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ARTICLE



## 'Italy's involvement in PSO: between self-interest and the logic of appropriateness'

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### ABSTRACT

What factors shape a state's willingness to get involved in Peace Support Operations (PSO), a notoriously risky and costly activity? Do states contribute personnel out of a desire to support the cosmopolitan values embodied in PSO, or out of self-interested behaviour? Are those decisions based on normative, rule-based motivations, or rather on instrumental calculations of national interest? The end of the Cold War opened up new policy options for decision-makers, with Rome showing a strong determination to be more active in that field. Italy purposefully developed a reputation as a security provider, building, along the process, a distinct external self-identity as a natural 'peace-maker'. Which factors explain Italy's evolution from its early guarded support to UN (United Nations) peacekeeping operations, to its current rate of participation? This article argues that Italy makes instrumental use of PSO to gain international visibility and upgrade its ranking, but its strategic narrative, when addressing the general public, relies on a secondary script that adheres to the rhetoric of cosmopolitan rules that prevail in multilateral settings.

### KEYWORDS

Italy; PSO; peacekeeping; self-interests; logic of consequences; logic of appropriateness

### Introduction: theoretical background

Rome<sup>1</sup> has made a great effort to offer sizeable contributions to PSO. It has invested in creating an image of peace-builder, to establish a distinct identity as a security actor. Successive Italian governments, of various political colours, have engaged a large number of soldiers and strained the shrinking defence budget to accommodate the ever-increasing number of operations sponsored (Carati and Locatelli 2017, 88); although priorities have differed according to economic contingencies and pressures coming from the domestic and international environment (Brighi 2007a, 2013; Andreatta 2008; Marrone and Tessari 2013; Walston 2007).

Several authors have advanced different International Relations theories that explain why policy-makers decide to contribute to military operations crafted as PSO. The realist or instrumental approach posits that PSO commitments are self-interested, driven by subjective expected utility (Neack 1995, 189; Mearsheimer 1994–95, 13). The rational choice theory assumes states to be rational actors, with own preferences, seeking a course of action that maximizes their utility, such as evaluating power relationships and preserving the national interest (Hechter and Kanazawa 1997, 193–194). A rational actor will also view PSO as a tool 'via which states endeavour to achieve their goals and maximise their profit as much as possible. When deliberating on the costs and

profits of alternative behaviour, states estimate the likelihood that the chosen actions will lead to a desirable result' (Kříž and Urbanovská 2013, 373).

In line with Constructivism, the logic of appropriateness says that human behaviour involves cognitive and ethical dimensions, despite the prevailing tendency to calculate the consequences and expected utility of a certain course of action (March and Olsen 1989, 690). Human and political action are not only the net sum of calculating individual expected utility, but also the result of a particular conception of a state's self-identity and of what is seen as virtuous, or corresponding to the institutionalized practices of a community and political institutions (March and Olsen 1998). It can be argued that foreign policy is shaped by social norms, defined as intersubjectively shared, value-based expectations of appropriate behaviour (March and Olsen 1989, 160–1, 1998, 311–12). The tendency to develop 'internalized prescriptions of what is socially defined as normal, true, right, or good' is quite recurrent and old (March and Olsen 2011, 690). In the international field, '... the impact of norms embedded in specific international institutions on state behaviour stems from the deeper normative structure of the 'world polity' because international society is assumed to share the general expectation that the action of its individual members match the shared expectations of appropriate behaviour addressed to them' (Boekle, Rittberger, and Wagner 2001, 120). The constructivist IR theory contends that cultural/social/normative environments shape the basic nature or 'identity' of states, and that, from interaction, the latter can internalize the same representations. Norms can be constraints on state action or 'intervening variables' interposed between interests (which are still assumed to be permanent), and foreign policy outcomes (Krasner 1982, 195).

When using internationally shared expectations of appropriate behaviour as a basis for deriving constructivist predictions about Italian rationale for PSO participation, reference will be made to explicit and specific norms, which are embedded in international institutions devoted to peacekeeping.

## Methodological approach

In this article, the dependent variable is Italy's involvement in Peace Support Operations. The research question addressed is whether this decision is based on normative, rule-based motivations, or rather on instrumental calculations of national interest. If the logic of consequentiality were to be followed, Italy would be expected to favour the pursuit of its national interests – power politics – as well as to seek an autonomous and influential policy. If the logic of consequences is to be followed, deployment to international operations is meant to strengthen a state's influence on the international scene, and the pursuit of its own agenda. It can help maintain the *status quo* or assure its presence in particular areas of the world, due to economic, historic or strategic interests (Neack 1995, 189).

As far as the 'logic of appropriateness,' the variable is that something has to be done in accord with a rule. Constructivists explain that they would want to participate in peacekeeping operations in order to show their adherence to the principles laid down by the international community. The normative rationale stresses values, such as peace, and multilateralism (Coticchia 2015, 57–60). If the logic of appropriateness is the dominant one, the independent variables should be conformity to international norms of humanitarianism and pacifism.

This article will deal, firstly, with the official motivations advanced to justify deployment to international missions, as gleaned and reconstructed from public speeches and declarations, parliamentary acts, press articles and interviews, as reported from secondary sources. The strategic rationale should adhere to the operational reality on the field. That is what I call the first script.

However, a secondary explanatory level must be addressed: the second script or strategic narrative.<sup>2</sup> It regards a description of the nature of the missions, that stands on the often unconvincing narrative of their humanitarian nature that is found in the country's public debate. Indeed, apart from utilitarian considerations, the government needs to provide an argument for

legitimizing its intervention (Cladi and Locatelli 2016, 8). This parallel script is framed to meet the general public's conceptions regarding what armed forces should be like. The pacifist role of the Italian military places the decision to intervene under a favourable light in the eyes of Italian public opinion, and is more likely to secure bipartisan support in the Parliament. As Carati and Locatelli have evidenced, portraying Italy's commitment to multilateral operations on humanitarian and peacekeeping terms, allows 'political elites to overcome domestic, institutional and public opinion barriers to the participation of Italian troops in distant and potentially risky operations' (Carati and Locatelli 2017, 92).

In order to assess the explanatory power of the independent variables identified above in the remit of the logic of consequences and appropriateness, three case studies will be explored in order to unearth how utilitarian and norm-oriented motivations dominated the choices to participate in multilateral operations in both scripts. Three focused case studies of PSO – to which Italy contributed significantly – will be conducted in order to test those variables: the UNOSOM II mission in Somalia (1993), Italy's involvement in Afghanistan, and the UNIFIL II mission in Lebanon (2006). Those missions (UN and NATO-led, before and after 9/11) are an evidence of the Italian commitment to multilateral peace operations and they exhibit a number of criteria, which makes them suitable for this case study. They involve large troop deployments, high financial costs and risks, as the situation on the ground was quite perilous, entailing the potential for mission creep and numerous casualties. The missions heralded the changing and multifaceted features of the complex nature of contemporary warfare and ranged from standard peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions to more complex (and riskier) peace-enforcing operations.

## Somalia

In 1992, Somalia was struck by famine, exacerbated by a violent internal struggle between warring factions. As the escalating violence kept the UN aid mission (UNOSOM) from delivering food and supplies, in early December 1992, the US led a UN authorized military force (UNITAF) to provide security in Somalia, to facilitate the UN aid mission (Davidson 2009, 296). From 1992 to 1994, Italy contributed 2,500 troops to UNITAF, referred to as 'Operation Ibis' (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Cotichia 2012, 101).

The first six months passed without major issues. The Italian public treated Somalia like a replay of the Multinational Force (MNF) operation in Lebanon, marked by the distinct even-handed and civil-military approach displayed by the Italians, and praised the professional behaviour of Italian soldiers.

UNOSOM II, established in March 1993, with authority to take enforcement measures, quickly derailed into 'mission creep', producing a high death toll and many casualties. The mandate envisioned imposing peace via the use of armed forces, namely to disarm the militias. After the death of three Italian soldiers in July 1993, the Italian press became more critical of UNOSOM II (Ratti 2011, 131). The mission was marred by issues related to the predominant approach to be adopted: peacekeeping or peace-enforcement? Italians stressed humanitarian aims and the need to engage with the parties on the ground, while the US and other participating countries increasingly leaned towards a confrontational approach towards the militias. Rome advocated a soft power approach – the so-called 'special Italian approach' (Pastori 2011, 193) –, which 'reflects the holistic and multidimensional approach to security issues that defines its security culture' (Foradori and Rosa 2010, 69, 81).

The rather public dispute that ensued over the overall aims and conduct of the mission, led the Italian government to demand greater representation in the UNOSOM II headquarters, and in planning and supervising the operations (Croci 2003, 269). The experience in Somalia bore out that it was no longer a 'humanitarian' mission, but a quite 'robust' military operation, with high involvement in combat actions. The perils in which the mission was mired caused a sever blow to the, until then, predominant 'Lebanese approach', and put an end to the illusion of a zero-death toll participation (Pastori 2011, 193). It percolated to the public, causing growing public unease

about what was originally a relief mission that turned into a combat operation (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 102–104). However, despite the dramatic turn of events, the leading category used in the parliamentary debates to frame the mission was ‘multilateralism’ (60, 62).

As regards the political rationale of the decision, several motivations for action were put forward. Rome considered it vital to take part, as involvement in the operation was seen as determining who the players in the post Cold war era would be (Davidson 2011a, 150; Croci 2003, 268). During this period, the more pro-active approach of Italian governments toward international security resulted in a more active participation in multilateral peace-supporting operations. Salvatore Andò, the Minister of Defence, justified Rome’s significant troop contribution to UNOSOM II stressing to the Italian Parliament the idea that it was time for Italy to stop being a ‘security consumer’ and rather start becoming a ‘provider.’ Rome’s decision to get involved was also explained as ‘evidence of the old Italian foreign policy vice of *Presenzialismo*’ – the need to have visibility (Croci 2003, 268). Moreover, ever since the end of World War II, Italy has been on a permanent quest to be part of negotiating processes involving major international players, to be part of the circles where ‘power politics’ is played. It wants to act as a primary actor in the organizations it belongs to, as well as in its regional context, in particular, where its weight is undoubtedly greater and its political assertiveness acknowledged. That means primarily the external recognition of its political independence in the framework of alliances, and a regional role equivalent to its national attributes and national interest.

Rome’s reasoning was also that its relationship with Washington would also improve with Italy’s contribution to the Somalia operation (Davidson 2009, 297). Deployment to PSO operations would give the governments that contributed troops more clout (Croci 2008a, 146; Ignazi et al., 99). Overall, a plausible argument was that participation would contribute to reinforce Italy’s image as an active and valued international player. An Italian contribution would also tally well with Italy’s image of itself as a force for peace (193).

Another rationale for involvement rested on Italy’s colonial presence in Somalia supporting the claim that participation would have been germane, given Rome’s historical role and post-colonial ties with Somalia (Davidson 2009, 296).

## Afghanistan

In the aftermath of September 11, and the US-led operations against terrorist forces in Afghanistan, the (second) Berlusconi government authorized the deployment of a limited military contingent to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) under very strict rules of engagement. Later on, in 2002, Italy joined the International Security Assistance Force under a UN mandate.<sup>3</sup> The UNSC authorized the establishment of a 5,000-strong ‘coalition of the willing’ force to help the Afghan Interim Authority create a secure environment in Kabul. Originally British-led and mandated, ISAF was extended and deployed from Kabul to other areas of the country, becoming a formal NATO-led mission coming in August 2003.

The size of the Italian contingent significantly increased over time, and by the end of 2012 it reached about 4,000 men (Coticchia 2014, 31). Italy took up the ISAF command from August 2005 till May 2006 (ISAF VIII), and has been in charge, for ten years now, of the Regional Command West (RCW), located in Herat.<sup>4</sup> It also held the Herat Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) until 2014, when the ISAF was concluded.

The decision to take part in the ISAF contingent in Afghanistan received the support of the parliament, due to the multilateral framework of the operation and the UNSC mantle of legitimacy. Italy’s mission was a balancing act for a government that could not shy away from supporting an ally or multilateral commitments, but doing so without infringing the constitutional tenet established by article 11 of the Constitution of not getting involved in armed conflicts which are not based on a situation of legitimate defence (Nutti 2005, 195). The domestic framing of the mission avoided portraying it as war or as a counter-terror operation, emphasizing its peace and

reconstruction dimensions (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012; Ruffa 2018), even as the security environment unravelled and the ISAF became a counterinsurgency force.

The ISAF became the most expensive and most lethal mission in which Rome has been engaged since 1945: between 2002 and 2014, 53 servicemen died on that theatre (Coticchia 2018, 118; Marrone, Tessari, and De Simone. 2014, 28). The Prodi government elected in 2006 ahead of a broad centre-left coalition was confronted with the question of Italy's contribution to the ISAF in the context of a mounting insurgency, and with Italian troops involved in combat actions. There was staunch opposition to the mission from far-left members of the ruling coalition, as the situation on the ground deteriorated and Italian casualties mounted (Ruffa 2018, 110), eventually leading to a vote in the Senate against the government's foreign policy programme. The outcome of the crisis led the government to resign in early 2008 (although, at the request of the president, it remained in office until May).

In the heated debate that took place, the government had to go to great lengths in order to demonstrate that Italy's participation was in compliance with the multilateral framework, and that it differed from the previous mission decided upon by the Berlusconi government. It was portrayed as a contribution to building peaceful international relations, as a stabilization operation – not as a counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency one –, and that it stressed the civilian dimension of the mission (Clementi 2014, 268; Nanetti and Leonardi 2015, 267).

Antonio Martino, the Italian Defence Minister, labelled the operation as a 'peace mission'; even as the OEF American officials framed it as a combat mission (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 132). In parliamentary debates, the military dimension of the operation was downplayed, in order to give relevance to the assistance and reconstruction dimensions. The episodes related to involvement in military actions against the Taliban were hardly ever reported in the press or discussed in the public debate (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 135, 137; Coticchia and de Simone 2015, 227). The operation went on despite occasional manifestations of opposition to the operation in parliament. Italian parties, which traditionally oppose these deployments, accepted the need for continuing with the ISAF mission despite occasional public criticism. The desire to placate public opinion led the centre-left government to continuously portray it as a stabilizing mission, confounding the public, which was led to believe that Italy participated in a humanitarian mission (or, alternatively, enhancing the generalized public disinterest) (Coticchia and de Simone 2015, 225). The elite's script emphasized the values advanced by the mission, such as 'multilateralism', 'peace' and 'humanitarianism' (225), at least until the inception of the second Berlusconi government (2008–2011), which decided to adopt a more straightforward communication strategy, unveiling the predominant combat nature of the operation (41–42). The new discourse stressed descriptive terms, such as the 'military dimension' and 'security' (232–233), failing to develop a more coherent narrative, which provided a convincing rationale of the military involvement capable of engaging the Italian public. As far as the public opinion is concerned, there were stable, high levels of support from the very beginning of the intervention up until May 2009, when the rates of approval for the mission diminished considerably, dropping below the 40% mark (Coticchia and de Simone 2015, 232–233; Coticchia and De Simone 2016, 32; Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 161). The deterioration of the security environment, the mounting Italian casualties and the lack of a new narrative capable of replacing the established script, seem to account for the fall in support for the mission (Coticchia and De Simone 2016, 43).

The political and public discourse also had practical effects, by rendering it slow to adjust the military set-up to the actual environment. Mission mandates did not reflect the operational realities of heavy fighting and insurgency, rendering more difficult the adjustment of the Italian mission to that security environment (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 136).

## Lebanon

In the summer of 2006, in the aftermath of the "summer war" between Hezbollah militants and Israeli forces, Italy took on a leading role in southern Lebanon. It volunteered to providing the bulk – alongside a French contingent – of 2,500 troops for an 'enhanced' UNIFIL (II) operation to

upgrade the symbolic UN presence (Menotti 2007, 440). The operation in Lebanon remains to this day the most demanding in terms of number of personnel deployed: 1,400 troops stationed within the 11,000-strong UNIFIL mission (Marrone and Camporini 2016, 5).

That amounted to 20% of the overall military strength, enabling an Italian general to take command of the force in early 2007 (Walston 2008, 128). It was a decision of the centre-left government, presided by Romano Prodi, eager to revive Italy's multilateralist vocation under the aegis of the United Nations. This happened at the same time that Prodi – complying with an electoral campaign pledge –, decided to pull out troops from Iraq, a move planned to take place until the end of the year. The unexpected willingness to offer a strong contingent, as a more robust interposition force in Lebanon, responded to the American request for greater involvement in military operations (with Afghanistan in mind), and received praise from Washington. Simultaneously, the government presented a respectable rationale, by justifying the mission in terms of restoring peace in the area, and reviving the principle of multilateralism. The government presented the case as an urgency, and argued that immediate action was required, in order to prevent the crisis from escalating and spreading to neighbouring countries.

In line with the Italian left focus on multilateral frameworks, the government was able to cut a role for the UN, as well as for Europe (Brighi 2007b, 134). By accomplishing the squaring of the circle, it benefited from the support of the opposing centre-right coalition, which largely voted in favour of the mission. Playing an active role in the solution of the war was a 'governmental interest', in the sense that it showed initiative and diplomatic activism in favour of multilateral values (Cladi and Locatelli, undated, 18–20), but, simultaneously, it served to graphically signal a change of course as regards international force commitments taken up by the Berlusconi government.

Piero Fassino, leader of the Democrats of the Left, stated the Italian soldiers were in Lebanon not 'to make war', but to 'give politics and dialogue a chance' (Coticchia 2015, 67). An analysis of the main frames used in the public debate by Italian elites, bears out that the dominance of narratives, such as 'multilateralism', followed by 'peace' and 'humanitarianism' (Coticchia 2015, 69). As regards public support for the mission, in the period 2006–2008, it remained at high levels, never dropping below the 50% mark (69–70).

### Italy's interest in PSO: utilitarian or normative concerns?

Italy's PSO policies are the result of Rome's overall foreign policy directions. A number of inter-related factors seem to motivate Rome's proactive approach of championing peacekeeping and PSO in general. Following the utilitarian logic, an interest-driven strategy would mostly explain Italy's involvement in peace missions. In the 1990s, Italian decision-makers reckoned that non-participation was not an option if Rome wanted to assure a position of some relevance for itself. Italian elites believe that the country greatly benefits from military multilateral missions, established for projecting stability in areas sometimes close to its own borders. Italy's foreign policy strategy has been to be an active shaper of the multilateral setting, which reflect the more general values that symbolize Western identity, while simultaneously enabling Rome to help direct the focus of those organizations to meet its security concerns (Crocì 2003, 267).

PSO deployment is also seen as a synonym of international recognition and visibility. Italian policy-makers see it as reinforcing international legitimacy and bolstering the country's international profile. Deploying troops to distant theatres has become a way of demonstrating to be 'good' or 'cosmopolitan-minded' states (Lawler 2004, 56). Involvement in PSO has become a form of 'soft power' for countries that want to bolster their status and external legitimacy (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 48; Kocks 2007, 16–17).

Arguably, there is – in most cases – a logic of utility maximization present in Italy's reasoning: wanting to see its role recognized. Projecting military power is a means to pursue national interests. Involvement in peace endeavours is presumed to raise the country's profile in the



international community at large, as well as within the NATO and EU inner circles. As a reliable ally, Rome is supposed to answer the call for intervention, and to stand out as a steadfast and active NATO ally. Italy has at times been pressured by allies into taking part and intervening in coalitions, or has altered its principled political stance on specific conflicts, influenced by its leading policy partners (such as the US). That was the case when, in 1999, prime minister Massimo d'Alema, had to fall over backwards to justify Italian participation – even to his partners in the ruling coalition – in the bombing campaign of Serbia under Operation Allied Harbour.

Italy's active contribution to PSOs has allowed it to obtain recognition, as well as important positions in the planning and running of various operations<sup>5</sup> or in the permanent organizational set-ups in international organizations. It is seen as improving its chances for being elected to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council (Caffarena 2007, 162).<sup>6</sup> Using a strategic logic, Italy's major interest is to see its contribution rewarded.

Italy's determination to taking a higher profile in common security endeavours, led it into participating in the humanitarian mission in Somalia, under UNITAF, as it was launched in late 1992. Rome saw it was an occasion 'to prove a good international citizen' (Brighi 2007a, 101), thus trying to increase the Italian standing and influence in international institutions. From the perspective of its national interests, it wanted to be a key participant in the process, being also seen as a reliable US ally, capable of shouldering its tasks (Cladi and Locatelli 2016, 18; Croci 2003; Davidson 2011b, 161; Nuti 2005, 192).

Italy's participation under the OEF and the ISAF in Afghanistan was mainly driven by prestige concerns. Italy's robust contributions towards US-led peace operations – even when its interests are not directly at stake and the instability is not located in its neighbourhood – is measured by whether and how much the country contributes to these high profile missions (Davidson 2011a, 148). Again, from an interest-driven perspective, deployment to multilateral operations is also a deliberate policy that finds its ultimate goal in being perceived as 'being part' of the international community, that is, as a constructive contributor (Carati and Locatelli 2017, 95).

March and Olsen have shown that the logic of consequential calculation or rules are not mutually exclusive, as norm-oriented strategic action can be 'compatible with an instrumentally rational logic of action' (Risse 2000, 4). As constructivist scholars have underlined, often, there is not a single dominant behavioural logic determining the outcome of foreign policy decisions, as they actually intertwine in subtle, complementary ways (March and Olsen 2011, 491; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 914; Risse 2000, 4, 2000, 4).

The constructivist perspective can also account for the way Italy decided to intervene in all three cases – in other words, shed light on the leading 'peace frame' of the missions (Coticchia and De Simone 2015). Consistent with the constructivist view, the strategic narratives of the interventions are always framed in terms of humanitarian emergencies, and as a contribution to international security. The humanitarian and multilateral argument has been critical in overcoming the resistance of domestic political forces and the public in general, against a more active foreign policy (Olmastroni 2014; Coticchia 2015; Coticchia and De Simone 2016), as in the Italian involvement in the Kosovo campaign, the post-war phase of Iraqi Freedom and Afghanistan's OEF/ISAF.

Italian political and military elites crafted a strategic account of peaceful and humanitarian operations in order to assure bipartisan consensus and the support of public opinion (Coticchia 2018, 123). The Italian case shows how decision-makers publicly resort to the rhetoric of 'peace mission', often in total disconnect with the real aims of the operations and with what is happening on the ground, that is, involvement in high intensity combats in counter-terror operations (Carati 2013, 2; Pastori 2011, 184).<sup>7</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, the Italian public developed a new rationale for the armed forces: involvement in humanitarian missions for peacekeeping, non-coercive, offensive operations. Furthermore, the myth of the 'good Italian' gained currency within Italian mind-sets, both among the political class and public opinion alike: 'This new focus on the need to participate in



military operations reflects a new discourse on security that reconciled pacifism and pragmatism on the use and purpose of the military' (Pirani 2010, 6).

In the 1990s, the Italian public became more supportive of its armed forces, probably due to the growing role of the armed forces, and the perceived effectiveness of the Italian military in peace-keeping operations (Isernia 2001, 255; Battistelli 2004; Malešič and Garb 2018, 152). However, the post 9/11 strategic scenario is difficult to reconcile with the popular conceptual framework, particularly averse, or at least cautious, about the use of force.

Although Italian public opinion was quite permissive on the use of force in the Balkan missions and even in Kosovo, such support started to erode after the launch of 'Antica Babilonia' to Iraq, and – in the late 2000s –, as the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan encountered increasing difficulties in a predominantly counterinsurgency military theatre (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012, 161). The need to depict military operations abroad as 'humanitarian' has constrained policy-makers to omit 'the military dimension of the debate, adopting a very low communication profile and limiting the discussion over controversial issues such as combat operations' (Coticchia 2018, 123).

The constructivist focus on norms helps to make sense of the narrative that informed, for instance, the overall conception of Italy's role in Lebanon. Utilitarian and interest-driven explanations were woven into a framework of cooperation with multilateral institutions that promote cosmopolitan interventionism (not plain, hard-nosed interests). In that case, the government's active posture was made possible by the Prodi government's keen interest in reviving major multilateral fora: it wanted to maximize the UN role, while also assuring a role for the EU. This was in line with other utilitarian political considerations of a domestic and international nature. From the point of view of internal politics, Prodi needed to secure the unity of its narrow, unstable governmental coalition, and to mark a rupture with the previous Berlusconi administration. From the international arena perspective, it wanted to 'increase Italy's standing and reputation' (Cladi and Locatelli 2016, 18), being perceived as a promoter of the EU, a reliable US ally, and a foreign policy player in Middle Eastern diplomacy (Cladi and Locatelli 2016, 4, 18–19). What this case allows to bear out is that, although responding to a distinct rationale, a norm-oriented behaviour can, at times, be consistent with the pursuit of national interests and status-seeking policies – such as was the case in the Lebanon intervention (91).

## Conclusions

A number of interrelated factors appear to motivate the proactive approach of Rome's championing peacekeeping and crisis-management operations. This article argues that this particular understanding of Italian national interest has emerged mostly from an objective assessment of calculated benefits.

Italy's decision to deploy to PSO has proved sensitive to power politics considerations. From the point of view of rational considerations, Italy's involvement in PSOs has been motivated by a reactive posture that seeks to avoid marginalization in international affairs, through active participation in the major international decision-making site of interventionism. By being involved in diplomatic negotiations, Italy has the opportunity to take part in strategic decisions regarding the world's main crisis regions.

It also wished to improve its status within the Euro-Atlantic community, increasing its positional value as much as possible in the eyes of the US hegemon. Bolstering involvement in international operations became essential to demonstrate the country's worth to the US. In the wake of the post-9/11, the option of not backing US operations was seen as strongly detrimental to both countries. As a reliable ally, Rome is supposed to answer the call for intervention, and to show to be a steadfast and active NATO ally.

Interestingly, international norms of appropriateness are most likely to dominate the self-conceptualization of the Italian public on the role armed forces play in those far away conflict theatres. Thus, the second script or strategic narrative, dominant in the public discourse, is aligned with the logic of appropriateness. By accounting for military deployments abroad as promoting international norms, decision-makers are able to portray Italy's missions as being more legitimate,

because in line with the broader interests of the international community. The pursuit of PSO can also be explained by using the constructivist norm change theory. Calculations of the national interest by the Italian public opinion are predicated on an *a priori* mainstreaming of particular values and beliefs, about international security embodied in the doctrine and practices of international organisations, such as the UN.

The benefits-driven behaviour does not exclude that rules are also compatible with the pursuit of benefits. In fact, in Italy, the decision to getting involved in international missions is often taken in the absence of a widespread, public debate on considerations of national interests involved in the use of force abroad. In the case of Italy, public opinion considers of great importance, its self-image as a force for peace. It has developed an identity that increasingly allowed for a rule-based action, such as PSO deployment. In Italy, public opinion has attached a great deal of importance to PSO authorized in accordance with international law, and that any tasks carried out within the scope of missions abroad concern humanitarian assistance, socio-economic reconstruction, or training of local security forces. Such self-identity as a security actor helps make sense of the public's support for multilateral peace operations, even when its national interest are not involved, nor pursued within the context of those operations.

This makes for an interesting concluding point, as resorting to international community values and to humanitarian rhetoric to justify these interventions is strategically used by the elites to enlist the support of public opinion. This implies that if a deeper debate were to be conducted, involving a much wider share of Italian public opinion, more explicitly linking the use of force in combat operations to the defence of national interests, particularly in times of austerity, it might as well promote a change of perception and a decline of public support.

## Notes

1. This article builds on a previous published work: 'The Rationale of Small and Medium-Sized States for Involvement in PSO: The Case of Italy and Portugal', European University Institute, EUI RSCAS; 2017/15, ISSN: 1028-3625, 2017.
2. Often, the governmental interpretation is not shared by all political actors, namely by the opposition parties. Such divergences are mirrored in the contents of parliamentary debates (Ignazi, Giampiero, and Coticchia 2012). There is also a disconnect between the official script and the interpretation by public opinion on the aims and role of the operations.
3. Before the ISAF, Italy's major contribution was the 'Nibbio' Mission, within the framework of the US-led, counterterror mission OEF. Its participation in that operation started in October 2000 and ended in December 2006.
4. Currently renamed Train Advise and Assist Command (TAAC).
5. Thanks to Rome's effort to assure the continuity of the Air Policing mission over the Baltic Republics, for the first time an Italian general was appointed commander of the Joint Force Command of Brunssum, one of NATO's most coveted military posts (Marrone and Camporini 2016, 7).
6. Italy's election as a non-permanent member for the 2007–2008 period occurred after it volunteered to strengthen the UNIFIL.
7. The pacifist frame has practical implications, as it negatively affects the definition of the RoE, caveats, the training and equipment (Coticchia and Giacomello 2011, 151).

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