



A Defence Under Attack: Costs and Benefits

edited by Paola Tessari and Elena Cesca

Abstract

This paper reports the proceedings of the conference “A Defence Under Attack: Costs and Benefits” that was held in Rome on July 16, 2013 within the IAI research project *Defence Matters*. The two conference sessions addressed the Italian debate on missions abroad and defence expenditures by making clear how the discussion of both issues is undermined by a lack of information for which all the actors involved are responsible. By stressing the importance of greater transparency and awareness of the central importance of defence policy and the valuable return of investments in this field, the speakers by looking at opportunities for Italy provided by the European Council of December 2013 that will deal with defence issues and by the semester of Italian presidency of the EU in the second half of 2014.

Keywords: *Italy / Foreign policy / Defence policy / Armed forces / Public opinion / Missions abroad / Defence industry*

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Introductory greeting by Gen. Mario Arpino

A warm greeting to all the participants at this conference organized by the Istituto Affari Internazionali within the research project *Defence Matters*, with the support of the NATO Public Diplomacy Division. This project is carried out by several European research institutes and aims to investigate the public's sensitivity to the national debate on defence issues.

I want to thank the Monte dei Paschi di Siena, our host in this beautiful building, and a special greeting goes to senators Nicola Latorre and Lucio Malan, who have always been close to our Institute, to the professors, the editorialists, and the representatives of the institutions and of the industry who have accepted to be here with us as speakers. They are well-known, prominent scholars and personalities, the moderators of the two sessions - our vice-president Vincenzo Camporini and our scientific advisor Giampiero Gramaglia - will take care of the presentations. At the end of each session a debate with the public is envisaged.

Before starting the conference, I would like to provide some food for thought. Our defence has long been accustomed to cuts, since the restructuring squeeze that started in 1975 has never let up. It is a permanent process, a true leitmotiv that for forty years has accompanied the work of the ministry. Today, with the law of 31 December 2012, n. 244, a new instrument for reform is available.

Unfortunately, also this reform having an existential impact on defence has been introduced through a mere budgetary tool, without at least attempting to have a political-strategic debate on it beforehand. It is true that there have been some hearings of the Chief of Staff and the Secretary General of the Defence. Yet we must regrettably admit that the real debate in our country's culture and among the political forces has not really taken place.

Plenty of issues needed to be clarified at a political level before raising once more the budgetary guillotine, starting with the definition of what military instrument Italy should have, and for what purpose. This discussion should be tackled seriously, systematically, once and for all and not just episodically when it comes to extend the decrees on Italian missions abroad or to criticize our participation in the F-35 program. Above all, the discourse should not be ideological or populist, but of a political-strategic, technical, operative, military, and political-industrial nature. And why not,

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* Paola Tessari is junior researcher in the Security and Defence area at the Istituto affari internazionali (IAI). Elena Cesca did an internship at IAI.

even constitutional. For example, the relationship between the real significance of Art. 11 of our Constitution and the use of the Armed Forces ought to be discussed and clarified, so as to avoid the obstacles and waste of time that regularly affect the course of the rare debates that do take place.

It would have also been interesting to evaluate NATO's position and strength which is eroded today - there is no point beating around the bush - by the slow American drift. Or the reluctance of the European Union to credibly organize a system of security and defence, a state of affairs that is certainly not helped by the ever greater British tendency to steer clear from any commitment at the EU level. The security of our energy sources might also deserve a whiff of consideration, while on this subject we continue to see a constant passing the buck between the EU and NATO.

Not to speak of the hazy concepts that underlie the so-called "responsibility to protect" that, for lack of a serious discussion, runs the risk of remaining a fig leaf that anyone can seize to further his own advantage. These could have all been excellent subjects of political debate, just to mention a few. The few that would prevent us from always just tagging along as usual.

Inputs are not lacking. The Istituto Affari Internazionali has offered and continues to offer its contribution: let us think about the recent conferences on the international missions, on Article 11 of the Constitution, the work done for the Parliament, this research project *Defence Matters*, and many others. But the most important occasion is approaching: in December the European Council will meet in Brussels gathering, for the first time, also the Ministries of Defence of Member States. It is essential to prepare for it, after an internal debate that removes every doubt and drops every veil. In May, the Minister of Defence Mario Mauro explained his guidelines to Parliament and firmly acknowledged this need. Not long after, the president of the Senate Defence Commission, who is with us here today, emphasized the special importance of the December meeting, both to outline an efficient European defence system, and in light of the reform of the national military instrument. Only a few days ago, the Supreme Defence Council, under the direction of president Giorgio Napolitano, took a significant position concerning the proper relationship between Parliament and Government on the procurement of military assets.

These are good intentions that we hope will be effectively implemented. Hopefully, it will happen with all the necessary contributions in order for the debate on defence matters to be finally free from the four weaknesses that in Italy have always kept it chained. I have already mentioned them, but let me repeat. The debate is not sufficiently in-depth; it is not regular; it is quite ideological; it is overly dominated by budget considerations that derive from a lack of real strategic debate, aside from the financial aspect. There is also a lack of transparency in the execution and the rules of international missions.

It is necessary to start calling things by their proper name again, not with verbal run-arounds. See for example "fleet coverage" during the First Gulf War, "comprehensive defence" in Kosovo, "reconnaissance" by fighter-bombers in Afghanistan and "protection of civilians" in Libya. In Syria, who knows what we might invent yet, given that the "responsibility to protect" has already been invented by the French, together

with the UN. What's more, our soldiers are capable and are praised by our partners. Not equally so, however, the Italian Government and Parliament that both leave a deplorable impression: that of "throwing a stone" pursuing foreign policy goals, and then "hiding the hand" to satisfy the domestic public opinion. This is not good, as those of us who have worked abroad know it very well.

This time we have the obligation to start off on the right foot. A new legal framework exists, and, for better or for worse, it is necessary for the General Staff, the Ministry of Defence, the Government, and the political forces to collaborate loyally in order to rapidly generate the necessary legislative decrees for its implementation.

We are in a time of emergency and unfortunately this new reform will have to take place, once again, by inverting the proper method of strategic planning which ought take place "before", but will in fact only occur "after" the budgetary decisions. This means that from an estimate of the financial resources that will be available, the size of the man force, the structures and the assets, and, consequently, what is habitually defined as the "sustainable level of ambition" will descend like a waterfall. In this process, spending review and the reform of the military must go hand in hand as, for all practical purposes, the former comes before the latter as its the first step.

The discussion about the financial decrees on missions abroad could be very long, but here it cannot and must not become analytical. At a political level, one would have to include at least the concepts of *Smart Defence*, *Smart Procurement* and *Pooling and Sharing*, confronting the ensuing re-allocations, including the industrial domain. In this case too, some indications could be provided when adopting the decree, given that in this field the word "specialization" is just about synonymous with "revolution".

The main on-going programs have already been thought out on the basis of these concepts. But we note that they must constantly steer across ideological - not to call them sectarian - minefields, even more than financial hurdles. Finally - it is not at all too soon - a reflection should be spared on the future of the dual character of Space, before the military expertise that has been so patiently accumulated in this area will be completely dissipated.

One last thing, before leaving the floor to the first session: after many years we have learned that every restructuring involves an expense upfront, while the savings come later. This should not be a surprise, and must be accepted.

First session: The debate on Italian missions abroad

The speakers of the first session:

Nicola Latorre

President of the Senate Defence Commission

Antonello Biagini

Vice Rector for Cooperation and International Relations, University of Rome, "La Sapienza"

Gianluca Ales

Foreign Affairs Correspondent, Sky TG24

Stefano Cont

Chief of the Office for Military Policy of the cabinet of the Minister of Defence

Summary of the debate

The first session of the conference was devoted to the debate on Italian missions abroad. Two central features were identified in this regard: the admissibility under Art. 11 of the Italian Constitution and the Italians' approach to military operations abroad.

Art. 11 and the need for a well-defined legal framework

The link between foreign policy and defence policy on the one hand, and between them and Italian participation in missions abroad on the other, emerged clearly during the debate. Indeed, defence policy today is predominantly identified with the international missions that are one of its structural components. Thanks to them, Italy has been able to continue to have a role in the geopolitical changes that are taking place in the world. The awareness of this role on the international stage clashes, however, with an inadequate legal framework: in the absence of appropriate legislation regarding the authorization of the missions, each new financial appropriation occurs by law decrees (essentially instruments of urgent legislation) that do not take into due consideration the national interest nor do they allow to properly identify the rationale for intervention. The present legislature, according to the hopes expressed during the debate, should therefore have a constituent role on defence policy, in order to re-define this strategic asset in a European perspective.

The need for a well-defined legal framework is reflected on Italy's international position and, in particular, fits into the perspective of an ever greater defence integration at a EU level, a feature that was advocated by the majority of the speakers in the debate. In effect, as emphasized in the course of the conference, the Italian engagement in the missions abroad has historically occurred under the aegis of international organizations by way of a conscious transfer of power, a deal necessary in order to pursue a greater common security. That meant an ever greater participation whose basis is Art. 11 of

the Constitution, which was frequently mentioned during this first session. At the same time, Art. 11 has often been exploited and has been the subject of interpretations with the main purpose of highlighting the “repudiation of war”, to the extent that the Article has also been the subject of electoral campaigns.

As emphasized in the course of the debate, the reading of Art. 11 is often divided into two parts: the first referring to the repudiation of war as a mean of aggression, and the second related to the participation in international organizations committed to the promotion of justice and peace among nations. In the course of the first session the arbitrary character of such subdivision was underlined. As a matter of fact, it was not planned in the original text by the constituents. They rather deliberately did not insert any punctuation marks, in order to link one part to the other in a continuous sentence and therefore to highlight the connection between the repudiation of war and the obligation to participate in certain actions under the umbrella of international organizations. An obligation that Italy cannot eschew and is the main motivation for the launch of missions abroad. In fact, it is difficult to identify a clear national interest in certain contexts that have recently seen Italy’s participation in such missions (for example the case of East Timor). In the absence of a rationale for the intervention, there is no way to extrapolate a national interest, which is actually seen as a selfish motivation. For this reason, when a debate starts on Italy’s engagement in a mission, often it is not to discuss the national interest but to defend a partisan viewpoint. The involvement in the missions becomes also a way to ensure the allocation of the financing for the maintenance of the equipment and the training of the personnel deployed. The reason is that, among the three main components of the defence budget - personnel, operations, investments - “operations” including expenditures for training and maintenance are traditionally the most subject to cuts. Funding is thus assured by the decrees which finance the extension of the missions. This mechanism entails another risk that will probably arise when certain large-scale missions will be concluded and some training and maintenance will no longer be funded: the Italian military will risk not to have the means to continue training even at home.

Finally, the debate was centred on Italy’s role in supranational organizations, with special reference to relations with the European Union, to integration in the defence field, and to Italy’s role in light of its geographic position in the Mediterranean. In this regard, the important opportunity identified in the course of the conference is the European Council of December 2013 that will meet for the first time with the participation of the Chiefs of General Staff of the Member States. It will be followed by the Italian Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2014, another opportunity to reflect upon a strategic outlook that would be shared at an Italian and European level.

Italians’ opinions on the missions abroad and the media role

A second topic that was tackled in this first session was the approach of the Italian public opinion concerning the missions abroad, in particular the Italians’ perceptions of the activities performed by the military. In this case the role and the responsibilities of the media are vital, as well as the amount of interest the Italian public shows for the issue.

First of all, it was pointed out that historically the missions abroad have had the merit of reconciling public opinion with the military, upon which a negative judgment has weighed since the end of World War II. Nevertheless, this has subsequently clashed with emotional or preconceived notions that have made the debate on the international missions increasingly difficult, resulting in the loss of the awareness on how competent and first-rate the Italian Armed Forces are. In the course of the conference, the need to rediscover this awareness has brought to the question of the lack of transparency by many actors involved in the dissemination of defence matters information. On the one hand, the responsibility to tell and explain the news befalls on those working in the media. On the other hand, the institutional actor has the duty, sometimes underperformed, to define and outline the foreign policy. Indeed, before *re-defining* the framework of defence matters, a clear *definition* of the national interest and its link with foreign and defence policy would be necessary.

Indeed the discussion made clear the responsibilities that the actors involved in the defence debate have towards the public which is often considered - wrongly - to be uninterested or passive with respect to the media coverage. Such a perception on public opinion was challenged by many during the conference. It was pointed out that there is a large share of audience quite interested and curious about defence matters which does not find adequate news coverage because of the media's presumption that the public cannot understand or feels an aversion to bad news. This was the case, for example, of the intervention in the former Yugoslavia when public opinion was characterized by an ambivalent attitude. At first it was critical for the lack of action to help the neighbouring Balkans, tormented by civil war, then it was accusatory with regards to the consequences of the military intervention. At the same time, the relationship between the military and journalists has been marred by mutual distrust - this is was admitted by the participants - not least because at a practical level it is undeniably difficult to take responsibility for the safety of journalists in a war zone. This consideration has led to wish for a different approach by the media: they should exert a pedagogic role and have a new consideration of the public which is now more receptive and has substantially changed if compared to past stereotypes.

Second session: The debate on military expenditures

The speakers of the second session:

Lucio Malan

Member of the Senate Defence Commission

Sergio Parazzini

Associated Professor, Faculty of Economics and Law, Department of Economic and Social Sciences-DISES, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Cremona

Giancarlo Grasso

Senior Advisor, Finmeccanica

Summary of the debate

The second session of the conference was devoted to the question of military expenditures, a subject that is increasingly subjected to discussion and criticism, particularly with regards to the Italian involvement in programs to modernize the military equipment and the necessary investments in times of economic crisis.

In this second session, the topics addressed in the first part of the meeting were picked up again with a special attention to the availability of information and the valuable industrial impact of defence investments.

The need for more information

A first issue underlined by the debate was the lack of sufficient documentation and sufficient knowledge about the subject. In fact, at the beginning data were limited to the international arms trade. In particular, it has been difficult for research centres and think tanks to deal with defence matters due to lack of a common terminology as well as to the scarcity of institutional sources in Italy (particularly as compared with other European countries). These features explain why, historically, Italian public opinion is not adequately prepared and needs more information and tools to grasp the role and the importance of certain defence policy choices. To this end, the need for documentation should be addressed by the media, the academia, in particular experts and scholars, so as to create a background understanding defence policy issues.

As already highlighted during the first session, the Italian public's need "neutral" information that goes beyond ideological choices. That would allow for an adequate reasoning in support of each one's opinions and independently developed positions. In particular, the awareness of Parliament's function as representative of public opinion, emerged during the debate, given the importance of Parliament's role in making the decisions needed to defend the country's security. The concept of security was repeatedly defined during the debate as an evolving concept that needs to take into account global threats (reference was made, for instance, to cyber defence), and has supranational characteristics that, in turn, require a supranational defence framework.

The importance of defining standard requirements at the European level and pushing for a rationalizing of the defence industrial sector within the EU ambit was recalled.

The industrial and employment benefits from defence investments

The argument of the industrial and employment benefits of defence investments regularly comes up in support of Italian participation in modernization programs of the military equipment. According to the findings that surfaced towards the conclusion of the conference, in the current context of economic crisis the purchase of the F-35 aircraft should not be considered an obscenity nor a misappropriation of funds that could be devoted to other uses. In the framework of the conference, the emphasis was laid upon the need to transmit a message to public opinion regarding the importance of security, not only in terms of military preparation and readiness in responding to real threats at a national level, but also and mainly as an integral part of the international partnership that Italy entertains within the larger spectrum of international organizations. In the context of virtuous cooperation, the industrial investments are contingent upon the constant re-definition of the goals pursued by the partnership. However, a more rational scrutiny in terms of contributions, in light of national capabilities and ambitions, should be factored by the government. To this end, it is essential to be aware of the nature of contemporary threats. The so-called European component of NATO (in other words the 22 EU Member States that are part of the Atlantic Alliance) must be able to pursue a harmonization of the requirements, especially vis-à-vis the costs represented by the current European fragmentation in the defence field. This would benefit the industry, insofar as it would be a push for aggregation and greater efficiency and it would also enable a greater competitive posture on non-EU markets. It is therefore necessary to pursue investments that can translate into technological advantages, investments that also affect dual-use technologies as laid out in the seven-year EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation "Horizon 2020". It was stressed that if Europe does not want its defence industry to disappear, it must harmonize the requirements and support investments on the basis of a common planning.

In conclusion, special attention was paid to the multiplying factor of technology innovation, which is particularly high in the aerospace, security and defence industry, with the hope that this awareness will lead to the drafting of a White Book on *Industrial Defence Strategy*, needed for an adequate planning in the Italian industrial sector.

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Istituto Affari Internazionali

Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 00186 Roma
Tel.: +39/06/3224360 Fax: + 39/06/3224363
E-mail: iai@iai.it - website: <http://www.iai.it>
Send orders to: iai_library@iai.it