



SHAPING NATIONAL ROLE ABROAD: ITALIAN MILITARY MISSIONS SINCE THE EIGHTIES

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Abstract:

Since late Seventies/early Eighties, military missions abroad have been a key element in Italian foreign and security policy. Traditionally discharged in a more or less tight multinational framework, they have been the instrument that the country has adopted to assert its international role and pursue – in the different geopolitical contexts – what it perceived to be its core national interests. After the Cold War, this instrument underwent some dramatic changes, due to both domestic and international factors. In recent years, military missions abroad in some instances (as Iraq) have become a deeply divisive element in the domestic political debate, but in most cases have been supported by large majorities in Parliament, albeit with differences on the tactics employed. However, even in the new strategic environment they seem to have maintained their role. This provides the country with good international visibility, due to a good degree of operational excellence.

Keywords: Italian Armed Forces, NATO, Military Missions Abroad

Resumen:

Desde finales de los años 70 principio de los 80, las misiones militares al extranjero han sido vistas como un elemento clave en la política exterior italiana y en su política de seguridad. Tradicionalmente imbricadas en un marco institucional más o menos firme de carácter multinacional, han sido el instrumento que este país ha elegido para imponer su papel internacional y conseguir (en diferentes contextos internacionales) lo que se ha percibido como sus intereses nacionales más vitales. Con el fin de la Guerra Fría, este instrumento ha sufrido enormes cambios, debido tanto a factores domésticos como internacionales. En años recientes las, misiones militares en el extranjero se han convertido en algunos casos (como en Irak) en un elemento de división en el debate político interno, pero en la mayoría de los casos han recibido el apoyo por parte de amplias mayorías en el parlamento, por muy diferentes que fuesen las tácticas empleadas. Sin embargo, incluso en el nuevo escenario estratégico, parecen haber mantenido su papel, aportando al país una buena visibilidad internacional, debido también a la adquisición de un buen grado de excelencia operacional.

Palabras clave: Fuerzas Armadas italianas, OTAN, misiones en el extranjero.

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1. Introduction: a Tradition of International Activism

Italian armed forces have a strong tradition of international activism, dating back to the last decades of the Nineteenth century. From the first, small presence in the International Military Commission established to provide good offices to Serbia and Bulgaria in 1885, to the far greater contingent operating in Crete between 1896 and 1906, they have supported, since the beginning, the national diplomacy in promoting its aims and providing the country with the due role and visibility². After the end of the Second World War and the admission of Italy to the main international organizations, the practice revived within the framework of an overall preference for multilateralism but with the limits stemming from a strong identification with the Western alliance and a geopolitical scope limited to Europe and its immediate neighbourhood. Between 1950 and 1989, Italian armed forces contributed to twelve UN peacekeeping missions in Asia, Africa, Middle East and Europe, some of them – such as UNTSO, UNMOGIP, UNIFICYP, and UNIFIL – still active in the field³. In the following years, this commitment significantly increased, while OSCE, EU and NATO gradually joined the UN as the country's main international points of reference. Qualitative changes accompanied quantitative ones. On one hand, missions escalated from standard post-conflict interventions to more complex (and riskier) peace-enforcing operations; on the other, the operative framework evolved from a more or less loosely coordinated multinational setting, towards a “joint and combined” model implying greater integration among national contingents, the development of shared procedures and the establishment of common chains of command.

It took almost thirty years to follow this path, from the first tentative steps between late Seventies and early Eighties to the contested missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, in mid-2000s. In this period, national armed forces underwent a dramatic change, from a Cold War, large-scale compulsory draft system to a professional military instrument, smaller but more deeply integrated within the NATO structure and routinely involved in operational activity. However, quite paradoxically, international activism and the transition to professional Armed Forces seem to have weakened the consensus existing around Italian involvement in armed missions abroad. With the crisis of the Cold War system, more complex cleavages have replaced the pre-existing, clear-cut, and often artificial left/right contraposition, in which the formal guarantee of the *conventio ad excludendum* allowed for a foreign action largely sensitive to the instances of the Communist Party. In the new context, while centre-right and centre-left moderate forces still agree on the broader meaning of the Italian activism, at the wings of the political spectrum a vociferous opposition has emerged, channelling a strong although sometimes uncertain social discontent. The same attitude of the public opinion has

² A detailed list of the main missions that the Italian army has discharged between its establishment and the early Nineties is in Magnani, Enrico (ed.) (1992): *Oltremare. Le missioni dell'Esercito Italiano all'estero*, Roma, Stato Maggiore Esercito; a typological taxonomy of the missions discharged to promote peace and international security between the end of the Second World War and the same period is in Santoro, Carlo M. (ed.) (1992): *L'elmo di Scipio. Studi sul modello di difesa italiano*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 8-9; a sketchy (and largely institutional) record of the Italian military involvement, both at home and abroad, can be found at <http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni+Militari/>.

³ An updated list of the Italian peace operations is in Attinà, Fulvio (2009): *La scelta del multilateralismo. L'Italia e le operazioni di pace*, Milano, Giuffrè; an historical account of some selected missions is in the two volumes: Rainero, Romain H. and Alberini, Paolo (eds.) (2001): *Missioni militari italiane all'estero in tempo di pace (1861-1939). Atti del Convegno di studi tenuto a Milano presso la Scuola Militare dell'Esercito nei giorni 25-26 ottobre 2000*, Roma, Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare, and Pizzigallo, Matteo and Alberini, Paolo (eds.) (2002): *Missioni militari italiane all'estero in tempo di pace (1946-1989). Atti del Convegno di studi tenuto a Napoli presso l'Università "Federico II" e l'Accademia Aeronautica il 27-28 novembre 2001*, Roma, Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare.



grown increasingly fluctuating, due also to the long-term emotional impact of the events of 9/11 and to the ups and downs of the missions undergoing⁴. The polarization of the domestic political struggle, coupled with a (perceived) increase in the number of options that the country faces in the international realm, has fuelled this process. At the same time (and on the other hand) increasing Italian participation to multinational mission has proved a key element behind the modernization of the national military instrument. From Somalia to the former Yugoslavia, the need to fit into wide multinational coalitions and to cope with an even wider set of situations has helped Italian armed forces to adopt new practices and develop new skills. It has been an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process, unfolding on a long span of time, with its contradictions shortcomings. In the background, the domestic and the international environment underwent a string of dramatic changes that forced the country not only to redefine its international position, but also to elaborate a new attitude towards its domestic and regional security needs.

2. The Formative Period and the Lebanese Experience

Between August 26 and 27, 1982, the main batch of an Italian military contingent (about 520 men under Lt. Col. Bruno Tosetti) landed in Beirut as part of a broader international mission (MNF – Multinational Force in Lebanon) also including US and French troops. Mission's task was providing physical security to the OLP personnel leaving the town, protecting the civilian population in Beirut region and supporting the Lebanese government in affirming its sovereignty and authority over the war-thorn country. The bulk of the Italian contingent came from "Governolo" 2nd *Bersaglieri* [lit.: Marksmen; Italian light infantry] battalion, 3rd Italian Army Corps, LANDSOUTH reserve great unit, with platoon-level *Carabinieri* and Engineers integrations. Hastily arranged in about one month amid heavy logistic difficulties, the mission ("Libano 1") ended without any mayor incident when, on September 11, *Bersaglieri* left Beirut after having relieved the US forces securing the harbour area. On August 31, last day of the evacuation of the PLO militias, Italian presence in Beirut and in the adjoining territorial water was 1,217 men from Army (479), Navy (708), and *Carabinieri* (40)⁵. Worth noting, large part was draftees, volunteering for serving abroad, according to a model repeatedly employed in the following years.

Public opinion received the mission quite well. Its peculiar nature was fit to appease

⁴ On the evolution of the Italian attitude towards multilateralism between late Eighties and 2000s, see Attinà, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-81; on the role on "humanitarian interventionism" in national foreign policy, see Rusconi, Gian Enrico: "Guerra e intervento umanitario. L'Italia alla ricerca di una nuova affidabilità internazionale", in Barberis, Walter (2002): *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. 18, *Guerra e pace*, Torino, Einaudi, pp. 797-838; on the changes affecting Italian foreign policy in the passage from the Cold War to the post-bipolar order, see, among many, Santoro, Carlo Maria (1991): *La politica estera di una media potenza. L'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi*, Bologna, il Mulino, and Coralluzzo, Valter (2000): *La politica estera dell'Italia repubblicana (1946-1992). Modello di analisi e studio di casi*, Milano, Franco Angeli; on their impacts on military policy, see D'Amore, Ciro (2001): *Governare la difesa. Parlamento e politica militare nell'Italia repubblicana*, Milano, Franco Angeli, and Ilari, Virgilio (2009): *Storia militare della prima repubblica. 1943-1993*, Repr., Invorio, Widerholdt Frères (First ed., Ancona, Nuove Ricerche, s.d. [1994]); on the attitude of the public opinion towards Italian military activism, see Battistelli, Fabrizio (2003): *Gli italiani e la guerra. Tra senso di insicurezza e terrorismo internazionale*, Roma, Carocci; on the polarization of the Italian society after the events of 9/11, see *Ibid.*, pp. 43 ff.; for a useful comparison, see Bellucci, Paolo (1998): *Difesa, politica e società. La politica militare italiana tra obiezione di coscienza e professionalizzazione delle Forze Armate*, Milano, Franco Angeli.

⁵ At that date, MNF also included some 800 men from the 32nd USMC Amphibious Unit (MAU), operating in Beirut from August 24, and some 400 men from French 2^{ème} *Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes* [2nd Foreign Parachute Regiment], operating in Beirut since August 21.



both the Catholic forces (which formed the bulk of the Christian Democrat constituency and found palatable the support provided to the Lebanese “Christian” government) and the more left-hand oriented supporters of the Palestinian cause, which found the mission an effort to oppose Israel’s aggressive policy in a country that was the main PLO’s stronghold. The limited scope, the emphasis placed on humanitarian aspects, the short duration and the lack of casualties all conjured in making “Libano 1” a boost to national pride and a turning point in national foreign policy⁶. At the end of the Eighties, when talks started about military missions abroad as the new operative perspective for the Italian Armed Forces, «the memory of the two Lebanese missions ... was still alive. The ‘Lebanon effect’ still operated in the public opinion and had positive effects on the enlistment of officers and the few specialized volunteers that the law allowed»⁷. Its political and symbolic impact was equally deep. Quite significantly, Socialist MP Lelio Lagorio – who was Minister of Defence between 1980 and 1983 and the first Socialist to serve in that role – repeatedly styled the Italian presence in Lebanon as the product of a «new Crimean attitude», and of decisions «taken in the sign of a revival of Risorgimento of Cavourian stamp»⁸. While the country was recovering from the social, economic and political malaise that affected it since the late Sixties, the Lebanese experience gained, thus, a special significance, marking on one hand the closing of a difficult period, on the other the opening of a new and more active phase in its international action.

On September 23, 1982, “Libano 1” revived on a far greater scale under the new label of “Italcon-Libano 2”. The mission started on the emotional wave of the killing of the Lebanese President-elect, the Maronite Christian Phalange party leader Bechir Gemayel (September 14), and of the ensuing massacre of Palestinian civilians in Sabra and Chatila refugee camps by hand of Phalangist militiamen (September 16-18). The omissive attitude of the Israeli armed forces (later blamed of «indirect responsibility» in the massacre by a national commission of inquiry⁹) that neither prevented nor interfered with the Phalangists’ action helped in make political situation extremely sensitive. For these reasons too, “Italcon-Libano 2” struck a more ambitious record and set the standard of Italian international involvement for a long time. Lasting until March 6, 1984, the mission mobilized some 8,350 men under Brigadier General Franco Angioni; the mean strength of the deployed force was

⁶ On the pivotal character of the two Lebanese missions”, see Nuti, Leopoldo: “Linee generali della politica di difesa italiana (1945-1989)”, in Goglia, Luigi; Moro, Renato and Nuti, Leopoldo (eds.) (2006): *Guerra e pace nell’Italia del Novecento. Politica estera, cultura politica e correnti dell’opinione pubblica*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 463-503.

⁷ Mini, Fabio, “A che (chi) servono le missioni”, *Limes. Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica*, no. 2 (2007), pp. 25-43.

⁸ Lagorio, Lelio: “Gli italiani ancora in Libano”, *Il governo delle cose. Mensile di politica, cultura, economia* (Sept.-Oct. 2006). See also the opinion of the Republican Party’s Secretary Giovanni Spadolini, President of the Council of the Ministers between 1981 and 1982 and Minister of Defence between 1983 and 1987, quoted in Lagorio, Lelio: “La spedizione militare in Libano 1982-1984. Considerazioni sui successi e le difficoltà delle operazioni. Il contributo e gli obiettivi della Marina”, *Rivista Marittima*, vol. 136, no. 10 (2003), pp. 13-23. An almost similar quotation is in Lagorio, Lelio (2007): “Un Ministro della Difesa negli anni Ottanta”, in *Repubblica e Forze Armate. Linee interpretative e di ricerca. Acta del Convegno di Studi tenutosi a Roma il 25 e 26 ottobre 2006 presso il Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa*, Roma, Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare, pp. 49-55; Lagorio’s souvenirs as Minister of Defence are in Lagorio, Lelio (2005): *L’ora di Austerlitz. 1980: la svolta che mutò l’Italia*, Firenze, Polistampa.

⁹ “Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the events at the refugee camps in Beirut, 8 February 1983”, in Medzini, Meron (ed.) (2000): *Israel’s Foreign Relations. Selected Documents*, vol. 8, 1982-84, Jerusalem, [Israel] Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Doc. No. 104, now at

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20since%201947/1982-1984/104%20Report%20of%20the%20Commission%20of%20Inquiry%20into%20the%20e;>

see also the report of the independent international commission chaired by the former Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sean MacBride: MacBride, Seán; Asmal, Kader; Bercusson, Brian; *et al.* (1983): *Israel in Lebanon: The Report of International Commission to enquire into reported violations of International Law by Israel during its invasion of the Lebanon: 28 August 1982-29 November 1982*, London, Ithaca Press.



about 2,300 men, about 70% of them assigned to operative roles, and in this case too draftees represented a fair share of the troops. The contingent was shaped as a light infantry brigade on HQ, three operative battalions, one logistic battalion; one cavalry troop (with armoured cars); one SF (“Incursori”) company; one signal company; one field hospital; one *Carabinieri* (paratroopers) platoon (with MP duties); and one engineers platoon. Rotation – carried out every four months – involved 1st (“Tuscania”), 2nd (“Tarquinia”), and 5th (“El Alamein”) parachute battalions; 2nd (“Governolo”), 3rd (“Cernaia”), and 10th (“Bezzecca”) Bersaglieri battalions; 67th (“Montelungo”) mechanized infantry battalion; and “San Marco” marine infantry battalion, the latter rotating at company level along the whole mission length. The maritime component included two cruisers (*Vittorio Veneto* and *Doria*), three destroyers (*Ardito*, *Audace*, and *Intrepido*), four frigates (*Perseo*, *Lupo*, *Orsa*, and *Sagittario*), two amphibious units (*Grado e Carole*), and one support unit (*Stromboli*). Air Force, finally, flew 1,184 transport missions, moving personnel and materials back and forth the operative area, with planes drawn from the 46th AF brigade and the 31st AF squadron, respectively located in Pisa and Rome¹⁰. Such a relevant and protracted effort was widely supported among the political forces, confirming the trend expressed in “Libano 1” and the existence of a (although ambiguous) consensus, providing military intervention with a new legitimization. In the eyes of the moderate, centre-to-left five-party government (Pentapartito), military presence increasingly evolved in a tool to assert Italian international role, especially in the wider Mediterranean basin. At the same time, the alleged peaceful character of this presence and the imprimatur provided by the UNSC appeased the internationalist ambition of the Communist Party, still trying to ride the difficult horse of a pacifism *à tous azimuts*¹¹.

Among public opinion, the new mission reinforced the trends emerged during “Libano 1”. Media gave wide coverage to the contingent’s everyday activities (especially to their humanitarian dimension), while popular magazines quite eagerly shed a critical light on some mockeries against Bersaglieri appeared on British press when the small, company-sized, contingent of the UK 1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards joined the MNF in February 1983¹². Even among professional observers, references to the “special Italian way” in which the mission was discharged became common catchphrases, leaving a strong and long-lasting legacy in national military culture and national rhetoric. Impartiality, professionalism, a widespread but less invasive presence in the field, special attention to the needs of civilian population, and a sympathetic eye towards the aspects of the humanitarian relief soon became

¹⁰ On “Libano 1” and “Libano 2”, see, from the Italian perspective, Tana, Fabio (ed.) (1985): *La lezione del Libano. La missione della forza multinazionale e la politica italiana*, Milano, Franco Angeli, and Lundari, Giuseppe (1986): *Gli Italiani in Libano, 1979-85*, Milano, EMI - Editrice Militare Italiana; a journalistic account is in Nebiolo, Gino (1984): *Gli Italiani a Beirut. Storia e cronaca della missione di pace in Libano*, Milano, Bompiani; General Angioni souvenirs are in Angioni, Franco (1984): *Un soldato italiano in Libano*, Milano, Rizzoli; two more institutional accounts are *I giorni di Beirut*, Roma, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. Direzione generale delle informazioni, dell’editoria e della proprietà letteraria artistica e scientifica, s.d. [1986], and “Libano: Missione compiuta”, *Rivista Militare*, no. 5 (1984), pp. 164 ff.; a well balanced survey is in McDermott, Anthony and Skjelsbaek, Kjell (eds.) (1991): *The Multinational Force in Beirut, 1982-1984*, Gainesville, FL, Florida International University Press.

¹¹ On Italian pacifism during the Eighties, see Battistelli, Fabrizio *et al.* (1990): *Rapporto di ricerca su: I movimenti pacifisti e antinucleari in Italia 1980-1988*, Roma, CeMiSS – Centro Militare di Studi Strategici and Rivista Militare, esp. Appendix A, “Breve storia del movimento per la pace in Italia, 1980-1988”; on the background of the movement, see Ilari, Virgilio: “Storia politica del movimento pacifista in Italia (1949-1985)”, in Jean, Carlo (ed.) (1986): *Sicurezza e difesa. Fattori interni e internazionali*, Milano, Franco Angeli, pp. 231-89; its international position is briefly exposed in Rossi, Sergio A. and Ilari, Virgilio: “The Peace Movement in Italy”, in Klatfleiter, Werner and Pflatzgraff, Robert L. (eds.) (1985): *The Peace Movements in Europe & the United States*, Beckenham, Kent, Croom Helm, pp. 140-61.

¹² The British contingent remained in Beirut until February 1984, with QDG C and A squadrons rotating with a squadron of the 16th/5th The Queen’s Royal Lancers and the support of a batch of the 30th Signal Regiment.



the (often stereotypically emphasized) trademark of the Italian engagement. Such an attitude strengthened when political situation increasingly deteriorated, leading to the suicide attacks against the US and French barracks of October 23, 1983 and the ensuing escalation of violence¹³. While Lebanon spiralled in a new outburst of civil war, the Italian presence in Beirut ended on February 19-20, 1984, following the withdrawal of the MNF. Since September 1982, the Italian death toll was just one killed and about 75 wounded. This appeared a great success and, despite triggering some polemics¹⁴, became the proof of the soundness of the Italian engagement in Lebanon and of the way in which the country had discharged its international obligations. Moreover, following the attacks to the multinational contingent, Italian political dynamism increased, leading to a drift with its partners, especially with France, which had been the main supporter of the MNF. During the meeting held in Venice in November 1983, tensions reached their climax, with Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti outspokenly criticizing the “retaliation bombings” carried out by French air force in the Beqaa valley.

The main point of disagreement was the role that Italy aimed at playing in the Mediterranean theatre and – more broadly – what it perceived as a subordinate position within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. In the following years, this issue would have led to tensions also with the US. Since late Seventies, the Southern front had grown a key element in the elaboration of the national foreign and security policy, while the definition of a national dimensions for the Italian security needs had gained a new (and sometimes polemic) light. Quoting Lagorio:

Italy, due to what it objectively is (i.e. the sixth industrial power in the world, a power with a high technical and economic level but without the burdens and the encumbrances of a great or an hegemonic power), has a more evident and important role to play in the world, and primarily in the wider area adjoining it ... Within the framework of our international policy, we have to think more than what we did in the past to the interest of Italy as a nation ... If it [Italy]

¹³ The death toll of the attack on the Marines barracks was 241 men killed and sixty injured. It represented the deadliest single-day death toll for the USMC since the battle of Iwo Jima, the deadliest single-day death toll for the US military since the first day of the Tet offensive, and the deadliest single attack on Americans overseas since the Second World War. In the attack on the French barracks, 58 paratroopers from the 1st Parachute Chasseur Regiment were killed and 15 injured in the single worst military loss for France since the end of the Algerian War. In retaliation for the attacks, France launched an airstrike in the Beqaa Valley against alleged Islamic Revolutionary Guards positions, while US planned to target positions in Baalbek, which housed Iranian Revolutionary Guards believed to be training Hezbollah militants. US President Ronald Reagan and French President François Mitterrand also approved a joint air strike on the camp where the bombing had been supposedly planned, but the attack was never carried out. De facto, there was no serious retaliation for the Beirut bombing from the US, although the attack led to a general review of the American strategy in Lebanon, as detailed in the report of the Department of Defence commission on Beirut terrorist attack issued in December 1983 (http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/reading_room/142.pdf).

¹⁴ Foreign media (partly quoted in the domestic press) repeatedly stressed an alleged pro-Palestinian (i.e. anti-Israeli) bias in the attitude of the Italian troops, even suggesting the existence of some sort of “gentlemen’s agreement” with the warring factions to avoid potentially troublesome incidents. Although officially denied, both at political and military level, the point periodically emerged in the parliamentary debate, especially when, in late summer/early autumn 1983, the drift with the French and US partners started to deepen around the stance to assume towards the different Lebanese actors. A partially connected – and equally thorny – issue proved the death of marine Filippo Montesi (a draftee), shoot while on patrol near the Palestinian camp of Bourj el-Barajneh, on March 15, 1983, which give strength to the social and political forces opposing the mission. In the following years, a more balanced judgement has emerged on the overall fairness of the Italian position and on the soundness of the national approach the complex Lebanese reality; in this sense, see, among the others, McDermott and Skjelsbaek, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-58, and, from a journalistic perspective, Fisk, Robert (2001): *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, Third ed., Oxford *et al.*, Oxford University Press.



wants to contribute to their security and be seen from them as a point of reference for a policy of peace, friendship and cooperation, it has to be credible, and to be seen as a stabilizing element from both the states that share our geographic location, our problems and our common historical experiences, and from the others ... The [Atlantic] Alliance no more offers a total guarantee for our country's defence¹⁵.

“Libano 1” and “Libano 2” were part of this ambitious strategy, aimed at enhancing and promoting the Italian role within the wider Mediterranean basin. In this perspective, they were just two steps in a longer path. Earlier in the same 1982, Italian forces had deployed in the Sinai Peninsula, within the framework of the newly established Multinational Force and Observer (MFO), to supervise the implementation of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt signed in 1979, following the Camp David accords¹⁶. In August 1984, another naval force reached Suez to carry out a large-scale minesweeping mission in coordination with French and British units. Finally, in October 1987, the units of 18th Italian naval group deployed in the Persian Gulf to monitor local maritime activity, protect the mercantile traffic, and perform another massive minesweeping operation during the final months of the Iran-Iraq war. This mission too fit within a wide international framework (operation “Cleansweep”) including British, French, Belgian, and Netherlands’ units under WEU coordination, and paralleled a similar US operation (“Earnest Will”) started earlier in July¹⁷.

However, a constant tension seems to mark (retrospectively) the Italian action. On one hand, the new national foreign and security policy stressed the country's ambitions for greater autonomy, also as a way to assert the international status that Italy was (re-)gaining after the social, political and economic crisis of the Seventies. On the other, it needed to dilute these instances within the wider context provided either by coalitions or supranational institutions, both to share the technical, operational and financial burdens that the missions entailed and to offer them a surplus of legitimization, especially in front of potentially divisive issues. Divisions within the government coalitions too help to explain this apparently erratic policy. Giovanni Spadolini, for example, who succeeded Lagorio as Minister of Defence in August 1983, duly highlighted the «revolutionary» aspects of the Lebanese experience but at the same

¹⁵ Lagorio, Lelio (1980): *Indirizzi di politica militare*, Roma, Ministero della Difesa, pp. 4 ff.

¹⁶ A sketchy (and largely apologetic) history of the MFO is in *Servants of Peace*, Rome, Office of Personnel and Publications, Multinational Force and Observers, 1999. Annual reports for the later period are at <http://www.mfo.org/documents.html>, together with the constitutive protocol, dated August 3, 1981; an analysis of the events leading to the establishment of the force, together with an evaluation of its legal status is in Milone, Monica: “La Forza multinazionale e gli Osservatori nel Sinai. Circostanze che hanno portato alla creazione della Forza multinazionale e di osservatori nel Sinai”, in Migliazza, Alessandro (ed.) (1988): *Le forze multinazionali in Libano e nel Sinai*, Milano, Giuffrè, pp. 267-99; see *Ibid.*, pp. 385-388, for the text of the agreement regulating the Italian participation.

¹⁷ On the Italian naval missions in the Eighties, see Ramoino, Pier Paolo (2008): “La Marina Militare e le P.S.O. Da Tiran a Sharp Guard”, paper presented to the seminar *L'Italia, la NATO e le Peace Support Operations: storia e problemi*, Department of Political Science, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, 8-9 May, now at http://dipartimenti.unicatt.it/scienze_politiche/Ramoino_PSO_Marittime.pdf, date accessed 10 December 2010; a record of the US military engagement in the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war is in Wise, Harold (2007): *Inside the Danger Zone. The U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf. 1987-1988*, Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press; a detailed (and rather critical) analysis of the political impact of operation “Earnest Will” is in Kelley, Stephen Andrew (2007): *More Lucky Than Good: Operation Earnest Will as Gunboat Diplomacy*, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate Institute; a reconstruction of the “tanker phase” in the Iran-Iraq war is in Navias, Martin S. and Hooton, Edward R. (1996): *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping during the Iran-Iraq Crisis, 1980-1988*, New York, I.B. Tauris.



time pointed out its «exceptional» nature. While supporting the need for a greater presence and deeper Italian initiative in the Mediterranean region, he remarked that: «there is no room for the spontaneous actions of middle power like our country ... Italy can provide its contribution to international security and stability only in strict coherence with a Western strategic design, a design that she must help to formulate, politically, day by day»¹⁸. It seems, thus, that no room existed for an independent Italian role beyond the mere territorial defence and the integration of the national military instrument within the broader European (i.e. Western) collective security system, provided by the Atlantic Alliance and the inevitable reference to the US ally. Nonetheless, there was a lively perception that Italy – due to its peculiar geographic location and its equally peculiar historical experience – had to assume commitments that other countries, in a different geographic position and with different historical experiences, could avoid. In other words, Italy had always to keep a watchful eye on the emergence of new potential crisis spots in the Mediterranean basin, due both to domestic instability in the riparian countries and still open territorial quarrels. At the same time, it had to be ready to intervene, either to defend and promote its national interests or to avoid potentially dangerous spill over of local instability.

3. From Bosnia to Kosovo: Ten Years of Transition

The diplomatic and geopolitical turmoil started by collapse of the Berlin wall caught Italian foreign and security policy in the middle of this difficult transformative process. In this period, strong and different forces were pulling the country in different directions. Domestically, the political experience of the “Pentapartito” had definitively lost its propulsive power. In the second half of the Eighties, coalition governments grew weaker, quarrelsome, and increasingly focused on the internal dimension, often seen as a mere day-by-day political appropriation. At the same time, mounting public awareness of grass rooted and long-entrenched corruptive practices was paving the way to the “clean sweep” of 1992-93, with “Mani pulite” judicial investigation leading to the demise of the so-called “First Republic” and of a large share of its political class. In the international realm too, room was becoming tighter for the pursuit of too much openly unprejudiced actions. These changes affected both Italy’s Mediterranean priorities and the ways in which the country could pursue them. After the “Achille Lauro” crisis, culminating in the Sigonella incident (October 1985) and after the American bombing of Tripoli (April 1986), relations with the US had gradually normalized and the evolution of the regional framework had forced the country to move away from some of its previous (and more “unorthodox”) positions¹⁹. Mikhail Gorbachev’s election as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1985) and his new approach to Moscow’s foreign relations had favoured a shift in national attention towards Europe, supported by the speeding of up the integration process envisaged in the Single European Act (1986) and by the first tensions in post-Tito Yugoslavia. The decline of Bettino Craxi’s Socialist Party as driving force of the government coalition, coupled with the revival of the Christian Democrat instances in the following string of Presidents of the Council of the

¹⁸ Spadolini, Giovanni (1983): *Indirizzi di politica militare*, Roma, Ministro della Difesa, p. 7.

¹⁹ On the changes affecting Italy’s Mediterranean perception during the final years of the Cold War, see Colombo, Alessandro: “La percezione italiana dei “rischi da sud” tra l’ultima fase della guerra fredda e il mondo post-bipolare”, in de Leonardis, Massimo (ed.) (2003): *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 107-34; a more detailed analysis is in Santoro, Carlo Maria (ed.) (1996): *Rischio da sud. Geopolitica delle crisi nel bacino mediterraneo*, Second ed., Milano, Franco Angeli; from a US point of view, see Lesser, Ian O. (1992): *Mediterranean Security. New Perspectives and Implications for U.S. Policy*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND.



Ministers, also fuelled these changes. Facing an increasingly dynamic international environment, domestic considerations and the preservation of the domestic political balance became pivotal in shaping Italy's overall posture²⁰.

Within this framework, the UN "revival" of early Nineties strengthened Italian general preference for multilateralism, seen also as a way to overcome domestic resistances to a more active and "visible" foreign policy. In 1990, Italian air and maritime forces joined the multinational coalition raised to repel the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. However, although undertaken under the aegis of the UN Security Council (Resolutions No. 660, 661, 665, and 678), the mission radically differed from the ones discharged until then, especially due to its openly combat nature. The difference was quite striking, in the eyes both of the public opinion and the country's political leadership. The loss in action of one *Tornado* fighter, with the crew taken prisoner by the Iraqi security forces, raised deep concern and an even deeper emotional wave, fostered by its extensive media coverage. Both during and after the military campaign, rumours spread about alleged war crimes committed by the international forces, while, in the following months, similar rumours started circulating about health issues affecting war veterans and the local civilian populations²¹. Finally, direct contact with foreign troops, in an operative context that radically differed from the traditional "peacekeeping-style" setting, emphasized the organizational and technological gap afflicting the Italian armed forces. From this point of view the Iraqi experience played an important role in promoting a wider reflection on the international relevance of the Italian military instrument, and on its technological and organizational needs in an increasingly turbulent geopolitical environment.

The Yugoslav crisis and its fallouts speeded up this process. Geographic proximity and a broader interest in the stability of the Balkan area made Italy a first line country in the management of the crisis. The Italian Navy was involved in a heavy coastal patrolling and embargo enforcement activity since July 1992, under WEU (operations "Maritime Monitor" and "Maritime Guard"), NATO (operations "Sharp Vigilance" and "Sharp Fence") and NATO-WEU aegis (Operation "Sharp Guard"). Operational activity lasted until October 1996 and during this period Italy also provided logistic support to the multinational units operating in the Adriatic Sea. The global effort was relevant. During "Sharp Guard" only, Italy

²⁰ On the Italian domestic policy between Eighties and Nineties, see Colarizi, Simona (1996): *Storia dei partiti nell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma and Bari, Laterza, esp. pp. 627 ff.; more critically, see Santarelli, Enzo (1996): *Storia critica della repubblica. L'Italia dal 1945 al 1994*, Milano, Feltrinelli, esp. pp. 284 ff.; on Craxi's domestic and foreign policy, see Colarizi, Simona and Gervasoni, Marco (2005): *La cruna dell'ago. Craxi, il partito socialista e la crisi della Repubblica*, Roma and Bari, Laterza; on the "Achille Lauro" issue and its domestic and international consequences, see Primiceri, Emanuela (2005): *Il sequestro della "Achille Lauro" e il governo Craxi. Relazioni internazionali e dibattito politico in Italia*, Manduria, Roma and Bari, Pietro Lacaita Editore; on "Mani pulite" and on its juridical and political meanings, see Nelken, David: *Il significato di Tangentopoli: la risposta giudiziaria alla corruzione e i suoi limiti*, in Violante, Luciano (ed.) (1998): *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. 14, *Leggi, diritto e giustizia*, Torino, Einaudi, pp. 597-627.

²¹ An assessment of these rumours is still problematic, especially with reference to the so-called "Gulf war syndrome" affecting US veterans during the Nineties; nonetheless, they were quite widespread, both in Italy and on abroad. Similar rumours also circulated during the missions in the former Yugoslav, about the possible effects of the troops' long-term permanence in a depleted uranium contaminated environment. In all occasions, media provided evidence of supposedly war-related health problems among both military personnel and the civilian population, although their impact on the general perception of the missions among domestic public opinion was slight. Similar considerations apply to the "war crimes" issues. Tales about the killing of unarmed or retreating Iraqi soldiers were common in the aftermath of the Gulf War, while bombing of civilian population and infrastructures rose widespread criticisms of the US posture towards the war. During the Somali mission too, national press referred of violence committed by Italian soldiers on the civilian population; successive judicial enquiries rejected the most part of (and, in some, cases all) the charges.



constantly deployed between two and three surface units plus one submarine and two patrolling airplanes, discharging about 20-25% of the whole activity, compared to about 10% of the other partners. In the same time, the country was involved in other national and multinational missions, from Iraqi Kurdistan (operation “Airone”, May-August 1991), to Albania (operation “Pellicano”, September 1991-December 1993), to Somalia²².

The Somali mission (operation “Ibis”) was maybe the most contested among the ones that Italian armed forces have discharged since the end of the Second World War. Hastily started in December 1992 under heavy emotional pressure both at home and abroad, it pivoted on a mixed contingent with “Folgore” parachute brigade as its backbone, although the prolonged effort – which lasted until March 1994 – led to the deployment of a total 15,000 men along the entire operational life. Part of a wide multinational action (at the beginning the US-led operation “Restore Hope”, in its turn part of the UN UNITAF mission, then, since May 1993, the UN-led UNOSOM II mission) it repeatedly clashed against the weakness of this cumbersome structure and its multiple (and often overlapping) responsibilities. Both UNITAF and UNOSOM II involved a high number of national contingents, although the bulk came from the United States, with some 25,000 men out of total 37,000. Other UNITAF contributing countries were Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Republic of Ireland, Kuwait, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. The “dual hat” mechanism favoured the emergence of coordination problems, while the creeping character of the mission, quickly turning from a humanitarian assistance effort to a peace enforcement mission under the provision of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, led to cleavages among contributing countries. The degradation of the security environment heavily affected the Italian contingent, which was repeatedly involved in violent fire fighting. Death toll was heavy both for the time and for a country still imbued of the “Lebanese” rhetoric²³. During the mission twelve men died (eight in action), including one female member of the Military Red Cross, and more than thirty were blessed during the incidents of July 2, 1993 (the so-called “Battaglia del pastificio”)²⁴. Moreover, hard criticisms hit the contingent, putting under heavy scrutiny the consolidated image of the “good Italian soldier”. Another element negatively affecting the Somali experience was the comparison with the almost contemporary mission in Mozambique (ONUMOZ “Albatros” operation, March 1993-April 1994). Despite the differences between the two missions (ONUMOZ was, in its essence, a conventional peacekeeping mission, aimed at supervising the truce agreement reached between the two main Mozambique political

²² While involved in Adriatic patrolling and discharging the legacy missions then undergoing, between July 1992 and October 1996 Italy joined UN UNTAC mission in Cambodia (October 1992), ONUMOZ in Mozambique (December 1992), UNOSOM II in Somalia (March 1993), and UNMIBH in Bosnia-Herzegovina (December 1995), together with NATO IFOR (December 1995), the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission in Skopje (September 1993) and the OSCE LTM to Moldova (April 1993), Bosnia and Herzegovina (December 1995) and Croatia (July 1996).

²³ On the Italian mission in Somalia, see Agnetti, Pino (1995): *Mogadiscio-Italia: storie incredibili (ma vere) dalla Somalia*, Bergamo, Larus; for an inside view of mission, see Loi, Bruno (2004): *Peace-keeping: pace o guerra? Una risposta italiana: l'operazione Ibis in Somalia*, Firenze, Vallecchi; see also *Id.* (2008): “L'operazione IBIS in Somalia”, paper presented to the seminar *L'Italia, la NATO e le Peace Support Operations: storia e problemi*, Department of Political Science, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, 8-9 May, now at http://dipartimenti.unicatt.it/scienze_politiche_Loi_Operazione_Ibis.pps; General Loi was CO of the Italian contingent between May and September 1993, when relinquished the command to General Carmine Fiore.

²⁴ On the “Battaglia del pastificio”, see Alberizzi, Massimo A.: “Mogadiscio, ore 7. Scatta l'inferno”, *Corriere della Sera*, 3 July 1993. A more detailed account is in Loi, *op. cit.*, pp. 111 ff. The battle was the main military involvement of Italian armed forces since the end of World War Two.



factions, the country's Government and RENAMO), its smoothness somehow enhanced the sense of failure surrounding the Somali experience. Moreover, death toll in Mozambique was lighter (two deaths from a plane crash) and none of the deaths stemmed from combat activity.

From many points of view, UNOSOM II gave a sever blow to the then widespread and predominant "Lebanese approach", and put an end to the illusion of a zero-death toll participation to this kind of activities. From this time on, Italian military involvement abroad started to follow a double track. On one hand conventional stabilizing, patrolling, and peacekeeping missions, low risk activities gathering a wide political consensus and carrying on the tradition of the "special Italian approach" to international missions; on the other more "robust" military operations, with high risk of involvement in combat actions. At the end of the Nineties and more clearly in the 2000s, this kind of operations became the "core business" of the Italian army. However, for large part of the decade they were still rather exceptional. More common was the experience in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the entry in force of the Dayton agreement between late 1995 and early 1996, and in Kosovo, after NATO intervention in 1999. In both cases, Italian action took the form of a "traditional" stabilizing mission (albeit in highly volatile environments), discharged within the framework of wider international NATO- or EU-led coalitions. Both for its length and its material implications, former Yugoslavia absorbed the bulk of the Italian military activity in the Nineties, culturally reinforcing the "Lebanese" model and, at the same time, fostering the process of transformation of the national military instrument, especially the army, which, since 1995, was charged with the main operational responsibilities. In this sense, the Yugoslav experience as central in the reorganization of the Italian armed forces, accompanying – and sometimes shaping – the debate that led in 2002 to the adoption of the so-called "Nuovo modello di Difesa" ("New Defence Model").

The first *Libro bianco della Difesa* ("Defence White Book") had been adopted in 1985. It largely elaborated on the Lebanese experience, articulating three pivotal points: the country's loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance and its political and strategic tenants; the perception of a growing threat coming from South; and the need to proceed to a quick modernization of the national military instrument in a fifteen years' time. To rationalize the different components of the national military instrument and to allocate efficiently the available financial resources, it also defined five "joint operative missions" and one "support mission" for whose accomplishment it established common programs and provided a financial contribution of about 4,000 billion liras per year to cover the investment expenses. The definition of a national "defence model" was one of the main positive aspects of the *Libro bianco* although, in many other sectors, its provisions have been often overlooked by the adoption of a lighter and more flexible tool such as the *Nota aggiuntiva al bilancio di previsione della Difesa*²⁵. Nonetheless, the need to reform the national military instrument continued to evolve, fostered also by the evolution that NATO's role and structures underwent in the same years. In this perspective, the evolution of the Italian military structure largely reflects the changing role of the country within the wider framework of the Atlantic Alliance and, at the same time, the changing role that NATO itself underwent within the international security system. The adoption of the so-called Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) during NATO Washington summit (1999) and of the Prague Commitment on Capabilities (PCC) during the following Prague summit (2003) was pivotal in forcing member countries to define their priorities. As to the Italian armed forces, it has led to an overall re-organization and modernization of the entire military structure, aimed at to enhancing its

²⁵ Ilari, Virgilio and Battistelli, Pierpaolo (2004): *Storia del servizio militare in Italia*, vol. VI, *Il terzo dopoguerra (1991-2001)*, Roma, Agenzia stampa della Difesa.



projection and interoperability skills²⁶.

4. Iraq, Afghanistan and Beyond: Shaping a New Role for the Italian Armed Forces?

At the turn between 1990s and the 2000s, the process of transformation of the Italian armed forces was still in progress. Despite the existing of a broad consensus about the need to modernize the national military instrument, divergences were great around key specific issues, while financial constrains negatively affected the whole process. A general opinion still considered peacekeeping the main task. Despite the Somali experience, the possibility that national forces were involved in combat operations was mostly perceived as a remote one. Yugoslavia, while stressing the logistic apparatus and exposing the limits of an Army still officially based on compulsory military service, did not really shake this opinion. Once again, the death toll of the missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo was relatively low – two deaths during the ten year long SFOR; four (five in 2009) during KFOR – and none of the casualties directly stem for combat activity. The Kosovo lesson – still in vogue, and embedded in 1999 NATO strategic concept – taught that stand off operations could have been the key of victory and that presence of land forces was a mere support, to consolidate the success and discharge the post-conflict normalization activity. Worth noting, in this same period, NATO doctrine progressively absorbed the concept of PSO, encompassing a large range of activities aimed a consolidating the political and military success gained with the major combat operation. The increasing attention devoted to the so-called “reinforced peacekeeping” led to the development of a full-fledged NATO doctrine in the filed of civil-military co-operation. The development of CIMIC is maybe the longest-lasting heritage of the Yugoslav experience and is – from different point of view – a direct product of the old Lebanese experience. In the following years, the CIMIC would have emerged as one of the most dynamic element in the NATO doctrine, gradually evolving in the following decade. Moreover, with its emphasis on the “winning the hearts and minds” of the enemy population, it imposed as one of the most palatable to national public opinion, traditionally sensitive to the representation of the “peace soldier”.

Broadly speaking, the Nineties proved a rather interlocutory decade. In this period, in an increasingly turbulent international realm, Italian involvement beyond national borders slowly but progressively changed, at the same time emphasizing the limits of a military instrument still largely shaped to bear the burden of an old-fashioned, conventional confrontation, within a static Cold War environment. In this perspective, it was the evolution of the country’s commitments to force it to elaborate some sort of way outs, working on its experience and adapting them to the new needs. This was also the driving force behind the new political approach to the international missions. Especially since the mid-Nineties, around Italian international involvement emerged a sort of bipartisan consensus, only excluding the most extreme right and left wings of the political spectrum. At the same time, a partially new and less emotional attitude spread among public opinion. Military missions became a common recurrence in national life while death of military personnel abroad became a rather “normal” occurrence. Media approach to the missions changed, with focus shifting partially away from their traditionally covered humanitarian and emotional aspects and toward their professional dimension. Finally, a new balance emerged among the services,

²⁶ See *Libro bianco della Difesa 2002* at <http://www.difesa.it/Approfondimenti/ArchivioApprofondimenti/Libro+Bianco>, esp. part I.



with the Army becoming increasingly involved, although in a more joint and combined fashion. The international dimension remained the (largely implicit) legal frame of reference. Excluding some (relatively) small and isolated experiences, in the Nineties too, Italian missions abroad still reflected a UN and/or a multinational decision. Worth noting, the only relevant exception to this rule – the Kosovo crisis, in which Italy provided a key logistic support to NATO air forces operating against Serbia – proved, from a political point of view, highly divisive, and led to a long string of polemics.

From an operative perspective, at the beginning of the new decade the Yugoslav experience had grown a model on its own. In Bosnia and Kosovo, Italian troops had developed a new corpus of best practices, reaching excellence in some specific sectors. At the same time, the long-term involvement and the great number of tasks entrusted to the contingent had allowed for a wide and extended turnover, providing an increasing number of troops with the opportunity of having a real contact with the operational reality. Even the transformation envisaged in the *Libro bianco* of 2002, although not fully completed, had started to reshape some aspects of the military instrument, moving from some core operative units. It had also started to affect the logistic and technical apparatus, paving the way to the radical shift towards a fully professional army started in 2005. However, greater efficiency and better deployability, although precondition for a more visible international presence, did not mean, on the political side, the acceptance of a more active role, especially an increased involvement of national armed forces in combat activities.

This largely explains the divisive effect that the two missions in Afghanistan (ISAF) and Iraq (operation “Antica Babilonia”), that Italian armed forces discharged respectively since 2003 and in 2003-2006, has had on the national public opinion²⁷. Both these missions marked a relevant departure from the previous Italian tradition. While on one hand they represented a “quantum leap” in the Italian military experience, on the other they seemed to break the political consensus of the previous decade. Their emotional impact has been much greater than that of the Yugoslav missions and in both occasions (but especially in the Iraqi case), difficulties has emerged in providing and circulating convincing reasons for the missions, so to aggregate consensus around them. Their (re-)financing generally proved a thorny issue, and often became occasion for political tensions. Both in Iraq and Afghanistan, fire incidents (such as the suicide attack against the Italian MP HQ in Nasiriyah on November 2003, or the so-called “Battaglia dei ponti”, in the same town, in the following April) and heavy death tolls raised widespread emotions. In some occasions, the same way in which operations were carried out ended in heated polemics, and in penal procedures involving some high rank officers. Finally, public scrutiny on missions was, generally, more stringent and more incisive than in the previous cases. The (perceived) lack of international legitimization often jeopardised the bipartisan consensus that the mission in former Yugoslavia had enjoined. Increased political turbulence negatively reverberated on the

²⁷ On the Afghan and Iraqi missions, see Nativi, Andrea (ed.) (2004): *Esercito italiano. Le nuove frontiere del peacekeeping*, Milano, Mondadori Electa, and, in more critical perspective, Gaiani, Gianandrea (2008): *Afghanistan-Iraq. Guerre di pace italiane*, Venezia, Studio LT2; on Iraq, see Angetti, Pino (2004), *Nassirya*, Milano, Boroli; on Afghanistan, among many, see *Id.* (2002), *Operazione Afghanistan*, 2 vols., Milano, Mondadori Electa, and Micalessin, Gian (2009): *Afghanistan: l'ultima trincea. La sfida che non possiamo perdere*, Milano, Boroli; a somehow different approach is in Marcucci, Arcangelo (2010): *Afgahnistan. Analisi di un conflitto troppo in fretta dato per vinto*, Varese, Arterigere; an international perspective is in O'Hanlon, Michael E. and Sherjan, Hassina (2010): *Toughing It Out in Afghanistan. Afghanistan, Defense Strategy, Foreign Policy*, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution; some personal souvenirs of the Afghan mission are in Battisti, Giorgio (2004): *Penne nere in Afghanistan. Cronache dalla missione «Nibbio 1»*, Mantova, Sometti, and Crainz, Edoardo (2006): *Missione in Afghanistan. Diario di un medico paracadutista della Folgore*, Milano, Mursia.



mission's collective perception, while casualties have periodically triggered requests of disengagements from different quarters of the political spectrum. Moreover, Italian presence in Iraq faced recurrent charges of partisanship, due to the circumstances that have brought to the intervention of the US-led coalition in 2003. In the case of Afghanistan, mission's length has gradually eroded part of the support that the mission originally enjoined. A certain degree of confusion between ISAF and operation "Enduring Freedom" (OEF) has favoured this process. Finally, for ISAF too, it became increasingly difficult to explain the reasons of the mission, especially with the decline of the emotive impact of the events of 9/11 and the emergence of new and more stringent problems.

Iraq and Afghanistan requested radically different capabilities if compared to the previous experiences. At the same time (especially in Afghanistan) a strong continuity emerges, especially in post-conflict activity and in the field of civil-military cooperation. The risk of involvement in high intensity combat operations gave the final boost to the process of modernization and re-organization of the national military instrument. A professional military instrument allows better turnover, higher efficiency and enhanced interoperability. Worth noting, Italian armed forces shift definitively to a full professional setting in the middle of these missions. The scale of the missions changes too, in both length and size. Italian presence in Afghanistan dates back to 2003 and the size of contingent has significantly increased over time, reaching, by the end of 2010, about 3,800 men. The country assumed ISAF command in August 2005-May 2006 (ISAF VIII) and is in charge of the Regional Command West (RC-W), located in Herat, and of the Herat Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). In this perspective, the Afghan and the Iraqi experience have favoured integration in combined forces, as both leading and subordinate nation. This is a great change compared to the traditional multinational model, based on a loose coordination among the different national contingents. The Afghan experience has shown the high level of interoperability that Italian armed forces have reached during the years and the credit that they have gained in their international intercourses. On the other hand, the impact of the Iraqi and Afghan experience has grown so invasive to obscure the contribution of the other military operations that Italian armed forces have discharged during the decade. Since 2001, Italy's international commitments have grown with the activism of the international organizations to which the country belongs and with the emergence of the ambitions of the European Defence and Security Policy. Beyond ISAF, UN started, between 2001 and 2009, two new missions with Italian contribution (UNOWA in West Africa and UNIMIS in Sudan); NATO four (Task Force Harvest, Task Force Fox, and operation "Allied Harmony" in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the NATO Training Mission in Iraq); OSCE two (OSCE LTM to Serbia and Montenegro); and the EU seventeen²⁸. This additional burden has put national military instrument under further strain. At the same time, it has allowed to gather new experience and to consolidate the corpus of "best practices" acquired in the previous years.

²⁸ EU missions includes EUPM (European Police Mission, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, started in January 2003); EUPOL Concordia and EUPOL Proxima, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (started, respectively, in March and December 2003); AMISS II, in Darfour (started in January 2004); EUJUST Themis, in Georgia (started in July 2004); EUFOR ALTHEA, in Bosnia-Herzegovina (started in December 2004); EUPOL Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (started in March 2005); EUPAT (European Police Advisory Team in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, started in June 2005); EUSEC, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (started in June 2005); EU BAM Rafah, at the Rafah Crossing Point between Egypt and the Gaza Strip (started in November 2005); EU BAM Moldova-Ukraine, on the border between the two countries (started in December 2005); EUPOL-COPPS, in the Palestinian Territories (started in January 2006); EUPT (European Planning Team for Kosovo, started in April 2006), EUFOR RD Congo, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (started in April 2006); AMM – Aceh Monitoring Mission, in Aceh (started in September 2006), EUPOL Afghanistan and EUPOL RD Congo, started, respectively, in May and July 2007.



In this perspective, the emphasis placed on Iraq and Afghanistan within the framework of the Italian military experience could be somehow misleading. Their material dimensions, their human and financial costs, their new operational character, all conjure in making these missions a highly visible turning point. From a certain point of view, they push to the extremes the Somali experience, partially rejecting some key elements of the “Italian approach” to the international missions. On the other, they hardly epitomize the decade as a whole. In an increasingly fragmented international environment, the set of missions that the Italian armed forces have to discharge has grown exponentially, adding new dimensions to the “traditional” peacekeeping activity. The increasing number of international subjects operating in the field of collective security has fuelled this process, adding new logics and new aims to the “old” UN set of values and procedures. UN themselves are trying to elaborate a new approach to the problem of international peace, also to overcome the limits of the model exposed in the *Agenda for Peace* (1992) and in its *Supplement* of 1995²⁹. The same conceptual foundations of the *Agenda* were obsolete at that time. Peacekeeping endorsed definition (“The deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well”) was an heritage of the Cold War, of its “negotiated” logic, and of the role that states played in the international realm. The consensus that requested not only the deployment of the mission, but also the definition of the national contingents, together with the need of a preventive ceasefire (which configured UN presence as a mere interposition), implied the presence of well-defined state subjects, controlling their territories and acting as guarantors of the conditions according which the interposition troops were deployed. It is worth noting that, while recognizing that the age of the full and exclusive state sovereignty was definitively set, the *Agenda for Peace* explicitly stated that: “[t]he foundation-stone of this work is and must remain the State”; that: “[r]espect for its fundamental sovereignty and integrity are crucial to any common international progress”; and that: “if every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, there would be no limit to fragmentation, and peace, security and economic well-being for all would become ever more difficult to achieve”. Few years later, the *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace* reaffirmed these concepts, in a document that, despite the Somali experience and the UN failure in limiting the effects of interethnic violence in Rwanda, quite paradoxically highlighted “the importance of the consent of the parties to the presence and mandate of a mission as a prerequisite for its success – effectively [returning] to the more restricted, Cold War definition”³⁰.

5. Conclusion - Where Do We Go From Here?

The experience of the last fifteen years clearly shows that assuming the state as the key international actor as the traditional peacekeeping approach does, it is quite a problematic passage in both theory and practice. At the same time, the attention that PSOs place on state

²⁹ Boutros-Ghali, Boutros (1992): *An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping. Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992*, New York, UN, at <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>; *Id.* (1995): *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: Position paper of the Secretary-General on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations*, New York, UN, at <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agsupp.html>.

³⁰ United Nations Association of the United Kingdom: “An Agenda for Peace Ten Years On”, *Global Policy Forum*, 03 February 2002, at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/reform/initiatives/ghali/2002/0203ten.htm>.



building not only as mere rebuilding of the state's institutional and administrative machinery but also of its civil society and relational networks, proofs that the emphasis that the *Agenda for Peace* placed on the political dimension was more a simplifying effort than the description of a factual reality. PSOs' multidimensional character is also the recognition of the plural and multifaceted nature of contemporary security, a nature that the *Agenda for Peace* identified, although the model of conflict resolution that it envisaged was unable to gauge. In this perspective, the transition from peacekeeping to PSOs is linked to the recognition that the main problem of contemporary international system is not merely ending armed hostilities and normalizing the relations among states, but rather control the instability that the same states can project beyond their borders, both directly and indirectly. State's failure can assume different forms, thus enhancing the multidimensional character of a stabilizing mission. At the same time, the definition of what peace and security are becomes more and more subjective, and linked to what every single state perceives as its endangered interests. Quite paradoxically, in an increasingly interdependent world, national security policies seem facing a contradictory trend, moving on one side towards increasing collectivization, one the other sliding towards a more or less creeping re-nationalization.

The evolution of the Italian international posture in the last thirty years largely follows this path. The development of a wide set of best practices, coupled with the enhanced ability to discharge high intensity combat operations that national armed forces have gained since mid-Nineties, reflects the evolution and the growing diversification of the international environment and the nuanced nature of contemporary security picture. At the same time, the country's greater involvement in stabilization activities appears as a direct consequence of the re-nationalization of its security policy after the end of the "decade of the illusions" (1989-99). In this perspective, the national experience shows a remarkable continuity if compared to its early efforts. Military presence abroad remains one of the cornerstones of Italy's international activism as well as a proof of her loyalty to the Western and European alignment. On the other hand, it provides Italy with the room that it need to pursue its specific national interests, either unilaterally or within wider coalition settings. The main critical point is the country's ability to define its interests properly. Between late Seventies and early Eighties, this need has led to the redefinition of Italy's Mediterranean policy. In the turbulent post-Cold War world, it has promoted a gradual opening towards more remote strategic contexts and the elaboration of new geopolitical representations, normally pivoting around the concept of "Wider Mediterranean". In the present historical context, future developments are still difficult to assess. However, the strong relation traditionally existing between Italian multilateral activism (herewith included its international military presence) and the process of elaboration of the country foreign policy seems keen to remain a key element in its political landscape.