



UNISCI Discussion Papers

ISSN: 1696-2206

unisci@cps.ucm.es

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
España

Labanca, Nicola

DEFENCE POLICY IN THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC: FRAMES AND ISSUES

UNISCI Discussion Papers, núm. 25, enero, 2011, pp. 145-165

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Madrid, España

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=76717367008>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in [redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org)

[redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org)

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative



DEFENCE POLICY IN THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC: FRAMES AND ISSUES

Nicola Labanca¹
University of Siena

Abstract:

The article focuses on the civil-military relations in Republican Italy. The new democratic model of relations between the political authorities and the military had a strong continuity in the past. Also, in the new Republic the Armed Forces enjoyed a large degree of autonomy. Different phases can be identified in the history of Italian defence policy. In the reconstruction phase (1945-48), the General Staff decided to have again a big Army, based more on quantity than quality. The membership of NATO and the hardest period of the Cold War (1949-53) greatly accelerated the transformation of Italian Armed Forces. Some scepticism against limitations that NATO posed to national autonomy were overcome by the consciousness that the Alliance provided conspicuous means and allowed to abolish the military limitations of the 1947 Peace Treaty. In the years 1954-62, the Armed Forces had to scale down previous expectations, but at the same time, modernized quickly thanks to US aid. The Army was the first beneficiary, then the Air Force and finally (in 1958) the Navy. This was for two reasons: the Navy was the service in best conditions at the end of the war, while Soviet threat in the Mediterranean was at a low level. However, the Army still relied mainly on numbers, with a low number of armoured and motorized units. In these years, Italy also inaugurated its nuclear military policy. From the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, the Armed Forces started a “ristrutturazione” (“restructuration”) required by the new NATO strategy of flexible response, which accelerated in the years 1975-78. The end of the Cold War imposed more drastic changes. In 1997, the organization and the powers of the General Staff (inter-services) were strengthened, in 2000, women were admitted in the Armed Forces, and in 2005, conscription was totally abolished. The Armed Forces were greatly reduced in numbers, and were deployed in many long distance operations. The impression however is that the Armed Forces, due to a poor budget, suffer from overstretching and are faced with difficulties in addressing the tasks they are assigned.

Keywords: Italian Republic’s Military History, Cold War, Post bipolar Age, NATO.

¹ Nicola Labanca is Associate Professor of Contemporary History in the University of Siena, where he chairs the M. A. degree in History (“Documentazione e ricerca storica”), and President of the Inter-Universities Centre of Studies and Researches on Military History. His fields of research include: the relationship among war, armed forces and society in XIX century Italy, the history of Italian colonialism, the history of total war in the XX century and the military history of the Italian Republic. His last books are: (2008) *Guerre contemporanee. Dal 1945 ad oggi*, Firenze, Giunti, (2009) (ed.) *Guerre vecchie, guerre nuove. Comprendere i conflitti armati contemporanei*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2009. The present article draws ideas and sentences from his experience of editor of *Le armi della Repubblica: dalla Liberazione a oggi*, Vol. V of Isnenghi, Mario (ed.) (2009): *Gli Italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni*, Torino, Utet, and in particular from two long articles written for this book: Labanca, Nicola (2009a): “Una Repubblica in armi, fra pace e guerre”, pp. 3-38, and Labanca, Nicola (2009b): “La politica militare della Repubblica. Cornici e quadri”, pp. 66-158.

**Resumen:**

El artículo se centra en las relaciones cívico-militares en la República Italiana. El nuevo modelo democrático de relaciones entre las autoridades políticas y el ejército tenía una marcada continuidad con el pasado, al mismo tiempo que en la nueva república las Fuerzas Armadas gozaban de una notable autonomía. Se pueden distinguir diferentes fases en la política de defensa italiana. En la fase de reconstrucción (1945-48), el Estado Mayor decidió tener de nuevo un ejército numeroso donde primase la cantidad sobre los elementos cualitativos. La pertenencia a la OTAN y el más duro periodo de la Guerra Fría (1949-53) aceleraron la transformación de las Fuerzas Armadas italianas. Reticencias al papel limitado que imponía la OTAN a la autonomía nacional fueron superadas gracias a la conciencia de que la Alianza proporcionaba importantes medios y posibilitaba la abolición de las limitaciones militares del tratado de paz de 1947. En los años 1954-62, las Fuerzas Armadas se vieron obligadas a reducir muchas de sus expectativas, pero al mismo tiempo avanzaron notablemente en la modernización, en gran parte gracias a las ayudas de los EEUU. El Ejército de Tierra fue el primer beneficiario, a la que le siguieron las Fuerzas Aéreas y finalmente (1958), la Armada. Ello fue así por dos razones: La Armada era el servicio que a finales de la guerra se encontraba en la mejor situación, al mismo tiempo que era en el Mediterráneo precisamente donde la amenaza soviética se hacía menos sentir. Sin embargo el Ejército de Tierra se centraba todavía en el número de tropas, con un bajo número de unidades acorazadas o motorizadas. En esos años Italia igualmente inauguró su política nuclear. Desde mediados de los años 60 hasta mediados de los 70 las Fuerzas Armadas iniciaron la “ristrutturazione” (reforma de “reestructuración”) requerida por la nueva estrategia de respuesta flexible de la OTAN que se aceleró en los años 1975-78. El final de la Guerra Fría impuso cambios drásticos: en 1997 la organización y los poderes del Estado Mayor (inter-servicios) fueron reforzados, en el año 2000 las mujeres fueron admitidas en las Fuerzas Armadas y en el 2005 el servicio militar fue totalmente abolido. Las Fuerzas Armadas fueron notablemente reducidas y empezaron a ser desplegadas en muchas operaciones a larga distancia. La impresión general es sin embargo que las Fueras Armadas, debido a un bajo presupuesto, sufren de sobre-extensión y se enfrentan a diversas dificultades, dadas las misiones que les son asignadas.

Palabras clave: Historia militar de la República Italiana, Guerra Fría, Era post-bipolar, OTAN.

Copyright © UNISCI, 2011.

Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores, y no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. *The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.*



1. The Historiography on the Military History of the Italian Republic

The historical and scholarly study of Defence policy of the Italian Republic has just started². Many sources are still unavailable, or not available to historians: this clearly influences studies and scholars. In any case, to understand, historians need to divide into periods, establishing chronologies, phases etc.: they can have it from a thorough examination of the main frames and issues of the topic. A fundamental element of this dividing into periods our subject can be found in the civil-military relations, that is – in other words – the political and civilian control of the military.

United Italy knew a first long phase, roughly corresponding to the Liberal Age, wherein the political class left a full and wide autonomy to the military for several basic decisions, besides most of the smaller ones³. In a second, shorter but more dramatic phase, under the Fascist regime, the military and the fascist reached a compromise which guaranteed Mussolini the formal support of the Armed Forces and, in turn, assured these latter a continuation, as long as possible, of their old autonomy⁴. This compromise lasted for the whole Fascist *Ventennio*, up to the moment wherein – humiliated by the defeat because of their lack of preparation in a feared, but not contrasted or hindered war, – on July 25, 1943 the Armed Forces had again obeyed the King only, and through Marshal Badoglio dismissed the Duce. Which model of civil-military relations would have replaced these two previous Liberal and Fascist ones, when the Republic was established? Or, even, would a specific Republican model, different from the Liberal and the Fascist ones, exist?

The impression here is that – between the government and the military, between these latter's external and internal functions, between attempted discontinuity and strong continuities – the democratic model was in the end more subdivided but not disconnected from the past. It thus developed a configuration with the chiefs of the military involved in the Republic political system but left again with a large autonomy to the Armed Forces. In Republican Italy the military have been not only scarcely controlled, but even scarcely known by the political class and, more in general, by civilians. This gap, which was not new to democracies⁵, knows a peculiar intensity and feature in Italy.

² See Rochat, Giorgio: "Gli studi storico-militari", in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), *Le armi della Repubblica...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 601-618. The only serious comprehensive work is the one by Ilari, Virgilio (1994a): *Storia militare della prima repubblica*, Ancona, Nuove ricerche. See also the brief de Leonardis, Massimo (2005): *L'Italia e il suo esercito. Una storia di soldati dal Risorgimento ad oggi*, Roma, Rai-Eri. A bibliography, now rather old, Nuti, Leopoldo (1997): "La storiografia sulle forze armate dell'Italia repubblicana", in Del Negro, Piero (a cura di) (1997), *Guida alla storia militare italiana*. Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane.

³ See Rochat, Giorgio; Massobrio, Giulio (1977): *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943*, Torino, Einaudi; Gooch, John (1994): *Esercito, stato, società in Italia (1870-1915)*, Milano, Angeli; Ceva, Lucio (1981): *Le forze armate*, Torino, Utet. For a monography see Labanca, Nicola (1986): *Il generale Cesare Ricotti e la politica militare italiana (1884-1887)*, Roma, Stato maggiore dell'esercito. Ufficio storico.

⁴ See Rochat, Giorgio (1967): *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini (1919-1925)*, Bari, Laterza; *Id.* (2005): *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*, Torino, Einaudi; Gooch, John (2007): *Mussolini and his generals. The armed forces and fascist foreign policy, 1922-1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Knox, MacGregor (2007): *To the threshold of power, 1922/33: Origins and dynamics of the Fascist and national socialist dictatorships*, vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁵ See Battistelli, Fabrizio; Ammendola, Teresa; Greco, Lorenzo (2008): *Manuale di sociologia militare. Con elementi di psicologia sociale*, Milano, Angeli; Caforio, Giuseppe (ed.) (2003): *Handbook of the sociology of the military*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum; *Id.* (ed.) (2007): *Social science and the military. An interdisciplinary overview*, London, Routledge; *Id.* (ed.) (1998): *The sociology of the military*, Cheltenham, Elgar.



This is only a general impression, as we have to admit that studies on the Defence policy of the Italian Republic have just started, and remain strongly influenced by the lack of available sources. Also relevant institutional changes recently experienced by the Italian military (reform of military top management, passage to a professional model, strong shift of the overall military orientation from a 'barracks army' to more expeditionary forces, etc.) have some influence in our today perception of the military history of Italian Republic.

Having a story divided into smaller periods, for a historian, is a requirement necessary to understand. We choose these periods also because of available sources and chosen perspective – and because of interpretation, of course.

Unfortunately, up to now there have been not many other valid attempts on our topic. Some scholars completely skipped the point, for instance substantially reducing their narratives to points and anecdotes: possibly very informed and learned, but not able to explicitly provide for a comprehensive image⁶. The problem was also avoided by other scholars who just segmented Italian Defence policy in decades⁷: this being more a chronologic than a historical measure, which gives the sense of the progression of events but which does not highlight historical process and its actors. In the end some scholars simply did not seem interested in establishing chronologies and periods, offering a simplistic and crude division of the history of Republican Italy, a rather complex and tormented history lasted up to now more than sixty years, in just two phases – Cold War and post-bipolarism: it is clear that they do not consider necessary a division in periods⁸. Others scholars offer a reasonable division into periods, but only limited to the very particular subject of their interest. Even in historical studies valuable, documented, critical and full of ideas, such a partial chronology and division into periods looks partial. For instance periods in the history of regulations and doctrines, or of weapons and weapon systems, can be reasonable in themselves but are difficult to apply to a more general history of national Defence policy, thus losing their possible more general value. For all these reasons, maybe the best work in this field – although it suffers more than others the passing of time and its old-fashioned ideological language (his author was a Communist Party MP) – is still the one which considered (with a respect mixed to critical suspicion) the history of the Republic Armed Forces like a series of successive steps of rearmament⁹.

As it can be clearly seen, in all the above mentioned cases (included the latter one, which did not hide its supporting ideology) interpretation and chronology are strictly twisted.

2. Six plus Two

We suggest to divide Italian Defence policy in eight periods, six in the bipolar age (or Cold war) and two in the post-bipolar. We cadence these periods by Italian events.

Other scholars could prefer to divide the history of Defence policy according to external, international events: this or that alliance, this or that war, this or that supranational

⁶ See Ilari, Virgilio, "Storia militare della prima repubblica...", *op. cit.*

⁷ See Nuti, Leopoldo: "Linee generali della politica di difesa italiana (1945-1989)", in Goglia, Luigi; Moro, Renato; Nuti, Leopoldo (ed.) (2006): *Guerra e pace nell'Italia del Novecento. Politica estera, cultura politica e correnti dell'opinione pubblica*, Bologna, il Mulino.

⁸ See Paoletti, Ciro (2008): *A Military History of Italy*, London, Praeger Security International.

⁹ See Cerquetti, Enea (1975): *Le forze armate italiane dal 1945 al 1975. Strutture e dottrine*, Milano, Feltrinelli.



military doctrine (*Mutual Assured Destruction, Flexible Response*, etc.). Of course, as always and inevitably even more during the Cold War, evolution of military institutions and relating policies have been strictly influenced by the international situation. And national actors had to take into account this broader context, both in peace and in war. But there is a risk in this procedure, that makes external factors more important than internal ones.

On the contrary we aim at maintaining a connection between military/defence history and Italian history at large, also because we are convinced of the relevance of the military dimension in the history of the Republic.

In any case, chronology and periods must be considered not a goal but a tool, a tool for understanding history and not an ontologically autonomous object. Even our suggested eight periods, defined to better clarify the changes sometimes quite abruptly occurring in Italian Defence policy, from a mixture of external, internal, technological, cultural, etc. perspectives, obviously do not want to explain everything. Other relevant aspects of Italian military history – such as change of generations in the military and in social composition of the officer corps, rotation of recruitment models, changing of military cultures, etc. – had different times and longer scansions.

Finally, even beyond periods, sometimes continuities and inheritance of the past heaped upon everything. For instance we will see how, with regard to the systems of civil and political control of the military – an already mentioned subject –, the Liberal model of autonomy and the Fascist model of compromise kept burdening the Republican model, influencing it.

We will consider in the following pages some of the most relevant frames, and issues, of these periods.

3. Reconstruction (1945-48)

3. 1. Frame

The first years following the end of the war were the most difficult period for the Italian Armed Forces. It was not a moment of apnoea or suspension. While in Europe Western and Eastern spheres of influence were evolving into blocs of alliances, although in a dissimulated or implicit way, some basic choices were made in those years. Military Italy was taking her position in a nuclear era which was also witnessing the birth of the Cold War¹⁰. The choices made in Defence policy in those years were at the same time a cause and an effect of this positioning, even if at the time they could seem just a recovery of autonomy and of national independence.

Civilians-politicians¹¹, like Alcide De Gasperi e Carlo Sforza, can be mentioned among the actors of this policy (but Anglo-American allied authorities kept a background inspiration, for instance formulating a first project of military reform for Italy). In any case their influence was obviously only general. Among Italian actors, the Ministry of War (since

¹⁰ See Romero, Federico: “L’Italia nella guerra fredda”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-57.

¹¹ Take note that in Italian language we may use both terms, in civil-military relations theory, almost without differences.



1947, Ministry of Defence) and the General Staffs were more relevant than Prime Ministers or the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Some Ministers, sometimes in rapid sequence, were relevant, such as old politicians like Luigi Gasparotto or Stefano Jacini, or minor figures like Mario Cingolani or Cipriano Facchinetti. But all of them had (with the exception of Gasparotto) a scarce experience in this field. Therefore, it is not a surprise that, in these first years of foundation of the Republic and of its defence policy, so much power was retained by the uniformed men. Some of them were prominent personalities such as Raffaele Cadorna, Raffaele de Courten and Claudio Trezzani. They were all men who, in spite of their different roles and feelings, had passed through the end of the Fascist regime and its war as protagonists.

3. 2. Issues

In those first years the Armed Forces were mostly an element of control of internal public order. But they soon became a tool of the Italian foreign policy thanks to NATO.

The Army was restructuring itself, the number and the efficiency of its divisions¹², while the available sea and air units were not sufficient for the international role of the new State. The Air force had been nearly completely destroyed: it had been beaten in 1943 and then, from 1943 to 1945, further reduced and divided. The Navy was in better conditions from a quantitative point of view, but was anxiously waiting for the decisions deriving from the Peace Treaty. And, in fact, it was not by chance that this latter obliged Italy to consign some of its ships to the winners (URSS and Greece took advantage from this opportunity, whereas the Western countries substantially renounced). Because of the general economic difficulties, no Italian service had enough resources to repair and maintain the arsenals or to provide for sufficient training.

On the other hand, the Armed Forces were considered fundamental for the guarantee of the public and institutional order, which, according to the governments, was endangered by political menaces, social agitations and secessionist claims¹³. To guarantee public order both the Army, reconstituted and rearmed, and the *Carabinieri* were considered essential. This 'Carabineer force' received special attention, and their number was specifically highlighted in the main reorganization tables of those years. The attention of the Anglo-American allies focused on these internal tasks, since they wanted to remove as soon as possible their troops from Italian territory.

But, beyond these immediate tasks, Italian military planned something more. In the Army, which was still the main national military tool, the debate was: which force should be created? The possible choice was between a small, but well equipped and trained, Army, and a larger one, according to Italian previous traditions – probably less prepared and equipped, but able to carry out several internal and external tasks, and even providing employment for a conspicuous number of officers. Some right considerations about the defeats suffered in the previous war would have suggested not following the second, traditional way. Also a reflection on the modern military profile needed by the new atomic age, reflection which was high time to do, should have led to the same conclusion. The General Staff, on the contrary, decided to recreate a large Army, with several and large ternary divisions (three infantry regiments and one artillery regiment). This planned institutional "frame" obviously was not so

¹² See Nuti, Leopoldo (1989): *L'esercito italiano nel secondo dopoguerra 1946-1950. La sua ricostruzione e l'assistenza militare alleata*, Roma, Ussme.

¹³ See Cappellano, Filippo (2008): "Esercito e ordine pubblico nell'immediato secondo dopoguerra", *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 250 (2008).



large as the one fighting in the Second world war nor formally consistent like the one of the last Fascism, although weakened by the binary structure of the divisions (only two infantry regiments), but was however huge if compared to the resources that the country could provide in the foreseeable future, and if compared to Armed Forces of other European nations. The General Staff was certainly aware that there were no immediate resources for compacting that frame, and therefore units were often just sketched as “cadres”, or were kept at a “minimum force” of soldiers; but in a few years, in spite of lacking an armament adequate to the size acquired in the meanwhile, the Italian army could formally draw up a theoretically considerable force. For all these reasons, although it had been broken by the war, Italy was once again provided with a large Army, at least from a quantitative (not a qualitative) point of view.

Other scholars think that for the military this was a “low profile” period¹⁴. Maybe this can be true with regard to military satisfaction, or to their public appearances, but certainly not with regard to their aspirations and to the substance of Italian defence policy. The Italian military, more than other European military, had to tolerate a downsizing in terms of political role: but it was natural, due to the defeat in Fascist wars, and to the limited space occupied by defence policy in the general context of Italian post-war priorities. Also the fierce defence of the services against the hypothesis that civilians could lead or even take part in the process of purge and de-fascistization of the military administration, namely a retrospective civil control of the military, was important. Indeed in this case, on the contrary, the profile was high, and continuity prevailed.

In any case, the very first period of Republican and democratic life actually saw fundamental choices for Italy, leading to a large Army in spite of a general lack of resources. It is clear that in those first few years Italian Armed Forces had the little strength they could afford, but they already thought about a great future.

4. Cold War Ambitions (1949-53)

4.1. Frame

The years 1948 and 1949 saw the beginning of the coldest years of the Cold War, and not only for Italy. For the Italian Armed Forces it was a moment of decisive choices, rapid growth and illusions – in fact, not all those choices were well meditated and needed.

In those years the rapid recovery of the Italian armed forces was well integrated in the Western policy, chosen by the Italian government. It was no longer the time of national union and recovered freedom, as in 1945, but of a clear Atlantic choice in view of a recovery of national strength. It created a larger action space for the military, whose role, with Italy now a “protected” democracy part a strong military alliance, was no longer limited as in the previous period to the tasks of recovering national autonomy. It should be reminded that, generally speaking, the Cold War saw a remarkable mixture of levels: diplomatic choices involved ideological ones, whereas military decisions were intertwined to economic ones, with an extreme integration of all these levels.

¹⁴ See Nuti, Leopoldo, “Linee generali della politica di difesa...”, *op. cit.*



This policy has various actors. Defence policy could not be without links with the policies followed by Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, by Ministers of Foreign Affairs such as Carlo Sforza and Ministers of the Treasury as Giuseppe Pella. The decisive role was played by the Minister of Defence Randolfo Pacciardi, who was uninterruptedly in charge from 1949 to 1953¹⁵, together with some military leaders among whom the Chief of the Defence Staff (inter-services) Luigi Efisio Marras, in charge for a long time and whose relevant role in the Italian adhesion to the Atlantic Alliance is well known. It was under the guide of these strong men, and in difficult times, that the Armed Forces of the new Italian Republic reached a theoretically relevant status.

4. 2. The Issues

In this second period the Armed Forces, reconstructed and on the way to their modernization, became again a tool of foreign policy¹⁶. But the illusion that the Korean rearmament was a permanent condition of the Cold War, and that Italy could bear more sacrifices for its military assets led the General staff and the government to some excesses.

The inclusion of Italy in NATO represented, from many points of view, an extraordinary acceleration and a remarkable experience for Italian Armed Forces. Many military, used to the strictly nationalist policy of the Fascist regime and shocked by the new peculiarities of the Western alliance compared to the tradition of Liberal Italy, had some suspicions with regard to NATO: cooperation with allies had never been so close, in the Triple Alliance of 1882 or in the Pact of Steel of 1939. And this was not only a military mood: in the Parliament and in the public opinion, from the left and from the right, NATO was accused of attempting to national independence and autonomy. But all these military doubts were silenced by the awareness that the Italian Armed Forces would have never found the resources for their renewal inside the country, without an external intervention. Therefore, NATO was for the military both a means and an end. In fact, it was only thanks to external aid that the Army could receive new weapons, the Navy could have fuel to leave the harbours and above all the Air force could fly again, at first with old second-hand planes, then with licensed aircrafts and jets.

It could be stated that Italian membership in NATO and above all American policy of aids and military supplies¹⁷ really had strong effects on Italy, although not always of the kind denounced by the opposition. However, the responsibility of these distortions was only partially external and political, since it actually derived also from expectations and plans which were Italian and military, sometimes even previous to entering the Alliance. It has already been mentioned the tendency of Italian military leadership, above all but not only that of the Army, to create a number of units and divisions hardly sustainable by the effectively available national resources. This tendency was strengthened by the flow of auxiliary resources activated by the Italian membership of NATO and by the Korean rearmament. An example of this policy was Minister Pacciardi's decision to have an Army of 12 divisions, as well as remarkable Navy and Air force. Divisions increased and, formally, Italian Armed Forces in the first half of the Fifties reached a remarkable size. Number and size of the units contrasted with their tasks: besides from the defence of the fatherland and, as far as possible, of the NATO Southern (Yugoslavian) front, Italy had no colonial empire to administer or to

¹⁵ See Argenio, Andrea: "Un ministro di ferro? Randolfo Pacciardi", in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), "Le armi della Repubblica...", *op. cit.*, pp. 619-625.

¹⁶ See Cerquetti, Enea, "Le forze armate italiane dal 1945 al 1975...", *op. cit.*

¹⁷ See Sebesta, Lorenza (1991): *L'Europa indifesa. Sistema di sicurezza atlantico e caso italiano 1948-1955*, Firenze, Ponte alle grazie.



protect against anti-colonial movements, no wars to plan. So the entrance into NATO, together with the aforementioned scarce control by the civilians, allowed the military to cultivate their traditional ambitions for large Armed Forces, more suitable to a great power. This was in the military's interest, even if during those years, as a matter of fact, it was a civilian like Minister Pacciardi who encouraged this policy of military ambitions¹⁸.

Then, Italian Armed Forces were fully involved in the Cold War. Some dark sides involving unbalances and reduced efficiency remained, even if are too often forgotten or hidden both by the official military history and by rather indulgent historians. In the middle of the Fifties the Italian military started to think that the infamous images of dishonour for the defeat in the Fascist war and of chaos for what happened after 8th September 1943 could be finally left behind. As a matter of fact, at least, Italian Armed Forces were now remarkable in size, by that time quite different from the previous small "transition army". The political situation and NATO membership had allowed them to overcome the limitations imposed by the Peace Treaty of 1947, thus creating a robust, if not well armed body.

Centre political coalitions, Korean rearmament and too ambitious programs such as Pacciardi's plan and NATO's plan in Lisbon (1952) had left Italy with the heritage of a larger military tool, too large for the country, above all unbalanced. And this, once again, with reduced or no parliamentary control. Parliament had renounced a closer control by accepting the budget consolidation¹⁹.

This period, full of so many ambitions in a country which had not been modernized and enriched by the "economic miracle", would end soon.

5. Downsizing and Transformation (1954-62)

5. 1. Frame

The second half of the Fifties, after the end of the Korean War and the recovery of Trieste to Italy²⁰, was a contradictory period for the Armed Forces. While at the economic-social level the country was pervaded by an intense "economic miracle" and at the political level a trend toward new political balances, from centre towards centre-left, was finally coming (in spite of many resistances), these were the last years of a possible consolidation for Italian military institution thanks to American aids.

The progressive breakdown of the policy of the previous decade also explains Italian political decision of accepting American nuclear missiles on the national territory²¹. This choice strongly confirmed the close and subordinate relationship with the hegemonic superpower.

¹⁸ See Nuti, Leopoldo (1994): "U.S. Forces in Italy, 1945-1963", in Duke, S. W.; Krieger, W. (ed.) (1994): *U.S. Military Forces in Europe. The Early Years. 1945-1970*, Boulder, Westview. See also Pignato, Nicola; Cappellano, Filippo (2007): *Gli autoveicoli da combattimento dell'esercito italiano*, vol. III, 1945-1955, Roma, Ufficio storico Stato maggiore dell'esercito.

¹⁹ See Nascia, Leopoldo; Pianta, Mario (2009): "La spesa militare in Italia, 1948-2008", in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), "Le armi della Repubblica...", *op. cit.*, pp. 177-208.

²⁰ See Cappellano, Filippo: "Trieste 1953-54" in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), "Le armi della Repubblica...", *op. cit.*, pp. 705-723.

²¹ See Nuti, Leopoldo (2007): *La sfida nucleare. La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche 1945-1991*, Bologna, il Mulino.



But all this did not save Italy from facing eventually the consequences deriving from the excessive ambitions of the previous period: at the middle of the Fifties Italian Armed Forces started a downsizing of their expectations and an amendment of their programs. Number and size of divisions faced severe cuts. In short, and not without alternating different trends, as it happened on a more general level, this was a period of dramatic changes and of uncertainties concentrated in a few years.

In the meanwhile – as long as the country evolved towards the centre-left and the reforms – defence policy was charged with a more general task of guarantee with regard to milieus and classes fearing those political evolutions and those reforms.

The major actors of this period were still, as part of the tradition of the Cold War, Premiers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the like. After the age of De Gasperi and Sforza, it was the time of minor figures, like Giuseppe Pella e Mario Scelba, Gaetano Martino and Antonio Segni. In contrast, great relevance was acquired by two Defence Ministers who, because of their personality and their long-lasting presence, left their mark on this period: Paolo Emilio Taviani (1953-1958) and Giulio Andreotti (who remained a Defence Minister for a longer period, 1959-1966 and 1974²²). The two ministers had different attitudes and ideas, and somehow antithetical personalities: all this gave, also visually, a sense of complexity to this period, wherein partially contrasting lines followed and alternated according to the events. Succession and changes can be even better understood by reading the names of the chiefs of General Staff of this period. Then we meet name and personalities such as General Giorgio Liuzzi, who was ending his period of leadership, Aldo Rossi, and Giuseppe Aloia, whose name like Andreotti's one is so linked to the following period. These changes suggest that the military too felt some kind of incertitude about the way to follow.

5. 2. The Issues

Defence policy in this period had the same contradictory and transitory character experienced by the country on a more general level²³.

See, for an exemplary case, what happened to the equipment. On the one hand, Italian Armed Forces realized a real modernization in weapon systems. As already mentioned, in these years Italy direct USA aids were coming to an end. At first the Army had been perhaps the major beneficiary. Now it was the turn of the Air force, whose configuration was actually quite scarce. Also the Navy tried to take advantage of this, and if it had to wait till 1958 it was only because it had ended the war in better conditions than the Air force. Moreover, the approximately twenty-year long life of the fleet had not ended yet, and menaces coming from the Mediterranean Sea against the national defence system and the Atlantic Alliance were rather scarce, whereas the SACEUR considered a first-class priority to control Italian “house door” of Gorizia²⁴ and protect the Southern air flank of a possible Central European general war. Then, the Air Force was able to modernise its equipment and procedures (many Italian

²² See D'Angelo, Augusto: “Un democristiano alla Difesa. Giulio Andreotti”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 626-638.

²³ See Stefani, Filippo (1987-1989): *La storia della dottrina e degli ordinamenti dell'esercito italiano*, vol. III, tomo I, *Dalla Guerra di liberazione all'arma atomica tattica*, and tomo II, *Dagli anni cinquanta alla ristrutturazione*, Roma, Ussme.

²⁴ See Ceschin, Daniele: “La soglia di Gorizia. I «paesi-caserma» del Friuli ai tempi della naia”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 758-770.



pilots spent long training periods in the USA)²⁵. But, in spite of this modernization, the Italian military, and in particular the Army, still based their strength on the number of men: its percentage of armoured or even only motorized infantry was one of the lowest in Western Europe.

If the means were not sufficient for the men, this was perhaps partially due to the fact that there were too many men, and not only to the disastrous starting conditions of post-war Italy. This explains why, as far as the Army was concerned, the most relevant force of the national military system, severe cuts were necessary (in spite of foreign aids). With the Korean War over, the end of the governments led by De Gasperi and Pacciardi's tenure of the Defence Ministry, there was necessarily a first change of mind. Someone began thinking that the policy of a quantitatively "large Army" pursued up to that moment had to end. In the following years a drastic downsizing of the units, many of which were reduced from divisions to brigades, followed. Eventually it had been realized that expenses for the personnel were much too higher than those for investments and equipment: an Army made of bayonets, even if they were millions, was no longer acceptable in times of atomic war and technological changes.

Even if Pacciardi himself had come to terms with this change of policy in the very last period of his ministry, it was Minister Taviani who promoted this downsizing. His style was different from Pacciardi's extremism and Andreotti's 'acrobatics'. Taviani liked to show a technocratic approach, even if without any exaggeration. It was difficult for everyone this policy of cuts, which were after all admissions of failure and critics to the previous regulations. On the contrary, Taviani liked to stress his "successes", e.g. his decision to accept the American nuclear SETAF on Italian soil.

While the military was to change, Italy was changing more than the military could think and accept: "centrosinistra" (centre-left), "miracolo economico" (economic miracle), and some years after "contestazione giovanile" (students' protest) would have been the names of that time. It is difficult to think of a broader gap between the military and the civilians.

6. Rearmament, Doubts and Inefficiency (1963-68)

6.1. Frame

At the end of 1963, the creation of the first "organic" centre-left government, under Prime Minister Aldo Moro represented for Italy, and for her Armed Forces, a historic date.

Moro came after a transition government led by Amintore Fanfani, with "external" socialist support, in the previous year, but represented a true discontinuity. Not so much because of the new political majority or because his government introduced the radical revolution feared by its adversaries (in the end, continuity prevailed on change once again), but because the new government somehow changed the external context of Italian policy. This was well demonstrated by the fact that, on the occasion of the first crisis of that government, in the summer 1964, actually after less than one year of rule, right because of

²⁵ See de Leonardis, Massimo: "L'Aeronautica Militare Italiana dalla ricostituzione postbellica alla fine della guerra fredda", in *Id.* (2003).: *Ultima ratio regum. Forza militare e relazioni internazionali*, Bologna, Monduzzi, pp. 147-166.



that change many feared a “rattling of sabres” (what in Italy is called “Piano Solo-SIFAR”²⁶). Underestimating the event-*affaire* “Piano Solo”, or the spreading of worried political perceptions following it, would lead to a misunderstanding of the fact that even a simple “*intentona*” [an attempted coup d’état] could stop political change in Italy and damage her such young and weak Republican democracy²⁷. On the contrary, we think that those events and those perceptions had a remarkable political weight, influencing for a long time and in many different ways both Italian history in general and in particular defence policy.

The major actors of this period are well-known and all had a remarkable political standing: from Fanfani, who had prepared the way to the centre-left, to Moro, who led the first centre-left governments, from Taviani, who was Minister of the Interior for a long time, to Segni and then Saragat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The defence Minister was once again Andreotti, whose defence policy changed with the advent of the centre-left, although he always declared that he knew nothing about the specific facts of that summer 1964. He was later replaced by Tremelloni, whose role at the defence Ministry should now be reread and re-evaluated. The Chiefs of the Army Staff were at first Aldo Rossi and then Giovanni De Lorenzo²⁸, whereas the Chiefs of the Defence Staff were Aldo Rossi and then a promoted Aloia. Above all of them, with a role which has been increasingly emphasized by historians, was the President of the Republic, Antonio Segni. Such relevant actors were well aware of the complex tangle of matters that, in those years, involved and influenced both the role of Italy in a new international context and that of the Armed Forces in Italian politics.

6.2. Issues

In fact, it should be remarked that events and perceptions about “Piano Solo” represent just *one*, although the most dramatic, of the links of a longer chain of facts occurred in the years between 1963 and 1968 in the realm of military policy. We could mention the overcoming of the Cuban crisis, international agreements on non-proliferation, the blooming of Italian centre-left and its rapid withering, up to preparations and ultimate birth of a “strategy of tension”²⁹ in Italy. All these events influenced, on a national and international level, the relationship between Italy and her Armed Forces. In other words, with regard to defence policy, the problem of Italian Armed Forces in those years does not seem to be simply their fidelity to republican constitution, as it has been thought for a long time, and then their positioning with regard to the “double State”, as it has been more recently suggested, or even the “double loyalty” of some of their leaders³⁰, but also their efficiency and congruity with the country’s foreign policy³¹.

In very brief words, we could say that the centre-left governments, with their insufficient and weak reforms, even in the military field bore some responsibilities.

²⁶ See De Lutiis, Giuseppe: “Segreti servizi”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-265.

²⁷ See Franzinelli, Mimmo (2010): *Il Piano Solo. I servizi segreti, il centro-sinistra e il "golpe" del 1964*, Milan, Mondadori.

²⁸ See Ilari, Virgilio (1994b): *Il generale col monocolo. Giovanni de Lorenzo (1907-1973)*, Nuove ricerche, Ancona.

²⁹ This expression is used by some historians and commentators to describe a number of bloody events the origin of which has never been fully clarified. The expression implies that some sectors of the political class or of the State’s bodies were involved in them (Editor’s note).

³⁰ See De Felice, Franco (1999): *La questione della nazione repubblicana*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

³¹ See Bovio, Oreste (1996): *Storia dell’esercito italiano, 1861-1990*, Roma, Ussme.



7. Need of Reform: the ‘Restructuring’ (1969-75)

7.1. Frame

The end of the Sixties and the first half of the Seventies coincided, for Italian Armed Forces, with the complex gestation of further severe cuts in military institutions, a kind of reform called in Italian “ristrutturazione” (restructuring).

While in the Seventies Italy went through tumultuous transformations, her Armed Forces came to this appointment in bad conditions. Change and improvements continually postponed in the previous year and decades had to be faced, at last: a strong change was necessary. It was based upon the mature conviction that inefficiency and disloyalty had to be overcome, and that Armed Forces should be put in the condition of operating with some effectiveness and should cease to feel as an element detached from the republican democracy.

The actors of the ‘restructuring’, namely of this turning point in defence policy, were various and for the first time of different relevance.

The major political protagonists had a diversified but relevant role. Among them, we must remember Prime Ministers, from Giovanni Leone to Mariano Rumor, from Emilio Colombo to Andreotti; Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Moro for a long time); and, obviously, Defence Ministers, namely Luigi Gui and Mario Tanassi, who were both in charge for a relatively long period. The previously mentioned crisis concerned Tanassi, who was the first Defence Minister serving a prison sentence because a court judged him guilty of corruption. In the political realm, for this period, some further actors of defence policy were, and this was quite new, the left parties. Among them, close to the Socialist party (in most of those years in the government together with Christian-Democrats), a little but cultivated network of civilian experts in strategic/military affairs grew. And, more important, a mention goes to the Communist party. Through the interventions of their leaders and thanks to the constant attention of their (few) experts, the communists ‘opened’ their party’s defence policy, as well as the foreign one: for the first time in the history of the Italian Republic they brought with them a popular consensus to defence policy broader than the one the government and the centre-left majority could provide.

But, as usual, an important role was played by the military – and in this period this happened with some innovations. Among the uniformed men who left a new mark on defence policy of those years a mention deserves Admiral Eugenio Henke, the first Chief of Defence Staff not belonging to the Army. Among the men in uniform, others should be mentioned – not anymore individuals, but this time groups, still without a name for lack of researches. Among these collective actors, on the one hand, there was the generation of younger staff officers subordinate to the afore mentioned chiefs, whose stimulating, renewing work and whose constant pressure on bureaucracy and in military press were essential for the change. On the other hand, for the first time in the history of the Italian Republic (but the phenomenon was general, not strictly Italian), a relevant role was played by those lower rank officers, and above all non-commissioned officers, as well as by many privates who, challenging rigid disciplinarian regulations, had the personal courage and the political wisdom necessary for denouncing backwardness, dysfunctions and injustice existing (just like, or even more than in other places of Italian society) inside the barracks³². The engagement of these last collective

³² See Francescangeli, Eros: “Il proletario in divisa”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-401.



actors was diversified and motivated by very different reasons: sometimes institutional-technocratic, sometimes renewing, sometimes radical if not even revolutionary. But in the end their action was more convergent than they thought, and the modernization of Italian Armed Forces in the Seventies, a period of Italian history generally defined the “season of movements”, was in not a little part due to their collective protest and action.

7.2. Issues

In this period the fundamental decision was, as already stated, ‘restructuring’³³.

It meant at the same time two aspects: a reorganization of the Armed Forces, with the axing of dead branches – no longer adequate to the new requests dictated by the NATO doctrine of *Flexible Response*, the military growth of the Soviet Bloc and the crisis of the US hegemony in an increasingly multi-polar world – and a modernization of armaments. The first aspect was particularly important: the acknowledgement of the need for reform meant that the military organization, actually the same derived from the downsizing in the Fifties and from the following consolidation in the Sixties, was now inadequate, excessive, and ‘wrong’. The three services came to this conclusion through different, although converging, paths.

The first to be aware of the problem was the Navy³⁴, resenting the obsolescence of some of its ships and the general inadequateness of a tool which more or less remained the same as it had been immediately after the war and in the first NATO years, designed to fight some minor opponent in the Adriatic Sea and to guarantee some escort to allied convoys in case of general war. Such a Navy was scarcely useful against new dangers, namely a large Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean with possible bases provided by Arabian coastal countries. The Air force, whose fleet was on the average newer, was suffering under the evident USA and NATO requests, complaining about Italian insufficient support to protection of the Southern flank in the central zone. Eventually, among the three services the Army was in the most critical situation. The growth of the officer corps and the large mass of the conscripts had created an excessively wide organism, provided with obsolete weapons, hardly able to satisfy the requests of the Alliance.

Therefore, all the three services shared a problem of efficiency/effectiveness, even if in different degrees and forms, most dramatically for the Army. It was not only a matter of having newer weapons, or in greater numbers.

After having cared only for *quantity* for years, now the request dictated by the *Flexible Response* was *quality*. The policy of numbers, from Pacciardi to Andreotti, was no longer sufficient. It was now considered one of the elements that, by expanding the military, had also amplified its inefficiency.

³³ See Jean, Carlo (ed.) (1989): *Storia delle Forze armate*, 2 vol., *Aspetti internazionali, giuridico- istituzionali, economico-finanziari e strategico-operativi*, Giuffrè, Milano, and Jean, Carlo (ed.) (1994): *Aspetti ordinativi e sociologici*, Milano, Angeli.

³⁴ See Patalano, Alessio: “Dal Garibaldi al Cavour. Il potere marittimo italiano”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-246; de Leonardis, Massimo (2003): “La Marina Militare nell’Alleanza Atlantica”, in “Ultima ratio regum...”, *op.cit.*, pp. 123-146; and, for some documents, Sorrenti, Deborah (2008): *La guerra fredda nel Mediterraneo : la politica estera italiana dal compromesso storico agli euromissili*, Roma, Edizioni associate.



8. Put to the Test, toward the End of an Age (1976-89)

8.1. Frame

The period between the mid-Seventies and the end of the Eighties was quite dense.

It was slightly more than a dozen years, from about the end of the Vietnam War and the final USA departure, which had already militarily left the country in 1973, and the end of bipolarism, the termination of the Soviet bloc (1989) and the implosion of URSS. But it was a period that changed the history of the world. Because of its density, in general history it is usually divided in sub-periods, or separated in different periods.

As far as the Italian Armed Forces are concerned, that period meant moving from the already mentioned, and decisive, ‘restructuring’ (1975-78) to a reform imposed by the end of the Cold War (1989-91). In other words, for the Italian military this was the period when the results of the reform started in the mid-Seventies were put to test. This means that these years put to test how structural, lasting, efficacious the changes introduced in 1975-78 had been, and obviously how insufficient and unsuitable they were with regard to the new problems arisen with the passing of time. We can anticipate here that the changes introduced at the different levels of modernization and democratization took place at different speeds and had different outcomes. For a better understanding, this period could be divided in further sub-periods. In any case and at both levels the result was a missed achievement of the more advanced objectives that the Armed Forces had given themselves. A relevant part of the patrimony constituted by the broader political consensus born around the mid-Seventies went lost, even if a new image of the Italian military was in those years emerging.

Among the protagonists of this period, maybe the politicians were brighter stars than the military, as far as it can be understood now from the available sources. Among the Prime Ministers, the familiarity with the military dimension of Andreotti or Francesco Cossiga, and above all the long government of Bettino Craxi, gave them a relevant role in the elaboration of defence policy. An even more marked position was obviously the one of the Defence Ministers, each of them having his own vision. This was perhaps less defined in Vito Lattanzio or Attilio Ruffini or Valerio Zanone, but certainly stronger in Lelio Lagorio, Giovanni Spadolini and Beniamino Andreatta, three among the most important key-figures (with Pacciardi, Taviani, Andreotti e Tremelloni) in our story.

If compared to these politicians, the military seemed to have less charismatic figures, maybe compensated by a good bureaucratic paper-work behind them. This does not mean that admirals like Giovanni Torrisi, or generals coming from the Air force like Lamberto Bartolucci and from the Army like Vittorio Santini or Riccardo Bisogniero did not leave their mark as chiefs of the Defence Staff. Some of these military chiefs were actually incisive, like Andrea Cucino, Eugenio Rambaldi, Umberto Cappuzzo and Luigi Poli for the Army, Torrisi for the Navy and Bartolucci, Basilio Cottone and Franco Pisano for the Air force. But all of them seemed to be simple supporters of ideas shared and formulated by offices and bureaucracies, rather than personal and original thinkers. That being said, compared with their predecessors, they were however not simply younger officers, but also different military men, belonging to a truly new generation.

Besides the top chiefs, other uniformed men must be taken into account for this period, even if unfortunately they can be only shortly mentioned here: we refer to the Italian “rappresentanza militare”. Among difficulties, bureaucracy from the top and pulls from the



bottom, these “uniformed trade unionists” moved their first steps in this period. The system was rather complex, divided into COCER (Central Council of Representation), COIR (Intermediate Councils of Representation) and COBAR (Base Councils of Representation)³⁵.

After the politicians, even if very different from each other, other collective subjects should be mentioned here. Among them we think of the (few) parliamentary experts in defence affairs and their closest collaborators in the respective political parties, the movement of conscientious objectors, non-violent groups, pacifists of any kind, critics of military expenses and of a possible nuclear war, but even supporters of female soldiers. All of them, from different postures, felt themselves as stakeholders of the national defence policy. It was the first time that this happened, and became institutionalized, in Italy.

8. 2. Issues

The period following 1975 is today understandably one of the most neglected by historians, for the general shortage of sources, and then of studies and publications, in the history of the Armed Forces of the Italian Republic³⁶. In any case, it seems that for these years the history of defence policy can be divided in sub-periods.

A first sub-period could start from the passing of the “leggi promozionali” (promotional laws, bills of rearmament) and of the “leggi sui principi” (laws on principles, concerning the reform of military justice and codes), dated 1975-1978, to the acceptance of euro-missiles and, more or less in the same years, to the start of two peacekeeping operations in Lebanon (1979-1982). The promotional laws contributed to enlarge the military budget and the Armed Forces were modernized, qualifying their potential as tools of foreign policy. The two operations in Lebanon (1982 and 1982-84) had also a symbolic value for the Italians: in fact, it was the first time that strong units of land troops went outside the national territory. As a matter of fact they were conscripts, whose training certainly had not taken into account a preparation to the new necessities of peace-keeping. In any case everything went quite well, and Italy did not suffer the high number of victims that, in the same operation, obliged the US and French troops to leave Lebanon.

A second sub-period could cover the years between the departure of a small Italian fleet for clearing of mines the Suez Channel and the Red Sea (1984) and the more demanding Italian naval presence with the operation “Golfo Uno” in the Persian Gulf (1987). These were not NATO or UNO operations, and Italy participated together with other important nations, first of all the USA, in the second case in a veritable war area. Some national pride claims, exemplified by the Sigonella episode in 1985 (the only remarkable episode mentioned in general histories of this period), grew up from these experiences. But it was something more complex than Sigonella alone. In fact, it should be noted that in these years Italy repeatedly showed, even if with difficulties and risks, an unprecedented military activism, integrated and subordinated to the USA (both in 1984 and in 1987). Her readiness and availability to “out of area” operations began to amaze external analysts, even if it gave rise to some strong doubts and perplexities at internal political level (it is not by chance that these operations were much

³⁵ See Caforio, Giuseppe; Nuciari, Marina (1990): *La rappresentanza militare in Italia*, Roma, Rivista militare-Cemiss; and Olivetta, Eraldo (2008): *Forze armate e tutela degli interessi del personale*, Roma, Aracne.

³⁶ See Cremasco, Maurizio (ed.) (1986): *Lo strumento militare italiano. Problemi e prospettive*, Milano, Angeli.



less popular than the Lebanese one, and are therefore more neglected). All this explains how Italy and her military were changing, if not had already changed³⁷.

The third and last sub-period goes from these operations until the end of bipolarism. Like and even more than other countries, Italian Armed Forces came to that point being definitely not so well prepared with regard to efficiency and readiness and had to face the new challenges imposed by post-bipolarism being scarcely provided with new material and new ideas. Military Italy of the years following the “restructuring” had just become lighter and more ready to an expeditionary war (but only for some units). But generally speaking the “modello di difesa” (Defence model, or system) in the Eighties was the same of once upon a time: the bulk of the military was still concentrated on the threshold of Gorizia, although slightly less than in the recent past, units had limited armament and scarce effectiveness, in short its functions seemed to critics more social and political than operative.

In conclusion, at the end of the bipolar system, Italy and her Armed Forces could claim to have contributed *pro quota* to the safeguarding of freedom in their own country and of peace in the West. But, at the end of the Cold War and after nearly half a century of military expenses, Italian military could not praise a peculiar great result.

10. Post-Bipolar Adjustments (1989/91-99/01)

10.1. Frame

If studying Italian Defence policy during the Cold War presents many difficulties in terms of availability and access to the sources, unfortunately much more in Italy than in other homologous countries, for the post-bipolar age problems are inevitably far huger. The only available documentation is now the press, from Parliamentary Papers and debates to military periodical press.

But some notes are not only possible but even necessary, although of a shorter and more provisional character.

Much but not everything was new for Italian Armed Forces in the first post-bipolar decade. The international political context had radically changed with the end of the Cold War and, with it, the main mission of Italian military. The national political system has also entered, between 1992 and 1994, a period of deep change: old and traditional political actors (parties) were exhausted or transformed, some had been literally put on trial, and not only by history. In such a changed background the new task of Italian Armed Forces was not clear.

In the meanwhile, the military were however requested to carry out many duties. Old tasks were performed with changing means; new tasks were performed by men who were often old, or grown up in a previous, bipolar age. Then risks were frequent. In this evolving situation a military reform was desirable: a new “modello di difesa” was thought necessary, and in fact it arrived at last, and was quite important. But, as we will see, change was late and partial.

³⁷ See Desiderio, Alfonso: “Le logiche delle operazioni «fuori area»”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 473-511.



On the basis of our present knowledge, it is difficult to say who were the main propellers, or the actors, of this military reform. Outside the political arena, just like any other developed country of the period, Italian society and peace movements asked for a substantial reduction of the military, namely of the Armed Forces and of the military expenses. We do not know who made the first move for military reform and another “Nuovo modello di difesa”, whether the military or the politicians, or probably both. In this decade ministers like Virginio Rognoni, Salvo Andò or Fabio Fabbri had but a short time to act, and even less time had the minister of the first centre-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi, Cesare Previti, or successively, in a “technical” (i. e., at least in its intentions, bipartisan) government, General Domenico Corcione, a former Chief of the Defence Staff. By the way Corcione was the only military in the history of the Italian Republic appointed Defence Minister. Other Ministers like Beniamino Andreatta or Sergio Mattarella, or Carlo Scognamiglio had more time to carry out their policies, in a period when the new post-bipolar international political system and the role Italy could play in it were better understood. But it is likely that the most relevant stimulus was given by the chiefs of the Defence Staff, such as Corcione or Admiral Guido Venturoni, as well as – or even moreover – by their staffs.

The final impression is that during the first post-bipolar decade Italian defence policy showed a general inadequacy to solve old and new problems, even if – it must be said – in a period of extraordinary changes³⁸.

11. Results and Worries at the Time of the Endless War ... (2001-...)

11. 1. Frame

Coming closer to present times, and trying to penetrate the true essence of reality, historians have the same difficulties of an observer or a contemporary analyst trying to disperse the fog of propaganda, with the only additional benefit of an intensive training to deep insight.

Generally speaking, the last decade for the Italian Armed Forces was very difficult under many respects. The impression is that governments and military chiefs asked too much (and couldn't avoid to ask, because of the policies they represent) from such a troubled institution. We do not forget (contented) statements about new results and new successes: but they, for all their truth, cannot hide to the historian's eye the never ending problems produced by sixty years of Republican life, if not by the nearly one century and half since Italian Unification. In spite of so much emphasis on the new, the historian observes that the long heritages are still there, entangled with more recent features, although in unforeseen contexts. For instance, those who think that in Italy in 1992-94 a second Republic was born will certainly agree that – with the reform of military leadership (1997), the opening the armed forces to women (2000)³⁹ and, above all, the end of the conscription and the passage to a professional system of all volunteers force (between 2000 and 2005) – basically new Armed Forces were born. Undoubtedly, the aforesaid innovations were radical, and deeply transformed, and will keep transforming with the passing of time, the substance and the image of the military institution in Italy. But some deeper line of continuity is still there. Old

³⁸ See Ilari, Virgilio (1992): *Storia del servizio militare in Italia*, vol. V, *La difesa della patria (1945-1991)*, t. I, *Pianificazione operativa e sistema di reclutamento*, e t. II, *Servizio militare e servizio civile legislazione e statistiche*, Roma, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici/Rivista Militare.

³⁹ See Nuciari, Marina: “Una lunga storia. Donne e Forze armate”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 401-406.



problems still exist, although in new contexts. Also in this field, the “end of history” has not come.

The traditional actors of Italian defence policy benefited from internal conditions, complex but not free of new and positive sides. In the present decade, which will be remembered as the Italian centre-right decade (with a short centre-left break in 2006-2008), the defence ministers Antonio Martino and Ignazio La Russa of the Berlusconi governments, respectively in 2001-2006 and in 2008 up to-day, have had parliamentary majorities much larger than those available to any other of their predecessors in the recent Italian history. Also the chiefs of Defence Staff (the 1997 reform had reduced the relevance of the Chiefs of staff of the single Services) have been in charge for a relatively long period, from Rolando Mosca Moschini to Giampaolo Di Paola and Vincenzo Camporini. In the light of the aforesaid, and in spite of the difficulties which should have been confronted with radical choices, still no one could courageously realize them⁴⁰.

Despite all this, problems of effectiveness, difficulties in budgets, overstretching due to the number of external operations in which Italian military have been involved, have remained. Today Italian Armed Forces seem, in the opinion of many independent analysts, «in affanno» (breathless). The seriousness of these signals must not be underestimated. They emerge even in titles of the commentaries signed by competent and usually moderate analysts, working for research institutes (close to the government, and not to the political opposition): «Nuovo modello di difesa: urge una riforma» [*A new model of defence: a reform is urgently needed*] and, against the insufficiency of the Defence budget, «Una scure che taglia le gambe alla riforma» [literally: *An axe cutting the reform's legs*, whose meaning is: *A rope tying the reform's hands*] or «La tela di Penelope» [*Penelope's cloth*]. The 2009 budget, according to the same analysts, would be «in a serious state, liable to further worsening»: «Without a decisive change related to a global and rapid adjustment of the new Model of Defence, there is a concrete danger of definitively compromising the short-, middle- and long-term budget of the Armed Forces starting from next year»⁴¹.

The impression is that these are not the usual alarm cries emitted by the defence analysts (and by the military) for getting some more crumbs from the cake of Government spending. The impression is that most of what has changed from the “restructuring” of the middle of the Seventies up to the reforms carried out along these post-bipolar decades is to be brought up for discussion again.

It has never been easy for the Italian governments imposing to the military the alternative of maintaining either some of their acknowledged peaks of excellence – a value for the country and not only for the services – or a structure too large if compared to the resources that Italy can devote to the Armed Forces. If the military do not decide, if they do not choose, the effectiveness of the whole system will be worn out and even the peaks of excellence will be blunted. The impression of the historian is that in the post-bipolar age the choice has not

⁴⁰ See Mini, Fabio (2008): *Soldati*, Torino, Einaudi.

⁴¹ Quoting from Gasparini, Giovanni: “Nuovo modello di difesa: urge una rivoluzione”, *Affari Internazionali* (22 January 2008), at <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=717> ; *Id.*: “Una scure che taglia le gambe alla riforma”, *Affari Internazionali* (17 July 2008), at <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=896>; Nones, Michele: “La tela di Penelope” (17 July 2008), at <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=897>; Gasparini, Giovanni: “Il vero bilancio italiano della difesa” (17 March 2008), at <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1089>. Recently see also, from the same source, Di Camillo, Federica; Marta, Lucia (2009): *National Security Strategies: The Italian Case* (WP) Roma, Iai, and *Working Paper* no. (2009), and more in general Nones, Michele; Silvestri, Stefano (2009): *European security and the role of Italy*, Milano, Iai (Documenti Iai 921).



been made yet. But having everything is a cost that the country cannot – and maybe does not even want to – afford.

Defence assertive policies unable to choose seem guarantee functions at the international and national level (it does not matter if towards the hegemonic superpower, the allies, the internal political forces or even the officer corps) but they only made things worse and prepare delusions, cutbacks and problems. The risk, already run several times during the Republic, of having too large a structure if compared to the available resources, should have taught that this inevitably leads to successive reductions, “restructurings”, cuts.

12. A Few Sketchy Conclusions

The availability of documentary sources and therefore the knowledge of the history of the Italian Republic’s defence policy are still too scarce for allowing definite conclusions⁴². But what we know about the afore mentioned periods and sub-periods can give at least a general impression.

Of course the history of the military dimension of Italian democracy is the story of an exceptional transformation, from the poor conditions in the first post-war period to nowadays, when the size and the relevance of the national Armed Forces rightly count them among those of the main world powers. Of course Italian Armed Forces have nowadays several peaks of excellence, as more generally happens to the whole country.

But this satisfied analysis must not be considered sufficient. The matter is the relationship between those peaks and the rest. From this point of view it is clear that some continuity emerges, not only in the long winters of the Cold War, but even between bipolarism and post-bipolarism, thus reaching the present days⁴³. Military history of the Republic rather surprisingly proposes again elements of histories already heard in one century and half of united Italy, from the liberal age to Fascism, from the First to the Second World War. These long-standing elements speak of inter-services rivalries, un-coordinated planning, scarce efficiency, and also vain ambitions and parochial illusions of national autonomy, oscillations between reduced national resources⁴⁴ and diversified and irreconcilable requests from the services. And all these elements can be also found in the Republican age.

Of course, Italian military has enormously changed too. They entered the Republic coming from the defeat of the Fascist war, the tragedy of September 8, 1943 and the division of the civil war. On the contrary nowadays Italian officers are now some of the most internationalized and modernized public servants. Obviously a military sub-culture and a military-civilian gap resist, like in any other country. But the integration with society is deeper than it used to be in Italy, where the Army was locked in its barracks and the military-

⁴² We pointed it out several times. See, inter alia, Labanca, Nicola (2005): “Note sui bilanci della Repubblica. Una fonte trascurata”, in Rainero, Romain H.; Alberini, Paolo (ed.) (2005): *Le forze armate e la nazione italiana (1944-1989)*, Roma, Commissione italiana di storia militare (Cism), and Labanca, Nicola (2006): “Musei militari, società nazionale, ricerca scientifica”, in Giannone, Giuliano (ed.) (2006): *Archivi, biblioteche, musei militari. lo stato attuale, le funzioni sociali, gli sviluppi*, Roma, Cism.

⁴³ See Battistelli, Fabrizio (1996): *Soldati. Sociologia dei militari italiani nell'era del peace-keeping*, Milano, Angeli.

⁴⁴ For all see Mayer, Giuseppe (1994): “Una serie storica della spesa della Difesa in Italia (1945/46-1993)”, *Quaderno 1993* (Società di storia militare), vol. 1994, and already Id. (1992): *L'evoluzione del bilancio della Difesa dal 1975 ai primi anni '90*, Sma, Roma.



civilians gap often coincided with right-left political cleavages. Even the Cold War atmosphere is now over, when being a military man and not being a supporter of the government was inconceivable, because this meant that you were considered and persecuted as an internal “fifth column” of the international “red” adversary. Now, at least, it is not anymore necessarily so. There are no longer conscripts. Non-commissioned officers and professional soldiers tend to mix. But old prejudices remain and give a measure of the still insufficient Italian social and cultural modernization.

We have already mentioned that several studies are still to be carried out. However, what surely emerges from this review is that the military dimension of the history of Italian Republic is not anymore negligible. It is relevant both in itself and with regard to the resources of the country. Above all, researching and writing military history of the Italian Republic is neither a technical history nor a minor one. In the end, when the necessary documents will be available, it will be more clear the central relevance for the post-bipolar Italy, definitely not a low-profile one, of political decisions like the Italian participation to the two Gulf wars, in 1991 and in 2003, to operations in Somalia⁴⁵ and former Yugoslavia, in Kosovo and Afghanistan⁴⁶ and so on.

In short, the history of the military dimension of the Italian Republic is not a minor history. Continuity and discontinuity are intertwined in it, going beyond the traditional division between bipolar age and post-bipolarism, reproducing the whole profile of one of the biggest, most complex and articulate questions of national history, whose study has been unfortunately undervalued and neglected up to now.

⁴⁵ See Del Boca, Angelo (2009): “Somalia 1992-94 e 1997. A volte tornano”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica:...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 771-786.

⁴⁶ See Mini, Fabio (2009): “Afghanistan 2001... Sulle montagne di Bin Laden”, in Labanca, Nicola (ed.), “Le armi della Repubblica:...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 787-808.