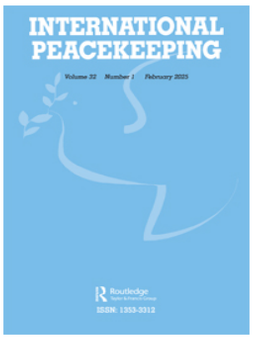

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Italy's Foreign Military Deployments: Theories, Gaps, and Future Research

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ABSTRACT

In the past thirty years, Italy has adopted a highly active foreign military deployment (FMD) policy, sending thousands of soldiers abroad in hundreds of operations. From different theoretical perspectives, Italy's FMD policy over the past thirty years can be seen as a deviant or outlier case, as some defense policy decisions do not align with what certain theories would predict. For this reason, the study of this case is highly important for the development of theory on foreign military interventions. To contribute to the understanding of the motivations behind Italy's decision to send troops abroad, this article reviews and systematizes the academic literature on Italy's FMD policy, identifies its main issues and shortcomings, and discusses their relevance and underlying causes. The article's main contribution is not to introduce new explanations but to identify the theoretical gaps that limit a complete understanding of the existing research and propose a research agenda to bridge them.

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Introduction

Foreign Military Deployments (FMDs)[1] have been pivotal to Italy's foreign policy in the post-bipolar era. Since the end of the Cold War, Italy has sent troops in nearly all major regional and international crises, including those in Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya. These deployments have been conducted through all the major international organizations Italy is part of, including the EU, the UN, and especially NATO, as well as on a bilateral basis, although less frequently. In 2024, this proactive approach led the country to solidify its role as a major 'international peacekeeper'[2]

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[1]Across the article, we consistently use the term Foreign Military Deployment, FMD. While this term might seem overly generic, we adopt it precisely because of its broad scope. By using FMD, we aim to capture every deployment (and the related political decision) of Italian troops abroad regardless whether it happens under the aegis of an EU/NATO/ONU mission or within the context of a national operation. Accordingly, FMD is well suited for our purposes as it simply underscores the decision to send Italian Armed Forces in areas that fall outside the national jurisdiction.

[2]Coticchia and Ruggeri, "International Peacekeeper."

by deploying nearly 12,000 soldiers across three continents and participating in 40 missions, a record figure for the country.[3] This made Italy the top contributor to EU operations, the second-largest provider of NATO military initiatives after the USA, and the leading supplier of troops among Western nations to UN missions.[4]

Italy's adoption of such a proactive FMD policy is puzzling. At first glance, Italy possesses several characteristics that, in other cases, have been considered as factors that hinder the possibility of intervention or, at most, lead to limited intervention. First of all, Italy has a pacifist strategic culture at its core, which leads to a cautious approach toward using military force in foreign policy.[5] This is a trait that Italy shares with other countries, particularly Germany[6] and Japan.[7] In all three countries, the legacy of militaristic regimes and the defeat in World War II led to the adoption of constitutions that severely constrained the use of military force and shaped the development of a strategic culture that does not view the use of force as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy.[8] However, unlike these two countries, which for a long time restricted any participation of their militaries in foreign missions[9] and continue to limit it today,[10] starting from the early 1990s, Italy has adopted a very active FMD policy.[11] Italy's current FMD policy is surprising even in relation to its resources. The country spends nearly half as much on defence compared to other mid-sized European powers,[12] such

[3]Natalizia and Mazziotti di Celso, "Beyond NATO's 2 Percent Threshold."
[4]"Beyond NATO's 2 Percent Threshold."
[5]Rosa, "The Accommodationist State."; Ignazi et al., *Italian Military Operations Abroad.*
[6]Longhusrt, *Germany and the Use of Force.*
[7]Middlebrooks, *Beyond Pacifism.*
[8]Coticchia et al., *Reluctant Remilitarisation.*
[9]Dalgaard-Nielsen, "The Test of Strategic Culture".
[10]While Japan still significantly limits its overseas operations, Germany has normalized this policy since the 2000s. However, Germany's FMD policy is not at all comparable to Italy's. Not only in terms of quality—Italy also initiates numerous bilateral operations, while Germany participates almost exclusively in multilateral framework operations—but especially in terms of quantity. Germany deploys a significantly smaller number of units. In 2023, for example, according to the IISS, Germany deployed less than 1% of its units abroad, while Italy deployed almost 7%. See Mazziotti di Celso, "Is Italy needed in the Indo-Pacific?"
[11]Coticchia et al., *Reluctant Remilitarisation.*
[12]The assignment of Italy's status as a middle power requires further consideration. Whereas some Italian scholars define Italy as a middle power (e.g., Belloni and Della Rocca "Italy and the Balkans"; Giacomello and Verbeek "Italy's foreign policy in the twenty-first century"), others argue that the overly simplistic division between great, middle and small powers is ill suited to capture the complexity of Italy's positioning in the modern international system (Abbondanza, "The West's Policeman?"; Abbondanza and Wilkins, "The Case for Awkward Powers"). Besides static interpretations based essentially on states positioning within a given international hierarchy, recent literature also proposes behavioral and functional approaches to categorizing power (Robertson, "Middle Powers definitions"; Wilkins, "Defining middle powers through IR theory"; Cooper et al., *Relocating Middle Powers*). While a thorough discussion of Italy's power is beyond the scope of our article, this contribution pragmatically places Italy below top-tier countries such as the US or China, but above countries with much more limited capabilities such as Canada, Singapore, Norway or South Africa that are considered as middle powers (Ping, *Middle Powers Statecraft*).

as France and the United Kingdom. Yet, it deploys a number of military personnel equal to or greater than theirs.[13] Under different theoretical lenses, therefore, the Italian case can be seen as a deviant or outlier case, as extant theories do not seem to anticipate such an active posture at the international level.[14] As such, its study appears particularly important because it can provide significant theoretical insights.

To contribute to the understanding of the motivations behind Italy's decision to send troops abroad, this article reviews and systematizes the academic literature on Italy's FMD policy, identifies its main issues and shortcomings, and discusses their relevance and underlying causes. The article's main contribution is not to introduce new explanations but to identify the theoretical gaps that limit a complete understanding of the existing research and propose a research agenda to bridge them.

The review method adopted is the integrative approach, as its purpose is not to cover all articles ever published on the topic but rather to analyze the different perspectives employed to examine the dependent variable.[15] The review provides two main findings. First, the literature remains scarce and fragmented. Studies on the topic have proposed valuable hypotheses to explain Italy's decision to intervene abroad, but most focus on specific case studies or short periods. As a result, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that analyze the key variables shaping political leaders' decisions on Italy's FMD policy. Second, the bureaucratic and organizational approach has been largely overlooked, despite its crucial role in understanding the decision-making process. More specifically, the literature has failed to account for the role actors such as the armed forces and the military industry have played in influencing political leaders' decisions on military interventions. Both of these issues limit our understanding of the factors that have driven Italy to deploy troops abroad so actively.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first part, we briefly present the key features of Italy's FMD policy. In the second part, we highlight the main theories developed to explain foreign military interventions. In the third part, we review the key studies used to explain Italy's foreign military deployment policy. In the fourth part, we discuss the results of our review and propose a research agenda aimed at addressing the gaps and limitations identified. While we refer specifically to Italy's case, the relevance of the avenues for future research we identify extends beyond this specific context, offering insights equally applicable to other cases and valuable for comparative analysis.

[13]Mazziotti di Celso, "Is Italy Needed in the Indo-Pacific?"
[14]George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in Social Sciences.*
[15]Snyder, "Literature Review as a Research Methodology."

Italian Foreign Military Deployment Policy

Until the early 1990s, Italy had rarely deployed troops abroad. However, starting with its participation in the Gulf War in 1991, Italy drastically shifted its approach and began deploying units to all major international crises, from the Balkans to the Middle East.[16]

Italy's post-Cold War Foreign Military Deployment (FMD) policy can be divided into three phases. The first phase of Italy's FMD policy began with its participation in the Gulf War in 1991. Italy's involvement in Operation Desert Storm, led by the United States, marked a turning point in its military policy. In the wake of Desert Storm, Defense Minister Rognoni introduced the *New Defense Model*, which promoted military interventions as an effective response to post-Cold War instability. This framework paved the way for an era of proactive military engagement. Notable among these was Operation Ibis in Somalia (1992–1994), during which Italian troops engaged in combat operations for the first time since World War II.

The Balkans, however, became the primary focus of Italian military projection during this decade. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Italy participated in multiple UN-led missions across the region, culminating in NATO's *Operation Allied Force* in Kosovo in 1999, where Italian forces contributed airstrikes and later supported KFOR with substantial deployments. By the end of the decade, Italy had assumed a more prominent role in international defence, formalized in the 2001 strategic document *New Forces for a New Century*. This document identified crisis prevention and management as core missions for the Italian Armed Forces.

The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror marked the beginning of the second phase of Italy's military interventions. The 2002 Defense White Paper highlighted the global threat posed by terrorism and emphasized the need for cohesive international responses. Italy actively participated in U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, with an average deployment of 8,000 troops annually during the 2000s, representing the peak of Italian military engagement abroad. In addition to Iraq and Afghanistan, Italy played a central role in UNIFIL in Lebanon, starting in 2006, assuming command of the mission multiple times. While differing in scope from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, UNIFIL became a long-term commitment, highlighting Italy's dedication to peacekeeping in the region. From 2011 onward, Italy opted for a reduction in foreign military deployments.[17] By 2014, troop levels abroad had decreased significantly, though Italy remained committed to missions such as *Operation Prima Parthica* against ISIS.

[16]Coticchia and Vignoli, "Italy's Military Operations Abroad."
[17]Mazziotti di Celso and Sguazzini, "Unveiling Military Strategic Narratives on Social Media."

Since 2014, Italy's Foreign Military Deployment (FMD) policy has undergone significant changes,[18] marked by an increase in the scale and scope of its international military engagements. Initially, Italy began focusing heavily on the Mediterranean region, a strategic shift outlined in the 2015 White Paper on International Security and Defense, which identified the 'Enlarged Mediterranean' as the country's primary area of interest.[19] This area spans from the Sahel to the Arabian Sea, reflecting Italy's prioritization of regional stability, counterterrorism, and managing migration flows. In response to this focus, Italy expanded its presence in Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Indian Ocean through capacity-building missions and bilateral agreements.

More recently, Italy's FMD policy has further evolved to include greater contributions to NATO's eastern flank, particularly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The ongoing conflict has prompted a substantial increase in deployments to Europe, with Italy playing a significant role in NATO's deterrence efforts. In 2024, Italy is the second largest troops contributor to NATO and US-led deployments.[20] Simultaneously, Italy has extended its reach into the Indo-Pacific,[21] reflecting the influence of broader geopolitical trends and alignment with U.S. strategic priorities.

How to Explain the Decision to Deploy the Military

Diverse theoretical perspectives aim to explain why countries choose to deploy troops abroad. These approaches vary in their emphasis on structural, institutional, and normative factors and their analytical scope. They range from macro-level systemic theories that focus on the broader international environment to micro-level analyses that delve into domestic dynamics and the role of individual decision-makers. In the following discussion, we examine the main theoretical frameworks scholars use to understand this phenomenon. We distinguish between two levels of analysis: the structural perspective and the actor-based perspective.[22]

Approaches Based on the Structural Perspective

Realist Approaches: Security and Alliance Dynamics

Realist approaches frame troop deployments as a response to external threats and alliance commitments. Rooted in the logic of self-help and power

[18]Natalizia and Mazziotti di Celso, "The Structural Roots of Italy's Expanding Foreign Military Deployments."
[19]Santini, "Italian Post-2011 Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean."
[20]Natalizia, "From Stoltenberg to Rutte."
[21]Abbondanza, "Italy's Quiet Pivot to the Indo-Pacific"; Termine, "The Engagement of Italy with Indo-Pacific Security."
[22]Carlsnaes, "Actors, Structure and Foreign Policy Analysis."

balancing, these theories argue that countries contribute to military missions to ensure their security and maintain the credibility of collective defence arrangements. Decisions to intervene are rational choices to maximize utility.[23] From this perspective, deployments are driven by strategic calculations: countries send troops to demonstrate their commitment to the alliance, deter aggression, and secure their territorial integrity.

Jason Davidson, for example, explained that one of the reasons France launched operations in Libya in 2011 was the fear of massive refugee flows fleeing the country, which could have threatened their borders' security.[24] Similarly, Jakobsen and Rynning argued that Denmark's involvement in international operations, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was driven by security concerns, specifically the fear of alliance abandonment.[25] Worried that the United States might deprioritize Denmark as a strategic partner, Copenhagen increased its defence budget and committed heavily to international operations.

Neoclassical Realism: Domestic Politics as an Intervening Variable

Neoclassical realism explains the decision to participate in international missions or deploy troops abroad as the outcome of systemic pressures filtered through domestic factors.[26] While acknowledging the structural constraints of the international system, such as the need to respond to power dynamics or security threats, it emphasizes the role of internal variables, including leadership perceptions, state capacity, and domestic political considerations, in shaping foreign policy decisions.

Andrew Payne,[27] for example, has illustrated how electoral dynamics often act as an intervening variable between structural constraints and presidential choices in the US presidents' decisions on military interventions, such as in Vietnam and Iraq (2003). Similarly, Kevin Marsh[28] showed that while President Obama determined that a military intervention was necessary to protect US national interests in Libya in 2011, he carefully tailored the scope and presentation of the eventual operation to conform to domestic political constraints and incentives.

Neoliberal Institutionalism Approaches: International Organizations

Neoliberal institutionalists share the assumption that states behave like egoistic value maximisers with realists and neorealists.[29] The main difference lies in the role they assign to international organizations. For realists and

[23]Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions"; Neack, "UN Peace-Keeping."
[24]Davidson, "France, Britain and the Intervention in Libya: An Integrated Analysis."
[25]Jakobsen and Rynning, "Denmark: Happy to Fight, Will Travel."
[26]Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy."
[27]Payne, *War on the Ballot*.
[28]Marsh, "'Leading from Behind.'"
[29]Baldwin, "Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics."

neorealists, these organizations are seen as epiphenomenal and thus constituting a 'false promise'.[30] In contrast, neoliberal institutionalists argue that they 'make a difference in states' behaviour and the nature of international politics'.[31] More specifically, how states 'defend and pursue their purposes is tempered by international institutions that encompass ideas, norms, rules, and etiquette … [which] have a moderating influence on the plans and actions of their sovereigns.'[32] Moreover, institutions serve the interests of the states because they can resolve the collective action problems deriving from the adoption of autonomous behaviour, allowing states to reach mutually preferred outcomes.

Based on these assumptions, participation in foreign military interventions is heavily influenced by the choices of international organizations. On the one hand, these organizations can prevent a state from intervening in a given theatre. Recchia, for example, argued that after the 2002–04 Côte d'Ivoire intervention, France almost completely renounced conducting interventions in Africa without the direct support of international (UN) or regional organizations.[33] On the other hand, these organizations can encourage a state to intervene. Peacekeeping scholars, for example, have shown that politically unstable countries often join peacekeeping operations not because of security concerns but because of the benefits they gain from these missions—such as attenuating the risks of coups or funding their own military readiness.[34]

Constructivist Approaches: Identity and Normative Commitments

Constructivist approaches emphasize the role of national identity, norms, and values in shaping foreign policy choices.[35] Deployments are viewed as expressions of a country's self-perception and its commitment to international norms. These theories highlight how ideas and values influence decision-makers, shaping the framing of interventions and their justifications to domestic and international audiences. A concept particularly used by these authors is that of strategic culture.[36] This concept reflects a nation's deeply ingrained beliefs and historical experiences regarding the use of force. Strategic culture influences how states perceive security threats, the legitimacy of military action, and the appropriateness of engaging in interventions, shaping the policies and actions of governments

[30]Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions."
[31]Stein, "Neoliberal institutionalism," 212.
[32]Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns*, 306–7.
[33]Recchia, "A Legitimate Sphere of Influence."
[34]Kathman and Melin, "Who Keeps the Peace?"
[35]Hoffmann, "Norms and Social Constructivism in International Relations"; Cronin, "Community Under Anarchy."
[36]Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture."

based on long-standing cultural norms rather than purely rational calculations of power and security.

Researchers in peacekeeping, for example, have shown that states whose political cultures align closely with the UN's institutional values of peace, stability, and human rights are more likely to contribute to peacekeeping missions.[37] Other scholars have used the concept of culture to explain different 'puzzles' in military interventions. For example, the concept of culture has been used to explain why France has adopted a global profile that far exceeds what one would expect, given the limited extent of its demographic, economic, and geographic resources.[38] Other scholars have applied this concept to examine differences in military intervention behaviour, particularly among countries with similar characteristics, such as Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Denmark in Afghanistan.[39]

Approaches from the Actor-Based Perspective

Cognitive and Psychological Approaches

An actor-based approach, particularly rooted in cognitive and psychological theories, explains decisions to deploy troops abroad by focusing on individual leaders' beliefs, motivations, and cognitive processes.[40] This perspective challenges the rational choice assumptions prevalent in structural theories, emphasizing that leaders interpret systemic pressures through their unique cognitive frameworks, which are shaped by their experiences, personal convictions, and interpersonal styles.

Elizabeth Saunders,[41] for example, illustrated how leadership types influenced military decisions. She argued that leaders' worldviews, whether they prioritized internal or external threats, affected their likelihood of intervention. Leaders with a broader worldview, like U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, were more inclined to intervene, as seen in his decision to enter World War I, driven by his vision of promoting democracy and creating a stable world order. Similarly, Michael C. Horowitz and his co-authors[42] examined how leaders' backgrounds, such as military experience, shaped their propensity for military intervention. Leaders with prior military experience, like Dwight Eisenhower, were less risk-averse and more strategic in using force due to their understanding of military operations and the costs of conflict.

[37]Perkins and Neumayer, "Extra-Territorial Interventions in Conflict Spaces"; Andersson, "United Nations Intervention by United Democracies?".
[38]Treacher, "A Case of Reinvention."
[39]Angstrom and Honig, "Regaining Strategy."
[40]Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations."
[41]Saunder, *Leaders at War.*
[42]Horowitz et al., *Why Leaders Fight.*

Bureaucratic and Organizational Approaches: Civil-Military Relations and Institutional Interests

The bureaucratic politics approach explains foreign policy as the outcome of bargaining and competition among bureaucratic actors rather than the result of unified, rational decision-making by a single leader or group. Popularized by Graham Allison,[43] this approach views decisions as 'resultants' of organizational infighting, shaped by the relative power, interests, and priorities of different bureaucratic entities. Morton Halperin[44] and James Q. Wilson[45] explored how bureaucratic dynamics shape foreign policy decisions. Halperin argued that foreign policy is influenced by the competing agendas of bureaucratic actors, such as military leaders focusing on operational effectiveness and diplomats prioritizing negotiation and multilateralism, often leading to compromises. Wilson complemented this by emphasizing how bureaucratic structures and internal norms influence organizational behaviour.

Numerous studies have provided clear examples of how bureaucratic actors shape foreign policy decisions. For instance, Risa Brooks showed how the Obama administration was heavily constrained by the armed forces when it had to decide on the strategy to adopt in Afghanistan in 2009.[46] Focusing on Afghanistan but examining the British case, Frank Ledwidge demonstrated how the decision to deploy the British Army to Helmand was primarily driven by inter-service rivalry, particularly under pressure from the British Army.[47]

In the next section, we review the Italian literature on the deployment of troops abroad. We analyze the main theoretical approaches and identify the key variables considered as determinants of Italy's decisions in this area. In reviewing and synthesizing relevant literature we follow the same analytical framework outlined in the previous section, which helps us identify gaps in the existing Italian literature. This framework allows us to systematically assess what has been covered in prior studies and, more importantly, highlight the aspects that have been overlooked or insufficiently explored.

Italy's Decisions on Foreign Military Deployments: A Literature Review

Following the framework introduced in the previous section, we organize the review of the Italian literature on troop deployment decisions into two levels of analysis: approaches based on a structural perspective and approaches based on an actor-based perspective. Within each level, we further classify

[43]Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*.
[44]Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*.
[45]Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.
[46]Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism," 41–2.
[47]Ledwidge, *Punching Below Our Weight*.

the studies according to the theoretical frameworks they adopt,[48] allowing for a systematic understanding of how different theories have been applied to explain Italy's foreign military engagements. For each theoretical approach, we identify the key variables considered important in explaining Italy's military interventions.[49]

Approaches Based on the Structural Perspective

Realist Approaches

According to a realist perspective, it is possible to explain Italy's choices over its FMD policy by looking at the evolution of the threats to national security. Santoro explained the increasing Italian military activism abroad from the late 1970s, attributing it to Italy's reaction to a changing international context that increasingly threatened its regional interests.[50] He argued that Italy's military policy shifted due to the oil crisis and subsequent global economic-financial crisis, highlighting new tensions and instability in areas beyond the traditional Cold War focus.[51] Although this hypothesis lost some traction with the end of the Cold War, it has remained important in the debate over Italian military operations abroad in North Africa and the Sahel.[52] For instance, crucial strategic interests in Libya have often been considered fundamental.[53] Scholars focused on explaining Italy's 'strategic reorientation' towards the 'Enlarged Mediterranean' agree that among the factors underpinning this decision was Italy's realization that new perceived threats had emerged in the area (terrorism, illegal migration, energy scarcity, etc.), especially after the Libya war in 2011.[54]

The realist school has not only focused on threats but has also emphasized the crucial role of Italy's alliances as a causal variable in driving the country's extensive engagement in military missions. Santoro notes that Italy, since its inception as a nation-state, has prioritized the protection of its vital interests by often relying on more powerful allies. Because of its geographical position,

[48] Admittedly, some studies have moved beyond strict paradigmatic classifications by considering the multiplicity of drivers behind Italy's foreign interventions (i.e., Abbondanza, "The West's Policeman?"). However, this integrative approach remains relatively rare, as most of the literature tends to adopt a single theoretical perspective rather than exploring the interplay between different explanatory factors.

[49] A systematic review of the literature has not been extensively conducted, except for the work of Coticchia and Moro ("From Enthusiasm to Retreat"), although in much less detail.

[50] Santoro, *La Politica Estera di una Media Potenza*.

[51] Starting in those years, Italy initiated its first foreign military actions: Navy units to rescue Vietnamese boat people in 1978, the 1980 political-military protection agreement for Malta's neutrality, deploying troops to UNIFIL in Lebanon, a significant peacekeeping mission to Beirut between 1982 and 1984, and to the Sinai, sending mine-hunters to the Red Sea in 1985, the Girasole patrol operation in the Sicily Channel from 1986–1987, deploying a naval squadron to protect convoys in the Persian Gulf from 1987–1989.

[52] Coralluzzo, "Le Missioni Italiane all'Estero."

[53] Croci and Valigi, "Continuity and Change."

[54] Coticchia and Mazziotti di Celso, "Still on the Same Path?"

'Italy has always sought protection through an asymmetrical alliance, laying the groundwork for an unequal relationship that would sooner or later prove unsatisfactory.'[55] Since the end of World War II, the United States has been a critical ally for Italy, primarily through NATO.[56] Consequently, Italy has deemed the alliance with the U.S. more important than other countries. For this reason, the country has always found it extremely important to support US initiatives, especially in multinational frameworks.[57] Italy has also contributed to NATO operations, responding to NATO's burden-sharing requests and demonstrating its commitment to the alliance's collective defence goals.[58] Scholars like Luca Ratti offer a nuanced perspective, arguing that Italy's post – Cold War foreign and defence policy displays a dialectical tension between a structural tendency to 'bandwagon' with the hegemonic power—seeking security and protection—and the desire to maintain a degree of regional autonomy.[59]

Neoclassical Realism Approaches

Far more common than the realist approach is neoclassical realism. In Italy, this approach has been one of the most widely used, if not the most dominant. Scholars adopting this theory argue that Italy's decisions regarding foreign military interventions stem from systemic pressures arising from the strategic context and the alliances it is part of but are mediated by domestic-level variables.[60] After all, a widely accepted argument in the Italian political science debate is that a defining feature of Italian foreign policy has consistently been its subordination to domestic politics.[61] Italian governments often treat foreign policy as an extension of domestic politics, a realm in which they aim to create political distinctions between themselves. Indeed, Italian governments responded *differently* to systemic incentives derived from the country's position in the international system. Researchers have occasionally examined the connections between domestic political debates and foreign and defence policies,[62] the impact of electoral politics on decision-making (i.e. the timing of the intervention in Iraq in 2003)[63] or the role of certain domestic actors on specific policy areas.[64]

[55]Santoro, *La Politica Estera di una Media Potenza*, 82.
[56]Natalizia and Termine, *La Nato verso il 2030.*
[57]Natalizia and Mazziotti di Celso, "The Structural Roots of Italy's Expanding Foreign Military Deployments."
[58]Natalizia and Mazziotti di Celso, "Beyond NATO's 2 Percent Threshold."
[59]Ratti, "All Aboard the Bandwagon?"
[60]Davidson, "A Neoclassical Realist Explanation"; Romero, "Rethinking Italy's Shrinking Place"; Carati and Locatelli, "Cui prodest?"
[61]Cladi and Webber, "Italian Foreign Policy."
[62]Carbone, "The Domestic Foundations"; Caffarena and Gabusi, "Making Sense of a Changing World"; Coticchia and Davidson, "The Limits of Radical Parties."
[63]Davidson, *America's Allies and War*.
[64]Zotti and Fassi, "Immigration and Foreign Policy."

Scholars agree that the primary variable is the necessity for Italian governments to enhance Italy's prestige in international relations.[65] These authors argue that Italy pursued prestige to gain recognition on the international stage, using multilateral peace operations as a rational strategy to demonstrate its reliability as a member of the international community.[66] In accordance with this view, political actors saw military involvement in regional crises as a means of affirming national credibility and reliability abroad. Cladi and Webber, for example, analyzed how domestic factors—particularly elite perceptions of the distribution of power and government instability—have influenced Italy's foreign policy choices, including the decision to deploy troops abroad. For instance, the decisions made by Italian governments regarding the Balkan crises between 1994 and 2000 were strongly shaped by the type of government in power. Under Prodi (1996–1998), who sought to secure Italy's entry into the European Monetary Union and enhance its status as an international player, Italy adopted an internationalist agenda focused on active multilateralism. This approach led to Italy taking the lead in the Alba Operation, a multinational peacekeeping force sent to Albania in 1997. On the other hand, the D'Alema government (1998–2000), aiming to justify Italy's credentials as a loyal NATO member, opted for significant participation in Operation Allied Force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This shift reflected Italy's strategic priorities and the influence of domestic elite perceptions on the country's foreign policy choices.

Some authors argue that, occasionally, decisions to intervene were driven by the government's interests, based on a liberal perspective.[67] Cladi and Locatelli,[68] for instance, argued that Italy's decision to participate in the peacekeeping operation in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) was influenced by the interests of Romano Prodi's government. Contributing to UNIFIL II allowed the government to meet the expectations raised during the electoral campaign. During his campaign, Prodi emphasized enhancing the European Union's international role and strengthening multilateral institutions (particularly the UN). The conflict in Lebanon offered a dual opportunity: to intervene through the United Nations and to differentiate from the previous, allegedly disastrous, Iraq intervention led by the Berlusconi government. More broadly, the dynamics between government and opposition are crucial in explaining party support for specific operations,[69] revealing a significant 'instrumentality of the votes', which changes primarily based on the parties' current positions.

[65]Carati and Locatelli, "Cui Prodest?"; Pinto Arena, "Italy's Involvement in PSO."
[66]"Cui Prodest?".
[67]Ibid.
[68]Cladi and Locatelli, "Why did Italy Contribute to UNIFIL II?"
[69]Coticchia and Vignoli, "Italian Political Parties."

The *nature* of the political parties also matters. Coticchia and Vignoli[70] highlighted that examining the voting behaviour of Italian parties on military operations in the new century confirms the persistence of a bipartisan consensus on such operations despite the contentious debates surrounding the Iraq case. This analysis also demonstrates that the Italian case supports the curvilinear relationship model between partisanship and foreign policy, as Wagner et al. outlined.[71] This model shows an increase in support from the left to the centre-right, followed by a decline towards the radical right. Recent studies[72] also investigated the impact of populist governments on Italian defence policy, demonstrating that they have no significant influence on military deployments abroad.

Neoliberal Institutionalism

Another widely adopted approach in the literature is neoliberal institutionalism. Many scholars argue that Italy's active foreign military deployment (FMD) policy stems from its strong commitment to international organizations.[73] In line with neoliberal theory, these authors contend that Italian policymakers shared a desire to maintain a robust involvement in multilateral institutions.[74] This choice, however, is not necessarily driven by utilitarian considerations but also by a logic of 'appropriateness.'[75] In many cases, Italy does not intervene out of a direct interest in power or security but because it believes strengthening international organizations is beneficial. Therefore, Italy's participation is motivated by a desire to increase cooperation rather than pursue self-interest. Some scholars note that this commitment to multilateralism is structural in the Italian constitution.[76] Referring to this phenomenon as 'institutional multilateralism,' they argue that decisions made by international organizations are more readily accepted in domestic politics because they come from impartial institutions. In other words, Italy's political elites delegated the decision-making to international institutions where they could act to influence the outcome.

In this context, many of Italy's FMD policy choices aim to strengthen a rule-based international system. For example, some authors suggest that the decision to intervene extensively in Lebanon in 2006 was driven by the Italian government's desire—under the leadership of Romano Prodi—to revive the principle of multilateralism. Reflecting the Italian left's focus on multilateral frameworks, the government sought to carve out a role for the

[70]"Italian Political Parties."
[71]Wagner et al., "The Party Politics of Legislative-Executive Relations."
[72]Ceccorulli et al., "The Government of Change?"
[73]Ratti, "Italy as a Multilateral Actor"; Fois and Pagani, "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?"
[74]Attinà, *La scelta del multilateralismo*; Bonvicini et al., *La politica estera dell'Italia*.
[75]Pinto Arena, "Italy's Involvement in PSO."
[76]Fois and Pagani, "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?", 84.

UN and Europe.[77] Fois and Pagani demonstrated that even when public opinion grew increasingly concerned about Italy's military engagements abroad, the Italian government continued its interventions, reaffirming that the use of force is legitimate within an international framework to maintain peace and enforce human rights. As such, concrete operations were seen as a necessary corollary to the 'battles' over the regulation of the 'rule of law' in international relations.[78]

Constructivist Approaches: Identity and Normative Commitments

One of the most widely used approaches is based on constructivist theory. Many authors agree that Italy's proactive FMD policy stems from its consistent commitment to multilateralism and multilateral engagements. Accordingly (and contrary to realist assertions), Italian decision-makers would not participate based on a purely utilitarian logic but rather out of a genuine belief in the value of transnational and supranational cooperation. This support for multilateralism has shaped Italy's foreign policy during and after the Cold War, leading to frequent military deployments abroad.

Several Italian scholars have emphasized the role of international values and global norms.[79] From a constructivist perspective, the interplay between structure (i.e. the end of the Cold War), strategic cultures (chiefly pacifism and pragmatism) and role conceptions (i.e. the desire to appear as a responsible stakeholder) has resulted in Italy's surprisingly robust international activism. For instance, the cultural interpretation of norms developed globally influenced Italian FMD policy, promoting a more active posture. Accordingly, Italian soldiers have undertaken numerous humanitarian missions, particularly under UN and EU frameworks, including disaster relief operations spanning Southeast Asia to the Caribbean.

The scholarly research on Italian foreign policy clearly shows that immaterial factors are important at the structural,[80] institutional,[81] and individual[82] levels. Authors have focused on the role played by strategic culture in shaping defence policy decisions, especially in the post-2001 era.[83] Rosa,[84] for instance, discusses Italy's 'accommodationist strategic culture'. As summarized by Coticchia et al.: 'Authors have examined the lens

[77]Brighi, "How to Change Your Foreign Policy in 100 Days"
[78]Fois and Pagani, "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?", 83.
[79]Ignazi et al., *Italian Military Operations Abroad*; Ruffa, *Military Cultures*; Brighi, "Europe, the USA and the 'Policy of the Pendulum'"; Pirani, "The Way We Were"; Caffarena and Gabusi, "Making Sense of a Changing World."
[80]Foradori, "Italy: New Ambitions and Old Deficiencies"; Ignazi et al., *Italian Military Operations Abroad*; Brighi, *Foreign Policy*.
[81]Andreatta, "Italian Foreign Policy"; Coticchia and Moro, "From Enthusiasm to Retreat?"
[82]Caffarena and Gabusi, "Making Sense of a Changing World"; Diodato and Niglia, *Berlusconi 'The Diplomat'*.
[83]Pirani, "The Way We Were"; Ignazi et al., *Italian Military Operations Abroad*.
[84]Rosa, "The Accommodationist State".

through which post-Cold War Italian leaders have perceived defence policy issues, stressing the persistence of multilateralism, peace and humanitarianism as main values of Italian strategic culture.'[85] Despite the significant transformation of Italian defence after 1989, 'the employment of the military instrument would be a by-product of the sedimentation within the 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.'[86] Thus, notwithstanding its military activism, Italy maintained a strategic culture based on peace, cosmopolitanism, multilateralism, and humanitarianism. Such culture has been instrumental in developing a bipartisan 'peace narrative' that allowed all parties to support military operations that have often attracted criticism from public opinion.[87] Relatedly, beyond existing anti-militarism and pacifism, the overall reluctance by Italian citizens to support combat military operations, as well as the opposition towards the enhancement of military expenditures, represent constant trends that constrain—even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine—Italian leaders in the field of defence.[88]

Approaches from the Actor-Based Perspective

Cognitive and Psychological Approaches

Cognitive and psychological approaches are rarely used, and when they are, they tend to focus on specific historical periods and particular leaders. In this regard, most studies have examined Berlusconi's foreign and defense policy. The academic discourse on the supposed shift in Italian FMD policy under Berlusconi's government concerning multilateralism was notably active.[89] Berlusconi's decision to support the US-led mission in Iraq and his numerous bilateral relationships were key points of contention. As observed, Iraq marked a pivotal moment in foreign policy-making as it necessitated an unprecedented balance between solidarity with the US and with key European allies like Germany and France. This discussion led to further reflections on new influences behind Italian post-Cold War defence policy. On one side, mainly due to Berlusconi's activism abroad, several scholars began to focus on the role of leaders in shaping Italian FMD policy.[90] On the other side, the perceived shift in foreign and defence policy was analyzed through the lens of 'foreign policy paradigms', which Brighi[91] argues act as

[85]Coticchia et al., *Reluctant remilitarisation*, 57.
[86]Ceccorulli and Coticchia, "Multidimensional Threats".
[87]Catanzaro and Coticchia, *Al di là dell'Arcobaleno.*
[88]Battistelli et al., *Opinioni sulla Guerra*; IAI-Laps, "Gli Italiani e la Politica Estera."
[89]Brighi, "Europe, the USA and the 'Policy of the Pendulum'"; Croci, "The Second Prodi Government"; Walston, "Foreign Policy: The Difficult Pursuit of Influence."
[90]Diodato and Niglia, *Berlusconi 'The Diplomat'*.
[91]Brighi, *Foreign Policy*.

mediating factors between domestic and international spheres. Values and norms are relevant here from the perspective of leaders' specific beliefs.[92] Relatedly, Caffarena and Gabusi[93] address the debate on Italian foreign policy change and continuity by looking at political elites' conceptions of national roles and how they are linked to operational ideas.[94]

Bureaucratic and Organizational Approaches

The bureaucratic and organizational approach to studying Italy's FMD policy is poorly developed. Studies analyzing the role of public bureaucracies—particularly the armed forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the intelligence—are virtually non-existent. In the past, this was not the case. During the Cold War, for example, the study of the Italian armed forces and their interests and needs was more widespread, even though the organization was much less transparent.[95] The same is true for private organizations, particularly large companies involved in the production of military equipment. These actors play an important role in Italy as the country is one of the world's largest arms exporters, ranking 7th globally since 2000 (SIPRI 2024), and Leonardo is one of the world's largest defence companies. Despite this, however, the academic debate on the influence of these actors on Italian foreign policy, and more specifically on FMD policy, is scarce.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, some Italian scholars attempted to analyze the 'military-industrial complex' role in Italy.[96] Still, their results were not rigorous—allegedly due to the lack of transparency from the Italian Ministry of Defense. Around the turn of the millennium, a handful of studies examined the economics of Italy's defence sector.[97] However, these studies focused on the relationship between national policies and the broader European context rather than the defence sector's influence on Italy's FMD policy.

Recently, some authors have tried to pay greater attention to these actors, particularly the armed forces, and their impact on military

[92]Limited research has been conducted in line with leadership-trait analysis in the case of Italy.
[93]"Making Sense of a Changing World".
[94]On Italian defense and national role conception see the research, among others, de Perini, "Italy and International Human Rights", Caffarena and Gabusi, "Making Sense of a Changing World".
[95]During the Cold War, and especially from the mid-1970s onward, Italy witnessed an important debate surrounding the armed forces. Significant volumes (e.g., De Benedetti et al., *Il potere militare in Italia*; Massobrio, *Bianco Rosso e Grigioverde*, Cerquetti, *Le forze armate italiane dal 1945 al 1975*; Ostellino and Caligaris, *I nuovi militari*) and articles (mainly by Army veterans, such as Luigi Caligaris and Giuseppe Caforio), and a key research center was established—the Military Center for Strategic Studies (CEMISS) within the Ministry of Defense—dedicated specifically to analyzing military issues and civil-military relations. With the end of the Cold War, however, the debate gradually faded.
[96]De Benedetti et al., *Il potere militare in Italia*.
[97]Zamagni, *Finmeccanica*; Onida and Viesti, *L'Industria della difesa*; Nones, "Industria della difesa"; Graziola et al., "Size, Determinants and Effects of Italian Military Spending."

policy.[98] Coticchia and Moro,[99] for example, emphasized how the armed forces' operational experiences have shaped Italy's approach toward international military deployments. These experiences favoured the modernization of the military, influencing doctrine and procurement, which, in turn, facilitated government decisions to deploy troops abroad. Cladi and Locatelli analyzed Italy's decision to join the 'Tempest' programme, showing that the final decision resulted from the converging interests of the armed forces and defence firms.[100] These are promising works, but much remains to be done regarding how the organizational interests of public and private actors have influenced the decision-making process on FMD policy.

Discussion

The analysis of the literature on Italy's Foreign Military Deployment (FMD) Policy has revealed two main shortcomings. First and most importantly, studies on this subject are few and fragmented, often focusing on case studies, specific periods, or 'isolated factors.'[101] Most research tends to concentrate on single events or individual interventions, which, while valuable, fail to offer a broader understanding of the overall trends and dynamics that have shaped Italy's military engagements abroad. As a result, the factors driving Italy's decisions in this area remain underexplored in their entirety, and there is no unified approach that ties together the different phases of Italy's FMD policy.[102]

This is a problem because the lack of a comprehensive approach and the focus on isolated events or individual interventions limits the ability to understand the broader trends and dynamics shaping Italy's military engagements abroad. Without considering all relevant factors and linking different phases of Italy's FMD policy, it becomes challenging to identify the underlying patterns or to make informed predictions about future decisions. A fragmented analysis also prevents a deeper exploration of the interconnected variables influencing Italy's military choices, which is essential for forming a complete understanding of the policy.

The second major shortcoming of the literature is the notable neglect of certain theoretical approaches and their corresponding units of analysis. While it is reasonable to expect certain approaches to gain more prominence

[98]Caruso and Locatelli, "Some Recent Development in Italian Defence Industry"; "Company Survey Series II."
[99]Coticchia and Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces*.
[100]Cladi and Locatelli, "Weapon of Choice."
[101]Labanca, "Italy: The Military in Politics," 1233.
[102]Admittedly, the only work that reconstructs Italy's entire FMD policy to date is that of Coticchia et al. (2023). However, this work does not specifically analyze FMD but rather the entire military policy, and it does not focus on the reasons behind Italy's adoption of this policy, nor does it explore why it has changed over time.

than others, the virtual absence of bureaucratic and organizational analysis in studying Italy's foreign and defence policy creates a significant gap. To date, the role of public actors—such as the armed forces, diplomatic corps, and intelligence agencies—and private actors, including defence contractors and humanitarian NGOs,[103] remains largely unexplored.

We believe this gap is a significant issue for the study of Italy's FMD policy. One of the key conclusions reached by foreign policy scholars is that state decisions in this domain are never straightforward or singular. A seminal contribution to this understanding comes from Allison and Zelikow's study of the Cuban Missile Crisis,[104] which demonstrated that answers to 'why' questions in foreign policy can vary significantly depending on the explanatory model or conceptual 'lens' employed.[105] Their study has illuminated how each framework adopted by the analysts magnifies, highlights, and reveals certain aspects of a phenomenon while potentially blurring or neglecting others. Therefore, how we interpret foreign policy decisions depends on the available evidence and the conceptual lenses through which we analyze that evidence. In the context of military policy, these conceptual models can have significant consequences for decisions, as they shape what is considered important and what is omitted. Thus, understanding the frameworks' limitations is as important as understanding their strengths.

A key implication is that we must continually evaluate and challenge the conceptual frameworks we use in studying foreign policy. This diversity of approaches opens minds, reminding both analysts and policymakers of what might be overlooked by their preferred models.[106] As foreign policy decisions often involve complex and multifaceted issues, having multiple frameworks allows for a broader understanding of the factors at play. By engaging with competing models, scholars and policymakers can avoid the distortions or limitations that any single conceptual framework may impose.

In this case, the failure to consider the bureaucratic and organizational approach has prevented analysts from considering two fundamental actors in the decision-making process: the armed forces and the military industry. We argue that this is an obstacle to an effective understanding of Italy's FMD policy. Numerous studies have shown that the armed forces, even in democratic regimes, can significantly influence military policy,[107] including

[103]On this topic, Daniela Irrera has published extensively (e.g., Irrera, "Non-governmental Search and Rescue Operations in the Mediterranean"; *EU emergency response policies and NGOs*). However, her studies do not reflect on the role of NGOs in the decision-making process that leads to the initiation or modification of operations.
[104]Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*.
[105]Smith et al., "Actors, Structures, and Foreign Policy Analysis."
[106]*Essence of Decision*.
[107]Feaver, *Armed Servants*; Kuehn and Croissant, *Routes to reform*; Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times*; Beliakova, "Erosion of Civilian Control in Democracies"; Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism".

foreign and domestic deployments. Missions can benefit the armed forces considerably, especially in the context of interservice rivalry.[108] First, in many cases, missions bring additional resources, which almost every government agency is interested in.[109] Second, missions can be crucial for recruitment: armies are well aware that being deployed overseas is often one of the main motivations for young people to enlist and stay in service,[110] due to economic incentives and the sense of adventure these missions convey.[111] Third, missions allow the armed forces to legitimize their resource requests to the political leadership and the public.[112] The armed forces may also have incentives to resist specific missions. If a mission threatens their autonomy or goes against their organizational essence, they may oppose it.[113] The primary tool through which the military bureaucracy can influence the decision-making process on FMD policy is information.[114] The military bureaucracy can leverage the informational asymmetry it holds in relation to the political sphere, carefully selecting the information it provides based on the interests it seeks to pursue.[115]

In the Italian case, various pieces of empirical evidence suggest that such dynamics may be present. First, scholars have shown that the Italian military has traditionally played an essential political role. For Labanca, for example, throughout the country's history, the Italian military 'almost always managed to have its demands met by influencing, penetrating, and conditioning the political system.'[116] Second, academic studies developed in the early 1990s have shown that Italy had a massive recruitment problem.[117] One of the main reasons Italians joined the armed forces was economic incentives and a desire for adventure.[118] Third, recent studies on the domestic operations of the Army have already shown, to some extent, that the Army changes its attitude towards operations depending on how they impact the organization.[119] Fourth, in the early 1990s, some of the few Italian civil-military relations scholars argued that, like in many other European countries, Italian senior officers feared that the declining

[108]Huntington, "Interservice Competition"; Weinier, "The Politics of Resource Allocation in the Post-Cold War Pentagon"; Sapolsky, "Interservice Competition."
[109]Halperin, *Bureucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.
[110]See, for example, Österberg et al., "The Motivation to Serve in the Military."
[111]Griffith, "Institutional Motives for Serving in the U.S. Army National Guard."
[112]Shemella, "The Spectrum of Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces"; Bove et al., "Beyond Coups: Terrorism and Military Involvement in Politics"; Kathman and Melin, "Who Keeps the Peace?"
[113]Halperin, *Bureucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*; Harig and Ruffa, "Knocking on the Barracks' Door"; Metz, "The Cult of the Persuasive."
[114]Feaver, *Armed Servants*; Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*.
[115]Halperin, *Bureucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*.
[116]Labanca, "Italy: The Military in Politics," 1234.
[117]Mastrofini and Angelini, *Il reclutamento in Italia*.
[118]Battistelli, "Peacekeeping and the Postmodern Soldier"; Caforio, "La professione militare in Italia"; Nuciari and Caforio, "Rapporti forze armate-società in Italia."
[119]Mazziotti di Celso, "The Impact of Military Policing on Armed Forces".

perception of external threats among Italians would result in losing influence, prestige, and military resources. In this context, expanding the role of the armed forces to include international peacekeeping missions and enhance their domestic role appeared to be a convenient solution for the military. International missions provided the armed forces with a new source of legitimacy, enabling them to attract recruits and secure resources.[120]

The second actor that is often underestimated is the military industry. Political scientists focused on civilian control of the armed forces are well aware of the significant influence that defence companies may have in shaping military policy,[121] of which FMD policy is one of the key elements.[122] The military industry can be interested in missions for several reasons. This is because operations can either lead to an increase in procurement or, at the very least, justify it in front of public opinion and political decision-makers. First, during operations, equipment and materials (weapons, vehicles, ammunition) wear out and break, requiring replacement or integration. Second, operations often reveal new operational requirements. They trigger the process of lessons learned by the armed forces, which usually concludes with requests for significant modifications to existing equipment or materials, if not outright demands for new ones.

The mechanisms through which the defence industry influences FMD policy choices are multiple and complex. Private actors can impact the decision-making process through lobbying, campaign contributions, revolving-door dynamics, and shaping public opinion.[123] Research has also demonstrated that the nature of state-defense industry relations,[124] firms' principal forms of funding, their relative gain prospects and the expected economic repercussions of the development of certain industrial programs[125] can shape interstate cooperation, with an impact on FMD policies. Furthermore, the defence industry can also significantly impact the armed forces since, in many cases, it is the only actor to which the armed forces can turn to acquire specific products. This situation, referred to as 'client politics'[126] by organizational scholars, makes it difficult for the armed forces to prevent the industry's interests from outweighing their own. On the latter, their influence is due to an effect that Wilson calls the 'follow-

[120]Caligaris, "L'Italie et sa politique militaire". This mechanism has been extensively studied by civil-military relations scholars in the context of democratization. See Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State*, and Huntington, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations."
[121]Ledbetter, *Unwarranted Influence*; Dunlap, "The Military-Industrial Complex."
[122]Huntington, *The soldier and the State*.
[123]Wilson, *Bureaucracy*; Bennett, *Homeland security scams*; Coyne, *In search of monsters*; Coyne and Hall, "Cronyism."
[124]Calcara, "State–Defence Industry Relations in the European Context."
[125]Calcara and Simón, "Face to Face."
[126]*Bureaucracy*, 79.

on imperative.'[127] The procurement of equipment and weapon systems is often a necessity for politics. This is because, in many cases, weapons procurement is designed to maintain the productive capacity of major defence contractors, who are often major employers. As a result, governments rarely risk closing their production lines. Since justifying procurement is often an essential requirement for many governments, they may use missions to justify the purchase of weapons and systems.

Empirical evidence shows, for example, that one of the main consequences of the Afghan experience for the Italian Army was the need to request new vehicles from the defence industry, particularly from land-based manufacturers like Iveco. These vehicles, such as the 'VTLM Lince' and 'VMTT Orso', would likely not have been commissioned without the experience in Afghanistan. From this, it can be inferred that the Italian land-based military industry was intensely interested in ensuring the operation continued. Other studies provide interesting anecdotal evidence as well. For instance, recent studies by Italian scholars focusing on Asia suggest that a significant factor behind Italy's recent deployments in the Indo-Pacific may be linked to the strategic interests of Fincantieri, a prominent naval shipyard seeking business opportunities in the region.[128] Since Italy began deploying units in the region, Fincantieri has signed important sales contracts with countries in the area, like Indonesia.

We believe these actors have been underestimated for two closely related reasons. The first is a cultural element associated with the legacy of the Second World War. The war and its aftermath, marked by the experience of fascism and defeat, fostered a pacifist orientation in public opinion and a general skepticism toward the military as an instrument of state power.[129] This historical backdrop has profoundly shaped Italy's academic discourse, leading to a relative paucity of defence and military policy research. This phenomenon has been widely acknowledged by leading scholars across various disciplines, including political science,[130] sociology,[131] and history.[132] This is true particularly after the Cold War, when 'social scientists seem to have stopped researching this area.'[133] The limited attention to military affairs reflects societal attitudes. It indicates a broader academic trend often prioritizing other foreign policy dimensions, such as diplomacy and international cooperation. Consequently, the analysis of Italy's decisions to deploy troops abroad remains understudied, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive exploration of this topic.

[127]*Bureaucracy*.
[128]Pugliese, "The European Union's Security Intervention in the Indo-Pacific."
[129]D'Amore, *Governare la Difesa*; Panebianco, *Guerrieri Democratici*; Ertola, *Democrazia e Difesa*.
[130]Coticchia and Moro, "From Enthusiasm to Retreat."
[131]Ruffa, *Military Cultures in Peace and Stability Operations*.
[132]Labanca, "Italy: The Military in Politics."
[133]"Italy: The Military in Politics", 1233.

The second issue pertains to a methodological problem: the availability of information. The obstacle preventing many scholars from studying defence policy, particularly the influence of military organizations and the military industry, is also related to the difficulty of accessing information. This problem was particularly pronounced during the Cold War and the early 1990s when all studies concerning Italy lamented the lack of information and the limited transparency.[134] In recent years, things have changed, but this legacy still heavily influences academic work, making it challenging to study military organizations and the defence industry. According to a leading Italian military historian, 'historians have been hampered given the impossibility of drawing on archival sources.'[135]

Conclusions

This article has highlighted two major issues within the existing literature on Italy's Foreign Military Deployment (FMD) policy. First, the body of research is scarce and fragmented, with a lack of comprehensive studies aimed at analyzing the key variables that have shaped the decisions of political leaders regarding Italy's FMD policy. The second issue is the lack of attention to the bureaucratic and organizational approach, which is crucial for a fuller understanding of decision-making processes. As Allison and Zelikow highlight, no single approach can fully explain state behaviour, and multiple perspectives must be considered.[136] The role of key actors, such as the armed forces, diplomacy, and the military industry, has been undervalued in the literature despite their significant influence on shaping foreign military deployment policy.

The implications of this research suggest two key avenues for future inquiry. First, overcoming the fragmented nature of the literature requires the development of comprehensive theoretical frameworks that incorporate all the relevant factors influencing Italy's military engagements. This could be achieved through a theoretical pluralism approach, allowing for integrating multiple perspectives and offering a more holistic understanding of the decision-making process. Such an approach might require more in-depth studies, potentially at a book-length scale, to thoroughly examine the interplay of different factors over time. Second, a greater focus on the bureaucratic and organizational approach is necessary to understand better how and why the armed forces and the military industry have influenced decision-making processes in the context of Italy's FMD policy. Anecdotal evidence, such as insights from previous interventions, suggests that these

[134]See, for example, Bova, *Il controllo politico delle Forze armate*; De Benedetti et al., *Il potere militare in Italia*; Massobrio, *Bianco Rosso e Grigioverde*.
[135]"Italy: The Military in Politics," 1233.
[136]Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*.

factors play a substantial role, and that future research should give more consideration to their influence. Future studies can offer a much clearer understanding of the forces shaping Italy's foreign military policy by addressing these gaps. We believe this is a relevant effort not only for the case of Italy but also beyond. In a European context characterized by attempts at re-militarization, it is crucial to properly understand the role of the armed forces and the defence industry as drivers of military engagements abroad.

Studying Italy's FMD policy is important also for advancing military intervention theory. Italy's approach challenges expectations based on its pacifist culture, public attitudes toward the military, and limited resources, making it a deviant case that existing theories fail to explain. Analyzing such outlier is essential for theoretical progress, as it forces scholars to refine frameworks and adapt them to account for atypical behaviours. By addressing these gaps, future research can enhance our understanding of the broader theory of military intervention.

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