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Italian Interests and NATO: From Missions to Trenches?

by Alessandro Marrone, Paola Tessari
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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to contribute to the debate on the relationship between the national interests of Italy and NATO with regards to two crucial aspects of Italian foreign and defence policy. On the one hand NATO's function as an "insurance policy" for European and national security; a function that the current crisis with Russia could bring to a role of the politico-military "trenches" between the West and the Russian Federation. On the other hand, the NATO-led crisis management missions in which Italy participates. In particular, the first chapter frames the two themes taking into account the current international and domestic context. The second chapter focuses on NATO as an "insurance policy" for European and national security and thus on the recent evolution of the relationships with Russia. The third chapter deals with NATO's missions, in particular in Kosovo and in Afghanistan, as an instrument of the Italian foreign and defence policy. In the end, the conclusions highlight some elements of continuity and discontinuity of the Italian participation in international missions, and elaborate on the Italian position if NATO was to turn from an "insurance policy" to the "trenches" in its relationships with Russia. Both within NATO and globally, these are two closely related issues that should be considered pivotal when reflecting on an effective Italian defence policy, if this aims to safeguard national interests effectively.

Italy | Defence policy | Foreign policy | NATO | Russia | Ukraine | Military missions



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1. National interests and the Italian foreign and defence policy

The topic of national interests in relation to Italian foreign and defence policy is more actual than ever and for at least two reasons.

The first reason is the enduring economic crisis in Italy and in the EU, connected to the austerity measures adopted since 2011, that in turn made the public opinion extremely sensitive to any government decision concerning public spending in support of its international role, rather than of its domestic policies. As such, questions such as "How much does Mare Nostrum cost?" or "Why do we need to spend for the F-35 aircraft?" have become quite common, especially more than in the last twenty years (1991-2011), a period characterized by a considerable and increasing Italian participation in international missions under the aegis of the UN, NATO, the EU or through *ad hoc* coalitions.

The growing attention – if not the scepticism – in relation to the necessary spending on defence, and to a lesser extent on foreign policy, requires an effort of the decision-makers to explain the reasons and the goals of these investments with regards to national interests. The investments could be accepted by the public opinion – and by the electorate – as a satisfactory reason to support the Italian foreign and defence policy and the international missions.¹

The second reason that makes the link between national interests and foreign and defence policy even more important today is related to the changes occurred at the international level, that weaken the traditional landmarks of the Italian public debate on them. The weakening of the political consensus towards the European

¹ Interviews, 5 June, 23 June and 8 July 2014.

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integration process, highlighted by the relative success of the euro-sceptical parties in the latest European Parliament elections, makes the justification "This is what Europe is asking for" unpopular in all fields, including those regarding foreign and defence policy.

The deterioration of the relations between NATO and Russia, in particular with the crisis in Ukraine, put two Italian traditional national interests in contrast with each other: a solid political relationship with the US on the one hand, and a profitable economic relationship with the Russian Federation on the other. Instability in the Arab World since 2011 has led to critical situations in all the "enlarged Mediterranean"² and brought the Italian government – whose approach towards the Middle East and North Africa countries was based on dialogue with local establishments – to face two dilemmas. First, whether to intervene or not in a crisis, with disastrous consequences occurred both with the intervention in Libya and the non-intervention (until mid-2014) in Syria. Second, whether to support or not a transition from secular dictatorships, which is likely to end up in Islamist dictatorships.

At the global level, the paralysis of the United Nations, due to the transition to a multipolar equilibrium in which Western hegemony is challenged, has showed all the weaknesses of the multilateral institutions and of the international community *vis-à-vis* clear breaches of the international law, thereby removing another benchmark of the Italian defence policy and in particular of the participation in international missions.

In this context, a public, open, inclusive and in-depth debate about what are the Italian national interests in the current international context is necessary. These interests should guide a foreign and defence policy that is in principle designed to protect and promote them. This paper aims to contribute to this debate, by focusing in particular on the relationship between NATO and the Italian national interests. A relationship analyzed through a twofold interpretation: "missions" and the "trenches."

Scholars and experts have so far constantly stressed how the international security environment is "uncertain", "unpredictable", "changing", as such expressions can be found in almost every document which entails the crafting of a National Security Strategy, or a White Paper on Defence, adopted by Western governments over the past two decades.

² For a definition of "enlarged Mediterranean" see: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rapporto 2020. Le scelte di politica estera*, April 2008, p. 57, http://www.esteri.it/mae/doc/Rapporto2020_SceltePoliticaEsteri_090408.pdf; Italian Defence General Staff, *Il concetto strategico del Capo di Stato Maggiore della Difesa*, March 2005, http://www.difesa.it/SMD_/CASMD/CONCETTOSTRATEGICO/Pagine/default.aspx. The enduring importance of the Mediterranean and the "maritime security" for Italy has been further demonstrated by the focal point of two sessions within the international conference CPExpo Exhibition organised by the Italian Presidency of the European Council in Genoa on 9-10 December 2014.

In this condition of general uncertainty, at least two elements seemed to be acquired since 1991 – the year of the dissolution of the Soviet Union – onwards. On the one hand, the absence of a more or less direct military threat to the security and territorial integrity of the European members of NATO, including those which entered through enlargement phases taking place until 2009, when the Alliance eventually amounted to 28. On the other hand, the significant and constant activism of those same states in crisis management operations outside the territory of the Alliance under the aegis of the UN, the EU, NATO, or through *ad hoc* coalitions. These two characteristics have marked the evolution of NATO from a purely defensive alliance to a collective tool for crisis management. Together with the traditional task of ensuring the “collective defence” of the member countries according to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, this evolution is reflected in the latest Strategic Concept adopted in 2010. This adds two other “core tasks” for the Alliance, namely “crisis management operations” and the pursuit of “cooperative security” through the enlargement of NATO itself, through partnerships with third countries and other international organizations, and through policies of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament.

The absence of a direct military threat to NATO’s countries, coupled with “out of area” Western activism are two constant characteristics that have also marked the Italian foreign and defence policy. A policy that adapted to the new post-Cold War context and, to some extent, has attempted to seize the opportunities offered by the new contest in relation to the pursuit of national interests.

Today, however, these two features of Italian foreign policy seem to be more uncertain. Due to a number of reasons, including the Obama administration’s dwindling use of the US military in crisis areas partly as a result of budget problems, Western countries have intervened less in (even serious) crisis situations over the last years. And when the interventions did take place, as in the case of Libya in 2011 and in today-operations in Iraq and Syria, large scale and protracted ground operations have been avoided.

At the same time, fifteen years after NATO’s intervention in Kosovo, the war in Ukraine marked the return of an armed conflict in the Old Continent and represents a turning point in the relations with Russia, to the extent that it changed the perception of a direct military threat in some NATO member states.

This does not mean that Western countries will not continue to carry out crisis management operations through NATO joint military command, or under the aegis of the UN and the EU, as it is currently the case for Kosovo, Lebanon and the Gulf of Aden, and as it will happen with the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan from 2015. Similarly, it does not necessarily mean that collective defence will return to be the only *raison d’être* of NATO in the context of a new Cold War with Moscow. However, the Alliance member states are undoubtedly rethinking the role and weight of both the “missions” and the “trenches”, the latter represented by collective defence, and in many cases there is a certain revaluation of the latter at the expense

of the former.

At the same time, and in a paradoxical way, the correlation between the three “core tasks” of NATO has increased: suffice it to think that some missions such as ISAF, and the forthcoming Resolute Support, need logistical assistance from the Russian Federation, which in turn is perceived as a threat ex Article 5 by some member countries, but it definitely remains an interlocutor in an important partnership such as the NATO-Russia Council.

As a result, it is appropriate to reflect on the ongoing and past changes to discuss how Italy can or should continue to protect its national interests in today’s reality, and in particular in relation with NATO as both an “insurance policy” for the Euro-Atlantic security – if not the real “trenches” – and as a tool for the collective crisis management, i.e. the “missions” chapter.

This kind of reflection is particularly important for two reasons. On the one hand, it is significant because Italy has made its participation in international missions a key instrument – if not the best³ – not only of its defence policy, but also of its post-Cold War foreign policy, from the first Gulf War to Resolute Support. On the other hand, it is important since Russia is a noticeable commercial and economic partner for Italy, e.g. for the gas supplies necessary to ensure Italian energy security. From a certain perspective, for Italy the “trenches” refer not only to the role of NATO compared to external threats, but also to what the country has to defend within the Alliance, and in general within the international community, when its national interests diverge from those of the allied countries with regards to crisis management and /or relationships with states like Russia.

2. NATO as “insurance policy” and relations with Russia

Despite the acknowledged importance of international operations, NATO’s role as an “insurance policy” for Europe and Italy has not decreased. By “insurance policy,”⁴ we refer to the role played by NATO even after the Cold War by gathering democratic countries with strong common security interests within a politico-military apparatus ready to be deployed at any time. Usually, an insurance policy implies a constant investment by the contracting parties regardless of the actual occurrence of the danger against which they pay to be protected. Similarly, the role of deterrence that characterized the Cold War has not disappeared, even if NATO-Russia relations have improved, but remains crucial in the strategic calculations of the several actors involved in the European framework. Even the 2010 Strategic Concept addresses collective defence by extending and updating the “insurance

³ Interviews, 8 July and 12 September 2014.

⁴ See, among others, Stefania Forte and Alessandro Marrone (eds.), “L’Italia e le missioni internazionali”, in *Documenti IAI*, No. 12|05 (September 2012), <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai1205.pdf>.

policy” in light of the most recent threats to NATO member states, to the extent that the core task of collective defence comprises also mutual assistance not only against an attack ex Article 5 of the Washington Treaty but also “emerging security challenges where they threaten the fundamental security of individual Allies or the Alliance as a whole.”⁵

2.1 NATO enlargement and relations with Russia

NATO enlargement process is regulated by Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, which establishes that “the parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.”⁶ Indeed, Article 10 refers to the access of new member states as one of the means the Atlantic Alliance has to pursue the aim of security and stability in the North Atlantic area.

According to NATO study on enlargement published in 1995, the end of the Cold War was a unique opportunity to improve security in the Euro-Atlantic zone. To this end, NATO has undergone a process of transformation in order to serve interests resulting from the new international scenario and, thanks to the enlargement, it has been contributing to stability by encouraging and supporting democratic reforms in the former Soviet Union countries, pursuing cooperation and good neighbourhood policies.⁷ Indeed, among the requirements to access NATO, political criteria have gained more and more importance with respect to the military ones. Candidate countries should respect these parameters: a democratic system based on market economy; respect for minorities; commitment to pacific resolution of conflicts; and civilian and democratic control over the military, and participation to the institutional bodies of the Alliance.⁸ In 1991 NATO Strategic Concept, the allies had already “agreed on the need to transform the Atlantic Alliance to reflect the new, more promising, era in Europe.”⁹

The geopolitical context resulting from the end of the Cold War triggering the first enlargement phases led to the emergence of highly unstable situations in the former Soviet countries. According to some experts, such situations not only required strong NATO presence but also the enlargement of the Alliance to include countries

⁵ NATO, *NATO's Strategic Concept 2010: Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 20 November 2010, par. 4, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm.

⁶ NATO, *North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington, 4 April 1949, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

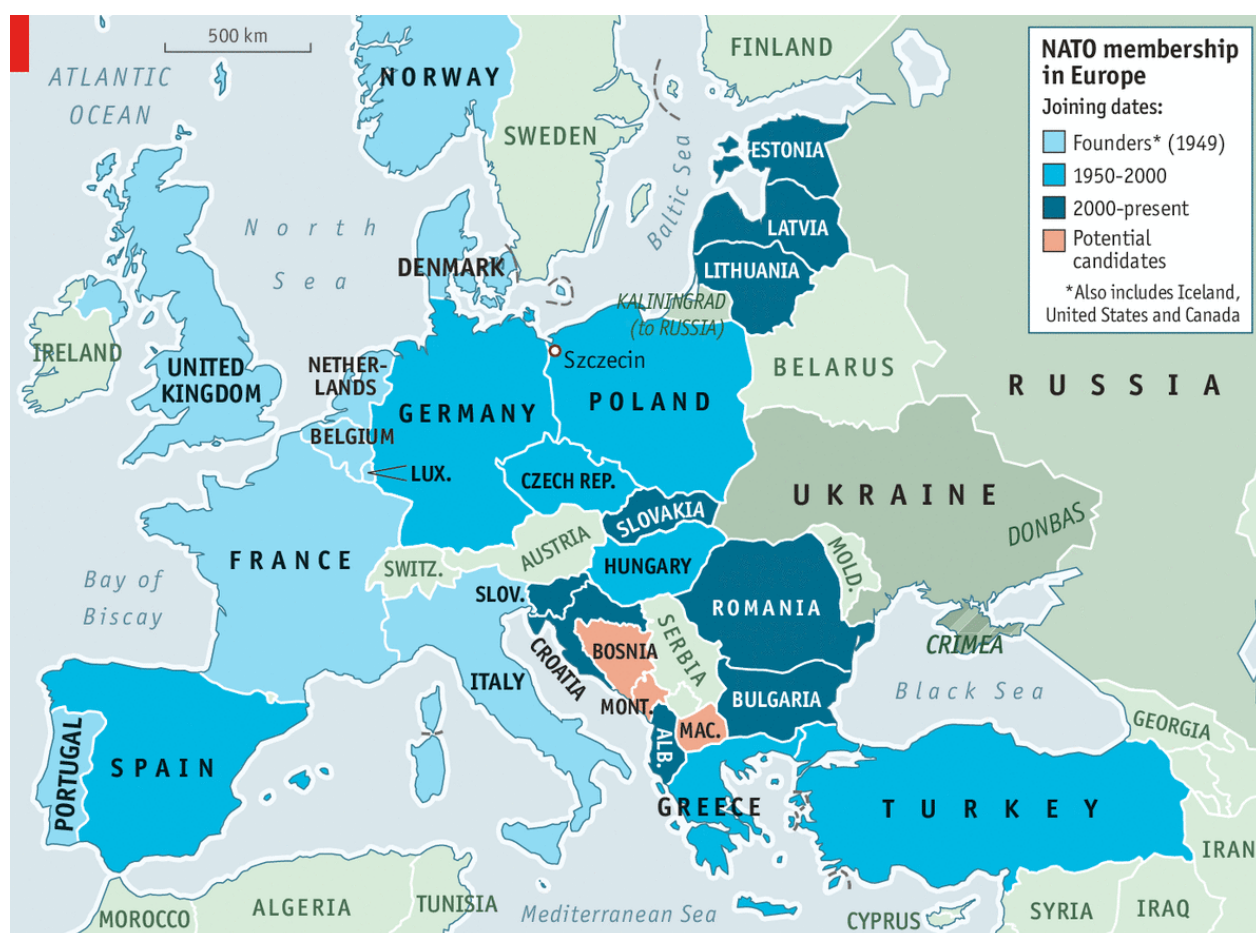
⁷ NATO, *Enlargement*, last modified 12 June 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm.

⁸ NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 1995, last modified 5 November 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_24733.htm.

⁹ NATO, *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, 1991, preamble, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm.

that were under the influence or even part of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ In fact, the Soviet Union played a role of guarantor for the unity of those countries belonging to it, and after its collapse they became source of instability and potential threats to the equilibrium and the security of the Euro-Atlantic region.¹¹ Furthermore, they were experiencing a substantial process of transition towards democratic systems and market economy and for this reason they needed a strong point of reference.

Figure 1 | NATO enlargement, 1949-2009



Source: "NATO flexes its muscle memory", in *The Economist*, 30 August 2014, <http://econ.st/1pkLGkw>.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, at 1997 Madrid Summit, NATO officially invited Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to join the Alliance: they formally joined

¹⁰ Margarita Assenova, *The Debate on NATO's Evolution: A Guide*, Washington, The CSIS Press, March 2003, p. 15, http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/NATO_Debate_guidebook.pdf. http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/NATO_Debate_guidebook.pdf.

¹¹ Mario Boffo, "L'allargamento e le altre trasformazioni della Nato all'alba del terzo millennio", in *Studi Urbinati*, ser. A, vol. 54, n. 3 (2003), p. 341, <http://ojs.uniurb.it/index.php/studi-A/article/view/357/349>.

in 1999. In the same years the European Union as well was enlarging towards East. In 1997 Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary became candidate countries and formally entered the European Union in 2004, together with the three Baltic Republics. Being aware of NATO role in the maintenance of peace in Europe, and because of the evident connection between the accession to NATO and the accession to the European Union, many Western Balkans and former Soviet countries started to express their will to join the Alliance. This confirmed the role of NATO as "a political and strategic heritage, too important and too refined to be dismissed."¹² Indeed, the enlargement process was also a reply to those arguing that NATO role had been annulled by the end of the Cold War. A second phase of enlargement was taken in 2004, when Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Romania, entered the Alliance; Albania and Croatia joined NATO in 2009.¹³

It is worth underlying that NATO presence in the Balkans in the first place helped to guarantee stability in an area that, for its geographical position, significantly influences the definition of Italian interests.¹⁴ During the Cold War, NATO safeguarded the entire Western Europe, Italy included, providing a deterrent function against potential armed attacks. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO confirmed its role as guarantor of the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area, actively participating to the process of pacification and stabilization of the Balkans, an area which, following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia was becoming a dangerous breeding ground for conflicts close to Italian borders.¹⁵ As a new "security demand"¹⁶ was emerging, NATO was able to respond with a renewed approach to crisis management. Thereupon, NATO has started conducting operations in former Yugoslavia, where it is still present guaranteeing domestic security in these territories with peace-keeping missions, which have monitored and assumed the internal stability of states established after the dissolution of the Yugoslavia federation.¹⁷

Many Italian stakeholders acknowledged the strategic interests that Italy has in the Western Balkans and the necessity of pursuing the normalization of the situation in the area, involving those countries in both the European and the Atlantic security projects. In particular, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini focused on this issue during the 2009 Prague Summit and during the High Level Political Forum EU-Western Balkans, in June 2010.¹⁸ If we address

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ NATO, *Enlargement*, cit.

¹⁴ Interviews, 8 July and 13 September 2014.

¹⁵ David S. Yost, *Nato's Balancing Act*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2014, p. 292.

¹⁶ Alessandro Colombo, *La lunga alleanza. La Nato tra consolidamento, supremazia e crisi*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001, p. 171.

¹⁷ For instance the ongoing mission Kosovo Force (KFOR) since 1999 and the Stabilization Force mission (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1996 to 2004.

¹⁸ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Italy-Balkans Bilateral Relations*, last modified 26 August 2013,

the Euro-Atlantic security from an Italian perspective, the benefit deriving from the enlargement process is twofold. On the one hand, the stronger and broader Alliance has promoted democratic developments in the newly accessed countries, benefiting the economic stability as well; on the other hand, this process has contributed to the stabilization and the pacification of an area that is close to Italy as well as to its economy.

Nevertheless, the NATO enlargement process represents one of the most debated issue since the establishment of the Alliance, especially as regards the relations with Russia. At the beginning of the 1990s, American leadership itself did not agree on the advantage of NATO enlargement: it was perceived by some as a threat to the chances of cooperation with former Soviet countries and Moscow itself. Nevertheless, the enlargement and the "open door policy" were part of the most common American view of Europe as free, peaceful and united. Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton confirmed this idea respectively in 1989 and 1994 and highlighted that the enlargement would have represented a guarantee for the Atlantic security.¹⁹

Conversely, Russia has always considered NATO enlargement as undermining its national security to the extent that it is enlisted among the external threats in 2010 Russia military doctrine.²⁰ In order to justify this fear, those opposing the enlargement in the Russian leadership, have often referred to the so called "broken promise,"²¹ namely an alleged commitment by NATO not to extend its sphere of influence beyond united Germany borders. However, this is not confirmed by any binding document.²²

Another delicate issue between NATO and Russia, also this one linked to the membership of Eastern Europe countries, is related to the long-range anti-ballistic missiles shield, set up to protect NATO member states from attacks coming from the Middle East, Iran for example. In 2007, Bush announced his intention to establish missile interceptors and a radar station in the Czech Republic and Poland. Clearly, Russia opposed this initiative. This trilateral project involved, initially, the USA and the two Eastern European countries and became a NATO initiative during the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit.²³ Afterwards, in 2009, the Obama administration reframed the missiles system in the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), which put aside the idea of installing missile interceptors in Eastern Europe, and focused on mobile installations to be adopted by the American Navy in the Black Sea. Nevertheless, NATO members' participation in an integrated missile defence

http://www.esteri.it/mae/en/politica_estera/aree_geografiche/europa/balcani.

¹⁹ Ivo H. Daalder, *NATO in the 21st Century: What Purpose? What Missions?*, Washington, Brookings Institution, April 1999, p. 53, <http://brook.gs/1IKorrJ> (Chapter 3).

²⁰ David S. Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, cit., p. 291.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 292.

²² Ibidem.

²³ NATO, *Bucharest Summit Declaration*, 3 April 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

system was not rejected, as it was restated during the 2010 Lisbon Summit.²⁴ Since the Russians perceived the presence of missiles close to their territory as a substantial threat, the former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev promised first the deployment of Iskander Missiles in Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave in between Lithuania and Poland, and secondly the withdrawal from the Strategic Arm Reduction Treaty, on the basis of Article 4 forbidding the deployment of missile defence system "capable of reducing the effectiveness of the Russian Federation's strategic nuclear forces" and apparently breached by the US actions.²⁵ In order to avoid further contrast, NATO put serious effort to find equilibrium with the counterpart, initially by encouraging Russian cooperation in EPAA²⁶ but it did not take any obligation regarding the use of the anti-missile shield.²⁷ Moreover, because of the fact that it is impossible outsource collective defence obligations to non-NATO members,²⁸ then NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen pointed out that a potential cooperation would anyway be structured in two separate missile defence systems.

At the same time, it is worth underlying that both the Alliance and NATO made significant efforts to favour cooperation, through the maintenance of friendly relations and the promotion of dialogue that took the shape in the initiatives mentioned below. The commitment to cooperation is also reflected in 2012 NATO Strategic Concept, which stressed the importance of collaboration between NATO and Russia explaining that "we remain convinced that the security of NATO and Russia is intertwined and that a strong and constructive partnership based on mutual confidence, transparency and predictability can best serve our security."²⁹ Many instruments pursuing dialogue and collaboration have been established, for instance the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991; Russia access to the Partnership for Peace, in 1994; the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security few years later in 1997, establishing the Permanent Joint Council to facilitate common initiative in the security sector substituted by the NATO-Russia Council through the Pratica di Mare (Rome) Agreement, in 2002.³⁰

²⁴ NATO, *Lisbon Summit Declaration*, 20 November 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm.

²⁵ Marco Siddi, "Le spine nel fianco della difesa antimissile", in *AffarInternazionali*, 13 December 2012, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1933>.

²⁶ NATO, *NATO and Missile Defence*, Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the 2013 RUSI Missile Defence Conference, London, 12 June 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_101397.htm.

²⁷ Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), *U.S. Offers Dialogue But No Legal Pledge to Russia on Missile Defense*, 1 November 2013, <http://shar.es/13YxGw>.

²⁸ NATO, *NATO: Defending against Ballistic Missile Attack*, Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Royal United Services Institute, London, 15 June 2011, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_75473.htm.

²⁹ NATO, *NATO's Strategic Concept 2010*, cit., par. 34.

³⁰ Riccardo Alcaro and Valerio Briani, *Le relazioni della Russia con la Nato e l'Unione europea*, Roma, Senate, November 2008 (Contributi di Istituti di ricerca specializzati n. 103), http://www.iai.it/pdf/Oss_Transatlantico/103.pdf.

The NATO-Russia Council was established to encourage dialogue and confrontation over common areas of interests, like counter-terrorism, crisis management, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) non-proliferation, armament procurement controls. Moreover, the body also aimed at strengthening mutual trust, through the establishment of defensive measures against theatre ballistic missiles, rescue operations, military cooperation, defence system reform, emerging threats.³¹ In particular, the Council enabled cooperation between NATO and Russia in countering narco-traffic in Afghanistan. As part of this, in December 2005, NATO-Russia Council planned a training program for the military personnel in charge of tackling drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Central Asia.³² Moreover, Russia collaborated with NATO mission in Afghanistan, by opening a gate via its territory, to deliver supplies to ISAF personnel and giving support to Afghan Air Forces through NATO-Russia Trust Fund.³³

With respect to the mentioned activities, the Pratica di Mare Agreement played a key role in reconciling NATO and Russia intents in general, and between Italy and Russia specifically. Rome clearly benefited from what was then named the "Pratica di Mare spirit,"³⁴ which had a big impact on the already important economic relations between Rome and Moscow, which is a crucial commercial partner and supplier of raw material. As an example, Italy's dependence on Russian gas amounts to 43% of its total internal demand, and 30 out of 135 million of cubic meters of gas imported in the European Union from Russia are addressed to Italy.³⁵ According to some analysts, the strong dependence on Russian energy stopped many EU member states, among which Italy, Germany, Hungary, from taking a clear position when the Georgia crisis and the Ukraine crisis occurred, respectively in 2008 and 2014.³⁶ Furthermore, from a closer point of view, one can argue that Italy and Russia are bound by a "privileged relationship," as a result of the significant economic interests they mutually have. Indeed Italy is Russia's fourth commercial partner, and the two countries exchanged goods for 31 billion euro value in 2013. The privileged relation is also reflected in the 28 points agreement on finance, energy and industry, signed by the former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta and the Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Russian-Italian Business Forum in November 2013.³⁷ It is also true that

³¹ "Firmata l'Intesa Nato-Russia 'Uniti contro il terrorismo'", in *Repubblica.it*, 28 May 2002, <http://www.repubblica.it/online/esteri/natodue/vertice/vertice.html>.

³² Robert Śmigielski, "Afghanistan in Foreign Policy of Russian Federation", in *PISM Bulletin*, No. 45 (19 March 2010), p. 233, <http://www.pism.pl/index/?id=588e343066cf54ec3db5132231df7d68>.

³³ NATO, *NATO-Russia Council Expands Support to Afghan Air Force*, 23 April 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_99887.htm.

³⁴ Marco Siddi, "Italy-Russia Relations: Politics, Energy and Other Business", in Ludvig Zsuzsa (ed.), *Eurasian Challenges. Partnerships with Russia and Other Issues of the Post-Soviet Area*, Budapest, Institute of World Economics, 2012 (East European Studies No. 4), p. 76, <http://real.mtak.hu/id/eprint/6808>.

³⁵ Alice Passamonti, "Ucraina e questione energetica: cosa rischia l'Italia?", in *Reporter Nuovo*, 14 March 2014, <http://www.reporternuovo.it/?p=102994>.

³⁶ Stuart Gottlieb and Eric Lorber, "The Dark Side of Interdependence", in *Foreign Affairs Snapshots*, 5 August 2014, <http://fam.ag/1ARyJSL>.

³⁷ Antonella Scott, "A Trieste l'incontro Putin-Letta. Al Business Forum siglati 28 accordi", in *Il*

Italy receives gas supplies from other countries as well, like the Netherlands and Norway, Algeria and Libya but these latest, because of the highly unstable situation they are experiencing, cannot be taken as a guaranteed supplier in case Russia blocks its sources.³⁸

2.2 The implications of Russia-Georgia war in 2008

Despite the several initiatives to favour NATO-Russia dialogue, relations between the two worsened mainly in two occasions, the Georgian crisis, in 2008, and with the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. Several scholars argue that both occasions demonstrated that Russia gives priority to its national interests against any subscribed international obligations, pursuing a policy of "strategic solitude"³⁹ and resorting to the use of armed force to enhance its influence on the neighbouring countries.

At the 2008 Bucharest Summit the heads of state and government supported Ukraine and Georgia access to NATO, by affirming that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO."⁴⁰ However, this did not entail the formal launch of the access procedure through the Membership Actions Plan, supported by the United States but opposed by some EU members like France. However, Ukraine and Georgia could effectively see themselves in the future as NATO member states. However, prospects changed when in August 2008 the secessionist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia embarked protests against the Georgian government. The Georgian government intervened with the armed forces and troops arrived to Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia on 8 August 2008. While violence was escalating, Russian military was also deployed as a means to support the separatist republics and to extend Moscow influence and presence.⁴¹ Bombings did not end until 12 August 2008. The conflict ended in favour of Russia, through a ceasefire which was mediated by the European Union – and in particular by France that had the presidency of the EU by that time – on 15 August 2008 in Geneva.

Some argue that the Russian intervention in Georgia was part of a move planned before the crisis had broken up, as testified by the Russian troops presence at

Sole24ore.com, 26 November 2013, <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2013-11-26/trieste-corso-incontro-putin-letta-business-forum-siglato-ventina-accordi-152456.shtml>.

³⁸ Alice Passamonti, "Ucraina e questione energetica: cosa rischia l'Italia?", cit.

³⁹ Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening. Ramifications of Russian Aggression towards Ukraine*, Stockholm, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), June 2014, <http://www.foi.se/report?rNo=FOI-R--3892--SE>.

⁴⁰ NATO, *Bucharest Summit Declaration*, cit., par. 23.

⁴¹ Giovanni Gasparini, "L'Invasione russa e l'Unione europea", in *AffarInternazionali*, 2 September 2008, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=931>.

Georgian borders since the end of July 2008.⁴² Others claim that Moscow sent Russian forces as a support to a peacekeeping operation aimed at protecting Ossetia and Abkhazia against potential contrasts with Tbilisi.⁴³ The Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, in charge of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the conflict in Georgia, confirmed in the final report that there was no pre-planned armed attack by Russia.⁴⁴ Certainly, mutual accusations had been exchanged about troops deployed along both countries' borders in the months prior to the conflict.⁴⁵ Furthermore, one should recall that Russia had already carried out some initiatives that could be interpreted as favouring the two separating entities for example the release of Russian passports to Russian-speaking people of Abkhazia and Ossetia.⁴⁶

As a consequence, relations between Western countries and Russia deteriorated. Indeed, as the US condemned Russian initiatives against Georgia,⁴⁷ NATO-Russia Council work was suspended until March 2009, as well as cooperation with NATO in peacekeeping operations – a part from Afghanistan – but also the participation in the Partnership for Peace program.⁴⁸ In the aftermath, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev publicly declared that the intervention in Georgia aimed at preventing any further NATO enlargement into the former Soviet sphere.⁴⁹ In the end, the internal instability in Georgia together with Russian support to the secessionist republics, led to the suspension of the process for Tbilisi access to NATO.

In September 2014, NATO Wales Summit final declaration revived, at point 93, the possibility for Georgia to join the Alliance, by sustaining that: "At the 2008 Bucharest Summit we agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO and we reaffirm all elements of that decision, as well as subsequent decisions."⁵⁰ However, any actual

⁴² George Mchedlishvili, "Russia-Georgia War: Moscow's Loss?", in *Chatham House Expert comments*, 9 August 2013, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/193878>.

⁴³ Gilles Gallet, "Enseignements militaires et stratégiques du conflit d'août 2008 en Géorgie", in *Notes de la FRS*, No. 2/10 (5 February 2010), p. 5, <http://www.frstrategie.org/barreFRS/publications/notes/2010/201002.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Maura Morandi, "Rischio Abkhazia", in *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, 14 May 2008, <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Tutte-le-notizie/Rischio-Abkhazia-41523>.

⁴⁶ Aurel Braun, "NATO and Russia: Post-Georgia Threat Perceptions", in *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 40 (May 2009), <http://www.ifri.org/?page=contribution-detail&id=148>.

⁴⁷ According to some observers, the perception of Russia as a hostile country by the NATO members had already strongly emerged with the events in Georgia, especially in the case of Eastern European countries. This perception was then reaffirmed during the crisis in Ukraine in 2004 (interview 8 July 2014).

⁴⁸ Marcel de Haas, "NATO-Russia Relations after the Georgian Conflict", in *Atlantisch Perspectief*, Vol. 33, No. 7 (November 2009), p. 4-9, <http://www.clingendael.nl/publication/nato-russia-relations-after-georgian-conflict>.

⁴⁹ Denis Dyomkin, "Russia says Georgia War Stopped NATO Expansion", in *Reuters*, 21 November 2011, <http://reut.rs/sbLK3G>.

⁵⁰ NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration*, Newport, 5 September 2014, par. 93, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm. See also: NATO, *Chicago Summit Declaration*, 20 May 2012, par. 29, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm.

action towards Georgia – and Ukraine – access to NATO seems to be possible only after a normalization of the internal situation and, above all of relations with Russia, is achieved.

2.3 The implications of Ukraine crisis

The already soured relationship between NATO and Russia has been further affected by the crisis in Ukraine which began in November 2013. The crisis originated when the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych suspended the negotiation for the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU and soon after signed a deal with Russia in order to have a 33% discount on Russian gas and 15 billion dollars in credit.⁵¹

Yanukovych's actions were met with protests by the Ukrainian people gathering in Maidan Square and asking for his resignation, to which the President reacted with the use of armed forces on 29-30 November 2013.⁵² After three months, under the supervision of Poland, Germany and France, an agreement re-establishing the 2004 Constitution and limiting the President's power was reached.⁵³ Meanwhile, the government majority voted to modify the 2013⁵⁴ law that had introduced Russian as an official language in many Crimea regions and as a result, in the night 26-27 February 2014, pro-Russian groups occupied the seat of the Supreme Council of Crimea and of the Council of Ministers in the capital city Simferopol.⁵⁵ With the support of military and paramilitary Russian forces, the Russian majority in Crimea took the control and forced the government forces to leave the country. On 18 March 2014 after a referendum that declared its independence from Ukraine, Crimea was annexed by Russia. President Yanukovych fled the country and was replaced by Petro Poroshenko, elected on 25 May 2014, after elections were held in the Ukrainian area that were still under the control of Kiev.

The annexation of Crimea to Russia, a breach of international law, has a double meaning. On the one hand, it shows Putin's opposition to "Western interventionism" in Eastern Europe and, on the other hand, it is Moscow payback for Ukraine approach to the EU and the resulting loss of Russian influence on the peninsula.⁵⁶ Over the months, clashes have spread cross the Eastern part of the country where a majority of Russian-speakers live, and pro-Russian rebels still fight with the

⁵¹ Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening*, cit., p. 21.

⁵² Ibidem, p. 22.

⁵³ "Ukraine: Yanukovych Signs Deal on Ending Crisis, Rada Reinstates 2004 Constitution", in *The Voice of Russia*, 21 February 2014, http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014_02_21/Ukraine-passes-law-returning-to-2004-Constitution-1135.

⁵⁴ "Ukraine's New Language Bill Will Be 'Balanced' - Acting Leader", in *Sputnik International*, 27 February 2014, <http://bit.ly/1mIk18A>.

⁵⁵ Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening*, cit., p. 21.

⁵⁶ Paolo Calzini, "Cosa vede l'occhio di Mosca", in *AffarInternazionali*, 25 March 2014, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=2581>.

support from Moscow based on the right to protect Russian people in Ukraine. The Ukrainian crisis has been marked by other tragic facts, for instance the shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines plane MH17 on 17 July 2014 which caused the death of 298 passengers.⁵⁷ However, such episodes fall out of the scope of this paper which aims, instead, at analysing the politico-strategic aspects of the events taking place in Ukraine. In fact, it is worth underlying that the crisis is considered by some experts as the worst episode marking NATO- Russia relations since the end of the Cold War. NATO leaders have reaffirmed that relations with Russia will not continue "business as usual" after Ukraine.

The crisis also shows how Russia feels threatened by NATO presence in the former Soviet countries,⁵⁸ and this fear is reflected not only in the use of armed force but also in the establishment of multilateral organizations gathering countries under Russian influence. This is the case, for example, of the custom union among Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The custom union was established in 2010 and will become the Euro Asian Economic Community (EAEC) in 2015. It will comprise a space of free movement of goods, services, capitals and workers, and it will also pursue the definition of a common policy in key areas such as energy, industry, agriculture and transports.⁵⁹ Armenia and Kyrgyzstan would possibly join the EAEC in the future. Apparently, both the military intervention, as well as the custom union, are part of a bigger framework of foreign and domestic policy, aiming at safeguarding Moscow interests in the neighbouring countries and at enhancing the support for its leadership among Russian citizens, as the guarantee of Russian people unity, values and interests as an alternative to European integration and NATO.⁶⁰ These elements emerged also during the elections held for the Ukrainian Parliament on 26 October 2014 won by the democratic and pro-European party of President Poroshenko. At the same time, other elections were organized within the autonomous Republics of Lugansk and Donetsk, in breach of the Ukrainian Constitution, and for these reasons the results are considered invalid by the European Union.⁶¹

In order to overcome the opposition between the EU and Russia, a solution might be found in an approach which aims at granting support to certain countries without pursuing formal NATO membership. The European Union could also contribute in this sense with any attempt to make the association agreement with Kiev compatible with the Eurasian Economic Union.⁶²

⁵⁷ Claudio Salvalaggio, "Missile abbate un aereo malese in Ucraina, 298 morti", in ANSA, 18 July 2014, http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2014/07/17/aereo-di-linea-malese-caduto-in-ucraina_3ca655eb-a994-4bcd-9d85-cd9f2e15a365.html.

⁵⁸ Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening*, cit., p.15.

⁵⁹ "Nasce l'Unione economica euroasiatica: Putin rafforza i legami con le Repubbliche ex sovietiche", in RaiNews, 29 May 2014, <http://shar.es/13YDwE>.

⁶⁰ Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening*, cit., p. 25.

⁶¹ Francesco Giumelli, "Chi paga i costi delle sanzioni alla Russia?", in *AffarInternazionali*, 20 October 2014, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=2844>.

⁶² Margarete Klein and Markus Kaim, "NATO-Russia Relations after the Newport Summit

While the situation has been aggravating, Western leaders have repeatedly called for a politico-diplomatic solution of the crisis. In particular, NATO response to the events so far has been structured according to three elements. Firstly, the Alliance has been reassuring its Eastern member states by enhancing the military presence in the area, the air force patrolling the Baltic regions, and allied joint exercises with Eastern European countries. Secondly, NATO has been providing both financial and military support to Ukraine. Finally, the Alliance has suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia,⁶³ including training against narco-traffic, terrorism, support to disarmament and WMDs proliferation.⁶⁴

The Ukrainian crisis and the need for effective response by the Alliance was the core of the Wales Summit held on 4-5 September 2014 in Wales. The Summit agenda, that was expected to focus on the end of operation ISAF in Afghanistan in December 2014, on Resolute Support and on NATO interests in the Persian Gulf and maritime security, focused instead on the relation with Russia.⁶⁵ NATO leaders agreed on the so-called "Readiness Action Plan",⁶⁶ with a spearhead unit represented by a very high readiness force comprising land troops ready to deploy within a few days with air, sea and Special Forces support. The spearhead unit also includes command and control systems, pre-positioning supplies and equipment in member states with the objective to send a clear message; "NATO protects all Allies, at all times," as it was stated by Secretary General Rasmussen.⁶⁷ According to the Readiness Action Plan, NATO presence in Eastern Europe will be organized on a rotating basis in order not to violate the Mutual Act signed with Russia in 1997: a solution that reassures new NATO members. NATO also plans to carry out joint exercise in Ukraine⁶⁸ and to adopt measures to help Ukraine in the following sectors: rehabilitation for injured troops, cyber defence, logistics, and command and control and communications. NATO's assistance to Ukraine will amount to around 15 million euros.⁶⁹

Reassurance, Cooperation and Security Guarantees", in *SWP Comments*, No. 41 (October 2014), p. 4, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publications/swp-comments-en/swp-aktuelle-details/article/nato_russland_beziehungen.html.

⁶³ NATO, *Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers*, Brussels, 1 April 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108501.htm.

⁶⁴ "Ucraina, Ue: ipotesi nuove sanzioni contro Mosca; Londra: oltre 4.000 soldati russi nel paese", in *RaiNews*, 20 August 2014, <http://shar.es/13YD6C>.

⁶⁵ Michael Clarke, "The NATO Summit: The Long Agenda of One Item", in *RUSI Newsbriefs*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (September 2014), https://www.rusi.org/go.php?structureID=articles_newsbrief&ref=A54059C6251C64.

⁶⁶ Alessandro Marrone, "La Nato e la partita con Mosca", in *AffarInternazionali*, 1 September 2014, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=2793>.

⁶⁷ NATO, *NATO Leaders Take Decisions to Ensure Robust Alliance*, 5 September 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_112460.htm.

⁶⁸ Lorenzo Biondi, "C'è l'accordo tra Ucraina e ribelli. Renzi: valuteremo su sanzioni se la tregua regge", in *Europa*, 5 September 2014, <http://www.europaquotidiano.it/?p=316005>.

⁶⁹ NATO, *NATO Leaders Pledge Support to Ukraine at Wales Summit*, 4 September 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_112459.htm.

As concerns the enlargement, NATO will always adhere to the "open door" policy, defined by the Secretary General an "historic success", that will continue to be applied to those countries meeting the membership criteria and that should not stop *vis-à-vis* any third country's veto – clearly referring to Russia.

The European Union as well has reacted imposing sanctions to Russia, directed against the financial, defence and energy sectors and freezing international lending to the five major Russian banks, prohibiting exports of dual use goods and technology, and certain energy-related equipment and instruments.⁷⁰ Sanctions against the energy sector have been raising deep concern in Europe, since the EU imports one third of its oil consumption and one fourth of gas from Russia, with the 53% of the latter passing through the Ukrainian territory.⁷¹ After the EU adopted such measures, Russia responded with a number of counter-sanctions banning imports of food products from the EU, Canada, Australia and Norway, and it is ready to extend them to technology and textile industry. The first effects from the sanctions will probably hit Russian economy in the near future, since it was already in a difficult situation before the crisis. In fact, the projections for Russian GDP growth in 2015 were cut from 2% to 1%, and inflation is expected to rise from 5% to 6.5% in the same year.⁷² Moreover, Russian banks owe 600 billion dollars to foreign financiers, whose loans will be suspended due to the sanctions against money flows to Russia.⁷³ Furthermore, in the first quarter of 2014, Moscow has lost 41% of its usual profit from gas exports.⁷⁴

As concerns more closely the impact of sanctions and counter-sanctions on Italian economy, in March 2014 Ernesto Ferlenghi, President of Confindustria Russia, expressed his concern to the President of Confindustria (the main organization representing Italian industry) Giorgio Squinzi and asked Italian stakeholders to take into account the interests of Italian companies in Russia and the damage caused by the sanctions.⁷⁵ In fact, according to the Italian Trade Agency, Italian exports to Russia have decreased by 25% corresponding to a loss of 100 million euros for each sector. As regards the years 2014-2015, the loss could reach an amount between 938 million and 2.4 billion euros.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ European Union, *EU sanctions Against Russia over Ukraine Crisis*, <http://europa.eu/!Vy68pK>.

⁷¹ Alice Passamonti, "Ucraina e questione energetica: cosa rischia l'Italia?", cit.

⁷² "Sanzioni in Russia: allarme inflazione: ora prevista al 6,5%", in ASCA, 26 August 2014, http://www.asca.it/news-*_Sanzioni__in_Russia_allarme_inflazione__ora_prevista_a_6_5_PERCENTO_-1416354.html.

⁷³ European Union, *EU sanctions Against Russia over Ukraine Crisis*, cit.

⁷⁴ Sissi Bellomo, "Allarme gas dalla Polonia: dimezzate le forniture di Mosca", in *IlSole24Ore.com*, 11 September 2014, <http://24o.it/2N50ER>.

⁷⁵ "Ucraina: Confindustria Russia a Squinzi, sanzioni preoccupano", in AGI, 14 March 2014, <http://confindustriarussia.it/ucraina-confindustria-russia-a-squinzi-sanzioni-preoccupano>.

⁷⁶ Giovanna De Maio, "Sanzioni alla Russia, boomerang sul made in Italy", in *AffarInternazionali*, 2014, forthcoming.

With reference to the energy sector, the crisis in Ukraine has already hit Russian gas flows to Kiev, whose price could rise by 200 dollars every thousand cubic meters, while so far Ukraine has been receiving gas at a significantly low price if compared to the average.⁷⁷ If Russia suspended its supply to Ukraine, the latter could use part of the gas passing through its territory and directed to Europe in order to satisfy the internal demand. This would undermine energy supply of many European countries, above all those entirely depending on Russian gas, but also Italy whose gas sources other than Moscow are located in highly unstable countries such as Libya.⁷⁸ One step towards a solution was taken with the conclusion of an agreement between Russia and Ukraine at the end of October 2014, thanks to the mediation of the Vice President of the European Commission Gunther H. Oettinger. According to the agreement, Kiev will have to solve its 4 billion dollar debt to Gazprom by the end of 2014. Regarding new supplies, Ukraine committed to pay monthly about 385 dollars per cubic metre until the end of 2014.⁷⁹

However, after this agreement was reached in the energy sector, on the same days NATO intercepted an unusually high number of Russian fighter flying over international air space in the Baltic region.⁸⁰ Since the aircraft did not file their flight plans and did not maintain radio contact with civilian air traffic control, they posed a serious risk to civilian air traffic. The contrast between Russia and NATO aggravated when President Barack Obama accused Russia of breaching the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed in 1987 requiring the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate and permanently renounce to their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometres.⁸¹ Obama's accusation originated from the development and testing of ground-launched cruise missiles carried out by Russia since 2008, representing a serious threat to the United States and all NATO members.⁸²

⁷⁷ Nicolò Sartori, "Sul gas Mosca e Kiev ai ferri corti", in *AffarInternazionali*, 23 June 2014, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=2702>.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ European Commission, *Breakthrough: 4,6 billion dollar Deal Secures Gas for Ukraine and EU*, 30 October 2014, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1238_en.htm.

⁸⁰ NATO Allied Command Operations, *NATO Tracks Large-Scale Russian Air Activity in Europe*, 29 October 2014, <http://www.aco.nato.int/nato-tracks-largescale-russian-air-activity-in-europe-2.aspx>.

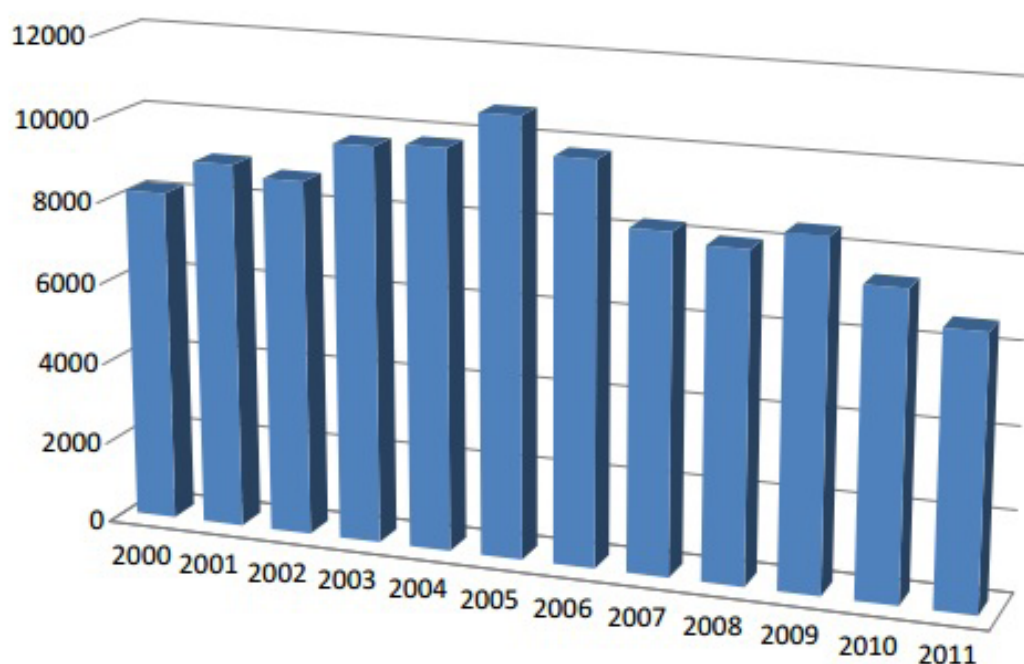
⁸¹ Oleg Nekhay, "Gli Stati Uniti hanno accusato la Russia di aver violato il trattato sulle armi: possibile una risposta adeguata", in *La voce della Russia*, 31 July 2014, http://italian.ruvr.ru/2014_07_31/Gli-Stati-Uniti-hanno-accusato-la-Russia-di-aver-violato-il-trattato-sulle-armi-possibile-una-risposta-adeguata-5915.

⁸² "US Accuses Russia of Nuke Treaty Breach... But Has It?", in *RT News*, 30 July 2014, <http://on.rt.com/l6qj3p>.

3. NATO missions as an Italian foreign and defence policy tool

In the period following the Cold War, Western nations embarked on a broad assortment of international missions in various operational theatres, chiefly in the Balkans, Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. For the most part United States-led, the missions also saw the strong, albeit asymmetrical, presence of European countries such as France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. During the 1990s, Italy averaged more than 20 missions annually, which went up to 30 in 1999 and remained at that level for the entire decade following 2000, a period in which the Italian Armed Forces deployed an average of 8,700 troops annually.⁸³ Nevertheless, this considerable engagement in such missions did not result in adequately serving Italian national interests⁸⁴ and yielded returns that could be defined as limited.⁸⁵

Figure 2 | Italian Armed Forces participation in operations abroad in the last decade



Source: Stefania Forte and Alessandro Marrone (eds.), "L'Italia e le missioni internazionali", cit., p. 49.

⁸³ Italian Chamber of Deputies-Research Office, *Nuovi profili della partecipazione italiana alle missioni militari internazionali*, Roma, June 2010 (Quaderni No. 4), <http://documenti.camera.it/leg16/dossier/Testi/di0238.htm>.

⁸⁴ Interviews, 5 June, 23 June and 8 July 2014.

⁸⁵ Interviews, 5 June and 13 September 2014.

This sustained, large-scale deployment of Italian troops took the form of increasingly challenging and perilous mandates that included combat tasks. A full 134 Italian troops lost their lives on foreign missions between 1990 and 2012 – four times the number (30) that fell on missions in the forty years between 1949 and 1989. Deployment in operations that include combat tasks is a significant evolution in Italy's post-Cold War foreign policy: indeed, the use of armed forces in international missions has progressively become an instrument not only of defence policies directly concerned with national security, but also of foreign policies focused on the pursuit of more general national interests objectives. This latter category includes, for example, maintaining solid relations with the United States and bolstering Italy's role both specifically within NATO as well as in the more broadly understood international community.

3.1 The United States, the Atlantic Alliance and Italy's international status

The goal of maintaining good and close relations with Washington is nothing new in the history of the foreign policy of the Italian Republic. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has been the cornerstone of Italian national security as well as of the system of alliances of which the country is part, principally – but not solely – as a consequence of the Cold War.

According to one interpretation widely embraced by scholars and pundits, Italy is surrounded by unstable regions stretching from the Western Balkans to the southern banks of the Mediterranean and, unable to influence developments in those areas on its own, has historically relied on "asymmetrical alliances" with more powerful partners to protect what are in some measure common security interests.⁸⁶ For instance, with the outbreak of the Western Balkans crisis in the early 1990s, it was in Italian interests to adopt a multilateral and institutionalised approach to confronting issues concerning former-Yugoslavia and Albania, including NATO's active presence in the region for the purpose of low-intensity crisis resolution.⁸⁷ Moreover, Italy's economic structure, as an importer of raw materials and energy resources and exporter of goods and services, necessarily leads to global interests, ranging from security to trade routes to the stability of areas geographically and/or functionally linked with interests that the country lacks the political and military strength to defend alone.⁸⁸ From this standpoint, the Italy considers the United States a guarantor of the security of Europe, and also to some extent of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and other regions of the world and, therefore,

⁸⁶ See, among others: Alessandro Colombo and Ettore Greco (eds.), *La politica estera dell'Italia. Edizione 2012*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012; Massimo De Leonardis (ed.), *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003; Antonio Varsori, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1998, only for the Cold War period.

⁸⁷ Roberto Menotti, "I rapporti politici transatlantici e la trasformazione della Nato", in Roberto Aliboni et al. (eds.), *L'Italia e la politica internazionale. Edizione 2000*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, p. 356-357.

⁸⁸ Stefania Forte and Alessandro Marrone (eds.), "L'Italia e le missioni internazionali", cit., p. 28.

useful to the pursuance of national interests – including, although not exclusively, security interests. In other words, beyond cultural affinities, historical heritage and the characteristics of Italian strategic practice, a rational calculation of interests has underpinned close bilateral cooperation, not least in the two decades following the Cold War.⁸⁹

Furthermore, as the focus of US foreign and defence policy started shifting from Europe and the Balkans to the “Greater Middle East”⁹⁰ in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, Washington began increasingly to assess the role of its European allies in function of their military and political contributions to American-led international missions.⁹¹ Italy’s participation in foreign operations consequently became fundamental to its standing with its US ally. It was already clear in the early 1990s that, in the new phase that began with the end of the Cold War, not backing the United States in military operations would put Italian foreign and defence policy at a disadvantage.⁹²

Finally, it must be considered that the post-Cold-War Italy-US relationship became more specifically predicated on collaboration in the defence industry, given its close intersection with both military and politico-diplomatic cooperation.⁹³ The 2000s saw not only an intensification in collaboration on international procurement programmes, as in the case of the F-35, but also an attempt by Italian firms to penetrate the American market, with Finmeccanica’s purchase of the American DRS Technologies firm and with the signing of a series of major contracts – some of which were later cancelled by the Obama administration. Virtually all Italian government coalitions in the post-Cold War period have considered good relations with the United States to be one of two key foreign and defence policy objectives, along with a firm anchorage to Europe⁹⁴ – in any case, with the centre-left tending to place the accent on Europe, and the centre-right on the Atlantic Alliance. Despite some clashes in periods of heightened tension between the United States and some of the leading European nations (as in the case of the 2003 military intervention in Iraq), Europeanism and Atlanticism were predominantly complementary. Rome focused on building a strong bilateral bond with Washington in order to strengthen Italy’s position *vis-à-vis* other European countries such as France and Germany.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Massimo De Leonardis, “Italy’s Atlanticism between Foreign and Internal Politics”, in *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No. 25 (January 2011), p. 17-40, <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/UNIS/article/view/UNIS1111130017A>.

⁹⁰ According to George W. Bush’s approach the “Greater Middle East” also includes Afghanistan and Pakistan.

⁹¹ CeMiSS-RAND, *Changing U.S. Defence Policy and the War on Terrorism: Implication for Italy and for US-Italian Relations*, Gaeta, Artistic & Publishing Co., 2002 (Collana CeMiSS No. 1.25), p. 46.

⁹² Sergio Romano, *Guida alla politica estera italiana*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2004, p. 258.

⁹³ For an up-to-date analysis see: Alessandro Marrone and Alessandro Ungaro, “Relations between the United States of America and Italy in the post-Cold War period: a defense industrial perspective”, in *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, No. 88 (June 2014), p. 157-181.

⁹⁴ Osvaldo Croci, “Much Ado about Little: the Foreign Policy of the Second Berlusconi Government”, in *Modern Italy*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (May 2005), p. 62.

⁹⁵ Leopoldo Nuti, “The Richest and Farthest Master is Always Best. US-Italian Relations in

This approach to relations with the US continued through the 1990s, during the crises in the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean. Overall, as underscored by some US authors,⁹⁶ maintaining good relations between Italy and the United States was an element of continuity between the Cold War and the period that followed it, despite the changes at domestic and international levels with which the various 1990s and 2000s Italian governments were forced to cope. This constant was accompanied by bilateral EU-member dynamics that continued to be those typical of European history: political rivalries, the formation of *directoires* for the management of crises pertinent to European security, and the continental and global status of some individual countries *vis-à-vis* others.

Dynamics of this sort have traditionally surfaced within the Atlantic Alliance and other multinational organisations that have a strong presence in Europe. These multilateral forums have been the main framework of reference for Italian foreign and defence policy, defining both the opportunities and the limits regarding Italy's international actions.⁹⁷ They have also become a means for reducing a military and economic capabilities gap between "middle" powers such as Italy⁹⁸ and major powers that render diplomatic efforts on a purely bilateral plane – while still useful and necessary – more difficult for Rome. This is another reason for Italy's continuing pursuit of a multilateral framework for its diplomatic and military action as well as a "seat"⁹⁹ in various international assemblies, including the various crisis management Contact Groups formed over time on the impetus both of the United States and principal European countries.

From this standpoint, NATO embodied the foremost warranty on Italian national security during the Cold War, and even afterwards remained an "insurance policy"¹⁰⁰ against any deterioration in the international scenario, as well as a means for

Historical Perspective", in David M. Andrews (ed.) *The Atlantic Alliance under Stress. US-European Relations after Iraq*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 189.

⁹⁶ See, among others: R. Craig Nation, "Intra-Alliance Politics: Italian-American Relations, 1946-2010", in Giampiero Giacomello and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *Italy's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century. The New Assertiveness of an Aspiring Middle Power*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2011, p. 48.

⁹⁷ See Roberto Menotti, "Italy's Growing Burden of Choice in Security Policy", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (September 2007), p. 431-444.

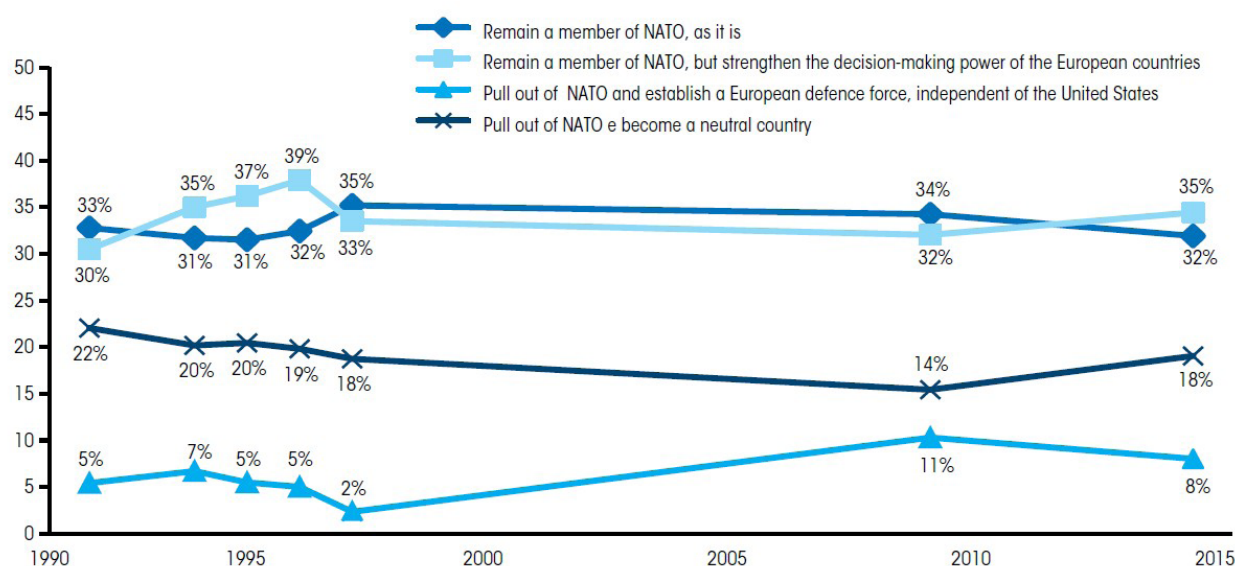
⁹⁸ For a definition of the concept of "middle power", see: Carlo M. Santoro, *La politica estera di una media potenza: l'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991; for a brilliant critique, see: Stefano Silvestri, "Italia o Italietta, al vertice o media potenza?", in *AffarInternazionali*, 17 July 2009, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1200>; for a discussion of the concept, see: Giampiero Giacomello and Bertjan Verbeek, "It's the Perception, Stupid! The Hard Life of Italy as a Middle Power", in Giampiero Giacomello and Bertjan Verbeek (eds.), *Italy's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century. The New Assertiveness of an Aspiring Middle Power*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2011, p. 13-28.

⁹⁹ The "seat" policy does not always have a positive meaning. See Angelo Panebianco, "Il paese disarmato", in *Il Mulino*, No. 349 = 5/1993 (September-October 1993), p. 898-904.

¹⁰⁰ The term has been used also in official speeches by the NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. See NATO, *A Strong Transatlantic Bond for an Unpredictable World*, Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Atlantic Council of the United States, Washington, 8 July 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/po/natohq/opinions_111614.htm.

extending the area of peace, security and freedom of Western, Eastern and Balkans/ Danubian Europe. However, NATO's functions have not been limited to those two alone. The Atlantic Alliance has also provided a fundamental framework for Italian foreign and defence policy as regards both the United States and its European allies. The management of missions through international organisations like NATO has made it possible to: extend areas of intervention in the defence of national interests in places too distant and/or too onerous for a single nation; share human and economic costs and risks; have a voice in setting coalition objectives in crisis areas; and strengthen solidarity among allies.¹⁰¹ Finally, NATO is the main vector for the modernisation of the Italian Armed Forces, and for keeping them inter-operable and technologically up to date with those of more militarily advanced allies¹⁰² and is, in turn, a means for strengthening relations with the United States and a certain standing within NATO and the international community in general. For all these reasons, keeping the Atlantic Alliance politically and militarily solid and operative has thus far been indispensable to ensuring national security.

Figure 3 | Perception of NATO's role: best for Italy



Questions: 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 2013: Which of the following solutions regarding the best way for Italy to provide for its security is nearest your point of view?; 1994, and 2008: Which of the following solutions on how best for Italy to provide for its security is nearest to your point of view?; 2013: Which of the following is nearest to your point of view regarding the best way for Italy to arrange for its security?

Source: Linda Basile, Pierangelo Isernia and Francesco Olmastroni, *Italians and Foreign Policy*, Research report by CIRCaP/LAPS (University of Siena) and IAI, 17 December 2013, p. 18, <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=1034>.

¹⁰¹ Stefania Forte and Alessandro Marrone (eds.), "L'Italia e le missioni internazionali", cit. p.44.

¹⁰² At first in the various Balkans missions and then in Afghanistan with ISAF, according to the majority of observers, Italy's participation in NATO missions offered a major opportunity for the Italian armed forces to build both credibility and operational capabilities (interviews, 5 and 7 June 2014).

More in general, Italian policy-makers have traditionally considered Italy's post-Cold War participation in international missions a means by which to bolster the country's position and credibility in key multilateral forums such as NATO, the UN, the EU and the G8.¹⁰³ Italy's contribution to international security was an asset, for instance, in successfully obtaining a non-permanent seat on the 2007-2008 UN Security Council, as well as in the wider diplomatic dispute over the Council's composition.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Italy has steadfastly supported including international mission participation as a criteria for selecting countries to sit on the Council. Such a parameter would undoubtedly give Rome an advantage over other competitors who – while they can point to other strongpoints (economic, demographic, and so forth) – do not make a comparable contribution to international security.

3.2 The Kosovo and Afghanistan missions: national interests and foreign policy

The interaction between the general objectives of Italian foreign policy with regard to the United States, NATO and the international community, and the direct national security interests at stake in crisis theatres, is clear in the cases of the operations in Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2002-2014).

Italy took part in the 1999 NATO Allied Force operation in Kosovo with more than 50 combat aircraft: Air Force Tornados, AMXs and F-104, and Navy AV-8Bs flew 1,072 sorties that clocked a total 2,903 mission flight hours.¹⁰⁵ Italy flew 3% of NATO sorties, against Germany's 2%, the United Kingdom's 5% and France's 6%, while the United States bore the brunt with more than 80% of all sorties.¹⁰⁶ Italy's military involvement was essential to the mission's launch, pursuance and success. This was not only, and not so much, consequent to the number of sorties but, above all, of logistics: more than 50% of the allied planes used on the mission took off from 12 NATO and US bases located on Italian soil – in proximity therefore to the operations theatre – and Italian ports on the Adriatic Sea.

¹⁰³ See, among others, Paolo Guerrieri and Stefano Silvestri, "New Alliances, Governance of the International System and Italy's Foreign Policy Choices", in *The International Spectator*, vol. 39, no. 1 (January-March 2004), p. 101-122.

¹⁰⁴ Fabrizio Coticchia, *Qualcosa è cambiato? L'evoluzione della politica estera e di difesa italiana dall'Iraq alla Libia 1991-2011*, Pisa, Pisa University Press, 2013, p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ Vincenzo Camporini et al., *The Role of Italian Fighter Aircraft in Crisis Management Operations: Trends and Needs*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, March 2014 (IAI Research Paper 10), p. 46, <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=1109>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

Table 1 | Sorties and corresponding flight hours – Operation Allied Force

General information (March 1999-June 1999)		
Coalition Forces	Chain of Command	UN Security Council Resolution
US (80%), France (6%), UK (5%), Italy (3%), Netherlands (3%), Germany (2%)	NATO	No

Italian contribution (March 1999-June 1999)		
Aircraft	Sorties	Flight Hours
22 Tornado, 6 AMX, 6 F-104 ASA, 6 Tornado IDS, 4 Tornado ECR/IDS, 4 F-104 ASA, 6 AV-8B	1.072	2.903

Source: Vincenzo Camporini et al., *The Role of Italian Fighter Aircraft in Crisis Management Operations: Trends and Needs*, cit., p. 46.

In the case of Kosovo, and of the conflicts that erupted in the Western Balkans in general in the wake of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, regional stabilisation efforts that included the use of force pursued a two-fold objective directly linked to national security. First, it contributed to containing, with the hopes of halting, a flow of refugees toward Italy that was beginning to create problems in terms of domestic public order, given the number of persons being taken in and the presence of criminal elements among them. The real threat of a new, massive and inexorable wave of migrants from across the Adriatic was fuelling debate among the Italian public and spreading the – not entirely unfounded – dread of wholesale exodus if the Serbian repression of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were not stopped.¹⁰⁷

The second objective directly associated with national security was to avoid the spread of destabilisation in a region adjacent to Italy along land and sea borders, whose dual threat included potential regional war and the creation of lawless havens for international organised crime. Right up to the start of NATO military operations in Kosovo – what's more, controversial and conducted without UN approval – Italy continued to favour a political solution in light of the risks associated with an intervention that could potentially trigger both an additional refugee influx and spiralling regional crisis.

¹⁰⁷ Carlo Scognamiglio Pasini, *La guerra del Kosovo*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2002, p. 54.

This approach was associated with a segment of the Italian elite's affinity for Serbia, for historical reasons (common struggle against Austria-Germany) and ideological reasons (affinities between the Italian Communist Party and the Tito regime). This position was combined in the early 1990s with another Catholic-based vision that had supported the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. Nevertheless, once it appeared obvious that the United States would lead NATO in a military operation against the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, the Italian government decided that direct participation in the mission, within the limits of possibility, would be the best way to influence its outcome. As stated afterwards by a member of the government at the time: "It was a question of deciding whether or not to have a share in the administration of Balkan security."¹⁰⁸ A participation that sought, for example, to moderate the military escalation against Serbia by using Italian bases exclusively for the bombardment of Kosovo, and not of Belgrade,¹⁰⁹ with a view to maintaining prospects for a diplomatic settlement with the Serbian regime and avoiding its collapse.

Nevertheless, these were not the only aims of the Italian government. Maintenance of Italy's position in the Alliance, of a solid relationship with the United States and of credibility at international level were equally compelling motives at the time. Indeed, it bears recalling that without the use of Italian military bases, the NATO air campaign would have been much less effective and infinitely more costly.¹¹⁰ Italy's position as an active, reliable and responsible member within the Atlantic Alliance was at stake: there was a perception among the leadership that Italy "had to" fulfil its pledges to NATO.¹¹¹ Furthermore, both in general and in the Kosovo crisis in particular, Italy's desire to share in the Alliance's strategic decisions meant shouldering tasks that proved relatively onerous for its Armed Forces.¹¹² Finally, the fact that the government was headed for the first time in the history of the Italian Republic by a former communist constituted an ulterior test of Italy's reliability as a NATO member and, therefore, one more way to prove the steadiness and reliability of Italian foreign and defence policy. A similar mechanism was triggered in terms of bilateral relations with the United States: the then-Prime Minister later admitted that, in a certain sense, it had been a question of "passing our exams".¹¹³

Finally, the recognition Italy sought from the international community was an important element in forging the country's position during the crisis: the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time stated that, regarding the NATO intervention in

¹⁰⁸ Umberto Ranieri, "Italy Proves Equal to the task", in *International Herald Tribune*, 12 June 1999.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 11 November 2014.

¹¹⁰ Italian Parliament, *Audizione dei ministri degli affari esteri, Lamberto Dini, e della difesa, Carlo Scognamiglio Pasini, sulla posizione del Governo italiano al vertice NATO di Washington del 23-25 aprile 1999*, 20 April 1999, http://leg13.camera.it/_dati/leg13/lavori/stencomm/0304/audiz2/1999/0420/pdfel.htm.

¹¹¹ Osvaldo Croci, "Forced Ally? Italy and Operation Allied Force", in Mark Gilbert and Gianfranco Pasquino (eds.), *Italian Politics. The Faltering Transition*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2001, p. 42.

¹¹² Fabrizio Coticchia, *Qualcosa è cambiato?*, cit. p. 163.

¹¹³ Massimo D'Alema, *Kosovo: gli italiani e la guerra*, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. 4.

Kosovo, Italy's cohesive conduct was "equal in importance to Italy's future rank in international hierarchies as to its participation in the single currency."¹¹⁴ This is especially true considering that European countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, against which Italian ambitions were measured, were preparing to make their active, albeit uneven, contribution to the operations.¹¹⁵ Indeed, it should be recalled that in the beginning of the Western Balkans crisis, Italy was excluded from the Contact Group formed by the United States, Russia and the principal European members, but was continuously involved in crisis management consultations between Washington, London, Paris and Berlin.¹¹⁶

Going on to the case of Afghanistan, in order to understand the reasons behind Italy's involvement in ISAF, the mission's importance for NATO and the United States must first be underscored. Firstly, the United States strongly advocated for a mission on Afghan soil, assuming its command uninterruptedly from 2007 onward as well as dictating the mission's objectives, (shifting) strategies and timetable and, in the meantime, insisting on increased contributions from its EU allies: both quantitative, in numbers of troops, as well as qualitative, e.g. fewer national caveats regarding their deployment.¹¹⁷ The George W. Bush administration asked European allies to boost their commitments in Afghanistan, not least in order to allow US armed forces to concentrate on the war in Iraq. It was no accident that NATO assumed the command of ISAF as of August 2003 and, on American impetus, began extending its range of action in 2004, eventually setting up regional command posts to cover the entire Afghan territory by the end of 2006. Pressure from the White House continued into the first term of the Obama administration, which, in 2009, decided to send in 51,000 American reinforcements for the purpose of bolstering the situation ahead of the subsequent withdrawal of combat troops.

This has been NATO's largest mission to date in terms of number of ground troops and combat vehicles, with a contingent that peaked at 131,000 troops in 2011, to drop down to 41,000 in 2014 – a much more massive military force than that of similar duration in the Western Balkans. At the same time, ISAF went from an initial peacekeeping phase, not unlike similar experiences in the 1990s, to one of full-blown counter-insurgency, with frequent, prolonged and fierce battles with insurgents. By September 2014 its death toll stood at 3,447, of which 2,508 were Americans.¹¹⁸ The mission witnessed the commitment not only of the 28 Alliance

¹¹⁴ Italian Parliament, *Audizione dei ministri degli affari esteri, Lamberto Dini, e della difesa, Carlo Scognamiglio Pasini, sulla posizione del Governo italiano al vertice NATO di Washington del 23-25 aprile 1999*, cit., p. 9.

¹¹⁵ Jason W. Davidson, *America's Allies and War. Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 98.

¹¹⁶ Roberto Menotti, "I rapporti politici transatlantici e la trasformazione della NATO", cit., p. 369.

¹¹⁷ See, among others, Alessandro Marrone, "Obama and Afghanistan. A Reality Check for European Expectations", in Birte Wassenberg and Giovanni Faleg (eds.), *Europe and the Middle East. The Hour of the EU?*, Brussels, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012, p. 81-94.

¹¹⁸ CNN, *Casualties: Afghanistan*, latest access 5 September 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/war.casualties>.

members, but also of 20 additional partners, for a total 48 armed forces under the command of ISAF, which, in turn, interacted with the UN and EU missions. For these reasons, and especially due to the importance Afghanistan held for the United States, ISAF has been NATO's principal mission for approximately a decade, as well as another fundamental testing ground for inter-alliance solidarity and for the Alliance's collective crisis management capacity.

ISAF's importance for NATO and the United States is key to explaining Italy's involvement in the mission. Italy has been participating in ISAF since it was launched in 2002, with a contingent that rose in number to over 4,000 in 2009, in line with the principal European countries, and ranked fourth behind the United States, the UK and Germany. Italy also made a significant contribution to the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, to the point of becoming, with the addition of another 200 instructors in 2010, the second largest contributor to that training mission after the United States. Moreover, Italy was placed at the head of the Regional Command West when it was created in 2005 as one of six regional commands into which the ISAF mission was divided. Headquartered in Herat, Italy remained Head of Regional Command West until 2014 and was the only European country, with the exception of Germany, to maintain that amount of military and political responsibility.¹¹⁹ Within the context of the rotating ISAF command, Italian General Mauro Del Vecchio took over leadership of the entire mission from 2005 to 2006. In addition to the ground-based component, Italy also utilised Tornado and AMX combat aircraft, whose 3,031 sorties from 2002 to 2014 clocked a total of 8,447 in-theatre flight hours, and were tasked with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), but also with supplying close air support to combat ground troops and air-to-ground attacks.¹²⁰ The mission, therefore, has been significant from political, diplomatic, economic and, above all, military standpoints. Italy lost 53 soldiers to the mission between January 2002 and August 2014 – the highest number of Italians fallen in military operations since the Second World War.

Various government coalitions have maintained Italy's pledge for over a decade.¹²¹ In attempting to analyse this decision, which differs from the case of Kosovo, no obvious link emerges between the use of military force in the Afghan theatre and the defence of national security: there was certainly no discernible risk of an increased influx of refugees, or of the general destabilisation of a region with geographical proximity to Italy. Undoubtedly, depriving international Islamic terrorism of a safe haven such as a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan would certainly have contributed

¹¹⁹ The other Regional Commands include: North, led by Germany; East, US-led; Capital (only Kabul), under the leadership of Turkey; South and South West, under US leadership (previously part of a single Command South under the rotating leadership of the UK, Canada and the Netherlands from 2006 to 2010).

¹²⁰ Vincenzo Camporini et al., *The Role of Italian Fighter Aircraft in Crisis Management Operations: Trends and Needs*, cit., p. 53.

¹²¹ In detail: 2nd and 3rd Berlusconi governments, 2002-2006; 2nd Prodi government, 2006-2008; 4th Berlusconi government, 2008-2011; Monti government, 2011-2013; Letta government, 2013-2014; Renzi government, 2014.

to reinforcing overall international security and therefore, to some degree, also Italy's.¹²²

If fear of international Islamic terrorism was a strong factor in the perception of public opinion and policy-makers in the months following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, its potency has gradually weakened over time. Italy has not been the object of terrorist attacks such as those of New York and Washington in 2001, or of London in 2004 and Madrid in 2005, nor did Islamic-based terrorism appear in the first decade of the 2000s to be more active or dangerous in Italy than any home-grown version. According to some observers, Italy had no "significant national interest" in Afghanistan per se, thus the real reason for Italian participation in military operations was to support the United States.¹²³

Therefore, if there were no direct national security interests in the balance in Afghanistan as there had been in Kosovo, participating in international missions there mainly served the same three, previously analysed, Italian foreign and defence policy objectives during the Balkans operation. First, to maintain close relations with the United States; second, to strengthen Italy's Alliance standing and, third to enhance its role in the international community.

As for bilateral relations with Washington, since the eight years of the Bush administration were marked by US military operations in the so-called "Greater Middle East", it is precisely in its positions *vis-à-vis* that region that Italy's preferential relationship with its American ally took shape, with the intervention in Afghanistan as its centrepiece. Given the importance Obama placed on Afghanistan in his first two years in the White House, it is clear why the Silvio Berlusconi government decided to send in an additional 1,000 troops in late 2009 immediately following an announcement that America would be sending in reinforcements to ISAF to boost security during the upcoming Afghan elections.¹²⁴

In addition to its relations with the United States, Italy made the military commitment to ISAF with a view to maintaining its standing in NATO and in the international community in general. On 21 February 2007, the Romano Prodi government called for a parliamentary confidence vote on refinancing the Italian ISAF mission, despite opposition from the left-wing majority. At the same time, the foreign minister insisted that a country such as Italy needed constancy in foreign policy in order to gain international influence and that, vice-versa, unilateral withdrawal would have undermined Rome's international credibility.¹²⁵ According to the government

¹²² It must not be forgotten that in the months following 11 September 2001, security measures were tightened in airports, seaports, railway stations and military installations on Italian soil, and arrests were made of a number of suspected terrorists operating in Italy (for the most part in recruitment activities).

¹²³ Jason W. Davidson, *America's Allies and War*, cit., p. 124.

¹²⁴ Fabrizio Coticchia, *Qualcosa è cambiato?*, cit., p. 194.

¹²⁵ Italian Senate, *Comunicazioni del ministro degli affari esteri sulle linee di politica estera*, 21 February 2007, p. 6, <http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/00253523.pdf>.

at the time, one of the principal motives for remaining committed in Afghanistan was to bolster Italy's credibility within the international community and – in order to maintain that credibility and fulfil the pledges undertaken in multilateral forums such as NATO – it was willing to brave domestic political crisis.¹²⁶

Conclusions

The two international missions considered in this paper are not exhaustive of the spectrum of military operations of a certain scope conducted by Italy in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, the spectrum of such operations includes major peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the UN and without the involvement of NATO, such as those in Lebanon since 2006 and in Somalia in the early 1990s, as well as operations within the US-led "coalitions of the willing", for instance in Iraq between 2003 and 2006, or led by Italy, as in the case of operation Alba in Albania in 1997.

It is worth mentioning the controversial case of the intervention in Libya in 2011, a politico-military Franco-Anglo-American initiative which then became multilateral within NATO, also thanks to Italy. However, within this range of missions, the Atlantic Alliance as an international organization has played a major role, compared to the UN and the EU, offering both a politico-diplomatic framework and the joint military command to some of the most demanding military operations among those completed in the post-Cold War era: in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya.¹²⁷ Without making the mistake of over generalising, some reflections on the current context can be drawn from the two examples analyzed in this paper and in particular regarding the link between national interests and Italian participation in international missions.

First of all, even in the post-Cold War era the relationship with the United States proved to be a cornerstone of Italian foreign and defence policy, particularly of Italian engagement in international missions. This happened regardless of the alternation between democrats and republicans at the White House and between centre-right and centre-left parties in the Italian government coalitions¹²⁸ – even if, of course, such alternation did influence the bilateral relations.

¹²⁶ Marco Clementi, "La politica estera italiana", in Alessandro Colombo and Natalino Ronzitti (eds.) *L'Italia e la politica internazionale. Edizione 2008*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, p. 107.

¹²⁷ Alessandro Marrone, "Il rapporto tra le missioni NATO e la trasformazione dello strumento militare italiano", in *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze politiche Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*, a. 4, n. 7 (2014), p. 150, http://www.educatt.it/libri/ebooks/A-00000370%20QDSP07_2014.pdf.

¹²⁸ According to some authors, the bilateral relationship with Washington in the post-Cold War era has become stronger with regards to the pre-1989 period. The Italian involvement in the former Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan are evidence of this enhanced relationship. See: Leopoldo Nuti, "The Role of US in Italy's Foreign Policy", in *The International Spectator*, 2004, (Vol. 38, No.1), p. 99.

The recent increase of instability in the European continent, as well as in its neighbourhood and in general in the “enlarged Mediterranean”, coupled with the deterioration of the relations between Western countries and Russia seem to strengthen – or at least to confirm – the importance of the United States for European security and thus for Italy. So far, the Obama administration has been characterized by the disengagement in crisis areas. This is proved by the complete withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, the abandonment of Libya once NATO air operations were accomplished, with the dramatic consequences now visible in both cases, and by the way the transition in Afghanistan has been handled. However, a strong American pressure on European allies for a joint military intervention would still push Italy to participate in new international missions. Indeed, in November 2014 Italian armed forces begun to contribute with four Tornado combat aircraft, two unmanned Predator aircraft, a tanker for air-to-air refuel, and 280 trainers and military advisors, to the international coalition led by the United States against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.¹²⁹

Secondly, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Italy’s participation in international missions, and in general its foreign and defence policy, have being influenced by the membership to NATO and its meaning regarding relations with others European countries and the United States. The ongoing transformation of NATO, which after twenty years of commitment to crisis management operations seems to pursue a new equilibrium between them and collective defence, reaffirms the importance of the Alliance as a fundamental framework for the Italian defence policy. Moreover, the same crises that have increased the weight of the United States in European security seem to enhance NATO’s role as an “insurance policy” for the Italian national security. From the Italian perspective, this policy requires to maintain a political, military and economic investment. An investment which continues to take shape in the contribution to international missions, as well as in the procurement and maintenance of adequate military capabilities (see for example the commitment to allocate 2% of the GDP to the defence budget) and in the participation in training and exercises within NATO, such as those foreseen in Eastern Europe in 2015.

Thirdly, the need to keep a position in the international community that properly responds to Italy’s interests and ambitions is a steady and significant factor in motivating and influencing Italian participation in missions, especially with regards – but not limited to – NATO and the United States. In the last decade, the weakening of universal multilateral institutions such as the UN, the difficult transformation of other frameworks such as the EU, the emergence – or re-emergence – of regional powers in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and in other regions of the world, and of course the development of globalization, make the international hierarchies more unstable and countries’ positioning more fragile than in the past. As a result, for

¹²⁹ “Isis, Italia invia Tornado con compiti di ricognizione. M5s: ‘Pinotti entra in guerra’”, in ANSA, 16 November 2014, http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2014/11/16/isis-italia-invia-tornado-con-compiti-di-ricognizione_fce9fd7a-68f8-494d-b222-2d537fc1f68f.html.

countries like Italy, the aim of achieving or maintaining a certain position within the international community is never fulfilled once for ever, and therefore an appropriate political and military effort towards the desired position is constantly required.

As mentioned above, however, there are at least two elements of instability in the use of international missions as a means of foreign policy, one with a global and the other with a domestic nature. At the global level, the emergence of regional powers, combined with the recent American reluctance to significant military commitments – after a decade of US operations in the Middle East – places significant limits to Western interventions in crisis areas, at least to types of intervention experimented in the post-Cold War period. At the domestic level, the economic downturn in Italy since the end of 2011 – characterized by unemployment's growth, GDP contraction, a rising public debt and the need to cut government spending – has led the public opinion and the electorate to focus on domestic issues and to judge Italian commitment in international missions – and investments in defence policy in general – as an expendable cost, given the circumstances and economic priorities. This results in a weak support, and / or in open opposition, not only to Italian international commitment, but also to the maintenance of the military means necessary to allow Italy's possibility to act if and when necessary. In addition to that, little attention is paid by the media and the Italian academia (with few exceptions)¹³⁰ to security and defence issues, and this in turn contributes to create a vicious cycle with the already limited attention by the public opinion to these matters.¹³¹

The interaction between elements of discontinuity and continuity as identified in the present document remains, therefore, fundamental in influencing Italy's participation in international missions, particularly those within NATO, and their use as an instrument of the Italian foreign and defence policy.

In the case of NATO-Russia relationship, the issue of the Italian national interests is even more complex because of its economic ramifications, including those relating to the country's energy security.

On the one hand, Italy has an interest not only in the stability and peace of the European continent, but also in making sure that NATO and EU member states do not feel threatened by Russia - even if at least initially many Italians did not consider the link between the crisis in Ukraine and NATO importance for Italy.¹³² In other words, there is the need for NATO to act as an "insurance policy" also in an uncertain, fluid, unpredictable and changing international context like the current, since security in this sense is a prerequisite to political stability and economic growth – as it was, *mutatis mutandis*, during the Cold War. The pursuit of this

¹³⁰ Interview 23 June 2014.

¹³¹ Interview 18 June 2014.

¹³² Interview 23 June 2014.

interest, at the same time national and collective for the European countries, may require a political and military pressure from NATO on Russia, which may result in a request to be in the "trenches" along with the other allies. The "trenches" that are also economic, and as important as the military one for the strategic implications, corresponding primarily to the sanctions adopted by the EU.

At the same time, Italy has an interest in the maintenance and growth of its economic exchanges with Russia, and in general in the normalization of the economic relations between the EU and Russia. A normalization which would benefit the entire European economy and not only the crucial energy field. Together with Italy in fact, also Germany, the Netherlands and Poland are among the major commercial partners to Russia, reaching 75 billion exchanges in 2013 in the German case.¹³³ In this case, the "trenches" mainly concern the relationship with key allies within NATO and the EU. Indeed, the Italian interests and vision diverge with some of them as for the relations with Russia, and this is also due to the different respective bilateral relations with Moscow. For the Italian foreign and defence policy, it is thus necessary to discuss a Western common strategy that also takes into account the Italian position, making the best out of the framework provided by NATO and the EU. A strategy that is meant to rebuild regional security architecture to pursue peace and stability in the Old Continent, and it is not limited to a mere and ineffective reaction to Russian actions.

From NATO's perspective, relations with Russia and crisis management missions are closely related for a number of reasons. Not only because they are two out of the three "core tasks" declared in the latest Strategic Concept of 2010, together with "cooperative security", which is also strongly influenced by the relations with Moscow. But also because they are two sides of the same coin both within NATO and globally. As seen above, ongoing debate is taking place within the Alliance on the prioritization of each of these two "core task", a debate that also influences the elaboration of the Political Guidance for the development of military capabilities of member states.¹³⁴ More generally, at the politico-diplomatic level, both the allies and NATO's institutional framework act as a *trait d'union* between the activities related to the two "core tasks": here there is a political linkage and thus the room for negotiation of different visions of the member states – visions guided by their national interests – needs to find place. At the global level, NATO's ability to ensure the collective defence of its members while pursuing the normalization of relations with Moscow is a crucial variable for international security and stability. At the same time, the ability to conduct crisis management operations remains crucial, given the growing unrest in Africa and in the Middle East. Not to mention that third countries – regardless of their partnership with NATO – judge the Alliance, its relevance and credibility, mainly with respect to these two "core tasks".

¹³³ Francesco Giumelli, "Chi paga i costi delle sanzioni alla Russia?", cit.

¹³⁴ Giulia Formichetti and Paola Tessari, "After the NATO Wales Summit: Prospects for International Security", in *Documenti IAI*, No. 14|09 (November 2014), p. 5, <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=1210>.

In conclusion, a strategic reflection on Italian defence policy should consider such overall context, particularly with regards to NATO, in order to enable this policy to effectively safeguarding Italy's national interests.

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