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Renew or Reload?
Continuity and Change in Italian Defence Policy

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Abstract

How do countries adapt their overall defence policy to deal with mutating scenarios? In this paper, as part of a broader research agenda, we try to address these questions focusing specifically on the evolution of Italian defence policy as it evolved since 2001. The focus of the paper is on the evolution of national doctrine as it emerges from the analysis of strategic doctrine. What we look at here is the "process of translation" from the political to the military level, as embodied by key political strategic documents, and its evolution over time. To do so, the paper examines the Italian White Papers on Defence of 2002 and 2015 through qualitative and quantitative (content) analysis.

Keywords

1. Introduction

The only enduring feature of the strategic environment that Western countries face these days is, seemingly, constant change. Geographically, the number of open fronts has been on the rise: NATO is facing renewed Russian assertiveness on the Eastern front, the Near East is embroiled in new conflicts (and old ones do not seem close to an end). While the commitment in Afghanistan is diminishing, outcomes are such that they should at least lead to serious rethinking of how military operations can be conducted if they are to be successful. The type of threats is also evolving, and concepts such hybrid threat or hybrid warfare have been increasingly used to depict such transformations in the way war is waged.

How do countries respond to these changes? And namely, how do countries adapt their overall defence policy to deal with mutating scenarios? Here, as part of a broader research agenda on armed forces transformation in Europe, we try to address these questions focusing specifically on the evolution of Italian defence policy as it evolved since 2001. Italy has been at the forefront of military commitments in the past two decades, being active in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Libya as well as playing a role in Iraq (from 2003 to 2006). Emerging from the Cold War with a force structure based on conscription and focused on making its part in a possible conventional confrontation with the Warsaw Pact, Italy underwent dramatic changes in organizational and operational terms. Moreover, it often did so in a context of limited resources, thus representing a relevant case both of "transformation in contact" (Foley et al. 2011) and at (almost) zero costs (Coticchia and Moro 2015).

The focus of the paper is on the evolution of national doctrine as it emerges from the analysis of strategic doctrine. Studies on the effect of national security and strategic cultures have long stressed the importance of looking at the way defence policy is framed in terms of values and even lexicon (Katzenstein 1996, Ringsmose and Borgesen 2011). On the other hand, national level strategic doctrine is a key component of defence policy, because it focuses on the main international threats posed to national security, aiming to avoid possible gaps between political goals and military means (Posen 1984). Consistently, what we look at here is the "process of translation" from the political to the military level, as embodied by key political strategic documents, and its evolution over time. To do so, we look at the two White Papers on Defence released (by the Italian MoD) in 2002 and 2015. Our approach to the documents is two-fold. First, we trace their origins, the political (domestic and international) contexts in which they originated. Second, we use content analysis to sharpen our examination, illustrating the evolution across time of the declaratory policy (Blackburn 2015) and illuminating the cognitive maps of defence policy-makers concerning specifically 1) the definition of their environment and areas of interests, 2) the threat assessment 3) the core missions of the armed forces, 4) the resource allocation, and 5) the organizational structure of the armed forces.

The new White Paper signals a point of departure from the previous one first and foremost in terms of its overall structure (Gilli et al. 2015) and place in the design of overall defence policy; moreover, it responds to novel threats by clearly singling them out and partially redrawing the consequences in terms of posture and force structure. Nonetheless, several elements persist and form a "core" of Italian approach to defence: the problem of resources, the embeddedness in a dense institutional network, and the core regions of interests. The paper proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review literature on the analysis of strategic and military doctrine, derive the importance of "unpacking" doctrine to extrapolate elements of continuity and change, and explain the research design. The empirical core of the paper is based on the qualitative and quantitative (content) analysis of the Italian White Papers on Defence of 2002 and 2015 across the key dimensions of analysis mentioned above. Finally, we map policy implications of these preliminary findings and potential paths of research.

2. Continuity and change in defence policy

Analysis of strategic doctrine through policy documents sheds light on key aspects of defence policy. It highlights how countries perceive their security environment, their view of the political and social geography, their threat perception, the range and coordination of their potential action, the "framing" of their military tasks, that is the specific the tools they believe are needed to survive and thrive in their context. The key aspect we want to explore here is continuity and change in defence policy as it emerges from policy documents, and to account for the evolution of main strategic aims of the Italian armed forces according to the national military doctrine. Most of the literature on the subject focused on military doctrine, which is a key component of defence policy because it takes into consideration the main international threats posed to national security, aiming to devise the best military means to achieve political goals (Posen 1984). Elizabeth Kier (1995) provided the standard reference for the study of the transformation of military doctrines. To summarize, doctrines could be radically altered in few years, remain static despite changes of the strategic scenario or they could adapt to external conditions maintaining intact their core values.

The debate over change in strategic doctrine provides also preliminary insights on its causes. Three key elements must be mentioned explicitly. First, in observing whether (and to what extent) change took place, literature sheds light on the responsiveness, at least in declaratory terms, of defence policy to the mutating environment, and to the shape of external threats (Blackburn 2015; Locatelli 2010). Limited policy change facing a mutated environment would signal that "strategic adjustment" is not a priority in setting the overall policy frame. This is not just about responding to overall transformations of the global security environment such as those brought about by the end of the Cold War or (possibly to a lesser extent) 9/11. In fact, in the past 15 years, Western militaries – and Italy among them – have been particularly active and thus their operational experience in large and complex scenarios should have deeply affected their overall posture. While perhaps none of the individual "crises" and interventions of this period (with the exception of the long war in Afghanistan) would account on its own to a push for large restructuring of defence policy, all of them together certainly have the size and intensity to deeply affect it.

Second, unit-level variables matter (Rynning 2002). Among them, resources inevitably play a large role in the setting of defence policy. In Europe in particular, the ancillary position to the US that characterized the Cold War years, together with large fiscal constraints that worsened in the 1990s, made the cost factor central in shaping debate and practice. The perceived salience of the resource dimension can lead to incremental changes or lack of changes notwithstanding the mutable threat environment. An outcome could be decoupling, intended as transformations that have the purpose of mimicking change when organizations are pressured to follow mainstream ideas and approaches (Wiesner 2013) but do not have a real willingness, or resources, to adapt. "Muddling through" can thus follow, with the related inability to modify the structure and mission of the armed forces to face the new challenges (Blackburn 2015).

Third, national cultural features relative to the use of military force, embodied in strategic cultures (Katzenstein 1996). Strategic cultures are the "lenses" through which countries interpret their security environment and frame the role of military means within it (Johnston 1995). The presence of pre-constituted values, beliefs and principles can clearly shape defence policy as their rigidity can hinder transformations (especially when large). Strategic cultures can certainly change over time, but in the short and medium run it is necessary to identify which are the core values and observe how they might impact the framing of policies. At a different level, other scholars looked at the way the armed forces define their role conceptions, finding for instance how national approaches to force employment – even in advanced democracies – can depend on the relatively autonomous preferences that are formed within armed forces themselves (Vennesson et al. 2009). Because of the level of analysis here, organizational culture within military organizations play a lesser role. However, organizational preferences within the military can certainly, in turn, affect the content of doctrines at higher levels, very much depending on the structure of civil-military relations (Gibson and Snider 1999).

Methods for the study of these phenomena are diverse, and recent approaches started from the observation of the limits of earlier analyses. Often times, research on strategic and military doctrine looked at its origins – in Barry Posen's terms, the "sources" – while taking for granted or providing a simple characterization of doctrine itself. However, doctrines (at all levels) are far from univocal or homogenous. Quite the contrary, except perhaps in periods of intense confrontation that characterized the pre-WWI and intra-war periods, dichotomies (be they "continuity vs. change" or "offensive vs. defensive") are difficult to find. Strategic doctrine suffers from the most classic "dependent variable problem" (Pierson 1994; Coticchia and Moro 2014). Given this, how can we disentangle the rich set of information that are included in doctrines and provide standardized measures that allow for replicability and accumulation of knowledge? Here, we try to provide a first-cut description of how strategic doctrine evolves, through unpacking the concept of doctrine itself, as the first step of a broader project that also aims to look more thoroughly at explanatory hypotheses.

Empirically, our starting point is how political military authorities frame their discourse concerning core tasks and approaches on the ground in contemporary warfare. The importance of lexicon to analyse the framing of strategies can hardly be overstated. As it has been widely noticed, the examination of cultural factors within military organizations is a very complex task, due to secrecy and the low level of information that generally affect armed forces (Arbukle 2006). However, the literature has largely emphasized how official documents are the most preeminent referent objects to study in order to draw the cognitive maps of actors in the field of defence and security (Johnston 1995; Berger 1998). The analysis of the "speech act" illustrates norms, expectations, shared attitudes and beliefs of political actors (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998; Gourevitch, 2002), highlighting the language and conceptual "codes" through which the decision-makers interpret complex issues (Wiener 2007). Content analysis (Weber 1990; Druckman, 2005) is "a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying characteristics of specified messages" (Holsti 1969: 25). Content analysis has been recently used in studies analysing defence policy (Blackburn 2015) as a tool to provide formalization and standardization that have long been needed, for instance, in the study of strategic cultures (Sweijs et al. 2015). Through standardized content analysis the paper illustrates the main conceptual references that allow illustrating the saliency of crucial aspects within the debate on Italian defence. Such frames are codes through which the actors interpret complex defence issues, from coming challenges to areas of strategic interest.

3. The 2002 and 2015 White Papers compared: a first-blush assessment

The 2015 White paper is the result of an intentional attempt to reorient the current Italian defence policy. While casting itself, at least in principle, in straight continuity with the 2002 predecessor, it also marks a revision of the military apparatus in terms of structures, missions and capabilities. For starters, while the 2002 document displays almost exclusively a descriptive intent, the 2015 version seems more in line with the purported role of a strategic planning document (Marrone 2015: 3). In fact, as explicitly stated several times throughout the text (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 18, 32, 38, 64, 68) and reiterated by official communication by the Minister of Defence (*Senato della Repubblica* 2015: 20), it is conceived as a forerunner of future initiatives, like the forthcoming Strategic Review. As a result, the document spells out clear policy guidelines, but it remains silent on many features of the expected revision.

Second, the different intent is also witnessed by the sheer size and structure of the two documents: the 2002 white paper is organized in 12 chapters and is as long as 244 pages. By reverse, the most recent edition features 10 chapters and amounts to just 68 pages. Thirdly, what marks a substantial difference is the political context anticipating and surrounding the release of the documents. From a domestic perspective, the early 2000s saw one of the most stable governments in Italian history: the second Berlusconi government, that lasted from 2001 to 2006 with a stable majority in both chambers of the Parliament (Coticchia 2015; Cladi and Webber 2011; Calossi and Coticchia 2009). By reverse, the Renzi government faced a more challenging context: politically speaking, after replacing in 2014

the Letta government, it could not rely on a stable majority, as it was based on a large coalition, spamming from the center-left Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD) to the center-right New Center-Right (*Nuovo Centro Destra*, NCD). Economically, it was struggling to address the enduring economic crisis – which meant an overarching concern for tight fiscal policies.

Equally relevant, the international context was radically different. For our purposes, suffice to remind here that the most influential events anticipating the 2002 white paper were the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 1999 Kosovo war, and the December 1998 French-British summit at St. Malo. Although the consequences of these events could not be anticipated at that stage, the 2002 *Libro Bianco* seems to provide a first-blush response to the "new" challenges (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 14-15) of a changed security context – i.e. one where international terrorism replaced traditional territorial threats, the European Union (EU) was adding flesh to the bones of a nascent ESDP (Howorth 2011; Locatelli 2008), and the Balkans had proven the harder case for all European states' credibility as security providers (Lucarelli 2000). In 2015, on the contrary, the geopolitical landscape had been shaken by widespread instability – from the faltering of nearby states (like Libya and Syria), to the Russian intervention in Ukraine – and the worst financial crisis since the end of World War II. On top of that, in the dozen years that separate the two documents, the Italian Armed Forces have participated extensively in combat operations in theatres as diverse as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya – a remarkable pool of experience for organizational learning (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 21-25; Coticchia and Moro 2015).

By the light of these considerations, it should not come as a surprise if the 2015 *Libro Bianco* displays significant differences compared to the previous version. As anticipated in the opening remarks, in order to proceed with some order, we will sort out five main issues addressed in the documents: threats, regions, missions, resources and structure of the Armed Forces.

The first term stands for the challenges identified within the texts of the White Books: what are the main sources of insecurity, and where do they come from? In 2002, the main reason of concern was found in the rise of asymmetric threats or, more clearly, in "as multi-form, diffused e multi-directional threats, as to call for multi-dimensional and multi-national answers" (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 15). It is worth quoting this section of the document at greater length:

> The conventional threat no longer exists, geographical risks arise, [with agents] basing their capabilities not only on armaments, but also on more diverse and complex tools [...] It is a range of asymmetric activities (which are variously linked and structured among them) that identify those risks the international community will address in the future (*Ibidem*)[1].

The logical consequences of this changed security context are two-fold: on the one hand, transcending national borders, the new asymmetric threats make security indivisible, so calling for concerted, multilateral solutions; on the other hand, being inherently multifaceted, the new challenges impose a multi-dimensional response (i.e. one comprising a military, but also political, economic and cultural approach) (*Ibidem*).

Coherently with its predecessor, the 2015 *Libro Bianco* also starts from the recognition of a diffused condition of international instability, whose origins are traced back to the parallel and opposite trends towards globalization and fragmentation (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 9). By doing so, the document apparently aims to spell out (although quite succinctly) the theoretical foundations to grasp the defining features of the current strategic scenario. The very same jargon used – *global village*, *interconnections*, *interdependence* – seems to be a delayed reflection of the political science literature most common in the 1990s, and indeed even before (Clark 1999; Giddens 1990; McLuhan 1962).

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[1] "La minaccia tradizionale non esiste più, sorgono dei rischi areali che basano le proprie capacità non solo sugli armamenti, ma anche su strumenti più diversificati e sofisticati […] Si tratta di una molteplicità di attività asimmetriche che, variamente combinate ed articolate tra loro, vanno a configurare quei rischi con cui la Comunità Internazionale dovrà confrontarsi nel futuro".

Differently from the previous document, however, the list of potential challenges is much more detailed, and it includes up to 11 items: shifting balance of power at the global level, fragile or unstable institution-building, pervasive role of technologies, reliance on networks, demographic changes, urbanization, scarcity of natural resources, climate change, globalization of financial resources, factional identities (*identitarismo localista*), plummeting investments in the defence sector (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 9-11).

The second item in our list is intended to highlight which areas of the world are deemed as particularly relevant for the country, either for the national interests at stake, or as a source of insecurity. In this respect both documents agree on the Italian priorities: coherently with the country's long term foreign policy orientation (Santoro 1991; Romano 1993; Croci 2007; Walston 2007; Ignazi et al. 2012), the first priority is represented by the Euro-Atlantic area: NATO and the EU are therefore the main avenues to tackle security issues. One may argue that the Atlanticist and European trajectories do not necessarily result in a positive-sum game, as either can be detrimental to the other – a problem that Italy shares with other European powers (Locatelli 2012). In both documents, however, the underlying assumption is that the transatlantic partnership and European defence integration are equally important for the provision of defence and deterrence capabilities. In this view, the Italian involvement in the EU military and security initiatives (a goal set more explicitly in 2015) is explicitly conceived as a complement to NATO[2], not a replacement (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 17; *Libro Bianco* 2015: 15-18).

The second priority identified in the documents is the Mediterranean area. Its centrality is aptly described in the 2002 White Paper: "The Mediterranean [region], due to its North/South sharp economic unbalances, its multiple conflicts and tensions, its central role as an economic, civilian and military line of communication, has gained an increasing strategic salience"[3] (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 15). More in detail, the 2015 version highlights the challenge of failed or failing states, the gathering of terrorists and criminal organizations e the widespread dissatisfaction with democratic regimes.

Just one major difference stands out in this respect: understandably, given the mayhem that plagued the Balkans for most of the 1990s, Eastern Europe figured prominently in the 2002 document, while the 2015 version holds it as a subset of the European region (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 12). Of course, the scant reference to the area can be easily explained by the remarkable pacification efforts that took place in the last decade, most notably the European enlargement in 2004, which subsumed most Central and Eastern Euopean countries within the EU. In fact, the *Libro Bianco 2015* explicitly mentions the region in terms of security concern only once, whereas it expresses the necessity "to reassure allied countries of Eastern Europe" (*Ibi.*: 21).

The emphasis on these critical areas also shapes the White Papers' take on missions. The underlying question is how the kind of missions that are envisaged in the documents are defined and their features described. Apparently, the White Papers are quite similar to each other[4]; the only (marginal) difference is in terms of wording: while the 2002 paper pays tribute to the purpose of national integrity (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 15, 65), the second one refers to national defence (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 12, 13, 16, 19). Apart from that, there is a striking continuity between the two, as the second mission is identified in granting the security of the Atlantic area, the third one in crisis management operations and a fourth one in supporting domestic institutions, as in cases of natural disasters (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 65-66).

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[2] Interestingly enough, the 2015 document never mentions the USA as a source of European security.

[3] "Il Mediterraneo, con i suoi forti squilibri economici tra nord e sud, i suoi molteplici conflitti e tensioni, la sua centralità come via di comunicazione economica, civile e militare, ha assunto una valenza strategica sempre più alta".

[4] Actually, one may note that they are also in line of continuity with the other strategic documents released since the early 1990s, like *Il nuovo modello di difesa* (1991) and *Nuove forze per un nuovo secolo* (2001).

In one respect, though, the two documents seem to differ: when it comes to the 2002 White Paper, the first two types of missions depict a very traditional sort of security scenario – i.e., one based on conventional threats like armed aggression, control of lines of communication, etc… Likewise, these kinds of contingencies call for a traditional defence posture. On the contrary, the third kind of mission, which should be acknowledged as the most likely case, requires an expeditionary, interoperable and ready deployable force (Locatelli 2010; Locatelli and Testoni 2009). So, the logic of the argument (a radical change in the security context leads to new, asymmetrical threats) suggests that the third kind of missions becomes increasingly relevant for the country. This was already evident by the light of the military operations in which Italy participated even before 2002, as well as the reference to NATO's 1999 strategic concept and the so-called Petersberg tasks (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 17-18, 20-22). And yet, no consideration of this sort can be inferred from the *Libro Bianco 2002*, nor policy implications are drawn (more on this point in the part on resources and structure of the armed forces). By reverse, the 2015 version, after paying lip service to the national defence function, stresses throughout the text – and most clearly in the lessons learnt section – almost exclusively non-conventional missions, like hybrid/asymmetric conflicts and, above all, stabilization operations.

Moving to the fourth item in our checklist, "resources" refers to the stated commitments in terms of defence budget: so, the amount of financing in the short and long term and, most importantly, the allocation of resources. Not surprisingly, both papers explicitly acknowledge (and complain for) the traditional reluctance of Italian policymakers to devote resources to the Armed Forces (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 12; *Libro Bianco* 2015: 5). Moreover, they concede that resource allocation is markedly unbalanced, with most of the funding being absorbed by personnel costs, and just a tiny fraction of the balance devoted to investments. Moving from this premise, the *Libro Bianco* 2015 emphasizes the need for more cost effectiveness (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 4, 6-8, 17, 19, 22, 25, 33-35, 38-44, 49). In particular, the principles of effectiveness and "economy of use" are reiterated throughout the text as guiding principles driving every aspect of the Armed Forces, from training to deployment. However, when it comes to an issue as important as procurement, no explicit reference is made to which assets are deemed necessary to reach this goal (whether power projection, air-lift, high-intensity, low-intensity, network-centric capabilities, and so forth). As concerns the 2002 document, there is still some reference to the need for effectiveness – i.e. how to keep the military apparatus up to date and going. However, there is less concern for the "bang for the buck" issue. All this comes down to a detailed description of the military budget and a reiterated call for more funding (*Libro Bianco* 2002: 76-77).

Finally, moving to the structure of the Armed Forces, the issue at stake for both White Papers is how to manage the reform process undertaken since the end of the 1990s with the demise of the draft and the adoption of a professional army model. Indeed, for mere chronological reasons, the 2002 document is almost exclusively concerned with the problem of how to complete this process (*Ibi.*: 105-106). Beyond that, there is just scant reference to possible attempts to reform the existing organization; in fact, most of the document turns out to be a lengthy and detailed description of the main agencies comprising the Armed Forces (*Ibi*: 37-64).

In the 2015 document it is easy to infer much higher ambitions, related in particular to a deep reform of the highest echelons of the Armed Forces. In particular, a revision of command structures is aimed to achieve more jointness (Camporini 2015: 8). While leaving unchanged the highest body of the Armed Forces, the head of the joint chief of staff (CASMD, *Capo di Stato Maggiore*), significant changes should affect (among others) VCOM-OPS (*Comando Operativo di Vertice Interforze; Comando Interforze per le Operazioni Speciali/Operazioni Cibernetiche*) and DNAL (*Direzione Nazionale Armamenti e responsabile per la Logistica)*, as both are supposed to expand their competences and powers within the chain of command of the Armed Forces. Finally, in order to ease inter-service cooperation and increase effectiveness, much emphasis is attributed to training and operational experience (*Libro Bianco* 2015: 41-42).

To conclude, such a first-blush assessment along five dimensions of comparison displays both elements of continuity and change between the two documents. The next section will complement these findings with content analysis.

4. Content Analysis

The research has been performed with the software AntConc[5] and it relies on three levels of analysis: word frequency list (or wordlist), the frequency of the categories, and keywords in context (KWIC). The first level simply provides the list of all the terms included in the texts examined by the software.

The frequency of categories illustrates how many times the categories of the vocabulary, created with logically connected terms of different conceptual frameworks, appear in each strategic document. Indeed, coherently with the previous analysis, we have developed a vocabulary of terms related to five broad conceptual frameworks: threats, organizational structure, missions, resources and geographical areas[6]. For instance, "Threats" encloses the terms that emphasize different challenges to Italian national security (e.g., crime, terrorism, resource scarcity, failed states, etc.)[7]. We have also focused on sub-categories of frames. For instance, all the words connected with the frame of terrorism (terror*, Al Qaeda, Bin Laden, etc.) have then been combined in order to distinguish alternative challenges. For each strategic document we have calculated how many times the sub-category has been cited. Then we have estimated the frequency of the sub-category (in percentage) out of all the terms of the speech.

Finally, the third level of analysis, key-words in context, shows the extracted piece of text where the term is inserted, allowing for a better understanding of its meaning. The graphs below illustrate the sub-categories that have obtained the highest results in terms of frequency. Figure 1 highlights the main findings of the analysis concerning the geographical areas, labelled as "Regions". As illustrated by the graph, "NATO" and "Europe" play a prominent role among the frames. Compared to 2002, in 2015 "Europe" becomes the most relevant frame replacing "NATO" as the leading conceptual reference. However, as already noted in the previous paragraph, the two frames appear strongly connected in both the documents. Also the KWIC function ('keywords in context') confirms such concordance between the two categories. Otherwise, "Mediterranean" acquires a significant importance only in 2015. In fact, the 2015 White Paper focuses specifically on this context, which represents a traditional strategic area for Italy. On the contrary, it is worth noticing that "United States", another traditional guideline for Italian foreign policy, is noticeably marginal in the documents. Oddly enough, such frame has never been quoted in the White Paper 2015, which conversely devotes a growing attention to "Africa".

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[5] AntConc (Version 3.2.4w), Tokyo, Waseda University. Available from www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html

[6] The authors provide additional information on vocabulary, texts and specific figures upon request. Terms are in Italian.

[7] "Key-words in context" helps distinguishing positive and negative connotations (e.g.: "this is *not* a threat").
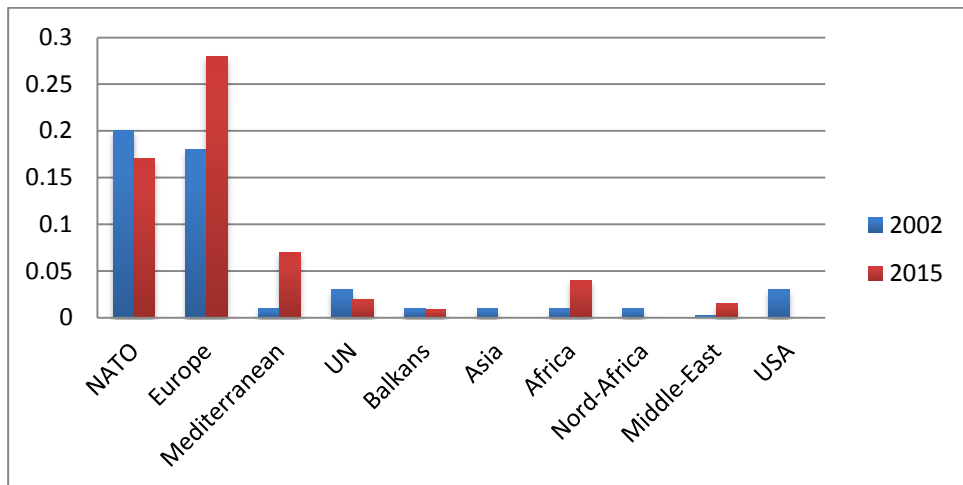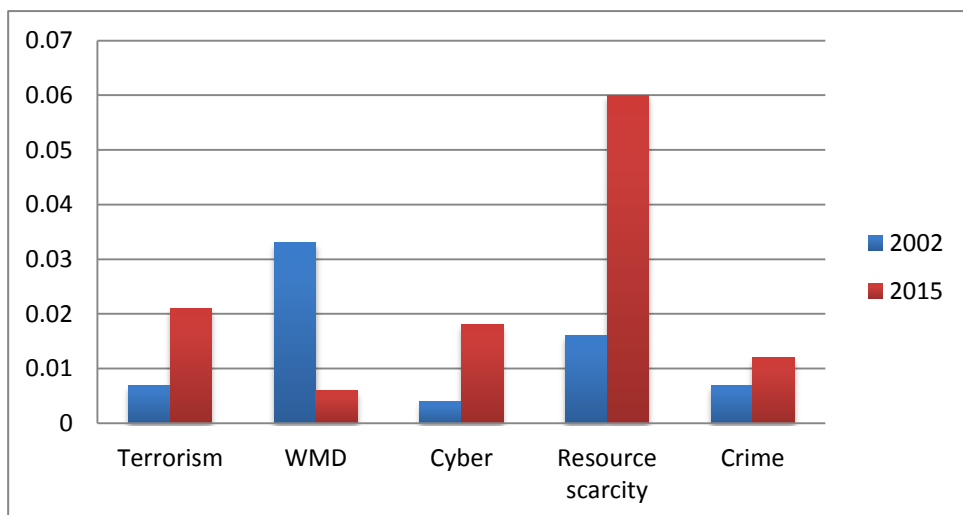
Fig. 1) Regions

Figure 2 shows the key-frames adopted in 2002 and 2015 regarding the main threats to Italian and international security. As expected, the menace posed by Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) has reduced considerably its importance in the last thirteen years. In fact, while such issue was at the heart of the debate before the Iraqi invasion, nowadays other challenges are reported with higher frequency in the White Book: terrorism (after more than a decade of the "war on terror"), organized crime and cyber threats. "Resource scarcity" (which encompasses the consequences of the economic crisis and of the lack of natural resources) emerges as the leading frame in 2015 among the perceived threats. The discontinuity in the level of saliency of such frame across time is remarkable. "Resource scarcity" is clearly interpreted in 2015 as the most dangerous menace in the current strategic scenario. The magnitude of the financial and economic crisis is perhaps the antecedent condition that allows to better explain this variance.
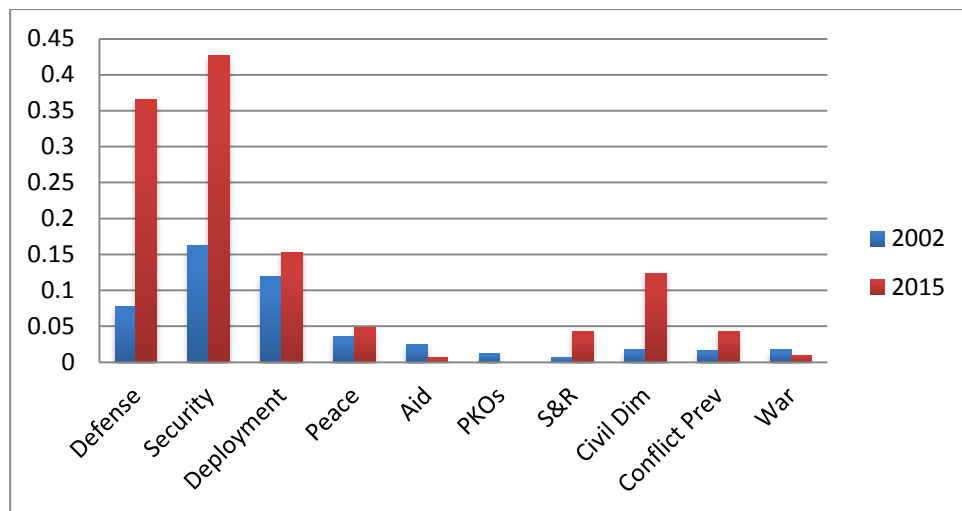
Fig. 2) Threats

While some discontinuities arise in the ways the documents face the categories of "Regions" and "Threats", Figure 3 reveals a substantial continuity concerning "Missions". In fact, although the attention devoted to "defence" and "security" increases a lot in 2015, these two frames essentially confirm their prominence among the other frames. One would wonder why after years of military operations abroad (indeed "the sub-frame "deployment" increases over time) the concept of "defence"

is still so frequent in the document. By looking at the text through the KWIC, "defence" is regularly linked to "national interest". Such connection can help in clarifying the enduring relevance of the frame. In fact, the unusual attention dedicated to concept of "national interest" (from 0,019% in 2002 to 0,182 in 2015; more than doubled also in absolute terms) represents a novelty for Italian strategic documents[8].

Content analysis illustrates how decision-makers have gradually shifted their consideration from sub-categories as "peace-keeping" (which includes terms as PKO, peacekeeping, peace-building, etc.) and "humanitarian" missions to "conflict prevention" and "stabilisation" interventions. In addition, the 2015 *Libro Bianco* assigns a major function also to the civilian dimension (e.g., civil-military cooperation, etc.), which has been confirmed as a key-asset of the Italian approach to missions abroad.
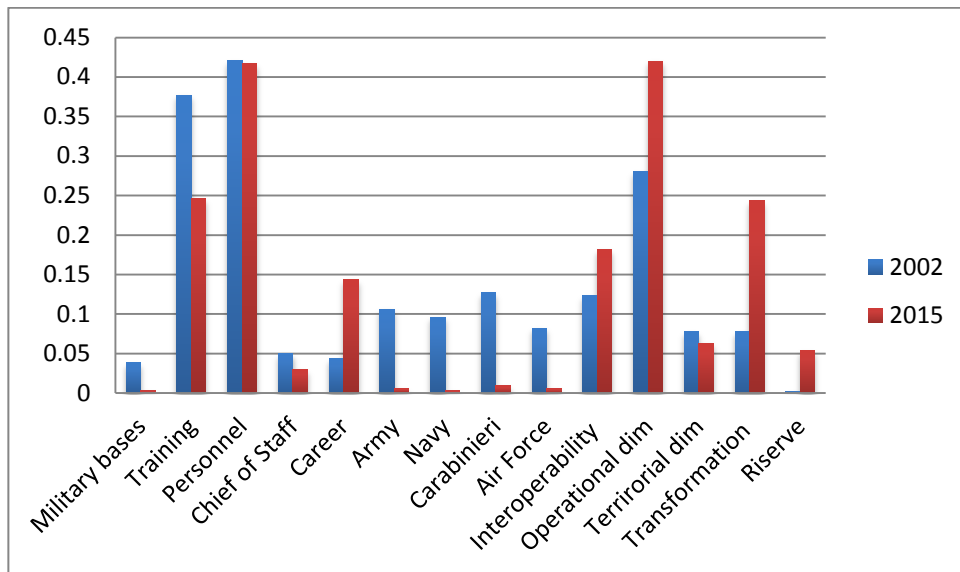
Fig. 3) Missions

As expected, after having deployed troops in the most complex and dramatic military interventions of the recent Italian history, decision-makers put emphasis on the "operational dimension" of the Armed Forces. Figure 4 shows the frequency of the categories adopted by the strategic documents regarding the structure of the forces. In continuity with 2002, the problematic issue of "personnel" is still crucial in 2015, as well its saliency. According to the content analysis, the two documents diverge for three main elements related to "Structure". First, the frame of transformation (which comprises terms as "innovation", "adaptation", etc.) obtains considerable relevance in 2015, in line with the broader attempt to reform national defence after years of deep economic crisis and intense military commitment. Second, the shared need to improve jointness emerges by looking at both the growing frequency of "interoperability" and (especially) the lack of references to single services, which were often quoted in 2002. Third, the 2015 *Libro Bianco* strongly focuses on the sub-category of "career", in conformity with the general aim of reforming the promotion of the personnel system.
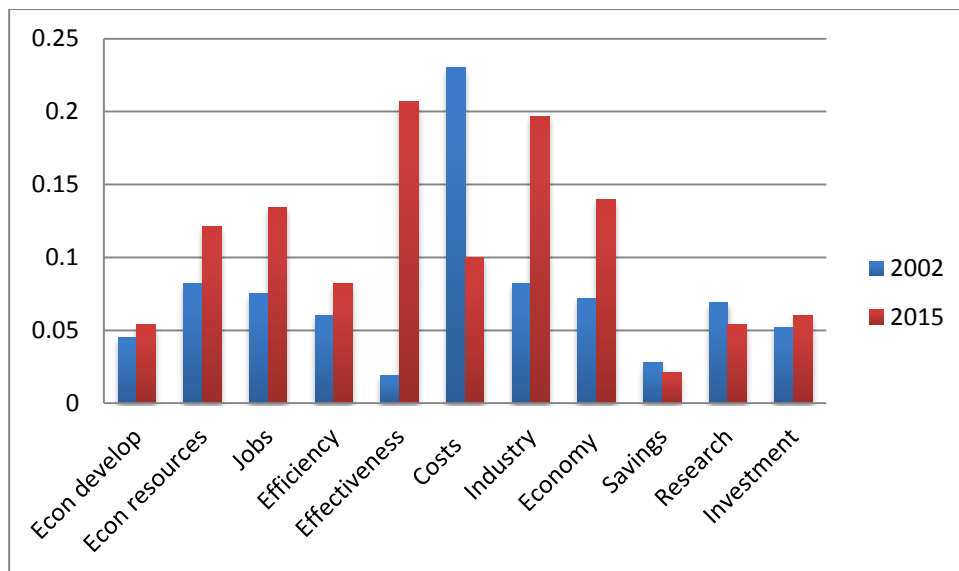
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[8] For a broader analysis on Italian White Papers (and also on the limited role played by "national interest" within the debate) see Coticchia and Moro (2014).

Fig. 4) Structure

Finally, Figure 5 illustrates the most salient frames adopted by the documents to address the category of "Resources". According to the findings of content analysis, it is possible to trace a clear shift from the "costs" of national defence (e.g., "expenses", "prices", etc.) to its "effectiveness", which becomes the leading frame. A second element that deserves consideration is the altered saliency of "industry". Such sub-category (which includes terms as "industrial", "production", etc.) has often been connected with the growing space acquired by procurement as well as by the explicit need to defend national industry as a vital interest for Italian Defence.

Fig. 5) Resources

5. Conclusions

How did Italy respond to the shifts in the threat environment? Unpacking strategic doctrine and looking at its different constituent elements allow us having a more fine-grained analysis, which shows that elements of change live together with log embedded features of Italian defence policy. With reference to change, the recognition of terrorism, and its link with the upheavals occurred (and still occurring) in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, has assumed an even more central role. Coherently, the military instrument is conceived overall as an expeditionary, mission-oriented force: to that end, "jointness" and "interoperability" become central features in the design of force structure and posture. One can also find, in the new document, evidence of a revival of some "old" concepts, such as "national interest". Here, it seems that such a notion entails attention on the defence industry, and the broader security-industrial apparatus, as a key element in the design, and for the effective implementation, of defence policy.

Other elements have been more persistent. Two factors seem to combine in accounting for continuity. On the one hand, the frequent mention in all documents is the economic constraints that restrict any innovation, in fact even pose challenges for the very functioning of the defence "machine" in their everyday routines. Second, as illustrated by literature (Murray 1999), a shared and well-rooted strategic culture will turn very slowly. In fact, political elite "socialized" within a given strategic culture will move away from prevalent strategic discourse with considerable difficulty. Thus, further studies should investigate if (and how) coming external shocks or "strategic dilemmas" (Lantis 2002) will modify the ways through which Italian decision-makers interpret defense and security issues.

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