

# Stick to the plan? Culture, interests, multidimensional threats, and Italian defence policy

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The international context seems to be increasingly exposed to multidimensional and transnational challenges, ranging from irregular migration and piracy to the violation of basic human rights. Rather than excluding a potential role for the military, many European states rely on it to face a complex security scenario. What are the reasons behind this activism? Taking Italy as a case study, this article works out two main arguments (ideational factors and interests relating to the so-called military–industrial complex) and tries to intercept their weight in the national debate leading to the decision to intervene militarily (or not) in Sri Lanka (2004–05), Haiti (2010), and in the Central Mediterranean (2015–). Ultimately, this effort contributes to understanding the role of the military instrument in Italy, a state particularly exposed to the new challenges ahead, and offers tools for research to be potentially applied in other countries that make similar use of armed forces to deal with non-conventional security threats.

**Keywords:** culture; interest; Italy; Sri Lanka; Haiti; EUNAVFOR MED

## Introduction

The end of the Cold War has considerably shaped the identity of all the European armed forces, which have tried to adapt to the emergence of new threats in a complex strategic context. Accordingly, European countries have been facing a challenging military transformation in recent decades. The need to ‘rethink’ the military instrument has gradually come to be viewed as a pressing requirement, especially for those states that have radically modified their defence policy in the post-bipolar era.

Following several years of inaction during the Cold War, Italy has shifted into the role of security provider. As of the 1990s, political leaders and public opinion have conceived the military instrument as a key asset in Italian foreign policy (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012). Italy has raised its ‘profile in European affairs, in transatlantic relations and in various arenas of the globe, with its troops, interests and resources’ (Brighi, 2013: 6). Moreover, it has fine-tuned its strategy, structure, and tools to prevent and oppose new threats: humanitarian emergencies, piracy, and transnational organized crime, among others. As illustrated by the recent White Paper (2015), Italian

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defence has focussed intensely on ‘multidimensional threats’ to national security (Ministero della Difesa, 2015).

Although Italy has recently widely deployed military forces to deal with such multidimensional challenges, the literature (with few exceptions, see Strazzari, 2008; Ceccorulli, 2012) has not spilled too much ink in analysing them. Hence, this article aims primarily to fill this gap, considering Italy and the operations undertaken (or not) in Sri Lanka (2004–05), Haiti (2010), and the Central Mediterranean (2015–). It examines why Italy *specifically* adopted military tools (instead of civilian and diplomatic instruments) to deal with the non-military menaces represented by these cases. Indeed, the question implicitly refers to the tasks of the military in multifaceted and unprecedented operations. By presenting two main arguments (ideational factors and interests relating to the so-called military–industrial complex) emerging from the interplay between internal and external dynamics as tools for analysis, this article paves the way for a comparative assessment of states’ employment of the armed forces to face non-conventional challenges.

Extensively based on primary and secondary sources, this paper briefly introduces the evolution of European and Italian thinking over defence after the Cold War. Then it goes through the two main arguments proposed to understand Italy’s military activism and the methodology followed for the case analysis. In the empirical section each argument is weighed according to the contribution provided to the decision in favour of Italian intervention with the military. The conclusions illustrate the main findings, providing insights for further research.

### European and Italian defence in post-Cold War security

The non-military dimension of security challenges has been widely illustrated by official post-bipolar documents and doctrines. None of the menaces identified by the *European Security Strategy* of 2003 was purely military. In addition, the new *Agenda on Security* (European Commission, 2015), has further contributed to blurring the distinction between domestic and external challenges and between security and defence (European Commission, 2015; European Parliament, 2015). The new European Global Strategy, released in June 2016, talks of ‘principled pragmatism’: idealistic aspirations and a strong sense of responsibility are said to guide the EU’s actions in peacebuilding and fostering human security, together with a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment exposed to challenges as variegated as terrorism, cyber attacks, and energy disruption (European Union, 2016). The armed forces’ new activism abroad has been testified, among others, by the NATO ‘activity’ in the Aegean Sea in 2016 in the context of the refugee crisis; by the launch of Operation Sea Guardian (ex Article 5 Operation Active Endeavour) also in 2016; and by the European EUNAVFOR MED operation against human smugglers in the Central Mediterranean.

On the whole, Italian defence has proven to be noticeably active in the post-Cold War era, participating in all significant operations undertaken by the Western allies, from Afghanistan to the Balkans (Coticchia, 2014). The Italian armed forces have been extensively employed to address multidimensional and transnational challenges, such as irregular migration and organized crime. The ‘Report on the Information Policy for Security’, published in February 2016, has particularly emphasized the relevance of these threats for Italy (Sistema di Informazione per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, 2016). The recent Italian ‘White Book’ pays specific attention to non-conventional threats and mainly to the ‘risks posed by migration, pandemics, terrorism and organized crime’ (Ministero della Difesa, 2015: 3), emphasizing the necessity to rethink the whole military instrument. The launch of operation ‘Mare Sicuro’ in the Central Mediterranean perfectly mirrors the idea behind pursuing defence through active security engagement abroad and offers an example of how ideas and interests play out to ensure maritime security.

Therefore, the advantage of looking at Italy’s military interventions and new security threats is that we both get a better understanding of the evolution of Italian foreign policy in the current strategic scenario and can start to investigate the new role of the military in facing new challenges, a neglected but easily replicable avenue of research.

Indeed, as highlighted by Isernia in this special issue, the Italian post-Cold War ‘military’ dynamism represents a crucial question analysed by the (limited) literature on Italian foreign policy. Several alternative explanations have been provided: strategic adjustment and the need to protect national security (Cucchi, 1993), acquisition of prestige and international recognition (Davidson, 2011), and multilateral constraints (Bonvicini *et al.*, 2011). A different line of enquiry has considered the driving role of ideas and values (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012). All of these arguments are solid and intercept important realities of Italy’s intervention abroad. The debate has focussed especially on ‘recurrent elements’ or ‘constant variables’ in Italian foreign policy. Yet, some of them, such as those based on prestige, multilateralism (which is strictly related to Italy’s institutional ‘bonds’ constituted by the EU, the UN, and NATO) or ‘strategic adjustment’, do not tell us why Italy has *specifically* adopted the military instrument to contrast non-military threats (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012).<sup>1</sup> For instance, the answer provided by the ‘multilateral context’ is not methodologically relevant here, given that acting within a multilateral framework has traditionally represented a constant rather than a variable factor in the decision-making process.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paper does not examine the *whole* Italian post-Cold War defence policy. Rather, the aim is to focus only on interventions using the military, defined as ‘the movement of regular troops or forces (airborne, seaborne, shelling, etc.) of one country inside another, in the context of some political issue or dispute’ (Pearson and Baumann, 1993: 1). Moreover, the ‘disputes’ or the ‘controversies’ under investigation feature the presence of non-military threats.

<sup>2</sup> Only limited exceptions exist, such as ‘Pellicano’ (Albania, 1991) and ‘Mare Nostrum’ (Mediterranean, 2013–14).

According to Kaarbo, many of the International Relations theories still ignore ‘decades of research in foreign policy analysis on how domestic political and decision-making factors affect actors’ choices and policies’ (2015: 189). This paper strives to fill this gap. Before looking at the empirical section, the next paragraph briefly illustrates the two potential (interrelated and non-exclusive) arguments (partially derived from the above-mentioned hypotheses) on the ‘dispositions’ (Doty, 1996) that made it possible for the Italian decision makers to employ the armed forces (rather than civilian tools) to deal with non-military menaces.

### *Culture, interests, and foreign policy*

According to Carlsnaes (2002), while relative agreement exists on the *explanandum* of foreign policy, a lack of consensus persists on the *explanans*, especially concerning the attempts to combine and integrate alternative explaining variables (see Isernia in this Special Issue). Cantir and Kaarbo (2012) focus on integrating foreign policy analysis (FPA) and role theory and national role conceptions (NRC), stressing how FPA can provide insights into the mass – elite nexus and intra-elite conflicts, while the NRC literature could incorporate the use of ideas and identity in foreign policy making.

As for the *explanandum*, the article focusses on selected foreign policy decisions to employ (or not) military forces to address non-military challenges, and illustrates the whole decision-making process behind these outcomes. Thus, we examine the ‘recurring forms of action – or inaction’ undertaken by the state in the global scenario (Rosenau, 1969: 54). To do this, the work focusses on the formation of domestic preferences, by looking at the political elites and significant social groups (e.g. the armed forces) that are involved in the decision-making process. Specifically, merging the analyses that have already investigated the interactions between the Italian domestic structure and the international context (Panebianco, 1977) and the above-mentioned FPA approach, we illustrate the intersection between ‘the primary determinants of state behaviour: material and ideational factors’ (Hudson, 2005: 3). But how can we investigate what Miranda (2011) calls the ‘striking balance’ between ideas and interest in the case of Italian foreign and defence policy?

Regarding Italy, Croci and Valigi (2013) distinguish three main factors that constrain the formulation of foreign policy: material capabilities, interconnected ideas or policy paradigms, and the role of civil servants, such as foreign ministries. Lombardi (2011) and Miranda (2011) assess the role played by ‘normative considerations’ and material factors such as trade relations to offer an explanation to the Italian military intervention in Libya. On the whole, constructivists and rationalists adopt two different approaches.

In conformity with a constructivist perspective, ideas strongly influence actors’ preferences. Ideas represent ‘the point of mediation between actors and their environment’ (Brighi, 2013: 36). Kitchen highlights how in states where particular ideas are highly institutionalized or culturally embedded ‘the impact of ideas is

likely to be strong and consistent throughout the policy process' (2010: 141). Finnemore believes that the normative context even affects the 'conceptions of interest' (1996: 310). Therefore, a rigid separation between norms, values, and 'interests' could be problematic due to their endogenous construction.

On the contrary, 'rationalists believe that actors' interests are exogenously determined' (Reus-Smit, 2009: 197). From a realist view, interests are given and predetermined, while from a liberal-institutional perspective, interests should correspond to the societies the governments represent. According to liberalism, the outcomes in foreign policy are strictly related to the cabinets' expectations as to the consequences of their actions.

Scholars (Risse, 2000) have contrasted rationalism and constructivism through March and Olsen's 'logic of consequences' (according to which actors behave strategically to reach goals) and 'logic of appropriateness' (with actors behaving in conformity with social norms). Nonetheless, the literature has highlighted ontological and epistemological problems in adopting this demarcation, given that rationalism too could be considered a 'social construction'. As such, states could rationally pursue socially constructed goals. Deets considers Putnan's two-level game 'incomplete because of how it clearly separates domestic and international levels and because it leaves questions on the formation of interests unexplored' (2009: 54). States may form security relationships based on shared identities and values, and many security relationships 'are driven by a mix of both identity and interests' (Seldem and Strome, Forthcoming). For instance, Miranda (2011) recognizes the interlinked and dynamic relationship between norms and interest in Italian foreign and defence policy and, consequently, the need to 'unpack' these concepts to carefully evaluate their role.<sup>3</sup> In her work, Miranda focusses on norms aimed at 'serving universal gods' (2011: 3), such as the Responsibility to Protect, because a 'pure-interest based foreign policy' cannot pursue these universal aims. Others (Seldem and Strome, Forthcoming) illustrate the crucial role of language in empirically understanding state identity and state interests. In line with Carati and Locatelli, 'although it is problematic to clearly distinguish norms and interests as two separate drivers of foreign policy, it is still important to understand what kind of norms a state refers to when it decides to take on a military intervention' (2017: 7). Thus, as posed by Dixon, even if humanitarian intervention could be considered as a 'cover' for material interests, we should investigate 'why there was a need for a cover, and why humanitarian rationale was being used as that cover' (2013: 159). The saliency of the 'humanitarian intervention' illustrates the relevance of a particular normative context that somehow shapes the ways actors behave. Conversely, the explicit reference to material interests as a primary justification for an intervention highlights their pre-eminence in the political decision to intervene.

<sup>3</sup> On norms, ideas, and Italian foreign policy see also Caffarena and Gabusi in this Special Issue.

In line with these claims the paper examines in detail the decision-making process and the ‘dispositions’ (Doty, 1996) that made it possible for Italy to reach a very specific outcome: the employment of military forces to address non-military threats. In other words, the paper takes into consideration the *relative salience* of ideational and material factors in a peculiar process of preference formation to trace their relevance and understand how the ‘practice’ (Doty, 1996: 298) of using armed forces to face non-military challenges has been possible.

*Italian strategic and military culture vs. the ‘industrial–military complex’*

Alons distinguishes between the ‘economic dimension of national interest’, by looking at the ways through which states maximize economic advantages or trade opportunities, and the state’s ‘ideological interests’, such as defending shared principles and values (2007: 215). Following such an approach, we focus on two different ‘ideological’ and ‘economic’ interests, or – conversely – on ideas vs. pure utilitarian interests. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned problematic distinction between values and interests, the paper unpacks the two concepts and highlights two specific dimensions.

First, we focus on the Italian ‘humanitarian strategic and military culture’. According to this argument (related to Alons’s ‘ideological interests’), Italy intervenes with its armed forces to face non-military challenges because of its specific post-Cold War strategic and military culture. As advanced by constructivists (Finnemore, 1996; Rathbun, 2004), the ways in which the cultural lens interprets global norms is extremely relevant in shaping foreign and defence policy decisions. Accordingly, a ‘cosmopolitan’ understanding of security informs operations together with a sense of international/national responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance. The employment of the military instrument would be a by-product of the *sedimentation* within national strategic culture of global norms and values related to ‘humanitarian interventions’ that Italy has shared and elevated as a potential determinant of foreign interventions. In line with Gray (1991), strategic culture is a set of ‘attitudes, beliefs and procedures that a community learns, teaches and practices’. The recent literature (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012; Rosa, 2014) helps operationalize Italian strategic culture,<sup>4</sup> while stressing the crucial role played by frames such as peace, humanitarianism, and – above all – a multidimensional (and non-military) view of post-Cold War security. As evidenced above, Italian defence is no longer limited to the protection of frontiers but aims to guarantee a broader area of stability through the armed forces.

Finally, relating to the military culture, and in line with an appropriateness logic, the structure and approach of the Italian forces (e.g. with mixed police-armed forces such as the *Carabinieri*) have also been portrayed by national strategic documents

<sup>4</sup> In line with Rosa: ‘the concept of strategic culture is here understood to be a set of institutionalized beliefs within a society, transmitted through socialization mechanisms, regarding the roles of war, international relations and the use of force in foreign policy’ (2014: 89).

as ‘perfectly suited’ to dealing with the current ‘complex emergencies’ at play in urban contexts (Coticchia and Moro, 2015). In sum, in conformity with the first argument, we expect that the ‘dispositions’ of Italian decision-makers towards the deployment of armed forces would be affected by overwhelming references to a ‘humanitarian strategic and military culture’.

The second argument (in line with Alons’s ‘economic dimension of interest’) pertains to the ‘material dimension’: the protection of specific interests of national companies. Arena and Palmer (2009) address the effect of economic circumstances on the international behaviour of democracies, focussing on the role of varying domestic constraints (e.g. economic circumstances) to better glean the impact of domestic pressures on leaders’ decisions. Within this economic dimension, the paper considers the relevance of specific interests, in particular of the military companies. Several authors have emphasized the crucial role of the ‘industrial–military complex’ in fostering a post-Cold War Italian dynamism. For instance, Paolicelli and Vignarca (2009) illustrate how Italian defense industry has been able to promote expensive and long-term programmes to support the wide range of national military operations even after the beginning of the financial crisis (Caruso and Locatelli, 2013).

Hence, we expect that the *interests of the so-called Italian* ‘industrial–military complex’ would illustrate the decision makers’ dispositions to deploy military forces to contrast non-military threats. In other words, each crisis, even if not featuring military challenges, could represent a good occasion to test and promote brand new Italian military technologies. The remarkable saliency of this argument would also illustrate the presence of specific national military company interests within the normative context of the decision-making process.

In this article, these arguments are assessed through a comparative analysis of different cases of intervention with the military. While we do not expect policy makers to be completely crystal clear in their narratives and their motivations, the parliamentary debates assure a full spectrum scenario of possible arguments and options on the table. Other sources (newspapers, comments, reports, etc.) also help the process to trace and highlight the overall ‘dispositions’ towards the deployment of armed forces in cases where self-interests clearly emerge behind an outward logic of appropriateness.

## Empirical analysis

The relative saliency of the two different ideational and material factors (‘humanitarian strategic and military culture’ and ‘interests of the industrial–military complex’) is scrutinized within the process that led Italian decision makers to deploy armed forces instead of civilian tools in interventions abroad. The selected cases vary in terms of geographical proximity, security challenges, ruling cabinet, and nature of the mission.<sup>5</sup> The analysis focusses on the post-2001 era,

<sup>5</sup> On the debate regarding continuity and discontinuity of post-Cold War Italian foreign policy across different political coalitions see Croci (2002) and Brighi (2006).

parameterizing key factors such as the international scenario (after 9–11) and the political system (the so-called ‘Second Republic’). The interventions in Haiti and the Mediterranean illustrate the ways through which Italian defence has addressed multidimensional crises with military tools. On the contrary, the (civil) mission in Sri Lanka allows the dependent variable to vary, in that it presents a case where the Italian decision makers preferred to face the crisis through civilian assets (Civil Protection, NGOs, etc.).

### *Sri Lanka*

A devastating tsunami caused more than 280,000 deaths in South-east Asia (and beyond) at the end of 2004. Sri Lanka was one of the countries most damaged by the natural disaster, reporting 30,000 victims and more than one million internally displaced people (Government of Sri Lanka, 2005). Right from the start of the crisis Italy was considerably active in providing humanitarian support to the country, where several Italian NGOs already operated (ActionAid International, 2006). On 26 December 2004 the Italian Government gave authorization to the ‘new’ Department of Civil Protection (DPC) to intervene in the area affected by the tsunami, primarily to assist and repatriate Italians (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2004). On 27 December, the first Italian medical team arrived at Unawatuna, in southern Sri Lanka. In the same hours, a few members of the DPC (then followed by many others) also landed in the country to recover and assist Italians.

On 30 December 2004, after a meeting among key institutional actors (but *without* the Minister of Defence), the Presidency of the Council of Ministers approved a decree (no. 305) that attributed the main role of management and coordination of the humanitarian actions to the DPC, providing an additional contribution of 10 million euros.<sup>6</sup> On 1 January 2005, the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced another 70 million through the Italian Development Cooperation Fund and the creation of a coordinated national committee of the representatives of local actors, universities, NGOs, trade unions, and the Red Cross, paving the way for initiatives such as the rescheduling of the debt.

By looking at the national decision-making process in the first days of the crisis, two main elements emerge. First, the DPC became the leading actor in the coordination of the NGOs’ activities as well as in the management of funds. The head of the DPC, Guido Bertolaso, openly pointed out the growing ‘skills and the competences’ of the DPC in managing international cooperation (Bertolaso, 2005). The Berlusconi government was visibly aiming to enhance the role of the DPC in the event of national and international ‘emergencies’. Decree no. 3388 (then updated after the tsunami) was approved on 23 December, and it originally attributed specific functions to the DPC in order to provide humanitarian support. The Italian NGOs

<sup>6</sup> On the first day after the tsunami 3 million were diverted from the emergency development cooperation fund.



fiercely criticized the ‘centralization of the aid’ (La Ferrara and Redaelli, 2005) while institutional contrasts occurred between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Protection over the management of private donations (more than 40 million, then supervised by the DPC) (*La Repubblica*, 2005).

Second, and relatedly, the Minister of Defence played a marginal role within the decision-making process, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs and also the Minister of the Interior were directly involved in the management of the aid. Analysis of the decrees approved by the cabinet at the beginning of January reveals the scarce significance of Italian Defence. For instance, in Decree no. 3392 (8 January 2005) the Minister of Defence was not mentioned at all, while new powers were granted to the Head of the DPC for the implementation of humanitarian aid (in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister). On 10 January, the Undersecretary Margherita Boniver affirmed the central role of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the humanitarian response, stressing the specific functions of manifold institutional actors, without citing the Ministry of Defence. The parliamentary debates also reveal the absence of *any* references to military assets or armed forces, while the main focus in the discussion was coordination among national and international (UN, EU, etc.) actors, aid transparency, the main sectors of intervention (health, education, etc.), and the recovery of Italians across the areas affected by the tsunami (Chamber of Deputies, 2005). The only military assets provided by the Defence were a few C-130 airplanes for transportation, while most of the flights were organized directly by the Civil Protection. Thus, despite the fact that Sri Lanka was also affected by a civil war, and contrary to other similar cases (e.g. Haiti), the Defence was almost totally excluded from the decision-making process. Italy preferred to use civilian tools rather than armed forces to intervene. Our two main arguments help better understand this ‘disposition’ on the part of the national decision makers.

While the saliency of the ‘interests of the industrial–military complex’ was practically absent in the debate, other domestic actors, such as the ‘new’ DPC, which was able to operate notwithstanding the current regulations in case of emergency, strongly pushed to ‘rule’ the intervention. The vice deputy of the DPC highlighted the ‘extraordinary power’ (Spaziante, 2006: 23) attributed to the Civil Protection. As revealed by the DPC Head of the Mission in Sri Lanka, the humanitarian assistance in South-east Asia was planned as ‘something different from the traditional aid assistance, something bigger ...’ (ActionAid International, 2006: 22). From a critical perspective, the representatives of the NGOs denounced the Civil Protection’s ‘quest for visibility’ and the ‘deprivation of the authority’ of the Development Cooperation Unit (Marcon, 2005). Moreover, other domestic actors (e.g. the Italian Red Cross), which were politically close to the government at that time, played a significant role during the crisis.<sup>7</sup> In addition, according to some

<sup>7</sup> The Red Cross played a primary function within the national coordination unit. Like Bertolaso, the leader of the Italian Red Cross, Maurizio Scelli, was also given strong political support by the Prime Minister, especially after his activism during the controversial Iraqi mission in 2003 (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012).

reports (Rossignoli *et al.*, 2011), the considerable presence of Italian associations and NGOs on the ground before the tsunami represented a vital factor in explaining why the Development Cooperation (especially at regional level) was so involved on the ground. In sum, several domestic actors (DPC, Red Cross, NGOs) pushed for a civilian intervention, leaving little room for ‘military actors’.

In line with the ‘humanitarian frame’ the issue of ‘solidarity in a globalized world’ (Chamber of Deputies, 2005) was frequently remarked on in the debate. The ‘generous Italian response’ to the devastating crisis (where almost 60 Italians died) was widely shared by political leaders and public officials (Deodato, 2005). As stressed by a parliamentary motion, prompt mobilization for a human tragedy ‘is part of our identity, of our tradition’ (Senate of the Republic, 2005). Italian institutions and citizens share ‘generosity and solidarity’ (Senate of the Republic, 2005) in the event of such devastating crises, which need to be addressed by a comprehensive approach, because of the ‘multidimensional nature’ of the threat they pose to international security (Castagnetti, 2005). However, all the tools portrayed as necessary for recovery and rehabilitation, such as development cooperation, were essentially *non-military*. Despite the existence of a civil war, the logistical problems and the local insecurity, the military dimension was totally excluded, to instead focus on ‘health and education’ (Fini, 2005). In addition, the debate on the intervention frequently underlined a specific point of the Italian law on cooperation: ‘the funds devoted to development cooperation should not be used for any military activities’.<sup>8</sup> Reporting the concern of international NGOs on the ways in which the humanitarian aid had been carried out, Italian MPs warned about a possible ‘diversion of funds for military activities’ (Malabarba, 2005).

In other words, and differently from other interventions, the interests of the so-called Italian ‘industrial–military complex’ were absent and the ‘humanitarian frame’ was absolutely disconnected from the military dimension, which was openly contrasted. The opposition to any deployment of armed forces for aid and reconstruction was visible during all the parliamentary debates. By looking at the contents of the discussions one may suppose that the ‘inconsistent humanitarian rhetoric’ adopted by the government to justify the combat operations in Afghanistan and – especially – Iraq (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012) had affected the general attitude towards the use of military forces in those months (Coticchia, 2014). Therefore, the prudent ‘disposition’ of decision makers regarding the employment of troops could have been influenced by this context. At the same time, the changing ‘political opportunity structures’ concerning the international role of the DPC fostered the significant role played by domestic (non-military) actors.

The combination of these elements helps trace the very low saliency of the ‘interests of the industrial–military complex’ (contrary to the growing interests of other domestic actors, such as the DPC), the ‘post-Iraqi disconnection’ in the public

<sup>8</sup> See art. 5, Law 49 February 1987 (e.g. Art. 1, 5), quoted in Fini (2005).

debate between the ‘humanitarian culture’ and the deployment of armed forces to face non-military challenges, and the decision to undertake a civilian operation in Sri Lanka.

### *Haiti*

On January 2010 an earthquake devastated Haiti, causing more than 250,000 victims. The UN strengthened the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which had been on the ground since 2004, while the international community quickly started to provide humanitarian assistance.<sup>9</sup> Italy also played an active role. As happened in the case of Sri Lanka, an ‘advanced team’ of experts was deployed at the very beginning of the crisis (Novazio, 2010). But this time the Italian intervention was deeply based on armed forces.

By analysing the decision-making process in January/February 2010 it is possible to better compare our two arguments and understand why the Italian elites demonstrated such different ‘dispositions’. According to the Prime Minister’s Decree (13 January), the ‘state of emergency’ represented the legal framework for the Italian involvement in the crisis. Three days after the decree, the first C-130 provided medical support to the civilian population (Council of Ministers, 2010).

Contrary to the case of Sri Lanka, the Italian cabinet took the military option to support humanitarian efforts into consideration right from the start. The initial ‘doubts’ (Gaiani, 2010) of the Prime Minister on the costs of a military mission were banished after a meeting (on 16 January) with the Minister of Defence who assured that the expenses of the operation would be ‘almost totally covered’ by Italian military companies (Giornale di Sicilia, 2010). After the Joint Command of the Italian armed forces positively assessed the feasibility of the mission (on 18 January), the Minister for Foreign Affairs declared that a military intervention would assist the humanitarian efforts and rescue operations.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, for the very first time, the aircraft carrier *Cavour* would be operationally deployed.

The day after the green light from the Joint Command, the *Cavour* started its first operation, carrying helicopters, almost one thousand troops and a base hospital. Thus, despite initial uncertainties, the decision-making process was extremely quick, in line with the declared ‘state of emergency’ and the dramatic needs on the ground. However, it is worth noticing that the aircraft carrier did not arrive in Haiti directly from Italy but stopped in Brazil some days before in order to involve a local civil–military contingent in a joint mission.

The Italian military played a leading role in the management of the humanitarian activities in Haiti, building schools and hospitals and providing aid distribution (*Corriere della Sera*, 2010). At the end of February, the Italian Parliament

<sup>9</sup> UN Resolution No. 1908, 19 January 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Speech reported by the US Department of State. Retrieved from: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/01/135727.htm>

authorized the involvement of a new Italian contingent within the MINUSTAH mission (Chamber of Deputies, 2010). ‘White Crane’, which approved the deployment of armed forces with the aim of ‘assisting the local population’, was labelled by the government as a ‘humanitarian relief mission’ (Chamber of Deputies, 2010). The operation was largely viewed by politicians as a complex emergency demanding a comprehensive approach while the armed forces were considered the most appropriate tool to address such challenges (Ceccorulli and Coticchia, 2016). The case of Haiti reveals the significance of the Italian ‘humanitarian strategic and military culture’, as well as the logic of ‘appropriateness’ behind the decision to employ the *Cavour*. The suitable features of the carrier (as well as the proper role of the armed forces) in the humanitarian emergency have constantly been at the centre of the debate. As reported by the Ministry of Defence, because of the lack of adequate harbours after the earthquake, the *Cavour* ‘proved to be the only tool capable of providing assistance rapidly and at a great distance’.<sup>11</sup> Italy’s aircraft carrier provided logistical and operational support to the relief efforts in particular as a platform for the helicopters, as a supplier of sanitary assistance offered by the hospital on board, and as a tool for multilateral cooperation (as proved by the cooperation developed with Brazil) (Giornale di Sicilia, 2010).

Analysis of the Haitian case illustrates the noteworthy role of the ‘humanitarian frame’. As noted above, a bipartisan consensus emerged in labelling ‘White Crane’ as a ‘humanitarian mission’. According to the cabinet, the involvement of armed forces does not contrast the image of Italy as an ‘international peacekeeper’ but rather it ‘fully corresponds to the deepest values’ of Italy and its global role (Italian Minister of Culture, 2010). As occurred in the public debate concerning the crisis in Sri Lanka, the values of ‘solidarity and humanitarian aid’ took centre stage in the discussion in parliament (La Russa, 2010). In this case these principles were directly connected to the employment of the aircraft carrier, whose goal – according to the government rhetoric – was to help ‘the suffering population’ of Haiti (Ceccorulli and Coticchia, 2016). The Naval Forces linked ‘White Crane’ to the traditional Italian ‘attitude of solidarity’ too (Magliola, 2013).

Notwithstanding this shared view, the crisis caused by the earthquake was never viewed in the public and parliamentary debate as a ‘direct threat’ to Italian national security. Thus, the ‘humanitarian frame’ alone cannot properly illustrate why Italian decision makers revealed different ‘dispositions’ in Sri Lanka and Haiti. As stated above, the military culture and the logic of appropriateness in the employment of a carrier (e.g. providing crucial support in terms of quick intervention and because of the absence of safe harbours) could highlight some relevant aspects relating to the Haitian context. But only by assessing domestic economic interests can we comprehend the divergent choices adopted by the Italian governments.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op\\_int\\_concluse/Haiti\\_OpWhiteCrane/notizie\\_teatro/Pagine/Haiti\\_Rientra\\_in\\_Italia\\_la\\_portae\\_11510Cavour.aspx](http://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_int_concluse/Haiti_OpWhiteCrane/notizie_teatro/Pagine/Haiti_Rientra_in_Italia_la_portae_11510Cavour.aspx)

In fact, the analysis of the national debate on the mission strongly confirms the argument that the ‘military–industrial complex’ pushed Italy to adopt military tools in the case of the ‘White Crane’ mission and that the pressure posed by military lobbies drove Italy to employ the *Cavour*. The operation represented the very first test for the most advanced and expensive national military asset, while fostering multinational cooperation (e.g. with Brazil) and enhancing the visibility of the national military industries. In particular, it is key to underline that Italian companies paid the costs relating to the deployment of the aircraft carrier: 90% of the expenses were covered by ENI (*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*), *Finmeccanica*, and *Fincantieri*, all companies formerly involved in building the carrier. Such economic support was exactly the outcome expected by the Italian defence reform that the cabinet had advanced a few months before the mission. Indeed, a new holding (*Difesa Servizi Spa*) was crafted specifically to increase commercial activities to develop ‘new sponsorships’.

Also, gaining ‘visibility’ for Italian military equipment was a manifest objective of the mission, which was considered as an ‘investment’ for Italian manufacturing. Several newspapers reported anonymous statements by officers who stressed the importance of ‘White Crane’ to support Italian industry: ‘showing Italian technology is a way to promote it’ (Cadalanu, 2010). In fact, the ‘marketing operation’ seemed to have an effect: inspired by the *Cavour*, the Indian Navy asked for a technology transfer to build their carrier. The joint mission with Brazil has largely been viewed as confirmation of this standpoint. Indeed, after the mission, the two countries signed an agreement in the field of defence and security, especially regarding the Navy (Cupellaro, 2011). Finally, as openly recognized by armed forces and government members, ‘White Crane’ was a ‘formidable test’ (Magliola, 2013) for the versatility of the *Cavour*, which was one of the supposed key features of its original design plan. Even some members of the opposition recognized that the ‘cost of inaction’ for the *Cavour* was almost the same as that of deployment. Thus, the carrier ‘needed’ an operation. And the sponsorship by national military companies contributed to removing possible government hesitations regarding the costs.

### *EUNAVFOR MED*

With Council decision no. 2015/972 of 22 June 2015 the European Union launched a military operation in the South-central Mediterranean, Operation EUNAVFOR MED (European Council, 2015). The operation was approved on 18 May, with decision no. 2015/778, shortly after one of the worst tragedies to have ever occurred in the Mediterranean (19 April 2016). Aside from the aim to ‘disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks’ it was also aimed at preventing ‘the further loss of lives at sea’ (EU External Action Service, 2016). Specifically relating to this latter aspect, the operation was renamed ‘Sophia’ following the birth of a Somali baby on a German ship of the EUNAVFOR MED task force bearing the name of the Prussian princess Sophia. Structured initially in three phases, the operations would need the explicit consent of the newborn Libyan

government to operate in anti-smuggling mode in Libyan waters, or alternatively a UN resolution.<sup>12</sup>

Since the very start, Italy proposed itself as lead nation in the operation (which is still running). The operative command is in Rome. Admiral Enrico Credendino was appointed Operation Commander. The operation's flagship is the same *Cavour* discussed in the previous case of Haiti. Italy contributes with a submarine, two drones (MQ-1 and MQ-9), and sanitary facilities. Law decree no. 99 of 8 July 2015 authorized the participation of Italian military personnel in Operation EUNAVFOR MED with 1020 units, and initially set aside an amount of 26 million euros for this purpose (Chamber of Deputies, 2016). The law decree underlined the necessity and the urgency to employ military personnel in the European Mission (Senate of the Republic, 2016).

The analysis of the political debate that led to the decision to use military means in this specific case has cast light on a particularly articulated set of logics that may be related to both the arguments made above. As occurred in the case of Sri Lanka, the 'military' option was contested by a part of the political spectrum as non-appropriate to cope with the challenges it was designed for, and in particular to save migrants' lives (Romani, 2015). Nonetheless, this time armed forces were employed to address non-military challenges.

In accordance with a multidimensional perspective of contemporary security, smuggling was considered an extremely worrisome phenomenon by all the political parties, to be tackled somehow, albeit with different emphases. In a late-June parliamentary debate, representatives of the government particularly stressed the role of Italy in promoting and obtaining European consensus on the anti-smuggling operation, on a detailed political commitment to it and on the recognition of the centrality of the Central Mediterranean contexts for the overall security of the European Union (Chamber of Deputies, 2015). Hence, and in conformity with the 'humanitarian culture', the operation, strongly supported by Italy, was a tool to highlight solidarity, values, and ideals, which invited to share responsibility in an increasingly dangerous phenomenon (Scanu, 2015). Italy, according to Undersecretary of Defence Rossi, 'has in its DNA principles deriving from a millenarian culture that it cannot betray at the risk of betraying its history and its future' (Rossi, 2015a). This kind of operation, it was underlined, should be interpreted as the utmost manifestation of EU distinctiveness in terms of values, solidarity, ideals, and common sharing (Scanu, 2015). The role of 'lead nation', it was emphasized, was a way to prove even further the argument of responsibility by Italy against the smuggling of human beings in the Mediterranean (Compagna, 2016). Indeed, after the experience of 'Mare Nostrum' (unilaterally led by Italy), the EU member states were called to act more proactively to avoid the deaths of migrants at sea, which were directly linked to the smuggling phenomenon.

<sup>12</sup> Since 20 June 2016 the mission has also had the supporting tasks of training the Libyan coastguards and navy and contributing to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya.

The anti-smuggling operation paved the way for a broader discussion on Italy's 'humanitarian aim' in the face of a soaring inflow of migrants in 2015. On the one hand, and in line with a 'humanitarian narrative', the operation was aimed at saving migrants at sea when necessary according to the Law of the Sea (Rossi, 2015a; La Torre, 2016). Hence, this argument insisted on the humanitarian objective. On the other hand, and in contrast to a humanitarian logic, the operation was seen as very close to a naval blockade, fundamental to hampering the continuous flows of arrivals in Italy (Divina, 2016). This argument was sustained by anti-immigration positions within the country which made clear that the operation had not to repeat the shortcomings of operations such as 'Mare Nostrum' which had ended up acting as a 'pull' for migrants and smugglers (Alicata, 2016; Gasparri, 2016). The eventual destruction of the boats was intended as a way to diminish possible arrivals on the Italian territory (Vito, 2015). Therefore, while there was a wide recognition that Italy had a responsibility to contrast the smuggling phenomenon, there was no correspondent recognition of the responsibility to welcome all migrants in distress at sea, also given the fact that this may weaken the naval device (Alicata, 2016).

The widespread appearance of the 'appropriateness' logic has also been observed, to demonstrate that the military was the most appropriate tool to deploy for the objectives of such an operation. Particularly emphasized by both representatives of the 'Marina Militare' and a broad array of the political spectrum, the military instrument was not only fitting but also necessary. According to Admiral De Giorgi before the competent Commissions in the Parliament in July 2015, the Italian navy normally operates in high seas and could benefit (differently from other European countries) from a direct relation with the Italian judiciary, which would allow timely action in case of the detection of smugglers (De Giorgi, 2015). He insisted that engaging in search and rescue operations would be quite easy for a military ship, given the advanced command and control systems at its disposal compared to those, for example, of the *Capitaneria di Porto*, and given its constant presence at sea (De Giorgi, 2015). The future of Italian military vessels, according to the former Navy Commander-in-Chief, cannot but be dual: Italy is already programming offshore patrols with dedicated reception spaces (sewage systems, devices for electricity, large spaces, etc.), essentially because Italy's responsibility goes well beyond its territorial waters (De Giorgi, 2015). With infrared device, helicopters may help save migrants' lives in poorly detectible situations. The employment of the *Cavour* had to be inserted within the broader argument of Italy as 'lead nation' seen before: in this sense, the flagship ensured the proper management of the operation in all its phases thanks to its equipment, experience, and ability to include different units (Rossi, 2015a). The carrier's logistic and sanitary capabilities (absent in other vessels) would add to its ability to deal with rescue operations (Rossi, 2015b).

Interests relating to the military-industrial complex seem to have also played a role, given that, according to many positions, the assets displayed and in particular the *Cavour* were openly questioned with respect to the aim of fighting smuggling and rescuing migrants (Artini, 2015; Pini, 2015). While obtaining a naval law

allocating more than 5 billion in 2013 to refurbish an ageing navy (Crecchi, 2016) and to sustain the national industry (Martinelli, 2015) and asking 5 billion more in 2015, Admiral De Giorgi insisted on the necessity to support the operation by employing equipment likely to ensure Italy's credibility at the international level as well as its leading role in the Mediterranean (AdnKronos, 2016). However, critics of this ponderous naval engagement in the operation maintained that military personnel were unfit to meet the objectives of the mission (Cotti, 2016). In particular, it was argued that saving migrants' life did not necessary require military mean, a consideration that can partly be accepted if looking at the role of NGOs and private vessels. Also, proper anti-smuggling operation could be effective in the case of operations in Libyan territorial waters (has happened in the case of operation *Atalanta* in Somalia). Some raised the question of concealed finalities behind the deployment of the flagship, such as the transportation of special units to be eventually employed in Libya (Romani, 2015), while others framed it as a prelude to a 'militarization' of the Mediterranean (Duranti, 2015). More to that, and similarly to the case of Haiti, the argument was made that the use of specific military assets and in particular of the *Cavour* for such an operation was a way to exhibit Italy's military equipment, a sort of 'floating fair for "made in Italy" weapons' (Piovesana, 2016). According to some others, the hidden interests behind the deployment of such military assets (hidden plans about Libya but also the possibility of exhibiting Italian assets) were all the more relevant given the high costs of the operation and given that 'high costs' were at the basis of the demise of Operation Mare Nostrum (Duranti, 2015; Alicata, 2016). Simply 'moving' the *Cavour* would require a huge amount of money (Cotti, 2016).

Summing up, the humanitarian culture was particularly crucial for the decision to deploy the military in the Central Mediterranean also because meeting an increasingly vocal concern at the European level, which stressed the case for military operations to curb smugglers' business and so save migrants' life, especially at the EU's doorstep. The military culture argument has also proved relevant in the debate, with a quite articulated argumentation. The second argument has appeared in the debate too, although particularly mentioned by critical positions towards the operation: for many, the unfitness of the military to face the challenges reported in the 'humanitarian narrative' and yet the deployment of military means had to be explained with hidden domestic economic interests, be they related to the future of Libya or to the opportunity of showing Italian maritime equipment to other Mediterranean states.

### Findings and conclusion

The article has provided two non-exclusive arguments in order to understand interventions with military means in cases of non-military multidimensional challenges. The analysis of public and parliamentary debates has assessed the



Table 1. Humanitarian culture, interests and military operations

Arguments	Cases		
	Sri Lanka	Haiti	EUNAVFOR MED
Humanitarian culture	Extremely relevant	Relevant	Extremely relevant
Interests	(Absent)	Extremely relevant	Relevant
Outcome	Civilian intervention	Military intervention	Military intervention

different weight of ideational elements and domestic interests in the decision-making process that led to interventions in Sri Lanka, Haiti, and the Mediterranean with military means. In sum, the empirical section illustrates possible co-existing interpretations as regards the employment of the Italian armed forces in dealing with multidimensional challenges. Table 1 summarizes the main findings.

The role of the national ‘humanitarian strategic and military culture’ has been confirmed as generally relevant, especially regarding the suitability of the military instrument for facing multidimensional challenges. The anti-smuggling operation EUNAVFOR MED (*Sophia*) was interpreted as key for Italian security and for the security of the Mediterranean region at large, the latter forming the peninsula’s main strategic perimeter. A part of the political spectrum particularly emphasized Italy and the EU’s responsibility for contrasting smuggling phenomena with a view to migrants’ safety, even though the arguments supporting the operation diverged with reference to its impact on migration flows towards Italy.

Notwithstanding the different opinions and the arguments for possible alternatives, the necessity of the military in the operation was particularly underlined, especially because of the double objective to fight smugglers and save migrants’ life. The same logic of appropriateness was adopted in the case of Haiti to justify the employment of the aircraft carrier *Cavour*. Finally, also after the dramatic tsunami in Sri Lanka, a widespread humanitarian frame was deeply shared among political leaders.

While ‘humanitarian culture’, as well as the logic of appropriateness behind political decisions, have generally been important, the interests of the ‘military–industrial complex’ vary in their influence across the cases. Thus, the lack of such interests (be they self-evident, reported or sensed from the parliamentary or public debate) seems to be the most relevant obstacle to militarily addressing multidimensional challenges, as occurred in the case of Sri Lanka, where the military option was totally discarded, also because of the growing domestic interests of non-military actors (such as the Civil Protection, NGOs, etc.). In sum, the analysis of our three cases illustrates how the absence of interests of the so-called Italian ‘industrial–military complex’ seems crucial in shaping the ‘dispositions’ of Italian decision makers towards the deployment of civilian forces to address non-military threats. While only a general contestation of military tools, as occurred

in the debates before EUNAVFOR MED and the intervention in Sri Lanka, has not prevented Italian leaders from employing troops if there are significant military interests on the ground.

The paper is a first attempt to understand why Italy adopts specifically military tools to face non-military challenges. Additional research is needed to corroborate, and generalize, the main findings as well as to potentially compare them with those of other countries. For example, it would be extremely interesting to assess the weight of the arguments made in other European countries regarding the same cases analysed for Italy. Do moral responsibilities play a role in the decision to intervene militarily? Do other armed forces perceive themselves as security providers? How shared is the consensus around new non-military threats and what role can the military play in dealing with them? These and more research questions are strongly encouraged to comparatively assess the role of the armed forces in the new security scenario.

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### Data

The replication dataset is available at <http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/ipsr-risp>.

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