

ITALIA
FORNITORE
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MEDITERRANEO

IAI/22/85

IAI8522

ITALY: A NEW ROLE IN THE SOUTHERN FLANK?

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INTRODUCTION.

The 1982 Beirut mission of the Italian armed forces is often considered as the turning point of the Italian military policy in the Mediterranean.

As a matter of fact, the participation of an Italian military contingent in the two multinational forces in Lebanon has been the natural outcome of a policy trend initiated well before that year.

In 1977, all political parties, including the Communist Party, approved a resolution endorsing the fundamental lines of Italian foreign policy. The resolution not only re-stated the support of the Parliament for the traditional features of that policy - participation in NATO and European integration - but contained also an explicit plea for an Italian contribution to the solution of the Mediterranean problems and the African conflicts in accordance with the U.N. principles and decisions. (1)

In July 1979, an army helicopter unit (12 pilots, 18 crewmen and 1 liaison officer with 4 AB-204 helicopters) was deployed to Makoura, as part of United Nations Interim Force for Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL), in substitution for the Norwegian contingent.

In the December 12 1979 NATO Ministerial Council, Italy agreed to be one of the European countries to host the American cruise missiles, whose deployment was intended to counterbalance the SS-20 threat. The selection of Magliocco airport near Comiso, in Sicily, as the deployment base, was announced in August 1981. Apart from its compelling military and technical motives, the choice was politically significant. The cruise deployment was another sign that Italy was, among NATO Mediterranean countries, the one capable of and willing to assume difficult and controversial decisions and responsibilities. The choice of a Sicilian base confirmed that Italy was considering its Mediterranean role and position strong enough to sustain and manage any diplomatic backfiring from those North-African and Middle-Eastern countries which might interpret the deployment as an indirect threat.

In September 1980, Italy committed itself to safeguarding Malta's neutrality and signed a treaty for economic, technical and military assistance. The commitment had evident security implications, since it implied that Italy was ready to confront any external attempt to threaten Malta's sovereignty. This was true even though the treaty did not provide for an automatic military intervention in case of emergency, but did require previous bilateral consultations. A small military unit was sent to the island to help in civilian construction works and to train the Maltese army. (2)

Still in 1980, after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, concern was raised on the possibility of a block in the oil flow from the Persian Gulf. Italy (like France, England and West Germany) refused to join the United States in creating a multinational naval force to intervene, if necessary, to keep the strait of Hormuz open. However, when the U.S. Navy was forced to move one carrier battle group from the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean to the naval force building up in the Indian Ocean, the Italian Navy was ready to partially fill

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the gap, expanding naval operations outside its designated gravitation areas.
(3)

In March 1982, the Italian Government accepted to participate in the multinational force designated to guarantee the full application of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel as resulted from the Camp David agreement. The Italian contingent assigned to the MFO (Multinational Force and Observers) was composed of three "Larice" class minesweepers and 92 men. The task of the naval group, which is still today conducting its daily patrolling mission, is to assure the freedom of navigation through the Tiran strait and in the Aqaba gulf.

In September 1982, an Italian military contingent participated in the two multinational forces which were deployed to Lebanon: first, to assure the safe withdrawal of the Palestinian fighters from Beirut, and then, after the Sabra and Chatila slaughter, to protect the Lebanese people, in particular the Palestinian camps, and to facilitate the strengthening of the authority of the legitimate Lebanese Government. (4) The second participation was the most important both in terms of the tasks to be performed and of the dimension of the force (more than 2.000 men).

Finally, in August 1984, a naval group composed of three "Castagno" class minehunters, of the "Cavezzale" support ship and of 305 men was deployed in the Suez Gulf. The scope of the intervention, which was negotiated on a strictly bilateral basis between the Egyptian and the Italian Governments, was to search for the mines which had impaired the navigation through the Red Sea and the Suez Gulf.

In summary, the overall picture of the last five years is one of a more active foreign policy, with a higher profile and a more explicit willingness to assume responsibilities and commitments. And it is also a picture of a foreign policy which finds its way of expression through the means of the military instrument, i.e. through the employment of armed forces, even though always in peaceful or "peacekeeping" operations.

Now, is it really correct to speak of a "new" Italian role in the Southern region? Is it realistic to expect that the Italian military profile in the Mediterranean will be expanded both within and outside NATO's framework? And how and in which direction could this trend eventually evolve ?

1. THE MILITARY POLICY.

NATO started talking about a "threat from the South" since the mid '60s. This threat was basically indicated in the increasing Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean and in the Soviet penetration in North Africa and the Middle East.

Actually, the Soviet Mediterranean drive was only one of the factors of evolution. The security relevance of the Mediterranean region became even more evident due to the events in the Persian Gulf - the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war - and the destabilizing Libyan foreign policy in Africa.

Italy was late in appreciating and responding to the strategic changes in the Mediterranean. This was due to the typical lag of the Italian military policy, mainly caused by the attitude of substantial uncommitment (somebody would say indifference) of the political parties towards security problems. But it was also due to the resistance of the Italian Army about recognizing the diminished importance of the "Gorizia gap" for the logical concern that it could spur a change in the allocation of funds of the military budgets among the services. In this allocation the Army had always been traditionally privileged.

The shift of emphasis from the North-Eastern front to the Southern flank was a contrasted process alimeted by various factors: an emerging Mediterranean bias within the new assertiveness of the Italian foreign policy; the unquestionable evidence of the growth of Soviet military capabilities and presence in the Mediterranean; the pressure of the Navy and the Air Force military, who felt they could better win the political approval of their modernisation programs if justified on the need to face the new strategic situation in the Southern region.

Only when the Socialist Lelio Lagorio was appointed Defense Minister in April 1980, the Mediterranean became an important parameter of the Italian strategic equation and more emphasis and attention was dedicated to the "national" aspects of the new security picture and to the role Italy could and should play in the region.

In June 1980 in front of the House and Senate Defense Commissions, Lagorio declared: "I think that Italy has a more concrete and evident role to play in the world, in particular in our closest area, which presents East-West and North-South relations. The military policy has a function in this area, even though limited....It is not the time anymore of the "frontal threat" in Europe. Now an "encircling threat" is emerging. And this threat can be better confronted with political initiatives aimed at helping the Southern countries in maintaining the existing stability and military balance....A military policy, then, not for the use of force but for the technical assistance in support of a friendship and peace policy towards the other countries." (5)

In 1981, the theme of the Italian Mediterranean role was again underlined: "Italy does not intend to operate outside the area where it is geostrategically located, and therefore outside its traditional area of responsibility. But Italy must be credible, and must be seen as a stabilizing element both by the geographically close countries and by other countries, if it wants to contribute to their security and be seen as a reference point for a policy of friendship, peace and cooperation." (6)

Finally, in 1982, Lagorio went so far as stating: "The Atlantic Alliance, however, does not and cannot exhaust the Italian policy. Our country follows its "own" policy which, even though largely coinciding with the Atlantic one, does not fully mirror it in all its actions. And above all is independent and autonomous regarding all territories not covered by the North-Atlantic Treaty. Differently from the mid '70s, the Alliance does not offer anymore a total defense guarantee to our country." (7)

This was a very explicit statement. It did not hint a trend towards a different position and role within NATO. And it was not a criticism of what NATO represented as a factor of deterrence and defense for Europe. However, it was a new element in the Italian military policy, even though it was not fully clear what it meant in terms of changes in the Italian defense concept, in the weapons acquisition programs, in the employment of forces. In other words, it was not an indication of a lack of confidence in the Alliance, but the expression of the awareness that the new situation in the Mediterranean could in the future require the defense of specific national interests. And the expression of the concern that there could be cases in which the Alliance's support would be late in coming or would be lacking. In particular, it was the attempt to alert the political class and the public opinion about these new features of the Italian security picture, thus to preserve and possibly increase the level of military spending.

The Italian military policy underwent a new change when the Republican Giovanni Spadolini was appointed Minister of Defense in August 1983. Actually,

more than a modification it was an adjustment of Lagorio's policy lines in terms of an explicit return to the traditional atlanticism of that policy and of a toning down of its Mediterranean bias. Furthermore, Spadolini appeared to be fully aware of the potentially disruptive elements of the Lebanese experience, if and when connected to a more active and responsive foreign policy in the Mediterranean region.

In November 1983, presenting to the Parliament the Italian military policy lines, Spadolini stated: "...We do not exclude those roles and missions wherein Italy has, for geographical and storical reasons, a comparative advantage with respect to other countries. Lebanon is an example, the Mediterranean another. But these stabilization roles would have no meaning and would be unrealistic outside an organic tie with the Western strategy within the East-West confrontation context. We must resist the temptation to theorize "Mediterranean vocations" or autonomous East-West mediation roles. In the tight East-West competition, which more and more expands in Third World areas, there is no place for medium powers' spontaneous initiatives, especially if they have, like our country, serious economic problems. Italy can and must give its contribution to the stability of the international security only in close connection with the Western strategic design." (8)

Thus, one of the roles of the armed forces i.e. to contribute to peace and political stability in Mediterranean areas relevant for the Italian security was considered credible only if performed within a multinational context and in accordance with the Western military policy. There was no space for a "national" role outside that of deterrence and defense of the national territory and that of integration within NATO's defense strategy. But there was also the awareness that Italy might be forced to take commitments which other countries in different geographical location could consider less urgent and vital. Therefore, that Italy must take a direct concern of the potential crisis situations in the Mediterranean area.

Finally, in the White Book on Defense published in 1985, the fundamental lines of the Italian military policy were defined as: Atlantic Alliance, European unification process, non-proliferation of nuclear armaments, arms control and cooperation in maintaining the Mediterranean stability. Italy intends to pursue an articulated political and military strategy which includes the contribution to the defense of NATO's Southern front and a mediation, assistance and cooperation policy towards the Mediterranean countries. (9)

2. THE ARMED FORCES.

The arms procurement programs of the mid '70s were presented by the military as the only way of halting the technological degradation of the military instrument and, above all, of putting the armed forces in the best position to perform the new tasks deriving from the changed strategic situation. And the "new" tasks were portrayed as depending not so much on the augmented Warsaw Pact threat, but on the instability of the Mediterranean area and on the necessity of defending vital national interests.

In November 1973, the Italian Navy Staff published a report titled "Perspectives and development trends of the Navy for the period 1974-1984." This report defined the Italian strategic concept as one directed towards the accomplishment of two goals. First, to fulfill the tasks assigned to the Italian armed forces in the context of NATO's defensive strategy. Second, to prepare the national military instrument to intervene autonomously in those contingencies where the allied support is deemed unlikely and where national interests are at stake. (10)

For the Navy the Mediterranean had become an important area of naval war operations even outside the traditional scenario of a NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation.

The Air Force was ready to follow the Navy's notion of the enhanced strategic importance of the Mediterranean, but with some caution regarding the significance of Soviet naval threat and the viability of the "national contingencies only" scenarios.

The Army logically, and rightly, tried to re-assert the preeminence of the North-Eastern border as the only rational and operationally feasible avenue of invasion of the Italian territory, questioning the validity and credibility of the threat from the South.

On the other hand, the modernisation was planned by the three services in accordance with their own peculiar and specific interests and not within the framework of a comprehensive policy aimed at directing each force's development towards a better integrated military instrument.

In the mid-70s, the Italian Parliament approved three so-called "promotional laws" devoting a total of 3080 billion lira in ten years for the modernization of the armed forces.

The first was the naval law in 1975 (1000 billion lira), followed by the Air Force and the Army laws in 1977 (965 and 1115 billions respectively).

The Navy program consisted basically in upgrading the fleet with new, modernly armed ships. The most important item was the acquisition of a "Garibaldi" class flat-top ASW cruiser, whose sky-jump deck made it capable of operating not only heavy ASW helicopters but also S/VTOL aircraft.

The Air Force program was primarily intended to renew the fighter-bomber flight line by substituting the old F-104G with the Anglo-French-Italian "Tornado", and the training line by phasing out the MB-326 and acquiring the more advanced MB-339 aircraft. Furthermore, the program aimed at modernizing the air defense system with the new "Argos-10" radars.

The Army concentrated its modernization effort in the acquisition of "Leopard-1" tanks, VCC-1 armoured fighting vehicles and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons systems.

All the weapons systems to be introduced in the inventory were improving the Italian armed forces' capability to fight a NATO-Warsaw Pact war, but at the same time they were obviously increasing also the capability of confronting minor and less demanding contingencies.

The modernization of the Navy - considering that the "Garibaldi" was seen as the first step for the creation of a naval aviation - and that of the Air Force - considering that the "Tornado" was an evident improvement over the F-104G in terms of radius of action, navigation and firing accuracy, inflight refueling and weapons load - objectively gave the two services an enhanced ability to operate in the Mediterranean area, thus directly strenghtening any Mediterranean role Italy might intend performing.

Furthermore, the planned procurement, starting in 1986-1987, of the AMX, as a replacement for the G-91R and G-91Y light fighter-bombers, was bound to augment that ability, due to the aircraft's good operational performances and its inflight refueling capacity.

In the early '80s, there was also a Southern projection of the forces with the re-deployment in Sicily of Army units, the increase in manning of the Army brigades stationed in the South, the modernization of the air defense system, the improvement of the existing facilities and of the technical and logistic support. This was particularly evident for the Air Force which upgraded the Magliocco airport to host the 112 cruise missiles of the NATO program, the

Trapani Birgi airbase to stage the NATO AWACS aircraft when operating in the Southern region, the radar net bases in Sicily and the minor islands, and which re-constituted the 37th wing in Trapani Birgi with F-104S aircraft in a fighter-bomber/interceptor role. (11)

As said, the participation in the second multinational force in Beirut was the most challenging and demanding operation conducted by the Italian armed forces since the end of WWII. The 2200 men contingent was involved in a militarily risky and politically difficult task, at 2000 kilometers from the national territory, in a country lacerated by a bloody internal struggle. A task for which military professionalism and diplomatic ability was needed.

The Lebanese mission was a clear success. It gave Italy a new international stature and it constituted for the armed forces a valuable experience, providing precious operational and logistical lessons. But it was also a mission which had profound political repercussions and whose characteristic elements were differently appreciated by the armed forces, thus indirectly enhancing interservice rivalries.

On the one hand, the intervention gave the military new pride, a sense of being finally considered as an important and efficient organization within the Italian society, and a useful tool for projecting the Italian image abroad. And it confirmed their perception that the international situation could present new opportunities for increasing their influence and the political weight of their demands. The politicians had to answer positively to requests for more money to improve the capabilities of the military instrument if they wanted to pursue a more active regional foreign and security policy.

On the other hand, the intervention became the occasion for the conceptualization of new ways of employment of military forces, for the rationalization of crises scenarios different from that of an East-West confrontation, for the growing of new military requirements.

In particular, it became the favorable opportunity for the Italian Navy to re-propose with new motives and stronger arguments its long standing requirement for a naval aviation.

Pride and expectations were evident in the evaluation of the operation by the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Umberto Cappuzzo. In an interview given to the weekly "L'Europeo", the General affirmed: "The Lebanon mission has been a turning point. Italy has re-discovered the military component of the international politics...In the crises management, the military force plays a not negligible role." Then he added: "I may say that we have "grown up". We remained in a Western environment, but we have demonstrated we can assume larger responsibilities..The Mediterranean was in the background, but it was present anyway...It is right to think in terms of greater Italian initiatives, always in concert with our main Western allies...The constitutional objections do not concern us if the intervention is taking place in the framework of a specific international agreement or treaty...Militarily, it has been a positive experience. For the Army it was absolutely necessary. Naturally our men are frustrated to be living in a period of peace, where it looks like the armed forces do not serve anymore...Experiences like that in Lebanon do put things again in the right perspective. They are a commitment both military and peaceful. They give the charge." (12)

Similar concepts were repeated, but with a different tone, in a subsequent interview published in the daily "Il Giornale". Warning against a too acritical assessment of the Beirut mission, and underlining the importance of the domestic support, Gen. Cappuzzo declared: "The public opinion has accepted the

deployment of our military forces outside the national territory because it was a peacekeeping task. But as the risks increased it had its pressure felt. The problem of a military presence and mission in foreign territory is still far from being addressed in clear terms. One thing is to "show the flag", another is to conduct a more "interventionist" policy. A Lebanon type force is apt and useful for a particular, limited-goal mission. If we want to do something else, we should have the courage to take important political and military decisions, in terms of acquiring means which today are unavailable. There has been a Lebanese lesson, but it was limited to that specific reality. That experience should not be generalized or uncorrectly emphasized." (13)

As for the Navy's evaluation, in an interview also published by the daily "Il Giornale", the Navy Chief of Staff, Adm. Vittorio Marulli, to a question on the desirability of disposing of all necessary means for a Lebanon-type operation, answered: "We lacked an embarked air component, and this is certainly an element which deserves the utmost consideration. The problem of an effective, timely and continuous air cover of the naval units wherever they will be operating is, for a long time, a serious worry for the Navy. Indeed, in all operations taking place in sea areas far away from the national territory, the intervention of the land-based aircraft is unlikely, costly and, outside certain limits, impossible." Furthermore, he maintained that "the difficulties and the uncertainties which were at the base of the unsuccessful attempt to deploy a very small number of our Air Force aircraft (in Cyprus n.d.r.) demonstrated how dim is the possibility of re-deploying air units to non-national bases capable of fulfilling the operational requirements of the mission." Finally, he concluded that "it is above all for the achievement of the two goals of deterrence and defense that the availability of sea based aircraft, organically integrated in the naval group operating in front of Beirut, could have become indispensable. The support of a aero-naval component could have provided credibility and security qualitatively very different from that offered by the naval guns only. And in the Lebanon case, where credibility and security could not be fully reached by national means, we were forced to eventually bind ourselves to the other partners, a bind which could have been politically inappropriate." (14)

Two days later the same newspaper published an interview of the Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Basilio Cottone, which was an indirect response to Adm. Marulli. Gen. Cottone, after having underlined that "it was an act of great political wisdom to withhold the order to redeploy the aircraft, which were ready to go", declared: "I think that in the Mediterranean Lebanon is the most distant point where the Italian forces could eventually operate... As far as the air component is concerned, I think that the Mediterranean has become a small sea. Italy is acquiring the "Tornado" aircraft and starting in 1976 the AMX aircraft will be coming into service. Both have significant endurance and radius of action, which could be further increased by inflight refueling, thus to cover the whole Mediterranean area taking off from territorial bases... I would like to add that the next European interceptor, the European Fighter Aircraft (EFA), will be capable of operating for three hours at 200 miles from the coast, without inflight refueling. With air refueling, it will be able to stay in the air up to the pilot's physiological limit, i.e. 10-11 hours... To defend a point in the Mediterranean, where the threat is omnidirectional, is not necessary to have interceptors available on the spot. The optimum interception equation might be better solved taking off from a land base 1000 kilometers off the attacking aircraft, than by taking off from the point to be defended." Finally, referring directly to the issue of the ships' defense, Gen Cottone affirmed: "The point targets must be defended with the various

available means. The aircraft is a weapons system operationally and economically valuable when it is dedicated to area defense, while it is very costly and has a poor return when it is employed for point defense." (15)

Gen. Cottone's and Adm. Marulli's interviews were certainly an attempt to sustain and defend specific and parochial service interests. But they were also expressing two different views of the role of the Italian military instrument. Even with more emphasis than Gen. Cappuzzo, Adm. Marulli was sustaining a crisis-cooling role and an intervention capacity for the Italian armed forces, up to the point of outlining the negative political implications inherent in not possessing the means which could permit a fully independent participation to international "peacekeeping" operations.

The differences among the services in the re-appraisal of the Lebanese operation, which led to a sharp polemic between the Navy and the Air Force, surfaced again in the lectures which the two high officers presented at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (Centro Alti Studi Difesa = CASD) in Rome, in June 1984.

Adm. Marulli's lecture had an evident political blend, especially in the analysis of the geostrategic and geopolitical situation of the Mediterranean region and in the characterization of the role Italy should play in it.

Many statements are interesting enough to be fully quoted, such as: "To keep the control of the Mediterranean sea lines of communication and contain the Soviet penetration in North Africa and in the Middle East is a priority requirement of the Atlantic Alliance." (16) Furthermore: "The difficulties of the operational theatre, the needed attention to external, but close and vital, events, the centrality of the Italian territory, the widely felt demand for a more active political role based on concrete initiatives and sustained by concrete presences well outside the borders, are all elements which clearly underline the necessity to adjust the military trends, forces and structure to the new reality." (17) Finally: "In the South, the Mediterranean Italy is by necessity, geographic position and vocation a first actor. It is a role which is requested, desired and awaited from various quarters, and not from our allies only." (18)

However, it was difficult to imagine how the containment of the Soviet penetration in North Africa and the Middle East could be a NATO task, considering its geographically limited responsibilities.

Furthermore, the control of sea lines of communication had a sense only if considered within the scenario of an East-West confrontation, and only if conducted together with other allied forces in the Mediterranean.

On the whole, the lecture seemed to suggest a wideranging Italian military policy with a Mediterranean projection only partially inserted in the context of NATO's defense strategy, with a willingness to show "concrete presences well outside the borders" - even though it was not clear which borders Adm. Marulli was referring to - and with a first actor role for Italy, which appeared to go beyond a natural and logical diplomatic activity, possibly coordinated at European or Euro-Atlantic level.

Gen Cottone's lecture was, instead, rigorously NATO-centric. In his view: "The national military policy, and the consequent achievement of its goals, must not be considered in an autonomous way but tightly connected with the larger context of the Atlantic Alliance's defensive objectives... From this follows that the structure and the means of the national military instrument must be fully integrated in the NATO operational military structure." Furthermore: "The Alliance's military policy is conducted in a well defined and delimited geographical area. This area is then a fundamental reference

parameter to shape and balance the Italian military instrument in its three components." (19)

The picture sketched by Gen. Cottone focused on the participation of the Italian military forces in the Alliance's integrated organization, without any attempt to envisage conflict scenarios different from the East-West traditional one. The strategic transformation of the Mediterranean area, even though analyzed in a way very similar to that of Adm. Marulli, was mainly seen as a negative element in the framework of a NATO-Warsaw Pact crisis, and as a negative factor adversely affecting the capability of the Italian forces to fulfill their NATO tasks. But it was not considered an element capable of stimulating a new Italian military policy or a different role for the armed forces. Gen. Cottone did consider that even in case of a NATO-Warsaw Pact war, the Mediterranean area would be a second phase operational theatre, which could become very important only if the outcome of the first phase, i.e. the defense of central Europe, was developing unfavourably for the NATO forces.

On the formal level the diatribes among the services were conducted within the framework of a correct interpretation of the Italian military policy by the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, Gen. Lamberto Bartolucci, throughout a series of interviews and his speech at the closing ceremony of the XXXV session of the CASD.

The increase in the threat added to the politico-military changes in the Mediterranean area, an area where "Italy, for geographic, economic and political reasons, is called to play a primary role with a double NATO and national responsibility." It was then necessary to revise the defense model and "to adjust the military instrument thus to make it able to honor the NATO commitments, contributing to the defense of the Southern front, and to perform an important stabilization function in the Mediterranean basin." (20)

As for the changes in the Mediterranean region, Gen. Bartolucci specified: "One could rather say that the evolution of the situation in this area determines for Italy the requirement of a politico-military strategy which would tie the contribution to the defense of NATO's Southern front with a mediation, assistance and cooperation policy towards the Mediterranean countries. One should not speak of a change in Italy's role, but instead of a strengthening of our position in the context of that evolution, and of our stabilization policy." (21) Finally, as for the stabilization role, Gen. Bartolucci stated: "It is then necessary that Italy participates to all the initiatives, including those with a military contribution, which might concur in the search for a solution of the crises through peace operations, favoring the progressive cooling of their destabilizing aspects. In this framework, the Italian armed forces must be ready to provide a valid contribution to these peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations, as it has already happened in the past." (22)

On the whole, that of the armed forces was a mixed attitude. The three services appeared to be at odds on the possibility of an autonomous role for the armed forces in a non-NATO Mediterranean contingency, on the needed degree of integration and on the way to pursue it, on the reform of the high commands, and on the weapons systems best suited for their missions. But they were united on the defense of their independent development choices, on the assessment of the many deficiencies of the military instrument, and on the request for higher defense budgets.

3. NEONATIONALISTS AND NEOPRAGMATICS.

The new strategic picture of the Mediterranean area and the endemic instability of its political features are both factors with which it is possible to play in terms of worst case scenarios and in terms of national security requirements.

These elements, when added to the effects of the Malta treaty and the Sinai, Beirut and Suez missions, did in fact contribute to the emergence of the concept of new roles for the Italian military instrument.

These new roles can in effect be theorized in two ways, even though not completely different from one another.

Today, two "hypotheses" of the Italian military instrument and of its eventual roles are currently present within the military establishment, the political class and the military experts.

On one side there are those - who might be called neonationalists - who tend to elaborate security scenarios and to express security requirements on the basis of an autonomous (even though not totally isolated) manifestation of the Italian military policy.

In considering the hypothesis of a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict in Europe, the neonationalists tend to underestimate the ground, air and naval support provided by other allied forces in the Mediterranean, and the military significance of Austrian and Yugoslavian territories as a buffer zone. They tend to portray war scenarios where the Italian forces will be basically alone in confronting the Soviet Union in the Southern front, and tend to validate unlikely military options such as sea-borne or air-borne invasions of the Italian territory.

In considering the defense of vital national interests, they tend to foresee bilateral crises to which they tie military requirements wholly unproportional as regard as their logical political and military developments. Or they consider operations, politically and militarily very risky and complex, as feasible and likely without any concern for the domestic political constraints.

In considering the hypotheses of stabilization and peacekeeping operations in the Mediterranean area, they tend to regard them as possible autonomous initiatives and interventions, outside the framework of a coordinated European or Euro-Atlantic policy. Even the planned Rapid Intervention Force is seen more as an expeditionary force, capable of wide ranging operations, than as a peacekeeping force with limited tasks in a multinational environment.

On the other side, there are those - who might be called neopragmatics - who view the re-structuring of the Italian military instrument, and the so-called new model of defense, in a more realistic and less ambitious way, projecting the new military requirements on the background of the limits and constraints imposed by the domestic political and economic situation.

Thus, in a East-West war scenario, the neopragmatics tend to give more credit to the military benefits for the Italian forces of operating integrated with other NATO forces in the Mediterranean. In this way they tend to play down some of the requirements which are based on the assumption of aero-naval operations conducted outside the framework of the allied Mediterranean campaign.

Furthermore, the neopragmatics tend to view the bilateral crises as events which should and would be managed first of all by political and diplomatic means. They feel that these contingencies do not require any particular increase in the Italian military capability, since the modernization effort presently underway would be sufficient to fulfill their requirements. Risky and complex operations are regarded as feasible only in a multinational framework,

where political elements would be preeminent and the military intervention capability only supportive of the diplomatic actions.

The neopragnatics tend to reduce the range of the stabilization and mediation activities. They feel that a Rapid Intervention Force is needed but it should be limited in its dimension and in its role. The participation of Italian military contingents in peacekeeping missions is deemed acceptable only in the framework of a coordinated Western policy.

Lebanon is seen by the neopragnatics more as the exception than the rule in terms of policy, domestic support, size of the force, rules of engagement, etc.

Both the neonationalists and the neopragnatics think it is necessary to go ahead with the modernization programs, thus to put the armed forces in a position to confront the security problems of the '90s. And they are also in agreement on the need of a better interservice integration and a larger interoperability and standardization within NATO.

However, for the neopragnatics the "new model of defense" means, above all, reducing quantitatively in favor of a higher "quality" of the military instrument and higher operational readiness. It means to cut all the unnecessary fat, winning the traditional resistance of the military establishment to close down facilities, and that of the politicians, who think in terms of constituency and votes. It means more interforce integration and a more coordinated and rational weapons acquisition process, and a re-structuring of the high command system.

4. CONCLUSIONS.

The possibility and the feasibility of a new Italian role in the Mediterranean area should be analyzed under three different aspects: the foreign policy; the military policy, in terms of the actual capability of the armed forces to fulfill the tasks eventually stemming from that new role; the attitude of the political parties and the public opinion.

As for the foreign policy, there has been and there currently is a more assertive Italian Mediterranean policy. A policy different in direction, autonomy and saliency from the one conducted in the '60s. Very likely, this trend will continue in the future.

There is a wide-spread perception within the political class, the opinion makers, the international relations and security experts, and the public opinion (albeit in a more superficial way) that in the Mediterranean area Italy might be confronted with new security challenges and forced to take difficult and maybe painful decisions.

The necessity of safeguarding the oil and raw materials flow vital for the national industrial life; the possibility that controversies might arise from the integral application of the Law of the Sea, in case of EEZs (Exclusive Economic Zones) overlapping; the danger of South-South crises eventually bringing an East-West confrontation; the perspective of a nuclear proliferation in the Mediterranean, are all seen as factors imposing a wider-ranging foreign policy. A foreign policy capable of projecting the image of a country still profoundly tied to the Western alliance and the Western policy, but at the same time independent enough to pursue specific diplomatic and economic objectives, within the framework of newly defined national interests.

Obviously, there is also the awareness of the constraints imposed by the medium power size of Italy, further compounded by the weakness of its political and economic situations.

NATO, and within it a special relationship with the United States, is still the cornerstone of the Italian foreign policy. However, particularly in the Mediterranean, the European and the national factors seem to be assuming wider

importance. The Middle East policy and the attitude towards Libya are clear examples of this bias.

The interest for the stability of the Mediterranean region is strongly felt by all political parties. And the need for an Italian participation to the international initiatives aimed at that goal is widely shared.

However, there is disagreement on the range of diplomatic actions to be adopted, and on the type of participation. It is significant that in all cases of Italian participation in multinational operations, even the less controversial, the decision has been taken only after heated Parliamentary debates. And sometimes the polemics among the parties have continued throughout the operation and after its end.

On the other hand, the fact that the Italian contingent's size was increased from 1150 to 1980 men (well above the level of 1100 established in the formal Lebanese-Italian agreement) in less than five months, without any additional Parliamentary discussions, throws some light on the Government's actual latitude of decision.

The disagreement among the political parties appears to be even greater if hypothetical Italian military interventions outside the Mediterranean region are considered. A parliamentary majority endorsing a military presence outside the Mediterranean, even within the framework of a peacekeeping initiative, would be unlikely, except in case of U.N. sponsored operations.

The political parties' attitude is, at a more sophisticated level, the mirror image of the public opinion response. The Lebanese mission has been a good case in point. The initial, emotional support for an operation portrayed as an humanitarian act - the protection of the Palestinian camps rang a sensible bell within the Italian people - slowly faded out when it became evident that it was a very risky peaceful mission, and when the number of draftees increased parallel to the danger of terrorist attacks.

In fact, after the Italians suffered their first casualty in March 1983, and even more after the bloody kamikaze attacks against the American and French troops, the political and public pressure for an early withdrawal of the force grew stronger.

Beirut has been a sobering lesson on the multifaced and risky aspects of peacekeeping operations also for those people who unquestionably approved the Italian participation. This lesson will certainly weigh in the future public opinion response if a new Lebanon-type operation will have to be considered by the Italian Government.

On the whole, the uncertainty of the public support and the very likely opposition of the leftist parties to the use of military forces as a foreign policy instrument tend to pose a serious handicap for a country like Italy where the international policy is influenced by the domestic political balance of power, and where international initiatives tend to be evaluated on the basis of their impact upon the domestic political scene.

These limiting factors will not certainly bring inaction nor will it reverse the present foreign policy course. However, it will limit too autonomous tendencies, forcing the government to find the legitimacy of its foreign position and initiatives within the framework of Western policy. These political and social constraints will be felt even more anytime the military policy factors will play a preeminent role.

But they will not hamper or preclude the continuation of Italy's traditional support for NATO and its willingness to fully honor the Alliance's commitments, contributing to the Southern front's defense.

In this respect significant examples are: the cruise missile deployment decision; the increase of the military budgets well above the 3% in real terms

for the period 1980-1983; the force modernization programs which privileged the air and naval components of the military instrument, thus favoring a more prominent military role in the Mediterranean; the planned creation of a rapid intervention force which could serve as a component of a NATO mobile reserve unit on the Southern flank.

As for the armed forces, they feel they are being put in an uneasy situation. On the one hand, the possible enlargement of their role in the Mediterranean region represents an appealing stimulus and raises their pride and expectations. Logically, new roles would need new capabilities and then deserve increased funding. On the other hand, they realize that the military budget projections are well below their requirements. The 1975 program goals are still to be reached and the future prospects are not encouraging, considering the high cost of the new technology weapons systems, and the rising level of the maintenance, training and personnel expenditures. While they openly state that the present financial resources would prevent the attainment of the efficiency goals needed to perform the new interforce missions, and of the required NATO standards, they worry about the perspective of a military policy which would add new tasks to their organization. In an indirect but clear message to the politicians, Gen Cappuzzo has stated that the Beirut contingent had been optimized for the mission and was not reflecting the "true" Army in terms of percentage of professional officers and non-commissioned officers.(23) And he stated that the technical and logistic support had been so outstanding as a result of the great effort devoted to it. Such effort would be unsustainable in a real war in favor of a ground formation of the same size of the Lebanese contingent.

In summary, one could say that:

- Italy seems willing to play a more preeminent role in the Mediterranean area.

- The modernization of the armed forces, if bound to the long-needed reductions in the military structure, will strengthen credibility and capability of the Italian military instrument, thus to better fulfill NATO and national tasks.

- The possibility of performing extra-NATO missions or participating in international peacekeeping operations will depend on how these could eventually be justified in front of the Parliament and the public opinion. The humanitarian aspects and the U.N. management are elements which will have a bearing on the political parties' attitude and consent. Military missions outside the Mediterranean region will be unlikely except for very small forces in a U.N. role.

- There will be the tendency to support the U.N. initiatives aimed at solving the international crises and to privilege the "European" framework versus the "Atlantic" one in the approach to crisis management. If the present political trend will continue there will be the tendency to avoid a too evident identification with the American policy, particularly in areas where it is felt that the Italian interests will be damaged by that identification.

- The military policy will continue to be firmly tied to NATO, but with more attention dedicated to the "national" parameters of the security equation of the Mediterranean area.

- The amplitude of an eventual new role will be limited by the endemic instability of the Italian political life and conditioned by the influence of the domestic political struggle on foreign policy decisions.

NOTES

- (1) See "Libro Bianco della Difesa 1985", vol. II, Rome, 1985, pp. 11-12.
- (2) See "L'Italia nella politica internazionale. 1980-1981", Edizioni Comunita', Milano, pp. 489-491.
- (3) In accordance with the 1977 White Book on Defense, the Italian Navy's war gravitation areas are: the Adriatic and the Tirrenian Seas, and Sicily and Sardinia Channels. See "Libro Bianco della Difesa", Rome, 1977, p. 131.
- (4) Statement by Defense Minister Lelio Lagorio in front of the House Foreign Affairs and Defense Commissions, September 23, 1982. See Commission Bulletin, n. 700, September 23, 1982, p. 11.
- (5) Statement by Defense Minister L. Lagorio to the House Defense Commission, June 25, 1980, Defense Public Information Office (DPIO) text, p. 4.
- (6) Statement by Defense Minister L. Lagorio to the House Defense Commission, April 14, 1981, DPIO text, p. 9.
- (7) Statement by Defense Minister L. Lagorio to the House Defense Commission, October 13, 1982, DPIO text, p. 1.
- (8) See "Indirizzi di Politica Militare" by Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini, November 8, 1983, DPIO text, p. 7.
- (9) See "Libro Bianco della Difesa. 1985", Rome, 1985, pp. 7-10.
- (10) See "Prospettive e orientamenti di massima della Marina Militare per il periodo 1974-1984", Stato Maggiore della Marina, November 1973 edition, published on Rivista Marittima, April 1974, p. 18.
- (11) See G. Simone, "Lagorio descrive la mappa militare di Comiso", Corriere della Sera, September 8, 1981. See also V. Odintsov, "Rafforzata la difesa nel Sud dell'Italia", La Repubblica, March 30, 1985.
- (12) See Gen. Cappuzzo's interview on L'Europeo, February 25, 1984.
- (13) See Il Giornale Nuovo, April 17, 1984.
- (14) See Il Giornale Nuovo, April 18, 1984.
- (15) See Il Giornale Nuovo, April 20, 1984.
- (16) See Adm. Vittorio Marulli, "Compiti, responsabilita' e impegni della Marina Militare alla luce della situazione del Mediterraneo e delle aree adiacenti.", Quaderni del CASD 83/84, p. 14.
- (17) Ibidem, p. 23.
- (18) Ibidem, p. 34.

(19) See Gen. Basilio Cottone, "L'Aeronautica Militare nell'evoluzione dello strumento militare nazionale. Situazione, problematiche e prospettive.", Quaderni del CASD 1983/84, p. 4.

(20) See statement by Gen. Lamberto Bartolucci at the closing ceremony of the CASD XXXV session, Rome, June 29, 1984, DPIO text, p. 9.

(21) See Gen. Bartolucci's interview by Alfonso Sterpellone, Il Messaggero, September 10, 1984.

(22) Ibidem.

(23) See Gen. Cappuzzo's interview on L'Europeo, February 25, 1984.

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