, “San Marco: lanciato 50 anni fa il primo satellite italiano”, Corriere della Sera, 15 December 2014, https://www.corriere.it/scienze/14_dicembre_15/san-marco-lanciato-50-anni-fa-primo-satellite-italiano-177e89ea-8468-11e4-b9cc-80d61e8956c5.shtml

²⁶¹ A. Aresu, L. Gori, “L’interesse nazionale: la bussola dell’Italia”, Il Mulino, 2018, p. 150.

4. *National interest and “country system”*: defining the scope of the “country system”, with a view to a structural collaboration between public and private, between State, firms and citizens, in the pursuit of the broader and common national interest of the whole country²⁶².
5. *National interest and international status*: balancing the (sometimes blind) search for international status and recognition with the actual capacity of influencing international dynamics and decisions in a way favorable to the Italian national interest.
6. *National interest and European interest*: promoting a realistic and mature relationship with the EU and the European integration project, not subordinating the national interest to the European one but finding the right balance between them.
7. *National interest and national identity*: being aware of the homogeneity of the Italian nation and identity, in spite of the local and regional particularism, and promoting a true pedagogy of the national interest.
8. *National interest and bipartisan culture*: promoting a bipartisan political culture in pursuing the national interest, as well as a coherent foreign and security policy agenda, in spite of the political differences between the governments which alternate in power.
9. *National interest and ethics*: being aware that pursuing the national interest does not mean crossing ethical, legal and constitutional limits.
10. *National interest and internal constraint*: acquiring consciousness that the national interest is national by definition. It belongs to Italy only, and thus it is up to Italy itself to define and pursue it with the national tools, energies and resources it has.

3.2.2 The 2007 Intelligence reform: towards a new security culture for Italy?

The 2007 reform of the Italian Intelligence System (Law 3 August 2007, n° 124) represents an important turning point in the traditional Italian way of understanding and managing the national security²⁶³. It promoted a huge and deep transformation of the organization and structure of the Italian secret services, with important changes at the operational and political levels. First of all, it established

²⁶² In the view of a closer collaboration between national institutions and private entities (companies, think tank and associations), a very important initiative has been recently launched by the Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa (CASD).

See: S. Pioppi, “Interesse nazionale e dove trovarlo. Il CASD chiama a raccolta i think tank”, Formiche.net, 15 July 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/07/interesse-nazionale-casd-think-tank/>

²⁶³ Law 3 August 2007, n. 124.

the Sistema di informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica – Information system for the security of the Republic – that is the whole system of security agencies, actors and authorities in charge of the protection of the political, military, economic, scientific and industrial interests of Italy. It is composed by the President of the Council of Ministers, the Delegated Authority, the Comitato Interministeriale per la Sicurezza della Repubblica (CISR) – Interministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic –, the Dipartimento delle Informazioni per la Sicurezza (DIS) – Department of Information Security –, the Agenzia informazioni e sicurezza esterna (AISE) – External Intelligence and Security Agency – and the Agenzia informazioni e sicurezza interna (AISI) – Internal Intelligence and Security Agency.

Indeed, the various Italian intelligence agencies, previously belonging to the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior, were all put under the supervision of a single body, namely the DIS, which is placed under the direct reporting of the President of the Council of Ministers. The aim was to unify and centralize the entire national intelligence community, avoiding fragmentation, and to place it under the political direction and responsibility of the major institutional figure of the Italian Executive, thus bringing it closer to the highest political authority within the Government (the President of the Council of Ministers, and not a "simple Minister" as it was before), without prejudice to the traditional division between an agency for operations abroad (the current AISE) and one for internal counter-espionage (the current AISI). Moreover, the President of the Council of Ministers can delegate some of the functions he possesses by law to the Delegated Authority, the latter being an Undersecretary of State or a Minister without portfolio. Finally, the CISR is an Interministerial Committee in charge of setting the goals of the intelligence policies as well as the budget of the intelligence agencies. The CISR is chaired by the President of the Council of Ministers and includes:

- Delegated Authority
- Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Minister of the Interior
- Minister of Defense
- Minister of Justice
- Minister of Economy and Finance
- Minister for Economic Development
- Director General of the DIS (acting as the CISR secretary).

However, the 2007 intelligence reform is important not only from an organizational, political and institutional perspective: it also has crucial implications from a cultural point of view²⁶⁴. In fact, within the framework of this reform, it was decided to create and implement a long-term campaign aimed at promoting the culture of security, as well as the role and activities of the Italian intelligence community. It was decided to "open" the closed and confidential world of the intelligence system (secret by definition) to the civil society and the Italian public opinion. This decision was dictated by multiple factors. First, there is the search for greater transparency and a more effective democratic control of the activities carried out by the so-called "Comparto intelligence". Second, there is a need to "educate" Italian citizenship and public opinion on specific issues related to security, and especially cyber security. In the current world, characterized by velocity, interdependence and complexity (see paragraph 2.1 of the previous chapter), security is no longer the prerogative of security services only: on the contrary, an effective defence of the national security of a State requires a conscious and continuous collaboration between public administrations (including the intelligence services), private businesses and companies and individual citizens. For the agencies in charge of the security and protection of Italy's interests, in order to perform their task in the best and most effective way, an active, collective and conscious participation by all the actors involved is needed.

In this sense, the information campaign launched to promote digital awareness and a correct use of digital and IT services is part of this broader framework²⁶⁵, as well as the recent roadshow inaugurated in Milan, called ASSET²⁶⁶, aimed at raising awareness in the Italian companies on a diverse spectrum of risks (economic, financial, geopolitical, cyber) for the business world. This is also a fundamental and concrete example of the structural collaboration between public and private that is needed in order to defend the interests of the "country system" (see paragraph 3.1.2.1 of this chapter).

Finally, a third significant factor in the Intelligence reform is the desire to raise awareness in the public opinion on the importance of the security culture in general, promoting a 360-degree approach in

²⁶⁴ G. P. Scotto Di Castelbianco, "A che serve l'Intelligence Italiana", in *Limes* 7/2014, p. 191.

²⁶⁵ "Be aware. Be digital.", 4 December 2017, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/archivio-notizie/be-aware-be-digital.html>. See also: "Cybercity: arriva il primo videogioco ambientato nel cyberspazio", 16 April 2019, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/archivio-notizie/cybercity-arriva-il-primo-videogioco-ambientato-nel-cyberspazio.html>

²⁶⁶ "ASSET: l'Intelligence in campo per le imprese", 26 November 2019, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/archivio-notizie/asset-lintelligence-in-campo-per-le-imprese.html>

a shared model of participatory security²⁶⁷. In this sense, approaching the young people, with the universities and the academic world²⁶⁸, is a crucial step in order to convey the message of the importance of the security culture as a general and extremely important value and aspect of the daily life of a society. The project “Intelligence Live”, a roadshow in all the major Italian universities, is the most emblematic and important initiative in this regard. The “mutual contamination”, as far as possible, between the “Comparto Intelligence” on the one hand and the civil society and the academic world on the other not only serves to facilitate the activity and mission of the intelligence community, but also represents the best way to make the whole country genuinely aware of the importance of security, as well as of the risks and challenges of the world we live in today. Only by making clear the importance of the intelligence activity, of the mission of protecting Italian political, military, economic, scientific and technological interests, of the importance of security as a public good for the whole community, the task of safeguarding Italy, its people and its interests can be said to be fully accomplished.

In addition, there is another intelligence reform that could be implemented in Italy, and of which there have already been some rumors²⁶⁹. It is the possible creation of a “National Security Council” (NSC), on the model of the American one: a permanent forum where the medium- and long-term strategic direction of the Italian foreign, security and defence policy could be planned²⁷⁰. In Italy there is the Consiglio Supremo di Difesa – Supreme Council of Defence – chaired by the President of the Republic and composed by the President of the Council of Ministers, the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Economy, Economic Development as well as the Chief of Defence. It “examines the general political and technical problems relating to national defence and determines the criteria and lays down the guidelines for the organization and coordination of activities which concern it”²⁷¹. Its composition is similar to that of CISR, where there is not the presence of the President of the Republic and of the Chief of Defence, but there is the Director of DIS. A possible Italian NSC would substitute, integrate and reinforce the role and functions of the current CISR: by adding the Chief of Defence in a permanent way, the President of the Republic on an occasional basis as an external observer and other Ministries or

²⁶⁷ G. P. Scotto Di Castelbianco, “A che serve l’Intelligence Italiana”, in *Limes* 7/2014, p. 191.

²⁶⁸ “Iniziative per scuole e università”, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/category/iniziative-per-scuole-e-universita.html>

²⁶⁹ F. Bechis, “Una legge e un Consiglio per la sicurezza nazionale. La proposta di Urso (FdI)”, *Formiche.net*, 26 July 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/07/legge-consiglio-sicurezza-nazionale-urso-fdi/>

²⁷⁰ G. Pelosi, “La riforma dell’intelligence italiana”, *Eastwest*, 8 August 2020, <https://eastwest.eu/it/intelligence-italiana-riforma-national-security-council/>

²⁷¹ Law 28 July 1950, n. 624.

institutional figures when deemed necessary, the NSC would reunite all the most important political and institutional actors in charge at different levels of the Italian foreign, security and defence policy. By becoming an official and permanent institution, it would be able to set the general political and strategic guidelines of the policies and actions to be undertaken in Italy with regard to security, defence and foreign affairs, acting of course in close coordination with and under the limits of the Italian parliamentary system. Such a reform would be important at the strategic, political and institutional levels, and would thus require an adequate, organic and serious political and public debate about its actual implementation, as well as on the best tools and mechanisms to make the possible NSC really effective and functioning.

3.2.3 Promoting the public debate on foreign, security and defence policy

Chapter 1 (in particular, paragraph 1.3.3) of this work have already dealt with the crucial issue of the public debate in Italy on foreign, security and defence policy, highlighting how it has been part of a socialization process that contributed to cement and solidify the Italian strategic culture over time, both at the level of the political class and the civil society. In particular, the public debate in Italy on such issues is at the margins of the political and civil life, the latter being dominated mostly by socio-economic topics. It assumes more the character of an a posteriori reactive debate when specific crises, needs or emergencies occur, rather than a structural and proactive a priori discussion on long-term trends and phenomena related to foreign, security and defence policy. It is a kind of debate mostly for insiders and experts only, and this is at the same time cause and consequence of the extremely low level of attention for such issues paid in Italy by both the political class and the civil society.

However, one could argue that in recent times a small and gradual change is occurring with regard to the attitude of some politicians, as well as of part of the Italian public opinion, towards the Italian foreign, security and defence policy. It seems that there is a higher level of attention towards such issues, as well as an increased awareness of their importance for Italy, especially in the context of the current geopolitical scenario. For instance, with specific reference to the Italian defence policy, some progress has been made in recent years in the direction of developing a serious and conscious security and defence culture in Italy. The White Paper for international security and defence published by the Italian Ministry of Defence in 2015 (the last one was released 13 years before, in 2002) was the clear sign of a renewed attention and centrality at the political level towards the Italian military apparatus and the developments it was (and still is) undergoing as well as towards the new and changing international trends and

dynamics. However, its concrete implementation has remained incomplete and unfinished²⁷², marking the ambivalent result of the project. A new White Paper could possibly be prepared and released by the Italian Government in the following years (2021 or 2022), taking into account the global consequences of the pandemic, the political instability of several countries of the Mediterranean basin and the overall geopolitical competition in the area. At the same time, it should be followed by concrete and immediate steps aimed at its actual implementation, otherwise it remains an important document at the theoretical level, but with a void realization and execution in practice.

An interesting “case study” is also offered by the speech on the so-called “Linee Programmatiche” held by the Italian Ministry of Defense Lorenzo Guerini²⁷³. In October 2019, Guerini outlined the priorities of the Minister of Defense in the new Italian Government, presenting a pragmatic and realistic view of the role, functions and capabilities of the armed forces. He talked about the current international scenario, the Italian challenges and priorities in the Mediterranean region, the relationship with allied countries, and the model of Defense required to properly address and deal with all the several issues. He furnished a coherent and conscious overview of the role that the Italian Armed Forces play and should play in the future, on the basis of one clear assumption: the protection of the Italian security and interests. It is quite emblematic the fact that he used the term “dual use” only once in the entire speech, while such concept has been instead a core theme of the activity of the previous Ministry of Defense, Elisabetta Trenta. Indeed, in the last years, an extensive use of the rhetoric of the dual use role and capabilities of the armed forces has been made by the political class, up to the point that sometimes it has become the main way to justify and legitimize the military spending. In reality, it is an important still secondary aspect: the Italian Armed Forces were created to protect the Italian Republic, its security, integrity and interests, to deter and if necessary to fight wars. The dual use capability, namely the possibility to intervene in case of natural disasters or for civilian purposes in general, is for sure an important element, but not the fundamental one. Putting too much emphasis on it will distort the true identity, role and functions of the Italian Armed Forces. Rather than publicly justifying the investments on the security and defence sector with such a rhetoric, the Italian political class should openly and clearly explain why they

²⁷² M. Nones, “La difesa del Paese non aspetta. Se il Libro bianco resta in cantina”, Formiche.net, 18 March 2018, <https://formiche.net/2018/03/difesa-libro-bianco-libro-bianco/>

²⁷³ “Audizione del Ministro della Difesa sulle linee programmatiche del suo Dicastero presso le Commissioni Difesa congiunte della Camera dei Deputati e del Senato della Repubblica”, 30 October 2019.

are important for Italy and why it is necessary to spend a certain and conspicuous amount of money in it, to the benefit of the transparency, awareness and quality of the democracy.

In this regard, a test to understand if perhaps a change of mentality is already underway in Italy at the cultural level will come from future choices regarding the allocation of financial resources destined to security and defence. While some political figures have already made some claims asking to reduce the funds destined to certain military programs aimed at modernizing and updating the equipment of the armed forces²⁷⁴, other voices on the opposite side have asked to confirm the budget allocation for the armed forces and the international military missions²⁷⁵. It is perhaps too early to fully judge how the pandemic will actually impact on the Italian defence budget: there will probably be a cut in funds, although it is difficult to assess to what extent. Military expenditures have always been among the main basins to draw on to find precious resources in times of crisis of the State budget. By virtue of the political and strategic culture of the country, the historical precedents, and the unprecedented economic emergency that Italy is facing, it is difficult to imagine that the defence budget will not undergo a downsizing, even if of just a small entity (also in light of what other governments in the world are already doing, such as in South Korea²⁷⁶ or Russia²⁷⁷). The point is not that of simply reducing, maintaining or increasing the military budget, but the overall debate around such issue.

On the one hand, it seems logic and legitimate to cut some expenditures in some areas of the State budget (in particular, the military expenditures) in a period of profound economic crisis like the one caused by the pandemic. On the other, it is important to keep in mind some aspects: first, political insecurity and geopolitical instability in the Mediterranean basin will probably continue to grow in the future, further reinforced by the pandemic; second, international competition between States will increase as well, both at the economic and political levels, and some forms of protection of the interests of the country will be required more than before; third, a dangerous arms race is in progress in the Mediterranean area, and there are no prospects that it will end any soon; fourth, investing in the security

²⁷⁴ P. Mauri, "F-35, i grillini ci riprovano: stop agli F-35", *Il Giornale*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/f-35-i-grillini-ci-riprovano-tagliare-gambe-programma-1858754.html>

²⁷⁵ S. Pioppi, "Le Forze armate ci difendono dal virus (e vanno sostenute). La sen. Garavini ci spiega come", *Formiche.net*, 11 April 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/04/difesa-risorse-covid-rilancio-garavini/>

²⁷⁶ "South Korea cuts defence budget to fund Covid-19 measures", *Army Technology*, 24 April 2020, <https://www.army-technology.com/comment/south-korea-defense-budget-covid-19/>

²⁷⁷ "Crisi post Covid: Mosca taglierà le spese militari", *Analisi Difesa*, 9 August 2020, <https://www.analisdifesa.it/2020/08/crisi-post-covid-mosca-taglierà-le-spesa-militari/>

and defence sector is important not only at the military and political levels, but also at the economic and industrial ones. Indeed, the companies active in the aerospace and defence sector (A&D) are among the most important and most technologically advanced enterprises on the business scene. Many of the technologies used in the civil sectors are developed and employed first for military purposes. In Italy, the A&D sector is worth € 13,5 billion (0,65% of the GDP), it generates an added value worth € 12 billion with an economic multiplier of 2,6 (71% higher than the average level of the Italian economy) and it spends € 1,4 billion in research and development (R&D), accounting alone to 10% of the total R&D investments of the Italian companies. Indeed, it is the only sector (together with the one of electronic components) that spends more than 10% of the budget in R&D activities. Moreover, Leonardo, the top Italian firm in the A&D sector, generates alone about 20% of the country's high-tech manufacturing exports. It ranks at the 4th place in the international A&D sector for the total spending in R&D and at the 1st place among the Italian manufacturing companies, feeding an industrial fabric composed by more than 4.000 small and medium Italian enterprises²⁷⁸. Thus, investing, or at least not reducing the current levels of investment in the security and A&D sectors could represent a driving force for the Italian economy in the medium- and long-run, as well as a fundamental priority in strategic and political terms.

In this sense, the pandemic could offer a great opportunity to bring out and feed an organic, serious, objective, sound, non-partisan (or rather, bi-partisan²⁷⁹) and in-depth public debate in Italy on the actual importance, role and size of the defence expenditures, as well as on the comprehensive foreign, security and defence policy of the country. It could also be the right moment for “fixing” a misperception that regards the military expenditures, namely the fact that they are perceived to be in contrast with other State expenditures, such as the health system²⁸⁰. Indeed, quite often in Italy erroneous comparisons are made between the money used for security and defence purposes and those allocated to the welfare system, fueling the idea that the two are in contraposition each other. This is actually a simplistic and populist view. In reality, they are both two fundamental functions and services that the State must provide

²⁷⁸ P. Crippa, A. Guidi, “Investire nell’industria della difesa italiana: una garanzia per il mondo post-Covid”, Ce.S.I., May 2020.

²⁷⁹ S. Pioppi, “Perché serve un dibattito bipartisan sulla Difesa nazionale. Parla Rizzo (M5S)”, Formiche.net, 1 August 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/08/difesa-nazionale-rizzo-unita/>

²⁸⁰ “Medicine vs armi: un proiettile costa come 90 tamponi”, Il Sole 24 Ore, 21 July 2020, https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/2020/07/21/medicine-vs-armi-un-proiettile-costa-90-tamponi/?refresh_ce=1. See also: S. Perdichizzi, “Ma quanti medici vale un caccia?”, L’Espresso, 30 July 2020, <https://espresso.repubblica.it/plus/articoli/2020/07/30/news/quanti-medici-vale-un-caccia-1.351550?preview=true>

and guarantee (as it is written in the Italian Constitution), they are not mutually exclusive and they cannot be perceived to be in contrast to each other.

Finally, the possible introduction of a six-year law on the defence budget (now it is a three-year law) is another valid option to be undertaken at the practical level²⁸¹. It would provide more certainty, regularity and stability at the financial level, avoiding the problems caused by the frequent political and institutional changes in Italy and thus providing a framework for planning in a more efficient and stable way the investments in the security and defence sector, to the advantage of both the Italian Armed Forces and the Italian industry.

3.3 What strategy for Italy: what to do at the international level

3.3.1 Some basic assumptions on the Mediterranean and Libyan scenarios

After having described the possible Italian strategy at the domestic level, and before outlining some policy suggestions for the Italian foreign and security policy in the Mediterranean basin, several clarifications should be made. Indeed, it is not possible to fully comprehend the conclusions made in this paragraph without first making and understanding some basic and clear assumptions, which are based on a realistic and pragmatic analysis of the events and dynamics in progress.

At the regional level, the Mediterranean basin is one of the most complex and dynamic areas of the world. It is characterized by increasing geopolitical competition between States, enduring instability in several countries and a growing trend of insecurity. It is marked by a low level of efficacy of multilateral frameworks and institutions in solving crises and disputes, a fact that is also linked with the changing nature of international alliances and partnerships, which are not as solid and strong as in the past. Indeed, in the current international arena, a State A that is a partner in a certain sector or an ally on a certain issue with State B is likely to be a competitor or even an adversary in other fields, and probably this assumption is valid for Italy more than for any other country in the area, given the fact that Rome has officially good relations with almost all the States in the Mediterranean basin, at all the levels (political, economic, diplomatic and security). However, just for this reason, Italy is probably more than other countries exposed to the risks resulting from the geopolitical games in progress in the area. This

²⁸¹ L. Romano, “La legge che serve alla Difesa italiana. Il punto di Nones (IAI)”, Formiche.net, 30 December 2019, <https://formiche.net/2019/12/legge-difesa-guerini-nones/>

fact is also in part the consequence of the so-called “presence diplomacy” often pursued by the country²⁸², as well as of the Italian obsession for acquiring and maintaining an international status that sometimes is beyond its real capabilities. These two aspects often guide Italy to seek a seat in all the major diplomatic tables and on all the major international issues at stake, without however being always able to exercise an active role and to provide a real and decisive contribute, suffering instead the decisions made by other players.

More specifically, for what regards the Libyan crisis, other considerations can be made as well. First of all, it represents one of the most complex and hard-to-solve international crises of the world, not only for Italy, but for the International Community in general. The simultaneous presence of so many actors, at the local, regional and international levels, with so many different interests, makes it enormously difficult to find a definitive and shared solution and to fully pacify and stabilize the country. The very fact that in a few months – February 2021 – it will be the 10th anniversary since the beginning of the anti-Qaddafi protests (and so the beginning of the crisis), and that during these ten years there have never been sincere prospects for peace and stability in the country, is the most simple and evident proof of the huge complexity of such crisis.

In addition, the events of the last year and a half have made the overall situation even more complex. In fact, given the huge role played by several foreign actors, now more relevant than ever before, it is consequently even more difficult to solve the situation. If, until April 2019, the game was mainly in the hands of the (numerous) local actors, so it was still mainly (not only) a Libyan domestic question, now it has fully become a proxy war, and thus a fully regional and international question. In brief: if until April 2019 it was still possible to find an agreement between the domestic actors only (and that was not an easy task at all however) in order to solve the situation, now the scope and intensity of the intervention of foreign powers have made the crisis unsolvable without a common and shared view at both the local – domestic – and international levels. The way to peace for Libya passes not only through Tripoli, Misrata, Bengasi and Tobruk, but also through Cairo, Ankara, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Moscow, Paris, Berlin, Rome, and Washington.

²⁸² A. Aresu, L. Gori, “L’interesse nazionale: la bussola dell’Italia”, Il Mulino, 2018, p. 61.

The second assumption is that almost nobody seems to actually want a peaceful resolution of the conflict and a true pacification of the country, especially at the international level. Foreign powers are working for protecting their interests and advancing their influence, not for achieving peace. Until such situation changes, there will be no real prospects for pacification in Libya, and all the efforts made in this direction will remain null and void, including the actions undertaken by the UN. Indeed, if foreign powers were really committed to peace, they would stop supplying arms, equipment and support of various kind to the local forces, leaving them in the position to find a shared political solution. As long as military armaments continue to arrive in Libya, the conflict will continue as well. The embargo imposed by the UN and enforced by the EU could be a good starting point for the resolution of the civil war, if only it was made not just by sea, but also by air and land, and thus being really effective.

Third assumption: the total failure of the UN mediation, as well as the failure of the Berlin-model, meaning the model of the great international conferences. In few words, the failure of multilateralism and diplomacy (by coincidence, two key pillars of the strategic culture of Italy and of its foreign and security policy). As Lorenzo Cremonesi has pointed out, the crisis of the UN diplomacy is not a feature peculiar only to the Libyan scenario, but a spread and common dynamic at the global level²⁸³.

The fourth point is that, at the moment, the military, hard solution seems to be the only logic valid in Libya, the only language spoken by the actors involved and the only feasible alternative to control and stabilize the whole country, given the failure of any diplomatic and political process and in spite of all the public declarations about the fact that there is no military solution in Libya. This is the direct consequence of the aforementioned second and third assumptions.

Fifth, in Libya there is a de facto division of the country in two parts. The massive intervention by foreign powers has helped to crystallize the reality on the ground: the split of the country in two portions made by the Libyan civil conflict and the GNA-LNA confrontation.

Finally, the current conflict situation in Libya is reminiscent of a game of Risk! with somewhat particular rules. There are only two players on the pitch, whose ultimate goal is to destroy the opponent's

²⁸³ L. Cremonesi, "Libia senza inviato Onu. Ma la diplomazia è ferma dovunque", Corriere della Sera, 28 July 2020, https://www.corriere.it/opinioni/20_luglio_28/libia-senza-inviato-onu-8576898c-d0f4-11ea-b3cf-26aaa2253468.shtml?refresh_ce

armies and conquer all the territories under his control. The external support provided in various ways by the foreign actors to the two sides represents the additional bonus armies that each player can add at each turn to reinforce its forces. As well as to win in Risk! the addition of external troops is the decisive element, in order to overcome the stalemate due to the initial balance in the number of tanks of the various players on the game board, thus in the Libyan game the level of intensity and constancy over time of the foreign support received from the various local actors is proving to be the crucial factor in shifting the power balance in favor of one faction rather than the other.

In this context, Haftar seems to behave like that player that at each turn, as soon as he receives the reinforcement troops (i.e. the support provided to him in different ways by the UAE, France, Egypt, Russia), decides to attack his opponent in every possible way and from every direction (it is just necessary to remember the numerous times in which he announced the infamous "zero hour" for the final conquest of Tripoli), without however being able to reach his goal. On the contrary, Al Serraj has mostly played in defence until now, slowly and constantly repelling the opponent's assaults, thus reducing the number of troops in his possession, and now moving on to the counterattack, also thanks to his load of additional bonus armies (i.e. military support provided by Turkey, consisting of mercenary troops, Turkish military advisers and special forces, armored vehicles, combat drones and electronic jammer systems).

Assuming (which is not necessarily true) that the game as a whole will end only when one of the two factions has completely destroyed the other and conquered all the territories, that is, when either the GNA or LNA has conquered the whole country (a fact that, at the moment, seems quite unlikely, at least in the short-medium term), what are the possible future developments in Libya? The two players could negotiate a truce, in order to reorganize their respective forces, happy with the status quo and a temporary partition that satisfies both (according to this view, Al-Serraj could either try to conquer Sirte and then stop the military advance, in order to resume the political negotiations from a position of strength, or he could reinforce the defensive lines and focus on the reconstruction of Tripoli, after the failure of the assault). Another possible option is that the clashes could proceed to the bitter end, with the GNA that could try to launch a massive offensive against Haftar in Cyrenaica, relying on the heavy Turkish support, with the risk, however, that such a move will end up in a total failure as did the LNA offensive, even in virtue of a possible direct intervention by Al Sisi's Egypt in favor of Haftar. In such a complex scenario, one thing is certain: the Libyan game, as well as a game of Risk!, is a very complex "game", where timing

and foreign support play a fundamental role, and where the possibility of a stalemate from which no real winner emerges does not seem so remote (besides, as already said, the Libyan crisis has been going on for almost 10 years)²⁸⁴.

3.3.2 Defining the real interests and priorities for Italy in Libya and acting accordingly

Having said that, what could or should Italy do in such a context? The first step is to understand the reality of the situation in Libya and to define what are the Italian interests in the African country, also in the light of the new and changing scenario. The analysis on the Italian strategy must start from a clear statement of fact: Italy is not the closest and most influential foreign actor in Libya anymore. Even in Tripolitania, where Rome has historically been the dominant player, other actors have replaced Italy, which is unfortunately no longer the privileged partner of any of the local factions in Libya.

Thus, a new perspective should guide the Italian action in Libya. The main question driving the Italian foreign, security and defence policy should thus be: “How can Italy recover the role and influence lost in Libya and protect and advance its interests”? It should go in parallel with the more traditional question regarding the pacification process: “How can Italy actively contribute to the political process and the stabilization and pacification of Libya”? This approach does not mean that Rome should not work at all with the view of a definitive political agreement in Libya: on the contrary, it means that Italy could and should do that in a more pragmatic and realistic way. First of all, if Italy was not able to actively contribute to the pacification of the country when it had a stronger influence in Libya, how can it provide a crucial support to such a process now that its role has been reduced? Second, the risk now is that other actors could make crucial decisions in Libya counting on the fact that at the moment they are more powerful and have more influence than Italy (Turkey and Russia in primis) and then including Rome in the negotiation process only in a formal way, de facto preventing it from giving an active contribution. Besides, as always happens in history, diplomatic fora are a tool to politically acknowledge the military status quo on the battlefield.

²⁸⁴ This is a general reflection and analysis on the most recent events of the Libyan crisis and the current status quo. The ceasefire announced at the end of August, the possibility whether it will be actually respected or not, and the implications for the future of Libya will be analyzed at the end of this chapter.

Indeed, in such a framework, the Italian strategy in the short-term should be based on defending and promoting the national interests on the ground (even if sometimes they could be temporary in contrast with the pacification process), which are²⁸⁵:

- energy interests: protecting the work of ENI as well as securing the energy supplies arriving from Libya;
- security interests: preventing and combating the terroristic threat and the proliferation of jihadist networks as well as controlling and managing the migration flows departing from the Tripolitanian coasts;
- military interests: training and mentoring the Libyan security forces, participating in demining activities and protecting the Italian soldiers deployed in Libya;
- economic interests: participating in the post-war reconstruction of the country;
- political interests: strengthening the relationships with the GNA and other local actors in Libya, reinforcing the capacity-building and state-building activities, maintaining, and if possible reinforcing, the role of Italy as a crucial and fundamental foreign partner of the Libyan country and the Libyan people;
- strategic and geopolitical interests: trying to stop other States from increasing their influence in Libya at the Italian expense, while playing an active role in stabilizing the country in the long-run, thus strengthening the position of Italy in Libya, North Africa and the broader Mediterranean area as a crucial middle regional power which is fundamental for the balance and dynamics of the entire region.

Among all these interests, at the moment the one that seems to be more in danger is the international status of Italy, with the actual level of influence exercised by Rome in Libya, as well as in the broader Mediterranean region. First of all, it is necessary to clarify what it means to have influence in Libya. It means that Italy can play its game and express its voice, that it cannot only suffer the consequences of the decisions made by other actors, but instead can play an active role in shaping those very same decisions in a way that is favorable to the Italian national interests.

²⁸⁵ In outlining the Italian interests in Libya, this work has taken inspiration from some points mentioned by Luca Gori during a webinar organized by IAI. Indeed, according to him, Italy has four vital national interests to protect in Libya: securing energy supplies; combating terrorism and avoiding the proliferation of jihadist networks; controlling the migration flows which depart from the Libyan coasts; defending and advancing its international status. See: “Webinar: L’Italia e la crisi libica: quali lezioni di politica estera?”, IAI, 29 May 2020, <https://www.iai.it/it/video/webinar-litalia-e-la-crisi-libica-quali-lezioni-di-politica-estera>

In this sense, over the last year and a half, because of the increase of the external influence of various international state actors and the parallel secondary role played by Italy at the military level, Rome has lost influence in Libya, in particular in Tripolitania over the GNA led by al-Serraj. Such loss of influence acquires even more importance if framed in the overall context: historically speaking, Italy has been probably the most important and influential foreign actor in Libya, at least until the 2011 events, with the popular revolts, the NATO intervention and the killing of Qaddafi. Then, due the endless internal instability and insecurity that followed the 2011 events, and the growing and continuous action of other foreign powers, the overall Italian role in the country has shrunk. Moreover, as Arturo Varvelli has noted²⁸⁶, Italy was very skilled in supporting the creation of the GNA between 2015 and 2016, through a political mediation process led by the United Nations. Thus, Italy was one of the major sponsor in having given life to the new government of al-Serraj, which with many difficulties was then physically installed in Tripoli, thanks again to the fundamental Italian support. Italy therefore played a crucial role in creating the only internationally recognized and legitimate government, even if in practice it was a weak and unstable executive at the beginning. The problem then was that, once the government took office, Italy did not believe much in this government and did not actually support it politically as it might have done in the second phase. This fact has been seen above all during the current Libyan civil war, where al-Serraj has several times asked for help and support from Italy, receiving instead much less than he would have expected, and he consequently turned to Turkey. Ankara seized the precious opportunity, effectively offering the support that al-Serraj asked for and needed, and thus increasing its involvement and also its influence in Libya, to the detriment of Italy.

Should or could Italy have supplied weapons and sent its soldiers to fight directly in Libya? Probably not, for several reasons. First of all, a resolution by the UN Security Council would have been necessary (as happened in 2011) in order to legitimately intervene militarily in Libya. Second, the Italian public opinion would have hardly welcomed a new armed intervention in Libya after the failure of 2011, even in the presence of a UN authorization. Third, Italy alone does not have enough military capabilities for a large-scale armed intervention, thus the support of other European countries, the US or NATO would have been necessary. Fourth, a direct military intervention by Italy would have risked compromising the work of ENI. In fact, ENI is perceived as an almost more Libyan than Italian entity in

²⁸⁶ A. Varvelli, “Webinar: L’Italia e la crisi libica: quali lezioni di politica estera?”, IAI, 29 May 2020, <https://www.iai.it/it/video/webinar-litalia-e-la-crisi-libica-quali-lezioni-di-politica-estera>

the North African country²⁸⁷, therefore it has been well regarded by all Libyans. Moreover, through its own plants, ENI supplies energy to Libya and to the Libyan citizens themselves. Consequently, any Italian armed intervention officially directed in favor of one faction and against another could have had the effect of associating ENI with Italy, and therefore would have put at risk the numerous strategic activities of ENI, as well as to clearly antagonize one faction over the other. In short, the limits of the Italian strategic culture prevented Rome from playing an active role during the militarization of the Libyan crisis: having to respect the pillars of pacifism, internationalism and multilateralism, Italy did not have the means, the will and the capabilities to be able to play a leading role in the context of the Libyan civil war.

On the other hand, with its non-intervention attitude and the “*equidistanza*” policy, even though it has reduced its influence in Tripolitania compared to the past, Italy could have gained, or at least maintained, a certain level of objectivity and credibility with regard to the local actors. Italy could thus be the only foreign State that could have a genuinely transversal political capital with all the different and numerous Libyan domestic actors, and consequently the only international country able to effectively promote the political dialogue with all the parties involved.

However, looking at the situation from a different perspective, the current Libyan scenario presents some positive aspects for Italy as well. The Turkish intervention has *de facto* saved the GNA, which still remains the main Italian interlocutor in Libya. A hypothetical conquest of Tripoli by Haftar would have probably implied a worst scenario for Italy, compared to the present one. Moreover, ENI remains the largest international producer of hydrocarbons in Libya, and it has recently discussed new forms of cooperation with the Libyan NOC²⁸⁸. Finally, Silvia Romano’s rescue operation demonstrates the good relations between the Italian and Turkish intelligence agencies, and it is plausible to assume that such collaboration is valid in the Libyan scenario as well, at least in some forms.

²⁸⁷ L. Pistelli, “Webinar: L’Italia e la crisi libica: quali lezioni di politica estera?”, IAI, 29 May 2020, <https://www.iai.it/it/video/webinar-litalia-e-la-crisi-libica-quali-lezioni-di-politica-estera>

²⁸⁸ “Il capo del Consiglio di Presidenza del Governo libico di unità nazionale al-Sarraj e il presidente di NOC Sanalla incontrano l’AD di Eni Claudio Descalzi”, Comunicato stampa, ENI, 8 July 2020, <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/media/comunicati-stampa/2020/07/pr-eni-ceo-libya.html>

Therefore, what should Italy do? At the level of the domestic conflict, it is possible (and necessary) to try to relaunch the intra-Libyan dialogue, perhaps by leveraging this position of transversal credibility that Italy has towards the Libyan parties at a national level and that other countries might not have. At the regional and international level, Rome should try to leverage the excellent bilateral relations that it has with all the countries in the area in order to smooth out alignments, attitudes and lines of conduct of the various regional and international actors present in the Libyan scenario. This is part of a broader two-stage process.

In the short and medium term, Italy should provide more concrete support to the GNA, as it is not only the government it sustains on a bilateral basis, but also the only government legitimately recognized at the international level. This is an aspect that is often forgotten: Italy must not be ashamed of this fact, and should provide as much concrete support as it can, in order to recover also some of the influence it has lost in Tripolitania, which is the area where the Italian material interests (energy, migration, security) are concentrated. In the long run, relaunching the peace process and the political dialogue, because it is the only way that could definitely stabilize and pacify Libya. Indeed, there are two ways of solving the Libyan crisis through diplomatic and political means: one is the “quick fix” solution, namely conferences where the actors involved are supposed to find a single, crucial and definitive agreement to calm down the situation and solve the crisis. However, such model has failed. The second way, the political dialogue, is a long and structural process that requires time and patience, it is based on small, progressive steps to be undertaken by all the parties and in the very end it could lead to peace and stability²⁸⁹. This double-track strategy is not based on merely idealistic assumptions, but rather on a realistic and pragmatic view. Stabilizing and pacifying the Libyan country is not only positive for the Libyan people: it is a crucial interest for Italy as well. Moreover, the stabilization of Libya is fundamental for the stabilization of the entire North African area and the Mediterranean in general. This is the logic of such approach: protecting and advancing the Italian national interests in the short-run given the present dynamics of the crisis (the current priority), while continuing to work for a long-term solution for the appeasement of the country (the long-term goal).

²⁸⁹ L. Gori, “Webinar: L’Italia e la crisi libica: quali lezioni di politica estera?”, IAI, 29 May 2020, <https://www.iai.it/it/video/webinar-litalia-e-la-crisi-libica-quali-lezioni-di-politica-estera>

Moreover, it is necessary to be clear about an ambiguous and contradictory aspect of the Italian approach towards the Libyan dossier: the mistaken equation that Libya means (only) migrants. Indeed, the Italian foreign and security policy in Libya has been heavily influenced by the Italian domestic policy and the political discussion on the immigration phenomenon and by the alternation in power of different governments over the recent years. In this sense, in the eyes of the Italian public opinion, as well as of the political class, the “Libyan question” was to be treated mainly as a “migration question”: more specifically, the importance of Libya has been mainly (if not only) understood in terms of the migration flows departing from the Libyan coasts and arriving in Italy. Thus, for the Italian public opinion Libya was and still remains an “immigration issue”, and this view in turn has influenced the political debate. The number one priority was to stop the migration flows coming from Libya, regardless of all the other issues at stake in the Libyan crisis (energy, terrorism, security, political influence and the overall Italian role in the country). Consequently, it is important to eliminate such mistaken association between Libya and migrants, and to understand and explain that the migration issue is only one of the several and all equally important interests at stake for Italy in Libya.

In addition, at the international level, it is necessary to work in close connection with Italy’s major allies, namely the European countries and the US. For what regards Europe, it is desirable to find a comprehensive agreement with France with regard to the regional policy of the two countries²⁹⁰. In fact, Italy and France are the two major European powers involved in the Libyan dossier, supporting however two different sides. An agreement must be found with France as this is functional to having and conducting a common and unitary European policy on Libya, which first passes through a common position with France and then also with Germany. This is necessary in order to have a truly unified European approach on the Libyan question, and consequently a stronger and more influential role, since at the moment the single European countries count for nothing. Russia, Turkey and other countries matter most. It is not in the Italian, nor European interests, to leave Libya to Turkey and Russia, despite the good relations between Rome and Ankara, and to let them establish a permanent sphere of influence in the North African State. Thus, the only way to be able to counter them is a truly joint, coherent and unified action at the European level.

²⁹⁰ J. Darnis, “Une vision stratégique des relations franco-italiennes : vers un traité bilatéral?”, Foundation pour la recherche stratégique, 29 July 2020, <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/une-vision-strategique-relations-franco-italiennes-vers-un-traite-bilateral-2020>

In this sense, some clarifications should be made with regard to the relationships between Italy and France. In recent years, the relationships between the two European countries have been characterized by some tensions, especially after the election of the pro-European Emmanuel Macron as French President in 2017 and the parallel formation in Italy of a coalition government composed by the Five Stars Movement and the North League in 2018 with a partly anti-European political agenda. The dossier in which the interests and actions of Rome and Paris came into contrast are several.

At the security, energetic and geopolitical levels, the Libyan crisis is the most relevant dossier where Italy and France have diverging interests, with the Italian perception that the 2011 French military initiative in Libya was carried out also with the aim of ousting ENI from Libya, to the advantage of the French energy company Total. The Libyan scenario is also linked to the French and Italian initiatives in the Sahel, as well as in the broader Mediterranean region. At the concrete level, however, it is difficult to imagine that a complex and expensive military intervention like the one of France in Libya in 2011 was aimed at advancing the interests of one single national company against another. The roots of the French intervention should be found in the will to play a leading and active role in the Libyan affairs, as well as in the broader North Africa and Mediterranean basin, a region that France traditionally considers a theater of action of his foreign and security policy. On the other hand, there is no doubt that Paris miscalculated the long-term consequences of his military initiative, followed by London and Washington.

At the economic level, the veto expressed by the French government in 2017 to the Fincantieri-Chantiers de l'Atlantique operation has alarmed several Italian operators, who perceived such a move as a slap in the face by the new French President²⁹¹. This case is emblematic of a constant trend that has characterized the industrial relations between Italy and France over the last years: when a French firm makes an economic investment in Italy in a sector that is undergoing a liberalization process, the corresponding French market usually remains closed to Italian companies, thus avoiding a reciprocity mechanism that quite rarely is achieved²⁹². Several examples can be made in this regard: French companies own important shares in Italian firms active in the luxury sector (Gucci, Bulgari, Fendi), in

²⁹¹ The Italian firm Fincantieri was willing to buy the majority of the shares of the French company STX-Chantiers de l'Atlantique from its previous South Korean holder. However, in spite of an agreement reached during the Presidency of Hollande, in 2017 the new French President Macron put a stop on the deal.

²⁹² J.P. Darnis, "Una visione strategica delle relazioni franco-italiane: per un trattato bilaterale?", IAI, August 2020, p. 4.

banks (BLN, Cariparma, Mediobanca), energy (Edison), food (Parmalat, Galbani, Parmigiano Reggiano) and the eyewear giant Luxottica²⁹³.

Thus, from Libya to the Sahel and to the Eastern Mediterranean, from energy to infrastructure, from industrial relations to scientific and technological research, from space to military cooperation and defence, the dossier at stake in the bilateral relationships between Italy and France are numerous. In this regard, the possibility of signing a so-called “Quirinale Treaty” has emerged over the last months²⁹⁴, in order to establish a permanent and structured cooperation and partnership between the two countries, on the model of the Élysée Treaty signed between France and Germany in 1963.

With specific reference to the Libyan and Mediterranean scenarios, an agreement could be found on the basis of mutual reassurances and concessions between the two States: the protection of Italian material interests on the ground (ENI in primis) by France, the recognition of the mutual “spheres of action” and the non-interference policy, the reassurance that Italy will not try to substitute France as the main partner for many countries of the area (especially in the Sahel), as long as specific Italian interests are not endangered. In Libya in particular, given the recent Haftar’s defeat and the downsized role of both France and Italy, a new space for a truly mutual cooperation between the two States can be found. Moreover, the new Italian military mission in the Sahel (the taskforce “TAKUBA”) represents a significant sign of renewed collaboration in this critical and complex area of Africa. However, it is necessary to find a strategic and structural alignment between Paris and Rome that could go beyond the simple participation in joint operations and that could pave the way for a united and coherent long-term approach towards the whole Mediterranean region. This is a difficult and complex process, that can not be achieved in a short time, especially if it is supposed to be stable and endure over time. As Jean-Pierre Darnis has pointed out, the key could be in drafting a bilateral treaty composed by few articles, where the emphasis is put on bilateral consultation mechanisms at the governmental and institutional levels, in order to enhance mutual trust and knowledge and to form a strong network of regular and stable connections between France and Italy, and in this way move then forward in reinforcing long-term cooperation on specific sectors and dossier.

²⁹³ “I dossier Italia-Francia / Gli interessi economici francesi in Italia”, Il Sole 24 Ore, 27 February 2020, <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/i-dossier-italia-francia-interessi-economici-francesi-italia-ACgVFIMB>

²⁹⁴ V. Sansonetti, “Italia-Francia, Di Maio e Le Drian rilanciano il Trattato del Quirinale”, Formiche.net, 3 June 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/06/di-maio-le-drian-trattato-del-quirinale/>

For what concerns the relationship with the US, as already said in Chapter 2, Italy has several times tried to get a stronger and more active and concrete involvement by Washington on the Libyan dossier, receiving a support based more on words and official declarations than on facts and material assistance. However, given the stronger role played by Russia, with the presence of the Wagner mercenaries and the Russian MIGs, Italy could try to leverage these facts in order to get a more direct involvement by Washington, in particular in favor of the GNA led by al-Serraj (also considering that the Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya is the American diplomat Stephanie T. Williams). Moreover, several US Government agencies and apparatus, with the Pentagon at the top of the list, are becoming increasingly concerned by the growing Russian presence and activities in Libya, thus there is more room for maneuver compared to the past for the Italian diplomacy to get a stronger support by the US on the Libyan dossier (in particular, after the end of the electoral campaign and the November 2020 Presidential elections).

At the time of writing the last remarks of this chapter, two important news have been announced with regard to the Libyan scenario: in chronological order, first the decision by Haftar to stop the blockade of the activities in the oil fields under his control; second, the agreement for a ceasefire in Libya declared by Fayez al-Serraj and Aguila Saleh (Haftar has refused it) with the intention to restart the political process in order to hold new legislative and presidential elections in Libya in March 2021. Such decisions represent a significant development of the events in the African country. At the political level, they could be the sign of relaxation of relations between the LNA and the GNA, even though it is difficult to assess whether the ceasefire will be respected and for how long. It is also possible that the hypothesis of a direct Egyptian intervention in the conflict in case of an armed attack by the GNA in Sirte and Jufra could have led the actors to seek a mediation and the ceasefire, in order to avoid a further escalation of the conflict. However, it is difficult to fully understand the real role now played by Haftar: he could have decided to agree to foreign pressures and to stop the blockade which has been going on for months in Libya, causing billions of dollars of damage to the economy, but he has refused to accept the truce, which instead has been declared for the Tobruk-based faction by Aguila Saleh, President of the HoR. Such fact could also be interpreted as a possible domestic struggle between Haftar and Saleh, with the former in a crisis of legitimacy after the failure of both the Tripoli's assault and the oil blockade, and the latter trying to strengthen its role in Cyrenaica. Considered to be a more moderate and balanced person than Haftar,

Saleh could be the key political figure to manage the mediation and pacification process with the GNA²⁹⁵. After one year and a half of devastating fighting, a new window of opportunity for diplomacy and political dialogue may have now opened in Libya, with Italy that should now play a crucial role in mediating between the parties and reaping the benefits of its non-alignment policy during the conflict, while keeping always an eye on the protection of its interests in the Libyan country.

At the economic level, after billions of dollars of missed revenues for Libya, the country could now restart to produce and sell oil on foreign markets. Indeed, the end of the oil blockade, in conjunction with the ceasefire and the end of hostilities, could pave the way to a period of economic growth and recovery for Libya, in particular for the capital Tripoli and the surrounding areas. In June 2020, Fajez al-Serraj fled to Rome to discuss with the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte the possibility to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries, in particular the possible establishment of a joint commission in charge of monitoring and assisting the activities of Italian firms and enterprises in Libya²⁹⁶. This news follows the announcement that Italian companies Aeneas and Salini Impregilo should soon resume work for building respectively two terminals of the Tripoli airport and a section of the Libyan coastal highway²⁹⁷. Italy could (and should) thus play an important and active role in the reconstruction of the country. However, realistically speaking, most of the new contracts will probably be awarded to Turkish and Qatari companies. Turkey (and also Qatar) has invested copious military, political and economic resources in the intervention in Libya, and now wants to capitalize such investment. Indeed, Turkey has already obtained the possibility to use the Misrata airport and the al-Watiya air base as military hubs for the deployment of its military forces in the area²⁹⁸. This is the first important and official strategic achievement of Ankara in Libya: indeed, from these locations, it will further project its influence in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean (starting also to look at the Western part) and in North Africa. Moreover, according to some sources, the backlog of Turkish contract work in

²⁹⁵ G. Gaiani, "Spiragli di pace ma la Libia resta divisa e in mano agli "sponsor" stranieri", *Analisi Difesa*, 24 August 2020, <https://www.analisdifesa.it/2020/08/spiragli-di-pace-ma-la-libia-resta-divisa-e-in-mano-agli-sponsor-stranieri/>

²⁹⁶ "Conte riceve Sarraj: Tripoli si impegna a favorire il ritorno in Libia delle aziende italiane", *Agenzia Nova*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.agenzianova.com/a/5ef74f3680d8d8.89720184/2999871/2020-06-27/conte-riceve-sarraj-tripoli-si-impegna-a-favorire-il-ritorno-in-libia-delle-aziende-italiane>

²⁹⁷ G. Pelosi, "Libia: cambio della guardia tra militari e imprese ma resta l'incognita dei pozzi petroliferi chiusi", *Eastwest*, 5 July 2020, <https://eastwest.eu/it/libia-cambio-della-guardia-tra-militari-e-imprese/>

²⁹⁸ "L'intesa militare tra Tripoli, Ankara e Doha conferma le due basi turche in Libia", *Analisi Difesa*, 19 August 2020, <https://www.analisdifesa.it/2020/08/lintesa-militare-tra-tripoli-ankara-e-doha-conferma-le-due-basi-turche-in-libia/>

Libya amounts to \$16 billion²⁹⁹, and it is likely that many new contracts in the field of energy, infrastructure and telecommunications will be awarded to Ankara. On the contrary, Italy will likely get a smaller slice of the cake (the two aforementioned contracts for Italian companies were signed well before the Turkish intervention in Libya and the consequent Italian loss of influence). However, Rome could and should use the space for maneuver left in Libya, even though it is quite more limited than in the past, relying on a very clear aspect: the fact that al-Serraj, in spite of all the precious support received by Turkey, does not want to be totally dependent on Ankara. The Italian presence is thus essential for counterbalancing the Turkish-Qatari dominant influence, and it is precisely on this factor that Italy could have a leverage to wisely use in the future³⁰⁰.

For what regards instead the broader framework of the whole Mediterranean region, as Giampiero Massolo, Italian Ambassador and former Director of the DIS, has pointed out, Italy must adopt an integrated approach, going beyond the traditional categories of the Italian diplomacy and the Italian foreign, security and defence policy³⁰¹. In particular, it is necessary to define a scale of priorities for Italy in the region, “putting security and defence first”, and to abandon the logic according to which Italy can act only on a multilateral basis. As already said, multilateralism has always been, and will continue to be, a pillar of the Italian strategic culture and of its external action in the global arena. However, in the current complexity of the international scenario, with the interweaving of so many actors, interests and geopolitical designs, Italy should combine multilateralism, bilateralism and, if and when necessary and possible, unilateralism. As he correctly explains, such an approach does not mean that Italy should drastically change its foreign policy and act alone all times, but rather a realistic, pragmatic and effective way of pursuing the Italian national interests. It is a line of action that most of the times allows Rome to work with other countries that can share a “road map” with it, but that other times requires Italy to act on its own. Moreover, Italy should not be afraid to raise its voice internationally, to make its legitimate demands and to defend its interests even when this entails the risk of receiving criticism from other countries and of possibly antagonizing someone for short periods of time.

²⁹⁹ “Turkey ready for fast reconstruction in conflict-torn Libya, official says”, Reuters, 19 June 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-libya-security/turkey-ready-for-fast-reconstruction-in-conflict-torn-libya-official-says-idUSL8N2DW37O>

³⁰⁰ F. Bechis, “L’interesse nazionale in Libia. Ecco di cosa ha discusso il Copasir (con il capo dell’AISE)”, Formiche.net, 26 June 2020, <https://formiche.net/2020/06/interesse-nazionale-libia-copasir-aise/>

³⁰¹ G. Massolo, “Beyond Tradition: What Role Should Italy Play in the Mediterranean?”, ISPI Commentary, 16 July 2020, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/beyond-tradition-what-role-should-italy-play-mediterranean-26978>

To sum up, the Italian strategy in Libya, as well as in the “enlarged Mediterranean”, should be based on very precise and simple assumptions: understanding what are the Italian national interests; defining a scale of priorities and the proper political and economic resources to pursue them; adopting an integrated approach, combining multilateralism, bilateralism and (sometimes) unilateralism; leveraging on its excellent bilateral relationships with all the States of the area in order to develop a strong network of connections; using all the instruments at its disposal, finding the right mixt between more (cultural, economic, political) and less (military and security) traditional tools in order to promote a coherent, strategic, long-term, strong and effective foreign, security and defence policy in the Mediterranean region.

3.3.3 Rethinking the strategy for the international military missions

A last remark should be made with regard to the military missions abroad, which, as already said in Chapter 1, constitute a crucial element of the Italian foreign, security and defence policy. The logic surrounding the Italian international operations is twofold: on the one hand, being present and active in those areas where Italian interest are directly at stake; on the other, reinforcing the political capital of Italy as a reliable international actor in providing security, especially in the eyes of partner and allied countries (the US in primis).

However, in recent times, an important debate has risen in Italy with regard to the real role, functions and modalities of the Italian military operations abroad³⁰². In the current international scenario, it appears necessary to recalibrate the line of action which guides the Italian missions abroad, focusing the attention on a more effective protection of the Italian national interests in all the different areas where Italian soldiers are deployed, with a particular eye on the Mediterranean region and Africa.

In particular, according to several experts, it is necessary to provide a new comprehensive strategy for the Italian international military operations in all the theaters where Italy is present. Such strategy should be characterized by a long-term view that can overcome the “episodicity” of the last 20 years³⁰³,

³⁰² See a column of ten articles entitled “Italia e missioni militari internazionali: ripensare la strategia”, published between January and February 2020 by Affarinternazionali, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/speciali/italia-e-missioni-militari-internazionali-ripensare-la-strategia/>

³⁰³ M. Nones, V. Camporini, “Ripensare Afghanistan, Iraq e Libia”, Affarinternazionali, 16 January 2020, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2020/01/una-strategia-per-le-missioni-internazionali-dellitalia/>

and should be accompanied by a public reflection involving both the political class and the public opinion³⁰⁴. Italy should realize that, in the current international scenario, it is not possible anymore to rely on other actors (in particular the US) to defend the Italian interests, and that sometimes it is necessary to act alone, as other States already do³⁰⁵. Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge the risks and threats for the Italian soldiers deployed in such operations, which, despite the label “missioni di pace” (peace missions) often used by the Italian political class, are still military (and sometimes actually combat) operations. This fact is demonstrated, for instance, by the attack against an Italian army convoy in Somalia or the one that has seriously injured five Italian soldiers in Iraq, both occurred in 2019. Thus, on the one hand, as already said in Chapter 1, it is necessary to recognize that such operations are crucial for the Italian foreign, security and defence policy, that they are aimed at stabilizing the country where they are carried out, but also that in order to do so they are based on the use of the armed force. On the other, after recognizing risks and threats, it is necessary to act accordingly, reviewing the mandate, rules of engagement and equipment of the Italian military forces³⁰⁶. Even in this case, the implementation of practical and concrete measures is subject to a cultural and cognitive change in mindset, approach and mentality. Furthermore, it is necessary to intervene also at the operational level. Indeed, the responsibilities for such an important change in the overall strategy of the Italian military operations abroad are not only of the government, the political class in general and the public opinion. It is also up to the military to keep up with operational needs. In this sense, the most relevant action to be undertaken is to reinforce and widen the scope of the Security Force Assistance (SFA) operations³⁰⁷, which are the most common type of operation carried out by NATO armies in order to stabilize a country in the long run, including Security Sector Reform (SSR), Stabilization and Reconstruction (S&R), Military Assistance (MA) and Stability Policing (SP) missions.

Looking at the new annual law for the authorization and prosecution of the military operations abroad³⁰⁸, it seems that some of the aforementioned suggestions have been implemented.

³⁰⁴ F. Coticchia, “Necessario un dibattito pubblico nel Paese”, Affarinternazionali, 31 January 2020, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2020/01/necessario-dibattito-paese/>

³⁰⁵ M. Bertolini, “Italia sempre più sola: una ricetta per tornare a contare”, Affarinternazionali, 21 January 2020, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2020/01/italia-sempre-piu-sola-ricetta-tornare-contare/>

³⁰⁶ A. Marrone, “Riconoscere il rischio e agire di conseguenza”, Affarinternazionali, 10 February 2020, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2020/02/militari-estero-riconoscere-rischio/>

³⁰⁷ C. Bertolotti, “Mediterraneo: visione strategica e capacità operativa”, Affarinternazionali, 12 February 2020, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2020/02/proiezione-mediterraneo-strategica/>

³⁰⁸ “Relazione analitica sulle missioni internazionali in corso e sullo stato degli interventi di cooperazione allo sviluppo a sostegno dei processi di pace e di stabilizzazione, riferita al periodo 1° gennaio – 31 dicembre 2019, anche al fine della relativa

First of all, it is necessary to say that in 2020 five new operations have been authorized compared to 2019³⁰⁹. They are the European Union Military Operation in the Mediterranean - EUNAVFOR MED Irini, the European Union Advisory Mission in support of Security Sector Reform in Iraq - EUAM Iraq, the Task Force TAKUBA for combating the terroristic threat in the Sahel, the NATO Implementation of the Enhancement of the Framework for the South and the deployment of a national aero-naval task force for presence, surveillance and safety in the Gulf of Guinea. Two operations have instead terminated, and thus not renewed: one in Hebron, West Bank, the other in Turkey. Between old and new missions, the maximum number of Italian troops deployed abroad is set to be around 8.600 soldiers, distributed across three continents: 38,2% in Asia, 36,2% in Europe and 25,6% in Africa. Indeed, the highest number of soldiers is deployed in Asia, while the largest number of missions is present in Africa. In the table below it is possible to see the total number of Italian soldiers deployed in international military missions (green line), with a constant trend of growing Italian presence in Africa over the last years (brown line).

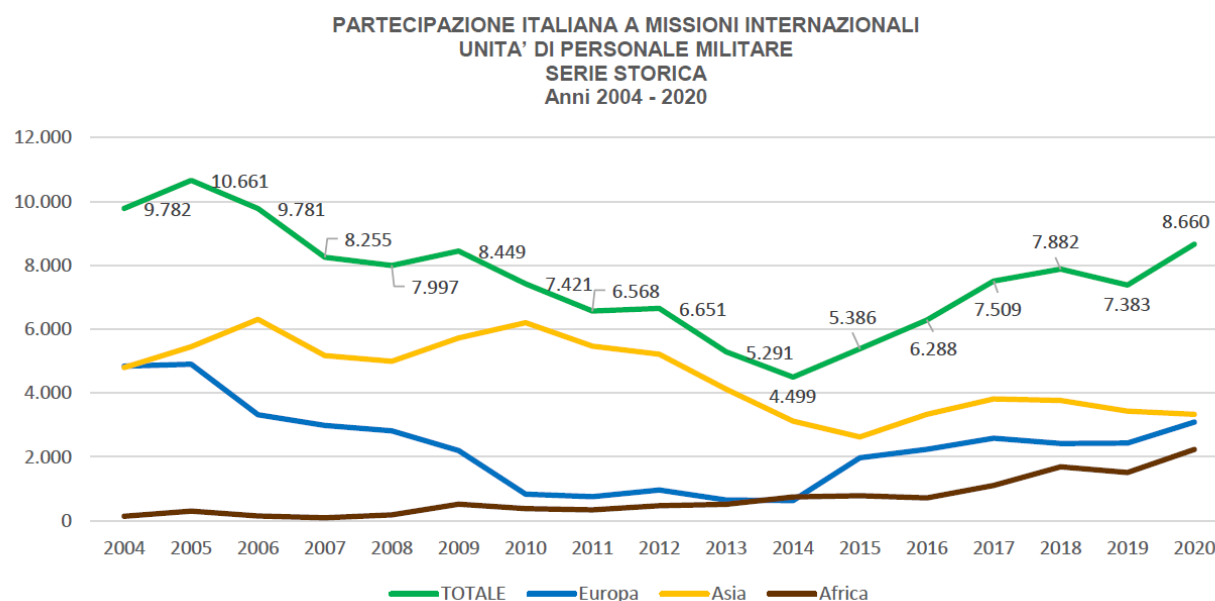


Figure 1. Time series (2004-2020) of the Italian participation in international military missions
 (Source: Camera dei Deputati, 2020).

proroga per il periodo 1° gennaio – 31 dicembre 2020, deliberata il 21 maggio 2020”, Camera dei Deputati, http://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg18/lavori/documentiparlamentari/IndiceETesti/026/003/INTERO.pdf

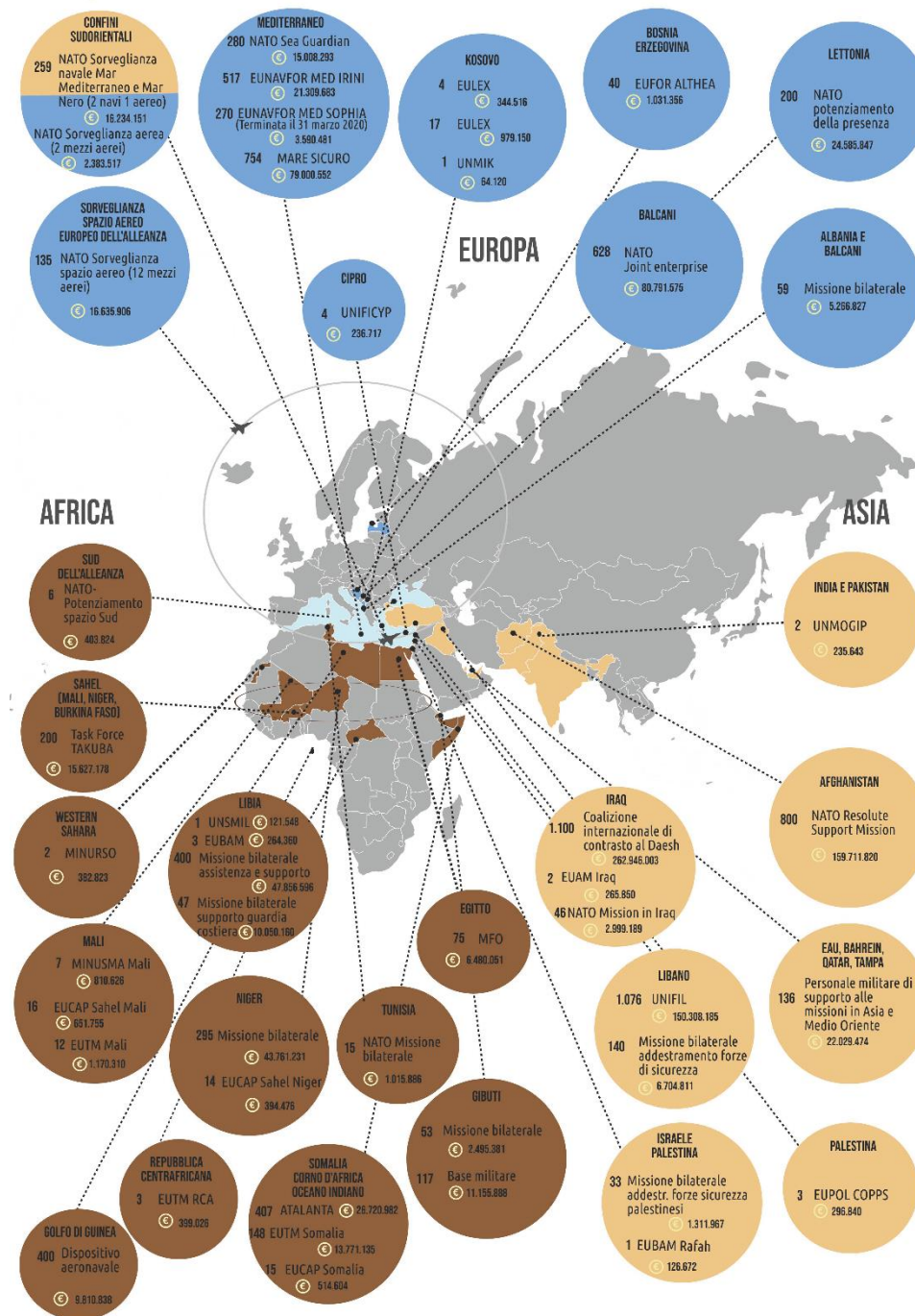
³⁰⁹ “Deliberazione del Consiglio dei ministri in merito alla partecipazione dell’Italia a ulteriori missioni Internazionali, adottata il 21 maggio 2020”, Camera dei Deputati, http://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg18/lavori/documentiparlamentari/IndiceETesti/025/003/INTERO.pdf

Among the new operations, the EU operation IRINI has already been discussed in Chapter 2 for its importance in the Libyan scenario. Two other new and significant missions in Africa are the task force TAKUBA and the naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea. While the latter is important for protecting the so-called Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) from the assaults carried out by pirates, the former is crucial for assisting and stabilizing the countries of the Sahelian region, an extremely serious source of regional instability for the continent, where numerous criminal, rebel and jihadist groups are present and prosper. Such area is of paramount importance for the Italian interests in Africa, in particular for controlling the migration flows and the illicit smuggling routes and for preventing the Sahelian States from collapsing as it happened for instance to Somalia or Libya³¹⁰. Moreover, with the anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Guinea (since the current year) and in the Gulf of Aden (since 2008), and the support missions in Somalia and Djibouti, the operations in the Sahel forms a horizontal band stretching from one shore of the continent to the other. Such arc connects then to the Middle East through the Arabian Peninsula, passing through Iraq and Lebanon (two other crucial theaters where Italian soldiers are deployed) and forming a unique arc of instability along the southern and eastern flanks of the Mediterranean Sea, whose ultimate and definitive stabilization is one of the greatest and most important foreign policy goals of Italy. It is clear why Italy has been increasing its activities in such areas over the last years, and why it should further enhance its presence and strengthen its role in the following times. The new missions authorized in 2020 represent an important step forward in the way in which Italy should manage the military operations abroad: putting Italian national interests first, acting on an integrated basis (multilateral, bilateral and unilateral when necessary) and developing a comprehensive strategy for the Italian foreign, security and defence policy in the Mediterranean region, of which the military operations abroad are a powerful, though not unique, tool.

³¹⁰ As a further proof of the paramount importance of such area for Italy, regarding the reports sent by AISE in 2019 to the Italian institutions on the geopolitical situation of the countries in the world, around half of them are related only to North Africa and the Sahel. See: "Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza – 2019", Sicurezza Nazionale, February 2020, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr/nsf/relazione-annuale/relazione-2019.html>

MONDO

1° gennaio - 31 dicembre 2020



DELIBERA DEL CONSIGLIO DEI MINISTRI DEL 21 MAGGIO 2020

Figure 2. Italian military operations in the world in 2020 (Source: Camera dei Deputati, 2020)

CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was to try to define and understand the main characteristics and peculiarities of the Italian strategic culture; to analyze the current geopolitical scenario in the Mediterranean basin and in Libya; to outline a possible strategy for Italy in the region, taking into account both the domestic and international levels of analysis and action.

Chapter 1 has dealt with the Italian strategic culture. Starting from the study made by Johnson, it outlined the main features of the strategic culture of Italy, taking into consideration historical, cultural, constitutional, political and cognitive factors. In particular, it emerged how the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy was totally different from the strategic culture of the Italian Republic, with the Second World War that represented a real game changer in this sense. Indeed, the strategic culture of the Italian Republic puts at the first place of the possible means to solve international disputes the tools provided by international law and multilateral diplomacy. An accommodationist attitude is preferred to a more assertive one, and this aspect also results in preferring defensive military actions rather than offensive operations, contrary to the liberal and fascist periods. Special attention has been dedicated to the Italian Constitution, which contributed to the institutionalization of the strategic culture of the Republic. Indeed, if on the one hand the Italian Constitution was the product of the new Italian strategic culture as it came out after the end of World War II, on the other it further reinforced over the years the pillars of internationalism, pacifism and multilateralism upon which the foreign, security and defence policy of the Italian Republic was, and still is, based.

Chapter 2 has provided a comprehensive analysis of the geopolitical scenario of the Mediterranean basin, focusing the study on four macro-trends. First of all, it has addressed the issue of the role of the US, which on the one hand is less interested and less involved in the dynamics of the region, but on the other keeps monitoring the overall situation, with special attention to Russian and Chinese activities in the area, as well as to the proliferation of jihadist groups. Second, the growing presence of Beijing was discussed, in particular in the context of the commercial, economic and infrastructural Chinese penetration related to the BRI project. Third, the attention turned toward the military aspect, with specific reference to the naval arms race in progress in the area: indeed, naval assets are crucial for patrolling water, protecting the SLOC and projecting and advancing the country's influence and interests. Fourth, the competition over energetic resources, in particular the gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, has been addressed as well, with the significant and assertive role played by Turkey, among the other actors.

The focus of the thesis moved then to the Libyan scenario. The Libyan crisis is characterized by the intersection of three levels of conflictuality, which are at the same time independent one another but also strictly related each other. The first level is the confrontation between the Tripoli-based GNA, with the crucial support of the city of Misrata, and the Tobruk-based LNA, allied with the town of Benghazi. Such confrontation takes place at the political, military and ideological levels, and has turned the Libyan crisis into an actual civil war over the last year and a half. The second level is represented by the permanent clashes and frictions between all the numerous clans, tribes and militias that characterize the Libyan domestic landscape. The struggle over institutional, political, economic and energetic resources makes the social structure of the country quite unstable and complicated, with local groups and interests often prevailing over their national counterparts. The third level regards the intervention of many foreign States in the Libyan scenario, supporting either the GNA or the LNA. Such external influence has become a crucial element of the crisis over the last years, with foreign powers playing a fundamental role in shaping the dynamics of the Libyan conflict. The transformation of the Libyan civil war into a proxy confrontation between several regional powers makes it more difficult to find a shared and definitive solution to the almost ten-year-long Libyan crisis.

Finally, Chapter 3 has put together the main findings of the first two parts in order to come up with a possible and feasible strategy for Italy in the Mediterranean basin. The analysis of the role played

by Italy in the Libyan scenario, of the measures it has undertaken and of those it has not, has been carried out in conjunction with the main features of the Italian strategic culture. In this sense, the most important finding is that the limits of the Italian strategic culture prevented Rome from playing a more assertive and active role in Libya during the military phase of the crisis. Indeed, the pillars of pacifism, internationalism and multilateralism, upon which the strategic culture of the Italian Republic is based, did not provide Italy with the means, the will and the capabilities necessary to play a leading role in the context of the Libyan civil war.

Chapter 3 has thus outlined a possible two-levels strategy for Italy. On the one hand, at the domestic level, it is necessary to develop a solid culture in Italy on the importance of foreign, security and defence policy and to start thinking in a strategic way. In this sense, three crucial aspects have been analyzed. First, the importance of genuinely recovering the notion of national interest in planning and conducting the foreign, security and defence policy of Italy. Second, promoting the culture of security at both the political and public levels, with new possible trajectories for further reforming and reinforcing the institutional role of the Italian Intelligence agencies. Third, fueling an organic, bi-partisan and sound public debate in Italy on the overall importance of foreign, security and defence policy, the role of the Armed Forces and the international military missions, as well as the best tools Italy possesses to promote its national interests in the global arena.

On the other hand, at the international level, Italy should try to play a more active role in the Libyan crisis and more in general in the entire Mediterranean basin, since the stakes are very high for Rome. In fact, the current crises will redefine the overall geopolitical balance of the region. In this sense, Italy should adopt a more dynamic, versatile and integrated approach, defining the priorities for its foreign policy, combining multilateralism with bilateralism and unilateralism when necessary, and using all the instruments and tools it has, from the more traditional (diplomacy and strong economic relationships) to the less conventional ones (military and security), in order to redefine its overall approach to the foreign, security and defence policy in the Mediterranean region.

Two final considerations should be made. The first one regards the two-levels strategy of Italy, and in particular the distinction between the national and international components. In this sense, in light of what has been said in this work, the first component of the strategy, namely the domestic part, is even

more important than the second one, namely the international part, considering the cultural implications it has. In fact, it could be argued that the main aim of the thesis is not a technical one, namely that of analyzing the geopolitical dynamics of the Mediterranean basin and of the Libyan crisis and providing then possible solutions and policy suggestions: this is an important yet “secondary” aspect. The main aim is a cognitive and cultural one: raising awareness on the importance of such dynamics and of the crucial role of foreign, security and defence policy for a country and in particular for Italy; providing the right cultural and cognitive categories in order to be able to interpret and analyze not only the geopolitical trends of the Mediterranean basin, but those of the entire world; in brief, furnishing the proper cultural, cognitive and methodological tools and instruments at the domestic level in order to conduct an adequate, coherent and strategic foreign, security and defence policy at the international level.

Finally, as in a circular dynamic where the end coincides with the beginning, this work will terminate with a reference to the Italian strategic culture, in the same way it started. Besides, it is by “influencing” the strategic culture of a country that the aforementioned cultural and cognitive changes could occur.

The analysis provided in the thesis showed the characteristics of the Italian strategic culture, its pillars, the way in which it came out after the Second World War and through which it consolidated and institutionalized over the years. It also described the evolution in the 90s, after the end of the Cold War, and the way in which small and big adjustments could (or could not) happen. Lastly, it pointed out the limits and boundaries of the Italian strategic culture which influenced the Italian action in Libya. Thus, a new research question emerges. How can Italy overcome such limits when they constitute a clear obstacle to the pursuit of a pragmatic and effective foreign and security policy? If diplomacy is the main, if not only, instrument of the Italian external action, as it is “prescribed” by the Italian strategic culture, what options remain for Italy when diplomacy fails and diplomatic crises turn into military conflicts? What tools has Italy at its disposal when it is not willing to engage in military confrontations, in order not to overcome the strict boundaries of the strategic culture? It is difficult to answer these questions.

The only possible solution could be to modify the limits of the strategic culture itself, and indeed this is precisely the ultimate goal of the thesis: shaping the boundaries of the Italian strategic culture and moving them a little forward, without completely overcoming or destroying them.

Like what happened at the end of the Cold War, new, small but fundamental adjustments could (and must) occur to the Italian strategic culture, if Italy wants to play its own role in the geopolitical games of the Mediterranean basin.

“L’ITALIA, LA CRISI LIBICA E L’INTERESSE NAZIONALE”

Intervista a LUCA GORI

**Vice Direttore Generale/Direttore Centrale per i Paesi del Mediterraneo e del Medio Oriente,
Ministero degli affari esteri e della cooperazione internazionale³¹¹**

DOMANDA: *Direttore, qual è la posta in gioco a livello geopolitico per l’Italia nel Mediterraneo (e quindi la sua strategia)?*

RISPOSTA: Nel Mediterraneo l’Italia si muove lungo due direttrici principali. La prima consiste nel lavorare per la stabilità della regione e nel contribuire attivamente alla soluzione delle crisi in corso nell’area: quella in Libia su tutte, ma anche quelle in Siria ed in Yemen. Inoltre, lavorare per risolvere le crisi che si protraggono da diverso tempo e che generano instabilità diffusa: si pensi all’annosa questione Israele-Palestinese, alla crisi del Libano, alla instabilità in Iraq e in generale nella regione del Golfo. Quindi il primo interesse dell’Italia è partecipare a tutti i processi internazionali che contribuiscono alla stabilità dell’intera regione mediterranea. La seconda direttrice è quella che l’Italia definisce “agenda positiva”: concentrarsi non solo sulle crisi del Mediterraneo, per quanto diffuse e importanti, ma anche sulle numerose opportunità di sviluppo che la regione presenta, sia per l’Italia che per l’Europa: energia, cambiamenti climatici, commercio, infrastrutture.

DOMANDA: *Quali sono gli interessi e quale la posta in gioco complessiva a livello geopolitico per l’Italia nella crisi libica?*

RISPOSTA: In Libia, l’Italia ha sostanzialmente quattro interessi nazionali in gioco: energia, terrorismo e sicurezza, migrazioni e un quarto interesse che riguarda lo status internazionale dell’Italia. Il dossier libico conferisce infatti un certo status internazionale all’Italia, non solo relativamente alla crisi in sé, ma nell’ambito dell’intera regione mediterranea. Poter svolgere un ruolo attivo in Libia significa potersi ritagliare un ruolo di iniziativa politica nella regione in quanto tale. Come si sa, la crisi libica è una crisi che coinvolge molti attori regionali e internazionali, quindi implica per l’Italia avere anche un ruolo nei confronti degli altri Paesi.

³¹¹ Here the interview with Luca Gori, held on August 21st, 2020, is reported. The original Italian version is presented first, followed by the English translation. I would like to express my deepest thanks to the Deputy Director Luca Gori for his time and availability, as well as for his sincere interest in this thesis and the topics discussed.

DOMANDA: *In una recente intervista a “Il Foglio”, il Ministro Di Maio ha sottolineato l’importanza del dialogo in Libia con tutte le varie fazioni coinvolte, per costruire un processo di pace e stabilizzazione costruttivo e inclusivo. “Abbiamo dovuto mantenere aperti i canali di comunicazione con tutte le parti libiche”, cosa che non va confusa però con l’equidistanza, ha aggiunto. “Ora per il nostro Paese si tratta di mettere a frutto questo capitale di credibilità”. Proprio in virtù della postura tenuta dall’Italia, il nostro Paese potrebbe essere l’unico partner internazionale davvero serio e credibile, di cui potenzialmente tutte le fazioni libiche potrebbero fidarsi, per guidare un reale processo di riconciliazione. Come muoversi alla luce di ciò e come può l’Italia sfruttare il fatto di essere forse, tra i vari attori statali presenti in Libia, l’unico effettivamente capace di dialogare con tutte le parti?*

RISPOSTA: L’Italia ha sempre cercato di utilizzare questa carta in Libia. Il problema della crisi libica è che, negli ultimi due anni circa, ha cambiato natura, trasformandosi da una crisi diplomatica ad una di tipo militare. L’Italia come Paese non partecipa alla soluzione di una crisi attraverso lo strumento militare, ma attraverso lo strumento diplomatico. Questo aspetto pone delle problematiche, all’Italia come anche ad altri Paesi Europei (si pensi ad esempio alla Germania), nel momento in cui una crisi si trasforma in crisi militare. L’Italia agisce in Libia non mediante forniture militari o l’invio di soldati armati sul terreno per combattere, ma attraverso il dialogo diplomatico con i molteplici attori locali. Infatti, Roma, nell’ambito di questo perimetro di azione, ha lavorato con al-Serraj, con Haftar, con Aguila Saleh, con le tribù del Fezzan, nel sud della Libia, ha lavorato quindi con tutti gli attori. Tuttavia, alle volte non si comprende come la nuova natura della crisi libica (appunto militare) abbia ulteriormente complicato il contesto nel quale si muove l’Italia, un contesto reale dove l’iniziativa militare la fa da padrone. Adesso il contesto sta forse cambiando nuovamente, e quindi l’Italia continuerà a svolgere la sua parte come ha sempre fatto.

DOMANDA: *Riguardo appunto alla dimensione militare della crisi libica, considerando gli effetti economici della pandemia, la crisi energetica mondiale e le conseguenze sui bilanci statali di attori come Arabia Saudita, Russia, Egitto, Turchia, si può pensare ad un congelamento del conflitto libico nel breve e medio termine? Mancando le risorse economiche, potrebbe venire a mancare o comunque a ridimensionarsi il supporto esterno fornito agli attori locali, variabile fondamentale della crisi libica. Si pensi anche alla guerra dei prezzi tra Russia e Arabia Saudita, il crollo delle quotazioni del petrolio a fine aprile e la fine dell’assalto a Tripoli a inizio giugno. Può dunque questa variabile aver influito sulle dinamiche militari, ed eventualmente influire anche in futuro?*

RISPOSTA: In realtà io non credo che la ragione fondamentale della fine dell'assedio da parte di Haftar a Tripoli sia di natura economica. Il motivo principale è che il ruolo attivo della Turchia nel conflitto ha riequilibrato le forze sul terreno. La capitale Tripoli è stata liberata dall'assalto militare ed ora la linea del fronte si è spostata tra Sirte e Jufra. Ciò che al momento impedisce la ripresa dei combattimenti è proprio il sostanziale equilibrio fra gli schieramenti sul campo: entrambe le parti sono consapevoli che nessuna sarebbe in grado di prevalere sull'altra. Il rischio di un congelamento del conflitto e di una eventuale partizione del Paese è un rischio reale, che esiste, e che l'Italia dovrebbe scongiurare. La partizione del Paese non farebbe altro che creare il terreno per nuovi conflitti in futuro, dovendo anche implicare una suddivisione delle risorse economiche e petrolifere. Allo stesso tempo, questo equilibrio militare sul terreno apre una nuova prospettiva per una soluzione diplomatica della crisi: è dunque il momento di aprire un nuovo spazio per la mediazione.

DOMANDA: *In tale contesto, quale potrebbe essere il ruolo dell'ONU, non avendo ancora nominato il nuovo inviato speciale per la Libia?*

RISPOSTA: Quando si parla dell'ONU, da un lato è facile accusarla di non riuscire a risolvere le crisi in corso: in effetti, guardando al Mediterraneo, non ci sono risultati straordinari o definitivi ottenuti dalla mediazione delle Nazioni Unite per quanto riguarda i conflitti in Libia, Siria o Yemen. D'altra parte, abbiamo a che fare con crisi estremamente complesse e complicate, rispetto alle quali i processi di mediazione dell'ONU sono faticosi e risultano ulteriormente depotenziati dalla frammentazione interna di questi Paesi e dall'azione esterna di innumerevoli attori. Come Italia, stiamo spingendo fortemente affinché la nomina del nuovo inviato speciale per la Libia avvenga il prima possibile.

DOMANDA: *Anche al fine di rilanciare l'iniziativa a livello europeo in Libia in maniera più decisa, bisognerebbe prima passare da un accordo condiviso e da una partnership strutturale tra Italia e Francia riguardo alla Libia, il Nord Africa e il Mediterraneo?*

RISPOSTA: L'Unione Europea ha purtroppo difficoltà a imporsi come attore in numerosi scenari internazionali, non solo in Libia, motivo per cui tale debolezza non dipende necessariamente dai rapporti tra Italia e Francia. In realtà, sulla Libia, Roma e Parigi hanno fatto molti progressi insieme, vi è ormai un raccordo molto stretto tra i due Paesi, tanto a livello tecnico quanto a livello politico, con un gruppo di lavoro che si riunisce regolarmente. Inoltre, c'è anche uno stretto coordinamento a tre, non solo tra Italia e Francia, ma anche con la Germania.

DOMANDA: *Nel libro da Lei scritto con Alessandro Aresu, si sostiene che per perseguire l'interesse nazionale l'Italia abbia due opzioni a disposizione: accrescere le capacità di iniziativa politica e ottimizzare le alleanze internazionali. Come applicare concretamente queste indicazioni, alla luce dell'attuale scenario del Mediterraneo? Si pensi ad alcuni momenti di difficoltà di alleanze strutturate, come la NATO, in particolare con le tensioni tra Francia e Turchia, e al moltiplicarsi di iniziative, spesso unilaterali e in contrasto fra loro, di molteplici attori nella regione. Si stanno delineando nuovi allineamenti geopolitici nel Mediterraneo?*

RISPOSTA: Sulla capacità di iniziativa politica, come già detto, bisogna avere delle idee precise, investire delle risorse importanti, anche a livello politico, non solo economico: non esistono più delle rendite rispetto al passato riguardo a determinati teatri dove l'Italia ha degli interessi diretti, ma bisogna appunto accrescere la capacità di iniziativa diretta. Sul nodo alleanze e sul rapporto con gli altri Stati, si parta dal presupposto che quella Italiana è una “diplomazia relazionale”: è vero che da un lato l'interesse nazionale postula anche la possibilità di azioni isolate e unilaterali nei casi più estremi, ma per l'Italia è cruciale muoversi sempre in un'ottica multilaterale e in accordo con gli altri Paesi. Sicuramente, al giorno d'oggi, il fattore su cui è necessario interrogarsi è rappresentato dal nuovo ruolo che sta assumendo la Turchia, e la contrapposizione tra quest'ultima e diversi Stati dell'area come Grecia, Egitto, Francia, Cipro, Emirati Arabi Uniti e Israele. Da un lato si tratta di una partita energetica, dall'altro squisitamente geopolitica, dall'altro ancora vi è una dimensione ideologica, che riguarda la Fratellanza Musulmana. L'Italia come Paese non ha interesse a schierarsi da una parte o dall'altra sulla base di posizioni meramente ideologiche, non lo ha mai fatto. Da questo punto di vista, è importante continuare a coltivare rapporti positivi con tutti gli attori, e con la Turchia in particolare favorire un approccio inclusivo sulle risorse del Mediterraneo, rispetto invece ad approcci più divisivi che causano poi ulteriori escalation.

DOMANDA: *In che modo si può parlare di interesse nazionale e quindi perseguire l'interesse nazionale, quando si fa parte di una comunità sovranazionale come l'Unione Europea? Come coniugare dunque interesse nazionale da un lato e appartenenza ad una comunità sovranazionale dall'altro?*

RISPOSTA: L'interesse europeo “neutrale” non esiste, è un mito. Esistono degli interessi nazionali che lavorano in competizione per definire l'interesse europeo. I risultati prodotti a livello europeo sono appunto i risultati di una competizione fra diverse visioni e diversi approcci da parte dei vari Stati Membri. Per l'Italia è fondamentale essere capace di portare sempre il proprio punto di vista in sede europea, per fare in modo che l'interesse europeo rifletta anche quello italiano. Poi c'è anche un discorso

più ampio, che riguarda l'interesse europeo inteso come la capacità di avere una visione per il futuro dell'Europa. Ad esempio, le ipotesi di ulteriore sviluppo del processo di integrazione europea rispondono a diverse sensibilità nazionali, per cui ci sono alcuni Paesi che hanno interesse in una maggiore integrazione (come l'Italia) e quei Paesi invece che si limitano a costruire un'Europa che sia il più intergovernativa possibile.

DOMANDA: *Secondo lei, è possibile coniugare queste due anime?*

RISPOSTA: Assolutamente sì. È necessario lavorare lungo entrambi i binari. Come Italia bisogna impegnarsi affinché nei processi di riforma a livello europeo, come può essere ad esempio quello riguardante la politica migratoria e il Regolamento di Dublino, venga riflesso anche l'interesse nazionale italiano e la sensibilità propria dell'Italia. Dall'altro lato, c'è la necessità per un Paese come l'Italia di svolgere un ruolo che vada a favorire, laddove possibile, una maggiore integrazione dell'Unione Europea, e quindi portare avanti il processo di integrazione europea nei settori e nei modi in cui sarà possibile farlo.

“ITALY, THE LIBYAN CRISIS AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST”

Interview with LUCA GORI

Deputy Director General/Principal Director for the Mediterranean and Middle East

QUESTION: *Mr. Deputy Director, what are the geopolitical stakes for Italy in the Mediterranean (and therefore its strategy)?*

ANSWER: In the Mediterranean, Italy is moving along two main lines. The first is to work for the stability of the region and to actively contribute to the solution of the ongoing crises in the area: the one in Libya above all, but also those in Syria and Yemen. In addition, Italy is working on resolving the crises that have been going on for some time and that are causing widespread instability: the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the crisis in Lebanon, the instability in Iraq and more in general in the Gulf region. Therefore, Italy's first interest is to participate in all the international processes that contribute to the stability of the entire Mediterranean region. The second line is what Italy defines a "positive agenda": focusing not only on the Mediterranean crises, however widespread and important, but also on the many development opportunities that the region offers, both for Italy and for Europe: energy, climate change, trade, infrastructure.

QUESTION: *What are the interests and what are the overall stakes at the geopolitical level for Italy in the Libyan crisis?*

ANSWER: In Libya, Italy has essentially four national interests at stake: energy, terrorism and security, migration and a fourth interest, that is the international status of Italy. The Libyan dossier confers a certain international status on Italy, not only in relation to the crisis itself, but also in the context of the entire Mediterranean region. Being able to play an active role in Libya means being able to carve out a role of political initiative in the region as such. As you know, the Libyan crisis is a crisis that involves many regional and international actors, so it also implies for Italy to have a role towards other countries.

QUESTION: *In a recent interview with "Il Foglio", Minister Di Maio stressed the importance of dialogue in Libya with all the various factions involved, in order to build a constructive and inclusive peace and stabilization process. "We had to keep the channels of communication open with all parts of Libya," which should not be confused with equidistance, he added. "Now for our country it is a matter of making use of this capital of credibility". Precisely because of the posture held by Italy, our country*

could be the only truly serious and credible international partner, which potentially all Libyan factions could trust, to guide a real process of reconciliation. How to move in the light of this and how can Italy exploit the fact that it is perhaps, among the various state actors present in Libya, the only one actually able to dialogue with all parties?

ANSWER: Italy has always tried to use this card in Libya. The problem with the Libyan crisis is that, in the last two years or so, it has changed its nature from a diplomatic to a military crisis. Italy as a country does not participate in the solution of a crisis through the military instrument, but through the diplomatic instrument. This aspect poses problems, to Italy as well as to other European countries (think for example of Germany), at a time when a crisis turns into a military confrontation. Italy acts in Libya not through military supplies or by sending armed soldiers on the ground to fight, but through diplomatic dialogue with the multiple local actors. In fact, Rome, within this perimeter of action, has worked with al-Serraj, with Haftar, with Aguila Saleh, with the tribes of Fezzan, in the south of Libya, it has therefore worked with all the actors. However, sometimes it is not understood how the new (namely military) nature of the Libyan crisis has further complicated the context in which Italy moves, a context where the military initiative is the master. Now the context is perhaps changing again, and so Italy will continue to play its part as it has always done.

QUESTION: *With regard to the military dimension of the Libyan crisis, bearing in mind the economic effects of the pandemic, the global energy crisis and the consequences for the state budgets of actors such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, Egypt and Turkey, Can we envisage a freeze of the Libyan conflict in the short and medium term? In the absence of economic resources, the external support provided to local actors, a fundamental variable of the Libyan crisis, may be lacking or at least downsized. Think also of the price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, the collapse of oil prices in late April and the end of the assault on Tripoli in early June. Can this variable therefore influence military dynamics, and possibly also influence them in the future?*

ANSWER: Actually, I do not believe that the fundamental reason for the end of the siege by Haftar in Tripoli is economic in nature. The main reason is that Turkey's active role in the conflict has rebalanced the forces on the ground. The capital Tripoli was freed from military assault and now the front line has moved between Sirte and Jufra. What is currently preventing the resumption of the fighting is precisely the substantial balance between the sides on the ground: both sides are aware that none would be able to prevail over the other. The risk of a freeze of conflict and a possible partition of the country is a real risk,

which exists, and that Italy should prevent. The partition of the country would only create the ground for new conflicts in the future, also having to involve a division of economic and oil resources. At the same time, such military balance on the ground opens up a new perspective for a diplomatic solution to the crisis: it is therefore time to open a new space for mediation.

QUESTION: *In this context, what could be the role of the UN, having not yet appointed the new special envoy for Libya?*

ANSWER: When we talk about the UN, on the one hand, it is easy to accuse it of failing to resolve the current crises: in fact, looking at the Mediterranean, there are no extraordinary or definitive results achieved by the mediation of the United Nations with regard to the conflicts in Libya, Syria or Yemen. On the other hand, we are dealing with extremely complex crises, in respect of which the UN mediation processes are tiring and are further weakened by the internal fragmentation of these countries and by the external action of countless actors. In this sense, Italy is strongly pushing for the appointment of the new special envoy for Libya to take place as soon as possible.

QUESTION: *In order to relaunch the initiative at European level in Libya in a more decisive way, should we first move from a shared agreement and a structural partnership between Italy and France with regard to Libya, North Africa and the Mediterranean?*

ANSWER: Unfortunately, the European Union has great difficulty to impose itself as an actor in many international scenarios, not only in Libya, which is why this weakness does not necessarily depend on the relations between Italy and France. Indeed, on Libya, Rome and Paris have made a lot of progress together, there is now a very close link between the two countries, both technically and politically, with a working group that meets regularly. In addition, there is also a close dialogue, not only between Italy and France, but also with Germany.

QUESTION: *In the book you wrote with Alessandro Aresu, it is argued that to pursue the national interest Italy has two available options: to increase the capacity for political initiative and to optimize international alliances. How can these indications be applied in practice, in the light of the current Mediterranean scenario? Think of some moments of difficulty in structured alliances, such as NATO, particularly with the tensions between France and Turkey, and the multiplication of initiatives, often*

unilateral and at odds with each other, of multiple actors in the region. Are new geopolitical alignments emerging in the Mediterranean?

ANSWER: For what concerns the political initiative capacity, as already mentioned, it is necessary to have precise ideas, to invest important resources, including at the political level, not only economic: there are no longer rewards of position compared to the past with regard to certain theatres where Italy has direct interests: on the contrary, we must precisely increase the ability to direct initiative. For what regards the alliances and relations with other States, it is assumed that the Italian diplomacy is a "relational diplomacy": it is true that on the one hand the national interest also postulates the possibility of isolated and unilateral actions in the most extreme cases, but for Italy it is crucial to always move in a multilateral perspective and in agreement with other countries. Certainly, today, the factor on which it is necessary to reflect is the new role that Turkey is assuming, and the contrast between the latter and several states in the area such as Greece, Egypt, France, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. On the one hand it is an energetic game, on the other it is exquisitely geopolitical, on the other there is an ideological dimension, which concerns the Muslim Brotherhood. Italy as a country has no interest in taking sides on one faction or the other on the basis of purely ideological positions, it has never done so. From this point of view, it is important to continue to cultivate positive relations with all actors, and with Turkey in particular, in order to foster an inclusive approach to the Mediterranean resources, instead of more divisive approaches that then cause further escalation.

QUESTION: *How can we speak of national interest and therefore pursue the national interest when we are part of a supranational community such as the European Union? So how can we combine national interest on the one hand and belonging to a supranational community on the other?*

ANSWER: The "neutral" European interest does not exist, it is a myth. There are national interests working in competition to define the European interest. The results produced at European level are precisely the results of a competition between different visions and different approaches on the part of the various Member States. For Italy it is essential to be able to always bring its point of view at the European level, so that the European interest reflects also the Italian one. Then there is also a broader discourse, which concerns the European interest as the ability to have a vision for the future of Europe. For example, the hypotheses of further development of the European integration process respond to different national sensitivities, so there are some countries that have an interest in greater integration (such as Italy) and those countries which simply build a Europe that is as intergovernmental as possible.

QUESTION: *Do you think it is possible to marry these two souls?*

ANSWER: Absolutely yes. It is necessary to work along both tracks. As a country, Italy must commit itself so that in the reform processes at European level, such as the one concerning migration policy and the Dublin Regulation, the Italian national interest and the sensitivity of Italy are also reflected. On the other hand, there is the need for a country like Italy to play a role that favors, where possible, greater integration of the European Union, and therefore to carry forward the process of European integration in the sectors and ways in which it will be possible.

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SUMMARY

The present thesis aims at analyzing the role played by Italy in the Mediterranean basin, with a specific focus on the Libyan crisis. The idea of focusing the work on this topic emerged from the awareness of the importance of foreign, security and defence policy for every country, and from the parallel consciousness that in Italy there is scarce interest for these issues, despite their great importance. In particular, the work aims at defining and understanding the main characteristics and peculiarities of the Italian strategic culture; at analyzing the current geopolitical scenario in the Mediterranean basin and in Libya; at outlining a possible strategy for Italy in the region, taking into account both the domestic and international levels of analysis and action.

The focus of Chapter 1 is on the so-called strategy culture of Italy. The study of the strategic culture of a country is aimed at explaining how the approach of States towards security issues is not purely determined by the structural conditions of the international system, such as anarchy and the distribution of power. On the contrary, it is also influenced by ideational and cultural factors. These factors shape the way in which policymakers see and interpret international events, thus leading to different decisions and strategies adopted by the actors involved when it comes to security and defence.

The first studies on the strategic culture of States date back to the 1970s, in the midst of the Cold War, with Jack Snyder's work entitled "The Soviet Strategic Culture: implications for limited nuclear operations". However, one of the most organic and important research in this field has been conducted in the 1990s by Alastair Johnson, who argued that the strategic culture of States is made by three components: the role and frequency of conflicts in human affairs; the nature of the conflict as well as of the adversaries and threats; the efficacy of violence. On the basis of these three key concepts, the present work has carried out an analysis of the Italian strategic culture. The main finding is that the strategic culture of the Italian Republic was born out of the ashes of the Second World War, and it presents opposite features to the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy. Indeed, it can be said that the Italian strategic culture during the Kingdom of Italy was characterized by the following features: first, a conception of war as a regular and inevitable dynamic in the international relations between States;

second, a perception of adversaries and enemies as actors posing serious and dangerous threats to the State, and thus a zero-sum game conception of the relations with them; third, the belief that the use of military force could be effective in pursuing the interests of the State and in defeating the enemies. On the contrary, the strategic culture of the Italian Republic is based on the pillars of pacifism, internationalism and multilateralism, with war that is not considered a natural and unavoidable feature of the international relations between States, with a positive sum game view of the relationships with other international actors and with the use of military force that is considered to be effective only in few and limited cases. The orientation towards internationalism, multilateralism and pacifism with regard to the conception of international affairs and the use of military force can be translated into specific preferences for different strategic options. Indeed, the strategic culture of the Italian Republic puts at the first place of the possible means to solve international disputes the tools provided by international law and multilateral diplomacy. An accommodationist attitude is preferred to a more assertive one, and this aspect also results in preferring defensive military actions rather than offensive operations, contrary to the liberal and fascist periods, when an offensive and aggressive attitude and a strong militarist sentiment used to prevail.

Another important finding is that the main features of the strategic culture of Italy has institutionalized over the years, and the institutionalization process further reinforced them. This process was carried out through three main steps: the participation in international multilateral organizations; the adoption of a pacifist constitution; the downsizing of the role played by military policy and the Armed Forces. With specific reference to the Italian Constitution, it could be argued that the 1948 Constitution institutionalized the strategic culture of the Italian Republic. Indeed, if on the one hand the Italian Constitution was the product of the new Italian strategic culture, on the other it further reinforced over the years the pillars of internationalism, pacifism and multilateralism upon which the foreign and security policy of the Italian Republic was, and still is, based.

A final issue analyzed within the category of the strategic culture of States is change. Can strategic cultures change and evolve over time? Many studies on the strategic culture of States have argued that the strategic culture is quite stable and persistent in time. It possesses a “semi-permanent” character and a strong degree of continuity, thus making it difficult for a strategic culture to modify itself and change in the course of time. However, this fact does not mean that no transformation cannot occur at all: indeed,

all the scholars, authors and thinkers recognized the possibility, albeit minimum and remote, for a strategic culture to evolve and mutate in the long run.

Italy is a paramount example in this sense, with a full “paradigm shift” between the strategic culture of the Kingdom of Italy and the Italian Republic, caused by a watershed moment of enormous impact such as World War II. However, that moment represented a unicum in the Italian history so far, and it is quite unlikely – tough, not impossible! – that in the future new events of similar reach and importance will happen again.

Nevertheless, small changes in the overall strategic culture could take place, or at least they are more likely to happen rather than another full paradigm shift. It can be said that modest adjustments could occur to a strategic culture in general, and they have actually occurred to the Italian one in particular. In fact, as demonstrated by the historical analysis on the management and use of the military instrument by Italy, the years since the Italian military participation in the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon (1982), and above all since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, saw an increase in the number of military operations abroad conducted by the Italian Armed Forces, in spite of a decrease in the level of military spending and of the pacifist character of the Italian Constitution. To some extent, it can be said that small adjustments have occurred in the Italian strategic culture, remaining however within its boundaries and never overcoming its limitations. Multilateralism and internationalism still remain two strong pillars of the Italian foreign and security policy, being further reinforced by the participation in the military missions abroad. The pacifist character of the Italian strategic culture seems to be called into question by the participation in such military operations, but in the end Italy has always acted under multilateral frameworks (mainly UN, NATO, EU) and under the respect of international rules and norms.

Thus, it can be said that all the interventions and adjustments to the overall foreign, security and defence policy in Italy have respected the pillars of the Italian strategic culture, sometimes forcing its limits, but never exceeding them. They have been “domesticated” by the Italian strategic culture, which has not changed in real substance.

Chapter 2 provides an overall analysis of the geopolitical scenario of the Mediterranean basin, with a specific focus on the Libyan crisis. Generally speaking, over the last years, the Mediterranean Sea,

and more in general, the Mediterranean region, seems to have gained a new centrality in international affairs. Among all the numerous and important trends currently ongoing in the Mediterranean region, this work has focused on four ones, which can be considered crucial in a medium- and long-term perspective: the less active role played by the US; the increasing Chinese activities; the naval arms race; the territorial and energetic disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The first trend is represented by the American strategy of retrenchment, or selective engagement. There has been a shift in the geopolitical priorities of Washington, which now attributes less importance to the Mediterranean basin and has redirected its attention on the Chinese expansion in the Pacific region with the so-called “Pivot to Asia”. This fact has in turn led to the opening of a power vacuum in the Mediterranean region, increasing instability (like in the Libyan and Syrian cases) and paving the way for the geopolitical competition between several State actors in the area, resulting in the current proxy wars in progress in Libya and Syria. This does not mean that Washington is not interested at all in what happens in the Mediterranean area: the US keeps monitoring the dynamics of the region on a constant basis, in particular for what regards Russian and Chinese activities and terrorist groups. However, the number one priority for America at the geographical level is represented by Asia and in particular by China, and the American Administrations (not only Trump, but also Obama before him) do not want to use and waste too many political, military, economic and diplomatic resources in controlling a region that is not considered a top priority anymore, leaving instead such responsibility to local actors and partners, in particular the European ones.

Over the last years, the scale of Chinese presence and activities in the Mediterranean region has constantly increased. Indeed, the Mediterranean basin is part of the Chinese project called Belt and Road Initiative. This plan, which brings to mind the ancient silk road that connected China to Europe through Central Asia and the Middle East, has not only an economic and commercial dimension: it is a way to link all the countries to China, expanding its influence and advancing its strategic interests. It is a tool aimed at further integrating the States embraced by the plan into Chinese orbit, making China the center of a new system and consolidating its leading position, and the Mediterranean region plays a crucial role in this geopolitical initiative.

The overall trend of geopolitical competition in the Mediterranean region is confirmed by an arms race that is currently in place in the area. Indeed, several countries are investing huge economic resources in modernizing, expanding and strengthening their militaries, especially the naval forces. In particular, one relevant aspect of the arms race currently ongoing in the Mediterranean basin is the fact that almost all the countries are investing in upgrading and expanding their submarine capabilities.

Finally, the fourth crucial dynamic currently ongoing in the Mediterranean region, in particular in the eastern part, is the struggle over energy resources. Over the last years, several important offshore gas fields have been discovered in the area of the Mediterranean Sea comprised between Egypt, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel and the Gaza Strip. The discoveries of such huge and important offshore gas fields in the area have led several countries to cooperate in order to create and strengthen economic, industrial, commercial, infrastructural and energetic partnerships. However, these gas discoveries and infrastructural projects have also created some tensions in the area, in particular between Turkey on the one hand and Greece and Cyprus on the other. Thus, Turkey has claimed some areas belonging to the Greek and Cypriot EEZs, assuming an assertive position and rising the level of tensions with its neighbors over the last years.

Started in 2011, with the so-called “Arab Spring” and the anti-Qhadafi revolt, followed by the NATO military intervention, the Libyan crisis is one of the longest, most complex and hard-to-solve conflicts of the Mediterranean region. In particular, the current Libyan scenario features three levels of conflictuality, being at the same time different and separated from each other, but also overlapped and interconnected: the domestic conflict, at the military, political and ideological levels, between the Tripoli-based GNA, supported by Misrata, and the LNA, whose main centers are Benghazi and Tobruk; the rivalries between the countless tribes, clans and militias that constitute the Libyan socio-political landscape, continuously looking for new opportunities, both within and outside the limits imposed by the GNA-LNA confrontation; the proxy war between several regional and international foreign actors, which has gradually become the dominant element over the last year and a half.

On April 4th, 2019, Khalifa Haftar and the LNA launched an armed offensive against the city of Tripoli, controlled by the GNA, with the official aim to liberate the Libyan capital from the Islamist and terrorist groups that control it. This was the public reason used to justify his real objective: taking control

of Tripoli with brute force and thus becoming the sole ruler of Libya, trying to unify the country under his military strength. However, his assault failed, and in June 2020 he was forced to withdraw its troops from the outskirts of the capital city. In addition, the situation is further complicated by the presence of thousands of local militias and armed groups. At different levels and in different ways they all play a role in the complex Libyan situation, participating in the intricate partition of power, money and resources that constitutes a key feature of the Libyan domestic scenario. Finally, the Libyan crisis has also become a proxy war between several regional and international foreign powers. The support of foreign actors to the diverse factions involved in the Libyan conflict has been a constant feature ever since the fall of Qadhafi in 2011. However, it has greatly intensified over the last year and a half, up to the point that it has become a fundamental factor, maybe the most relevant one, for the solution of the conflict.

In particular, France, Russia, the UAE and Egypt have been the main sponsor of Haftar and the LNA, while Turkey, Qatar and Italy are the most important supporters of the Tripoli-based GNA. Over the last months, the scope and intensity of the intervention of Russia on the one hand and Turkey on the other has sharply increased. The most significant sign of the Russian intervention in Libya is the presence of the mercenaries of the Wagner Group, as well as of a dozen of MiG fighter aircrafts. Turkey has provided logistic, political and above all military support to the GNA, with also the financial assistance of Qatar. In particular, the Turkish intervention has been decisive in stopping the armed assault on Tripoli launched by Haftar.

The Italian role in Libya is quite complex to assess, for certain aspects. Historically speaking, Italy has always been of the closest and most important foreign partner of Libya, especially during the Qadhafi era. Italy was one of the States that supported the process that led to the Skhirat Accords in 2015 and the creation of the GNA, helping also al-Serraj to make port in Tripoli in 2016. In September of the same year, Italy launched a military operation called “Ippocrate” in Misrata. The mission provided for the construction of a field hospital aimed at furnishing health assistance to the Libyan soldiers involved in the fight against ISIS in the country. At the political level, ever since the beginning of the Libyan crisis in 2011, Italy has acted in order to restore the unity of the country and stabilize the State institutions. As already said, in 2015, Rome strongly favored the signing of the Skhirat Agreements and the creation of the GNA, led by al-Serraj. This support is in line with the main Italian interests in Libya, concentrated in the region of Tripolitania. Indeed, the Italian international action was driven by the need to ensure the

energetic supplies arriving in Italy from Libya, especially through the “Greenstream” gas pipeline, connecting the fields of Wafa and Mellitah to Sicily. The Italian energy company ENI has been operating in Libya since 1959 and maintains a strong presence in the country.

However, between 2017 and 2018, the Italian position in Libya slightly changed. If until that moment only the GNA had full Italian support, Rome started to gradually recognize also the figure of Haftar, who was consolidating his position in Cyrenaica. Such recognition became official when he was invited to take part, together with al-Serraj, in the Palermo Conference, held in November 2018. In the course of the last year, the combination of the actions of foreign powers and of Italy’s policy of playing with both sides (the “*equidistanza*”) has resulted in a gradual but important loss of influence of Rome in Libya, and especially in Tripolitania, where Ankara has become the most important and close ally of the GNA, replacing Italy. Thus, Italy, even if it continued to work with al-Serraj, did not provide to him the assistance and concrete help he needed or expected, starting instead to move closer to Haftar. In the end, this moved resulted in a loss of influence on one side (the GNA), without a compensation on the other (the LNA). The consequent risk was, and still is, to be condemned to complete marginality.

Thus, what strategy for Italy? How could the Italian strategic culture evolve and adapt to the new challenges posed by the current geopolitical panorama? What practical steps and actions could (and/or should) be undertaken by Italy? A possible and feasible strategy for Italy in the Mediterranean basin should be guided by a very precise assumption: namely, the need to intervene at both the domestic and foreign levels, developing a solid culture in Italy on the importance of foreign, security and defence policy on the one hand, and implementing concrete, pragmatic and realistic steps in the international arena on the other. For this reason, the overall strategy for Italy is divided into two parts: one underlining the strategy at the national level, the other offering some policy suggestions at the international one.

One of the first steps that should be undertaken in Italy at the domestic level is to recover the notion of national interest, upon which a comprehensive and coherent long-term strategy can (and should) be developed with regard to the Italian foreign, security and defence policy. Indeed, the concept of national interest has been completely removed from the new Italian strategic culture after the end of the Second World War. The pillars of pacifism, multilateralism and internationalism, upon which the new Italian strategic culture came to be based, did not allow for the possibility of developing in Italy a

coherent and structural reasoning on the Italian national interest and on the best ways to pursue it. Thus, the first operation that Italy should do in order to fully and genuinely recover the notion of national interest is to liberate it from the legacies of the past: the ideological association with an exacerbated nationalism and the Fascist regime on the one hand, and the fallacious coincidence between national interest and international status on the other. A realistic and pragmatic reflection should be carried out in Italy with regard to the actual Italian role and status in the world, as well as to the real capabilities and resources Italy possesses. In particular, four power dimensions upon which the national interest can be built are identified: demography, economy, military power, scientific research and technology.

Another crucial step in promoting the security culture in Italy comes from the so-called “Comparto Intelligence”. The 2007 reform of the Italian Intelligence System represents an important turning point in the traditional Italian way of understanding and managing the national security. It promoted a huge and deep transformation of the organization and structure of the Italian secret services, with important changes at the operational and political levels. However, the 2007 intelligence reform is important not only from an organizational, political and institutional perspective: it also has crucial implications from a cultural point of view. In fact, within the framework of this reform, it was decided to create and implement a long-term campaign aimed at promoting the culture of security, as well as the role and activities of the Italian intelligence community. It was decided to “open” the closed and confidential world of the intelligence system (secret by definition) to the civil society and the Italian public opinion. And just the public opinion represents the third factor upon which is necessary to intervene in Italy in order to spread a solid security culture. In this sense, the pandemic could offer a great opportunity to bring out and feed an organic, serious, objective, sound, non-partisan (or rather, bi-partisan) and in-depth public debate in Italy on the actual importance, role and dynamics of adopting a strategic thinking in Italy and on the comprehensive foreign, security and defence policy of the country.

At the international level, the analysis on the Italian strategy must start from a clear statement of fact: Italy is not the closest and most influential foreign actor in Libya anymore. Even in Tripolitania, where Rome has historically been the dominant player, other actors have replaced Italy, which is unfortunately no longer the privileged partner of any of the local factions in Libya. Thus, a new perspective should guide the Italian action in Libya. The main question driving the Italian foreign, security and defence policy should thus be: “How can Italy recover the role and influence lost in Libya

and protect and advance its interests”? It should go in parallel with the more traditional question regarding the pacification process: “How can Italy actively contribute to the political process and the stabilization and pacification of Libya”? This approach does not mean that Rome should not work at all with the view of a definitive political agreement in Libya: on the contrary, it means that Italy could and should do that in a more pragmatic and realistic way. At the level of the domestic conflict, it is possible (and necessary) to try to relaunch the intra-Libyan dialogue, perhaps by leveraging this position of transversal credibility that Italy has towards the Libyan parties at a national level and that other countries might not have. At the regional and international level, Rome should try to leverage the excellent bilateral relations that it has with all the countries in the area in order to smooth out alignments, attitudes and lines of conduct of the various regional and international actors present in the Libyan scenario. This is part of a broader two-stage process. In the short and medium term, Italy should provide more concrete support to the GNA, as it is not only the government it sustains on a bilateral basis, but also the only government legitimately recognized at the international level. In the long run, relaunching the peace process and the political dialogue, because it is the only way that could definitely stabilize and pacify Libya. This double-track strategy is not based on merely idealistic assumptions, but rather on a realistic and pragmatic view. Stabilizing and pacifying the Libyan country is not only positive for the Libyan people: it is a crucial interest for Italy as well. Moreover, the stabilization of Libya is fundamental for the stabilization of the entire North African area and the Mediterranean in general. This is the logic of such approach: protecting and advancing the Italian national interests in the short-run given the present dynamics of the crisis (the current priority), while continuing to work for a long-term solution for the appeasement of the country (the long-term goal).

To sum up, the Italian strategy in Libya, as well as in the “enlarged Mediterranean”, should be based on very precise and simple assumptions: understanding what are the Italian national interests; defining a scale of priorities and the proper political and economic resources to pursue them; adopting an integrated approach, combining multilateralism, bilateralism and (sometimes) unilateralism; leveraging on its excellent bilateral relationships with all the States of the area in order to develop a strong network of connections; using all the instruments at its disposal, finding the right mixt between more (cultural, economic, political) and less (military and security) traditional tools in order to promote a coherent, strategic, long-term, strong and effective foreign, security and defence policy in the Mediterranean region.