
The Italian Republic and maritime security, from a state-centric to a postmodern approach: studies and perspectives*

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This article provides an evaluation of studies on maritime security in the Italian Republic, as well as an initial interpretative framework. Specifically, it highlights the shift from a national maritime security model to an international/supranational model, which is typical of post-modern states. This shift is the result of the Italian maritime sector's transformation during the Cold War. This transition was driven by globalisation and the sector's integration into economic and military systems such as the EEC/EU and NATO.

Key words: Navy, maritime security, Italian Republic, Mediterranean

Maritime security from 1945 to the present day

This article aims to provide an overview of the historiography relating to changes in Italian maritime defence and security in the post-war era. While national studies on this topic are scarce, there is a wealth of international works. However, these often take the form of a 'hybrid' blend of historical studies and other fields of research, particularly when it comes to security. Unsurprisingly, it is precisely these areas that have produced the most significant theories to help us understand the changes in the relationship between republican Italy and maritime security.

The first issue to consider is that a so-called postmodern paradigm has changed the relationship between states and the sea since 1945. This change can be traced back to the expansion and globalisation of international maritime traffic in the post-war years, particularly after the containerisation of maritime transport in the 1970s. At the same time, the direct link between naval power, industrial

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power and merchant power has been deconstructed. On the other hand, states — especially those in the West — have increasingly applied a multilateral, interconnected and internationalised logic to the economy and matters of security.¹

Another key aspect of the changing role of navies and other security bodies has been the redefinition of maritime sovereignty due to the territorialisation of the sea. Deborah Paci has explored this theme in depth,² and in this article I will limit myself to recalling two important historical moments in this post-modern transformation: the Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone (1958), and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), which defined issues of jurisdiction over archipelagic waters and exclusive economic zones.³

Consequently, the transformation of maritime territories has contributed to the development of new security policies and practices, which are often based on international cooperation. These include the protection of marine resources and the management of non-state actors and transnational phenomena, such as piracy, migration, terrorism and criminal trafficking.⁴ At the same time, maritime security policies have changed to guarantee national rights of control over maritime space and its economic resources. As a result, from the post-war period to the present day, ‘modern’ (state-centric) and ‘postmodern’ (international and supranational) practices in the exercise of maritime defence and security have increasingly coexisted.⁵

It seems that Italian maritime historiography has not fully acknowledged these transformations. They are barely featured in the two main summaries on the subject: Paolo Frascani’s study of the sea as a part of Italian identity and Eugenio Ivetic’s analysis of the Adriatic as a border space and the Mediterranean as a space for foreign policy-making.⁶ This shortcoming reflects the lack of studies on the relationship between the Italian Republic and the sea

¹ Robert C. Rubel, *Navies and Economic Prosperity, the New Logic of Sea power*, London, Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies, King’s College, October 2012, especially pp. 3–4; Steven Haines, *Sea-power*, in Hance D. Smith, Juan L. Suárez de Vivero, Tundy S. Agardy (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Ocean Resources and Management*, London, Routledge, 2015, pp. 371–373.

² Deborah Paci, *La costruzione del confine marittimo nell’Italia repubblicana. Il caso della “guerra del pesce” nel Canale di Sicilia*, “Italia Contemporanea”, 2024, 305, pp. 213–238.

³ Adalberto Vallega, *Towards the post-modern ocean*, “European Review”, May 2000, n. 2, pp. 201–213.

⁴ Christian Bueger, Timothy Edmunds, *Blue crime: Conceptualising transnational organised crime at sea*, “Marine Policy”, September 2020, p. 104067.

⁵ Basil Germond, Celine Germond-Duret, *Critical geographies of the ocean: mobilities, placefulness and maritime relationalism*, in Jason Monios, Gordon Wilmmeier (eds.), *Maritime mobilities*, London, Routledge, 2018, pp. 36–37.

⁶ Paolo Frascani, *Il Mare*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, pp. 178–198; Eugenio Ivetic, *Storia dell’Adriatico. Un mare e la sua civiltà*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2019, pp. 300–324. See also a recent pamphlet on the role of the Mediterranean in Italian history by Eugenio Ivetic, *Il Mediterraneo e l’Italia*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2022.

in the context of security and defence, which are also absent from recent historiographical reviews of national maritime history.⁷

Before examining the national dimension of the relationship between the Italian Republic, defence and maritime security, it is useful to consider how scholars have interpreted the transformation of the role of security institutions in the postmodern sea, starting with Geoffrey Till's theories on maritime power in the age of globalisation. First, we must acknowledge that the globalised and systemic dimension of defence needs are no longer linked exclusively to the territorial space of the nation state. Second, the international system has accelerated since the 1970s, especially after the end of the Cold War. Third, maritime trade is central to ensuring the prosperity of states. In this context, security threats do not only concern states but also come from a variety of non-state actors (e.g. organised crime, piracy, human trafficking). In response to this transformation, the focus of military force has shifted towards four functional aspects: control of the sea, overseas shipping, the maritime order and upholding a maritime consensus. The first two aspects fall within the navies' traditional functions of control and naval projection, but the third element is a product of commercial globalisation and the aforementioned changes in jurisdiction. As a result, new security issues have emerged, necessitating changes to strengthen the non-military agencies and institutions responsible for maritime security. This has led to the fourth point: the need for international cooperation to maintain good order at sea.⁸

All these changes have turned navies into instruments serving national interests and designed to cooperate in integrated international and supranational contexts. However, this postmodern trend primarily impacts the navies of Western Europe, North America, Oceania and — to a certain extent — East Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore). These navies have experienced stronger supranational integration into various types of organisations (e.g. NATO, EEC/EU, UN).⁹ Italy seems to fit into this category, which has significant implications for the definition of its post-war maritime security policy.

Another aspect that is worth mentioning is the transformation of naval warfare during the twenty-first century. I am thinking of new forms of conflict that fall outside conventional warfare, either below the threshold of open violence (grey zone operations) or straddling it (hybrid warfare), but which do not degenerate into open conflict as conventionally understood. Historians have

⁷ A few assessments from different chronological perspectives include those by Michela D'Angelo, Elisabetta M. Tonizzi, *Recent Maritime Historiography on Italy*, in Gelina Harlaftis, Carmen Vassallo (eds.), *New Directions in Mediterranean Maritime History*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2004, pp. 55–82; Andrea Caffarelli, *Navigare necesse est. La storia marittima nell'ultimo ventennio*, "Storia economica", 2017, n. 20, pp. 673–692.

⁸ Geoffrey Till, *Seapower. A guide for the 21st Century*, London, Routledge, 2009, pp. 6–19.

⁹ Ivi, pp. 2–3.

pointed out that these are not new phenomena; ‘gunboat diplomacy’ was an integral part of naval operations even in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ However, as studies in other disciplines have shown, maritime coercion is closely linked to the territorialisation of the sea. In fact, maritime territorial disputes and conflicts are linked to the use of coercion measures falling within the grey zone, to hybrid warfare and to assertive measures entrusted to paramilitary or maritime police agencies (paragunboat diplomacy).¹¹

Alongside the impact of other changes to the sea, this transformation has resulted in a redefinition of the division of roles between navies and other maritime security agencies (particularly coast guards). This is evident in the convergence of certain security tasks, including border protection and managing new postmodern threats. At the institutional level, this change has prompted a transformation characterised by a redefinition of security-related policy-making, bringing civil agencies, police forces and the military closer together.¹² As we will see, this is also a relevant aspect for the history of Italy’s relationship with maritime security in the present era, especially over the last 30 years. During this time, the peninsula has become the southern frontier of an integrated supranational European space, where there is a growing overlap of functions between military defence and civil security. These operate in a fragmented institutional context in which numerous police and security organisations with jurisdiction over the sea compete with one another.

A last element that is worth mentioning concerns the transformation of international power relations and their impact on navies. The end of the Second World War and the subsequent bipolar system, followed by the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower, changed the distribution of global naval power. Before 1939, Western Europe was home to four of the seven great naval powers: Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany (the other three were the United States, Japan and the Soviet Union). After the war, the diminished international role of most of these countries meant that their navies were reduced. In particular, after the Suez Crisis (1956), the Soviet Union remained the only European naval power capable of operating independently, while the navies of the Western European countries integrated into NATO took on an essentially regional role.¹³ As a result, the European

¹⁰ Williamson Murray, Peter R. Mansoor (eds.), *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; James Cable, *Gunboat diplomacy 1919-1979: Political applications of limited naval force*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999.

¹¹ James J. Goldrick, *Grey Zones Operations and the Maritime Domain*, Canberra, Australian Strategic policy institute, Barton, 2018. I am grateful to Francesco Zampieri for some useful observations regarding these specific issues.

¹² Ian Bowers, Swee Lean Collin Koh, *Introduction*, in Id., *Grey and White Hulls, an International Analysis of the Navy Coast-Guard Nexus*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2019, pp. 2–13.

¹³ Lawrence Sondhaus, *Navies of Europe, 1815-2002*, London, Longman, 2002, p. 284.

powers — albeit with different measures — turned into medium-sized naval powers (i.e. states whose ability to operate at sea is only partially autonomous), forcing them to integrate into supranational organisations or cooperate with other state actors to achieve their foreign policy objectives.¹⁴

This aspect is important for historians because it reminds them that the post-war context provides potential for comparison, which is particularly useful given the delay in national historiography. Furthermore, it shows that the post-modern transformation of Italian maritime security began relatively early. As studies on republican foreign policy point out, since 1947, Italy has had to permanently renounce its aspirations to be a great power and reposition itself as a regional middle power with ramifications in the wider Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa. This has shaped its foreign policy in terms of its support for multilateralism and international cooperation. In this evolution, the mid-1970s were a watershed. Previously, Italy had assumed a position of strict Atlantic and European adherence, subsequently characterised by the search for an autonomous role, especially in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.¹⁵ The break in the mid-1970s is confirmed by studies of military history, to which research on naval history and maritime security history must necessarily refer. Although historiography on the military history of the Italian Republic is expanding, it has not yet reached the breadth and depth of studies focusing on previous periods. Research has emphasised the centrality of the 1975–85 period, which was characterised by the introduction of promotional defence laws (beginning with the 1975 naval law). The latter shifted the focus of military policy increasingly towards the Mediterranean area. However, studies of Italian military history during the Cold War and the subsequent period are still significantly limited in quantitative and qualitative terms, which can be attributed to a variety of factors: shortcomings of the discipline; difficulties in accessing the sources; the prevalence of the perspective offered by international (mainly US) documentation over the national one; and the sectoralisation and technical nature of certain studies.¹⁶

Having established these paradigmatic and methodological premises, the following pages will review the studies and possible interpretative hypoth-

¹⁴ These theories are described in J.R. Hill, *Maritime strategy for Medium Powers*, Annapolis, Naval Institute press, 1986, pp. 20–21.

¹⁵ Antonio Varsori, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2021, Kindle ed., pos. 177, 12161–13889. On the concept of 'middle power' and 1975 as a turning point, see also Carlo Maria Santoro, *La politica estera di una media potenza, L'Italia dall'unità a oggi*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1991, pp. 177–178.

¹⁶ For a historiographical framework, see Nicola Labanca, *La politica militare della Repubblica. Cornici e quadri*, in Id. (ed.), *Le Armi della Repubblica, Dalla liberazione a oggi*, Turin, UTET, 2009, pp. 67–154; Id., *Nella guerra fredda e oltre*, in Id. (ed.), *Guerre ed eserciti nell'età contemporanea*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2022, pp. 211–213, 241–242 (on the 1970s as a watershed) and the annotated bibliography, pp. 254–256.

eses relating to the relationship between the Italian Republic and the sea in the context of defence and security. In line with my interpretation of the post-modern changes to the sea and to the foreign and defence policy in republican Italy, the discussion will be divided into two chronological sections, with 1975 acting as the dividing line. In addition to the fact that the mid-1970s were a watershed, there is another reason for establishing a chronological separation in this period: access to Italian archival documentation, which was closed for 50 years following its production.

Studies and perspectives on Italian maritime defence during the Cold War (1943–75)

In a 2009 essay summarising the history of the Italian Navy from 1945 to the present, Alessio Patalano referred to it as an institution in search of a painful identity. This identity was eventually established when the Italian Navy joined NATO, the driving force behind an internal qualitative transformation that revived the country's naval projection capacity after the 1960s.¹⁷

In general, during the nuclear age, all navies were at risk of losing their identity and function within a country's national strategy. Even the US Navy came close to being downsized because of the impact of nuclear weapons, at least until the Korean War (1950–53). For medium-sized navies, the transformation was mainly due to their integration into international or supranational entities. This change was also prompted by the United States' decision to strengthen its alliances with Western partners by sharing technology (particularly in vital areas such as missiles, electronics and nuclear innovation) and providing training.¹⁸ Taken immediately after 1945, this decision implied moving away from a past of strategic independence towards a future based on alliances. These aspects inevitably raise the question of how institutions redefined their identity and strategy in this new context.

A comparison with the French case reveals that the latter adopted a middle ground between autonomy and integration. Following its collapse in the Second World War, technological renewal and the sharing of Anglo-American experience within NATO altered the French Navy's doctrine and development in the nuclear age. The result was an attempt to transform it into a tool of French foreign policy on the global stage, with aircraft carrier groups becoming ever more important for maintaining a prolonged pres-

¹⁷ Alessio Patalano, *Dal Garibaldi al Cavour. Il potere marittimo italiano*, in N. Labanca (ed.), *Le Armi della Repubblica*, cit., pp. 229–245, p. 243.

¹⁸ Corbin Williamson, *The U.S. Navy and its cold war alliances, 1945–1953*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2020, p. 262. For an overview of the technological evolution of navies, see Norman Friedman, *Navies in the Nuclear Age*, London, Conway, 1993.

ence in the oceans. Although the country's financial constraints meant that the results were less impressive than expected, the French Navy did manage to define an autonomous naval policy, albeit within the strategic framework of NATO.¹⁹ After 1945, the Japanese Navy drew on its imperial tradition to maintain a sense of continuity, but it also learned the lessons of the war and shifted the focus of its development to the defence of communications and close ties with the United States. Both elements served Japan's new role as an economic power dependent on maritime trade.²⁰ Conversely, after aiming to be Germany's main instrument for global expansion during the world wars, in the nuclear age, the Bundesmarine became the German Federal Republic's smallest armed force. Throughout the first 30 years of the Cold War, it was almost completely integrated into NATO and underwent technological modernisation with the aim of providing local defence, primarily in the Baltic region.²¹ Existing scholarship dates the end of this reconstruction phase to around the turn of the decade, between 1965 and 1975, in line with the break that I have identified for Italy.

The Italian model seems to share some of the characteristics of the cases cited above. However, in order to establish some lines of interpretation, we must consider the relationship between the naval-military element and the maritime system that the Italian Republic had inherited.

Studies of the maritime history of the Liberal and Fascist periods have highlighted the general weakness of the shipping, heavy industry and shipbuilding sectors, leading the state to intervene — in the late nineteenth century — by subordinating the functioning and survival of these sectors to the country's power logic.²² As a result, the Royal Navy and its projection capacity became a necessary means for opening up commercial and colonial spaces abroad for Italy, as well as a tool for the country's maritime defence in the Mediterranean.²³ This model reached its peak between the two world wars, when Italy became the world's second-largest exporter of naval armaments,

¹⁹ Hugues Canuel, *The Fall and Rise of French Sea power, France's Quest for an Independent Naval Policy, 1940-1963*, Annapolis, Naval institute press, 2021.

²⁰ Alessio Patalano, *Post-war Japan as a Sea Power, Imperial Legacy, Wartime Experience and the Making of a Navy*, London, Bloomsbury, 2005, especially pp. 148–149, 152.

²¹ Johanness Berthold Sander Nagashima, *Die Bundesmarine 1950 bis 1972, Konzeption und Aufbau*, Munich, Oldenbourg, 2006.

²² The most detailed reconstructions on the issue include Ludovica De Courten, *La Marina mercantile italiana nella politica di espansione, 1860-1914: industria, finanza e trasporti marittimi*, Rome, Bulzoni, 1989; Giulio Mellinato, *L'Adriatico conteso. Commercio, politica e affari tra Italia e Austria-Ungheria (1882-1914)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2018; on shipbuilding, see Paolo Fragiaco, *L'industria come continuazione della politica. La cantieristica italiana 1861-2011*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2011, especially pp. 18–20, 38–40, 54–64, 83–85, 91–94, 101–104.

²³ Mariano Gabriele, *Il potere marittimo italiano, 1861-1915*, Roma, USMM, 2017, pp. 39–40.

while it continued to support shipping for reasons of prestige, in the form of aid and subsidies.²⁴

On the eve of the Second World War, the Royal Navy had become the fourth largest fleet in terms of number of vessels and the fifth largest in terms of tonnage. During the Fascist era in particular, Italy's naval policy emphasised the importance of the military in achieving ocean freedom, which the country lacked.²⁵ However, due to more general problems with its military policy, the regime failed to reconcile this perceived strategic necessity with its naval policy.²⁶ This failure became apparent during the Second World War, when Fascist Italy was trapped in the Mediterranean. Between 1940 and 1943, not only was the Italian Navy defeated, but the merchant navy was also destroyed, and these events also marked the end of a cycle of Italian maritime power. In fact, the collapse of the regime's maritime projects highlighted the broader limitations of a naval power based on a continental-territorial model aimed at acquiring overseas space rather than growing the country's commercial presence, which is typical of maritime states.²⁷

In this sense, the 1947 Peace Treaty and the consequent end of the 'great navy' era spanning 1861–1943 fundamentally changed the relationship between the national maritime economy and the naval forces, constituting a sort of 'year zero'. In fact, by downsizing the maritime institution, the treaties also minimised the importance of the military-industrial complex. By doing so, they influenced the subsequent development of Italy's maritime economy. The latter took a path characterised by significant public intervention through the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI), in line with previous practices, but it was mainly directed towards the civilian maritime sector.²⁸ A clear sign of this was the substantial decline in Italian warship exports, mainly of small and specialised vessels, which lasted until the 1970s.²⁹

²⁴ See Andrea Filippo Saba, *L'imperialismo opportunistico. Politica estera e industria degli armamenti (1919-1941)*, Naples, Esi, 2001; Roberto Giulianelli, *Ship financing in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century*, "International Journal of maritime history", 2016, n. 2, pp. 335–355.

²⁵ P. Frascani, *Il mare*, cit., pp. 126–128.

²⁶ See also Fabio De Ninno, *Fascisti sul mare. La Marina e gli ammiragli di Mussolini*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2017.

²⁷ Colin S. Gray, *The leverage of sea power. The strategic Advantage of Navies in War*, New York, Free Press, 1992, pp. 6–8; Jack S. Levy, William R. Thompson, *Balancing on Land and at Sea. Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?*, "International Security", 2020, n. 1, p. 18; Bruce A. Elleman, *Principles of Maritime Powers*, Boston, Rowman&Littlefield, 2022, pp. xi–xviii (Introduction by Sarah C.M. Paine) and pp. 127–136.

²⁸ P. Fragiaco, *L'industria come continuazione*, cit., p. 109; Giulio Mellinato, *Lo stato navigatore. Finmare tra servizio pubblico e business (1944-1999)*, pp. 433, 437–440; Roberto Giulianelli, *La navalmeccanica dalla protezione alla competizione (1945-2002)*, pp. 392–393, both in Franco Russolillo (ed.), *Storia dell'IRI*, vol. V, *Un gruppo singolare. Settori, bilanci, presenza nell'economia italiana*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2015.

²⁹ Erminio Bagnasco, Achille Rastelli, *Le costruzioni navali italiane per l'estero*, Rome, Rivista Marittima, 1991, pp. 81–89.

Hence, the state of defence and maritime security in post-war Italy was hypothetically in a state of rupture with the previous period. It should be noted that, during the first phase (1945–75), the contribution of other actors — particularly the maritime police — to maritime security does not appear to have been significant. This is partly due to a lack of research. Furthermore, as we will see, the Coast Guard's transformation into a maritime border security force with autonomous operational capabilities at sea only began towards the end of the Cold War, when the Guardia di Finanza (the Italian financial police) was only responsible for maritime customs control. Following the 1958 Geneva Convention, state jurisdiction was extended to a contiguous zone of only 12 nautical miles.³⁰

One of the main challenges for historians is the lack of comprehensive works on the Italian Navy during the Cold War. The main summary of Italian naval history, written by Giorgio Giorgerini in 1989, offers some important insights, but it stops at the 1980s. Giorgerini offers a periodisation that divides the history of the maritime institution into three sections: 1943–45, the defeated Navy; 1945–61, reconstruction; and 1961–88, towards the Mediterranean and beyond. The latter section ends with the intervention of the 20th naval group in the Persian Gulf (1988), but it focuses on the break with the 1975 naval law. This summary highlights the significance of the Italian Navy's inclusion in NATO, which is one of the key aspects of the postmodern internationalisation of navies. However, the book essentially presents itself as an insider's history, drawing on classic themes from journalistic investigations and memoirs about the maritime institution. The first is the armistice of 8 September 1943, presented as proof of the Navy's solidity in uniting behind the orders of the high command, which is considered proof of its detachment from the Fascist regime. This was followed by the Peace Treaty, seen as a punitive moment, and subsequently the establishment of an 'Atlantic navy' after Italy joined NATO. The 1960s were dominated by nuclear ambitions linked to attempts to strengthen Italy's role in NATO, which was confirmed in 1967 when the country was granted command of NATO's naval forces in the Mediterranean. Finally, the naval law was a 'salvific' moment that outlined Italy's new role in the Mediterranean and contributed to the restructuring of the national maritime industrial system.³¹

Although the information provided by Giorgerini is undoubtedly relevant, the book remains highly biased. For example, it openly takes sides in the

³⁰ S. Bertolucci, *Il problema del mare territoriale*, "Rivista Marittima", 1959, n. 4, April, pp. 53–67.

³¹ Giorgio Giorgerini, *Da Matapan al Golfo Persico. La marina militare italiana dal fascismo alla Repubblica*, Milano, Mondadori, 1989, pp. 582–672; a similar approach can be found in other, more recent summaries, including Renato Battista La Racine, Franco Prosperini, *La marina militare 1861-1991. Compendio di 130 anni di vita*, Rome, USMM, 2007, pp. 97–128; Patrizio Rapalino, *Dalle Alpi all'alto mare. Il ruolo della Marina militare nella tutela degli interessi nazionali (1861-1943)*, Vicenza, in Edibus, 2014, pp. 271–325.

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discussion of interforce issues, essentially echoing the viewpoint of the naval leadership rather than providing a critical analysis. Furthermore, it tends to portray the political class as incapable of understanding maritime defence issues, uncritically attributing the difficulties encountered by the maritime institution to these problems. In doing so, it ignores the complex internal and external factors that have influenced national defence policy.

Starting with the literature on the events of the armistice,³² this limitation can be found more generally in works published between 1943 and 1975. For example, to date, the most detailed reconstruction of the events that happened between 1943 and 1946 is provided by the memoirs of the then Minister of the Navy, Admiral Raffaele De Courten. His memories seek to illustrate the maritime institution's unity between the armistice and the June 1946 referendum, suggesting that it maintained an institutional identity during the country's crisis and presenting the Navy as loyal to the monarchy. However, the editor of the memoirs, Mariano Gabriele, had already indicated that the minister's self-representation was somewhat limited.³³ In this regard, historical research has challenged the idea that 8 September represented a unifying moment, instead suggesting that it was the Navy's organisational structure that held it together after the armistice. De Courten adopted an apparently apolitical stance in subsequent events.³⁴ This aspect points to the influence of the memories of the protagonists of Italian naval affairs in those years, and to the methodological-historical limitations of memoir writing. Conversely, Giovanni Bernardi's study of the relationship between the maritime institution and the victorious powers during the period from the Armistice to the Peace Treaty is closer to a traditional diplomatic history.³⁵

Moving on to the 1950s and the 1960s, the reconstruction of events and the problems faced by the Italian Navy once again exhibit a self-representative quality, being the product of memoirs or pamphlets of the time.³⁶ The analysis of the vessels seems to be more comprehensive, even extending beyond 1975, but it remains limited in terms of the link between the development of

³² See Patrizio Rapalino, Giuseppe Schivardi, *Tutti a bordo! I marinai d'Italia l'8 settembre 1943. Tra etica e ragion di Stato*, Milan, Mursia, 2006; Concetta Ricottili, *La marina militare attraverso l'8 settembre. Il senso dell'onore tra dimensione storica e dimensione retorica*, Padua, Il poligrafo, 2007. The history of those events is described in Francesco Mattesini, *La Marina e l'8 settembre*, Rome, USMM, 1993.

³³ Usmm, *Le memorie dell'ammiraglio De Courten*, USMM, Rome, 1995, especially pp. 15–16, 53, 62, 258, 595–597; for Gabriele's request for constructive criticism, see note 109 at pp. 65–66.

³⁴ Elena Aga Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando. 8 settembre 1943*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006, p. 122; for the second point, see Andrea Argenio, *Le uniformi della Repubblica: Esercito, armamenti e politica in Italia (1945-1949)*, Rome, Viella, 2021, p. 55.

³⁵ Giovanni Bernardi, *La marina gli armistizi e il trattato di pace*, Rome, USMM, 1976.

³⁶ See the volume by the then Chief of Staff, Virgilio Spigai, *Il problema navale italiano*, Livorno, Vito Bianco, 1963; Gino Birindelli, *Vita da marinaio*, Livorno, Vito Bianco, 1991.

the assets and the Navy's military policy.³⁷ An event-driven overview of naval diplomacy up to the 1950s is provided through accounts of the Navy's cruises, which were also used to improve the image of the country damaged by the war.³⁸ More recent works that focus on specific issues, such as the Navy's nuclear ambitions, provide further insight. These studies show the importance of US technology transfer, but also the Italian Navy's ability to develop unique technical solutions, as in the case of the Garibaldi missile cruiser.³⁹ In this sense, Marco Di Giovanni observed that defeat in the war had prompted reflection — facilitated by contact with former enemies — and raised awareness among the officer corps of the need for rapid technological modernisation in sectors such as electronics and nuclear power, in which Italy was lagging behind most clearly. Officer training also needed to be updated. The Italian Naval Academy in Livorno modernised its programmes in the 1950s and 1960s, and close contact with other NATO navies was essential for the strengthening of new skills such as data analysis and operational planning. However, while the Navy showed greater openness than the Army, its links with scientific research remained limited to specific operative areas, leaving capital-intensive research to the impressive resources of the United States.⁴⁰

There are also several more detailed publications that describe the essential features of the Navy's strategic thinking. These works effectively highlight the growing awareness of the loss of national autonomy and the need for Atlantic-European integration, since any conflict between the blocs would necessarily involve Italy. Hence the need to reconfigure the country's naval strategy, based on its maritime defence — aligned with NATO's overall strategy — but also on the ongoing recovery of part of the country's lost status as a regional power.⁴¹

³⁷ Giorgio Giorgerini, Alberto Nani, *Gli incrociatori italiani 1861-1975*, Rome, USMM, 1975; id, *Almanacco storico delle navi militari italiane. La marina e le sue navi dal 1861 al 1995*, Rome, USMM, 1996; Michele Cosentino, *La Marina militare italiana dal 1945 al 1975*, Rome, Rivista marittima, 1996; Michele Cosentino, Maurizio Brescia, *La Marina Militare italiana 1945-2015*, 3 volumes, Genoa, Edizioni storia militare, 2014–15; Michele Cosentino, *La Marina Militare durante la guerra fredda*, Rome, USMM, 2023.

³⁸ USmm, *Storia delle campagne oceaniche della Regia Marina*, vol. IV, Rome, USMM, 1993, pp. 564–595; USMM, *Giro del mondo dell'incrociatore Raimondo Montecuccoli, 1956-1957*, Rome, USMM, 2007.

³⁹ Vincenzo Meleca, *Il potere nucleare della marina italiana*, “Bollettino d'archivio USMM”, single issue published in 2017, pp. 65–103; this must be supplemented with the analysis of military nuclear relations between Italy and the United States, which can be found in Leopoldo Nuti, *La sfida nucleare. La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche 1945-1991*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007, pp. 82–334.

⁴⁰ Marco Di Giovanni, *Ufficiali “comandanti” o tecnocrati? La formazione dei quadri nella marina militare italiana nel secondo dopoguerra. Tradizioni culturali, scienza e management nell'età della guerra tecnologica, appunti e ipotesi di ricerca*, “Mélanges de l'école française de Rome”, volume 115, n. 2, 2003, Rome 2003, pp. 595–623.

⁴¹ Giorgio Giorgerini, Riccardo Nassigh, *Il pensiero navale italiano dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, 3 volumes, Rome, USMM, 1997; see also the analysis by Ezio Ferrante, *Il pensiero strategico* Copyright © FrancoAngeli.

Although they fall outside the postmodern paradigm that I have outlined (partly because they were published before it took root in international studies), studies on strategic thinking seem to acknowledge some features of this evolution: the centrality of supranational security integration and the importance of defending national communications independently of the merchant navy. However, these studies are severely limited by their relatively limited access to primary Italian sources from the period.

In this regard, Francesco Zampieri's analysis of the events surrounding the 1975 naval law is interesting. Based on archival research in Navy sources and the private papers of the then Chief of Staff, Gino De Giorgi, Zampieri's study seeks to provide a complete picture of what was the Navy's main instrument of renewal in the era of detente and the Helsinki Accords (1975). This change was rooted in the development of a new maritime strategic concept, as set out in the 1973 White Paper, which led the armed forces to seek new ways of operating in the south and beyond the Mediterranean, as well as defining some long-term characteristics of their development.⁴² This highlighted the maritime institution's search for a new, even autonomous role, partly in response to the changes taking place in the Mediterranean, starting with the increased Soviet presence and the activism of southern Mediterranean states. This was particularly relevant given the territorialisation of the sea, which accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s through the numerous bilateral agreements between Italy and neighbouring countries concerning the definition of exclusive economic zones.⁴³

Another important aspect is the role of the law in laying the foundations for subsequent developments that would lead to the search for a sphere of action outside the central Mediterranean. This issue was presented in connection with broader issues, such as the energy crisis that began in 1973, the growing prominence of the Middle East and Suez in the Italian economy, and the consolidation of Soviet influence and naval presence in the Mediterranean.⁴⁴ Zampieri emphasises the significance of the transformation of the Mediterranean in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly attributing it to the process of maritime territorialisation as a driving force behind the naval law.⁴⁵ Finally, he highlights the devel-

navale in Italia, Rome, Rivista Marittima, 1988, pp. 77–81; Luigi Donolo, *Storia della dottrina navale italiana*, Rome, USMM, 1996, pp. 399–409.

⁴² N. Labanca, *Nella guerra fredda e oltre*, cit., pp. 241–242.

⁴³ Yugoslavia (1968), Tunisia (1971), Spain (1974) and Greece (1977). For an overview of developments dating up to the present day, see Fabio Caffio, *L'Italia e gli Spazi marittimi. Risorse e dispute nel Mediterraneo. La posizione italiana*, in Matteo Bressan et al. (eds.), *Geopolitica del mare*, Milan, Mursia, 2018, pp. 81–118.

⁴⁴ An overview of these transformations from a diplomatic perspective can be found in Elena Calandri, Daniele Caviglia, Antonio Varsori, *Détente in Cold War Europe. Politics and diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016. However, little attention is paid to the issue of maritime territorialisation.

⁴⁵ Francesco Zampieri, *1975 la Marina rinasce. La legge navale del 1975*, Vicenza, in Edibus, 2014, pp. 133–202.

opment of a communication strategy by the maritime institution aimed to inform the political world and public opinion about the changes taking place at sea, which are necessary for the development of a naval policy capable of responding to these changes.⁴⁶

Research on the years between 1943 and 1975 clearly provides us with various elements that allow us to place the history of the Italian Navy within a postmodern paradigm. Nevertheless, we will need to extend our focus if we want to develop a comprehensive interpretation. In particular, we will need to analyse how the processes of defining a naval policy were influenced by the relationship with NATO and the main allies in the Mediterranean (France and Britain), and by the Italian perception of the external threat from the Soviet Union and the countries of the southern shore. It will also be essential to study the relationship with the other armed forces, especially in view of the unification of the military ministries in 1947 and the accelerated administrative integration of the 1960s. Finally, we must understand the relevance of the transfer of technological and doctrinal knowledge between the Navy and its allies. Only an analysis that brings these elements together can shed light on the extent to which the relationship between defence, security and the sea changed in the early years of the Italian Republic. The aim is to establish whether and how the changes of the 1970s were the result of a general awareness among the national leadership of the opportunities arising from a rapidly changing Mediterranean.

There are other lines of research that could broaden our understanding of security institutions. Of particular relevance is the issue of social history, which in the naval sphere has not moved beyond the Liberal period,⁴⁷ again with the exception of — now outdated — insiders' histories and contextual sociological research on the maritime institution,⁴⁸ as well as accounts of life in the Navy.⁴⁹ However, important changes in recruitment, beginning with the 1964 conscription reform that replaced the previous 'seafaring people' system by expanding the Navy's recruitment pool, have made this strand of historiography more urgent. Another key issue is the origin of naval personnel, with a clear predom-

⁴⁶ Ivi, pp. 203–220, 231–262.

⁴⁷ Nicola Labanca, *Uniformi sul mare. Note sul reclutamento della Marina militare nell'Italia liberale*, in Paolo Frascani (ed.), *A vela e a vapore. Economia, culture e istituzioni del mare nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Rome, Donzelli, 2001, pp. 215–246; Francesco Zampieri, *Marinai con le stellette. Storia sociale della regia Marina nell'Italia liberale (1861-1914)*, Rome, Aracne, 2008.

⁴⁸ For the first case, see Gino Galuppini, *L'Accademia navale di Livorno 1881-1981*, Rome, USMM, 1981; id., *Le scuole sottufficiali della marina militare*, Rome, USMM, 1996; an example of the second case can be found in Gian Carlo Fortunato, *Un'indagine sociologica sugli allievi dell'Accademia Navale di Livorno*, "Rivista marittima", 1970, n. 1, pp. 57–70; for a more recent analysis, see Marco Mascellani, Maurizio Licciardello, *Fischia immersione! Vita quotidiana a bordo dei sommergibili classe Toti*, Rome, Laurus, 2020.

⁴⁹ Gianfranco Bacchi, *Il punto più alto. Sulla rotta di un sogno al comando dell'Amerigo Vespucci*, Genoa, Edizioni cinque terre, 2021.

inance of officers and non-commissioned officers from the Italian South, a trend that had already become established by the mid-1980s.⁵⁰ An analysis of this aspect would also help to contextualise the development of the maritime institution within the broader framework of changes to state institutions. From the 1960s onwards, the latter were affected by the rapid increase in the dominance of personnel from southern Italy, even in middle and senior positions.⁵¹

The era of projection (1975–2014)

Studies focusing on the post-1975 period are more likely to fall within the remit of research on international security and contemporary maritime power. The issues under consideration inevitably revolve around the key events of the end of the Cold War (1989–91), the acceleration of European integration (i.e. the foundation of the European Union in 1993) and the new threats to the sea, which diversified after 11 September 2001, in particular. My discussion will end in 2014, when a Naval Programme for the Protection of Maritime Defence Capabilities was launched. It initiated a third transformation of the Italian Navy, which was followed by a new White Paper for International Security and Defence in 2015. According to some contextual analyses, the latter marked the beginning of a process of refocusing towards the Euro-Mediterranean area, characterised by a greater strategic consistency.⁵² This aspect was confirmed in Italian naval policy in the following years, on the condition that the Mediterranean be considered an enlarged maritime area whose ramifications necessarily require the ability to operate and cooperate with other navies in the ocean areas contiguous to the area of primary national interest.⁵³

The purpose of this last section is to outline potential areas for historiographical research, again in the framework of the postmodern paradigm of maritime power that underpins this article. This is not an easy task, given the unavailability of primary sources due to the closure of archives, which has complicated historical analysis, making researchers entirely dependent on official documentation or sources expressing the views of key figures involved in the events, such as direct testimonies and interviews. The latter often provide a self-representative, event-driven view of the relationship between the Italian

⁵⁰ Fabrizio Battistelli, *Soldati. sociologia dei militari italiani nell'era del peace-keeping*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 1996, pp. 68–70.

⁵¹ Guido Melis, *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana, 1861-1993*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1996, pp. 477–480.

⁵² Ministry of Defence, White Paper on International Security and Defence, July 2015; see the observations in Andrea Gilli, Alessandro R. Ungaro, Alessandro Marrone, *The Italian White Paper for International Security and Defence*, “The RUSI Journal”, 2015, n. 6, pp. 34–41.

⁵³ I have offered some provisional observations in *La marina e le guerre per mare*, in N. Labanca, *Guerre ed eserciti*, cit., pp. 334–335.

Republic and maritime security, to the detriment of a historiographical interpretation.

To understand why the transformations since the 1970s have taken place, we must consider certain events that have characterised the relationship between Italy and maritime security. In fact, the long-term consequences of the 'projective' transformation that began in 1975 can be summarised in three key issues: the acquisition of an autonomous naval aviation force in 1989, centred around light aircraft carriers (Garibaldi in 1985; Cavour in 2009); greater offensive capability and a wider range of action for ships in support of 'out-of-area' operations; and the creation of an amphibious unit capable of operating far from Mediterranean waters. In other words, since the 1980s, the naval force has been better able to 'go out to sea', viewing the ocean as an extension of the 'enlarged Mediterranean'.⁵⁴

Furthermore, we must bear in mind an additional factor that lies beyond the remit of institutions: changes in the national maritime industry after the 1970s. One of the stated objectives of the 1975 naval was to support an industry, largely controlled by the state, which had been brought to its knees by its technical backwardness and foreign competition, especially from Japan. This led to a recovery in exports of national naval armaments from the late 1970s onwards. Consequently, this sector became one of the few successful areas of public shipbuilding, albeit through a turbulent process of concentrating production in the Ligurian and Trieste hubs.⁵⁵ Fincantieri, the public holding company that has controlled a significant part of the sector since 1959, owes much of its success to the construction of warships, thanks in part to demand from the Italian Navy.⁵⁶ This change reflects a focus on producing for the maritime sector that is better suited to the evolving landscape of the globalised maritime world.

However, the maritime institution's changed capabilities have been placed at the disposal of a political class that, following the end of the Cold War and a military policy linked mainly to territorial defence (as highlighted in the 1985 White Paper), has expanded its use of military force beyond Italy. This occurred within a context of growing international cooperation in military operations and participation in military operations other than war. In the specific case of the Italian Navy, this has also led to the development of ships whose function has been defined as 'dual-use', precisely to serve in humanitarian emergencies.⁵⁷ Another aspect to consider is that, since the 2000s, it has

⁵⁴ P. Rapalino, *Dalle Alpi all'alto mare*, cit., pp. 326–336, cit. p. 335.

⁵⁵ P. Fragiaco, *L'industria come continuazione della politica*, cit., pp. 243, 245, 247, 266, 289, 319; R. Giulianelli, *La Navalmeccanica*, cit., p. 416.

⁵⁶ The events are described in Roberto Galisi, *Dai salvataggi alla competizione globale. La Fincantieri dal 1959 al 2009*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2011, pp. 117–118, 131, 137–138, 152.

⁵⁷ A summary of Italy's involvement in international operations can be found in Fatima Farina, *Operazioni internazionali e trasformazione militare*, in N. Labanca, *Guerre ed esercito*, Copyright © FrancoAngeli.

been necessary to launch a new phase of technological modernisation. Linked to these issues is the management of a process of accelerated professionalisation of the armed forces, due in part to the suspension of conscription in 2005 and the introduction of voluntary military service for women in 1999.⁵⁸

Some long-term critical issues within the national military apparatus have also had an impact on the Italian Navy. Since 1997, the powers of the Chief of Defence Staff have been strengthened precisely to remove the separation between the three armed forces inherited from the bipolar period. However, research has highlighted the persistence of institutional rivalries (e.g. the F-35 fighter jet affair in the previous decade), partly because of the relative scarcity of financial resources. At the same time, the Italian armed forces have shown considerable projection capacity, thanks in part to the naval logistical capabilities acquired after the 1970s and the presence of an independent air and naval force. An important example for the Navy was its participation in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, where Taliban forces were hit by air strikes launched from the Garibaldi aircraft carrier. Only the US and French forces demonstrated similar capabilities at the time. Its presence in Lebanon in 2006 and in Libya (Operation Odyssey Dawn) in 2011 was of similar importance in demonstrating rapid reaction and logistical projection capabilities. In the latter operation, Italian naval forces ensured the evacuation of civilians and the maintenance of the embargo imposed on the Gaddafi regime. In general, the transformation of the armed forces and the national military doctrine have increasingly emphasised their expeditionary role. This has led scholars to affirm that the Navy has responded well, even in comparison with the wealthier French and British institutions, despite growing military budgetary difficulties following the 2008 crisis.⁵⁹

The success of 'power projection' also appears to have created a divide within the armed forces' strategic culture. While the Army has tried to present itself to the public as a 'peace force', the two institutions with the greatest projection capacity (the Air Force and Navy) remain more focused on their traditional warfighting functions.⁶⁰ This aspect raises another crucial issue,

citi, cit., pp. 424–449. Among the Navy's missions during this period, it is worth citing the following: rescue of the Boat People of Vietnam (1979); Lebanon (1982); Sinai (1982); Persian Gulf (1987–88); First Gulf War (1991); Somalia (1993); Albania (1997); Kosovo (1998); East Timor (1999); Second Gulf War (2003–06); Lebanon (2006–present); Libya (2011).

⁵⁸ For an analysis of the issue of female recruitment, see Fatima Farina, *Donne nelle forze armate. Il servizio militare femminile in Italia e nella Nato*, Rome, Viella, 2015.

⁵⁹ Fabrizio Coticchia, Francesco N. Moro, *The Transformation of Italian Armed Forces in Comparative Perspective*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, pp. 31, 36, 40–45, 58, 85–87, 93–94, 121; see also Jeremy Stohts, *The Decline of European Naval Forces, Challenges to Sea Power in the Age of Fiscal Austerity and Political Uncertainty*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2018, pp. 73–89.

⁶⁰ Piero Ignazi, Giampiero Giacomello, Fabrizio Coticchia, *Italian Military Operations Abroad Just Don't Call it War*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, p. 171.

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namely how this discrepancy is the product of different institutional strategic cultures, and how the latter originated. In my opinion, there is little doubt that the ‘enlarged Mediterranean’ is the predominant concept in the Navy’s strategic culture, at least since it was theorised in the early 1980s, codified in the 1990s by the Institute of Maritime Warfare and fully developed in the 2000s.⁶¹ This concept also seems to have gained ground in public opinion, especially after 2000, as it has been disseminated in non-specialist journals focusing on defence and security issues and analyses by specialised research centres.⁶² At the same time, the ‘enlarged Mediterranean’ has helped to influence the European Union’s strategic approach to maritime issues, given that its southern border is subject to maritime security threats — not only military ones — that give the Mediterranean a geopolitical dimension, linking the Atlantic, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus and even Central Asia.⁶³ The origin and development of this concept in the institutional sphere remains to be analysed, as does the question of whether it is linked to long-term theories,⁶⁴ as well as how — in the wake of the naval law — the maritime institution has developed its own public communication strategy for this strategic approach. In sum, it is necessary to understand the contribution of the military to the development of Italy’s defence culture.

Italian strategic concepts of maritime security have begun to influence those at the European level. As I have previously demonstrated, starting in the 1990s, the doctrinal and technological integration promoted by NATO during the Cold War — especially through the establishment of the Western European Union (WEU) Maritime Force at EUROMARFOR in 1995 — was superseded by a process of strengthening naval cooperation that clearly reflected certain postmodern traits.⁶⁵ A perfect example of this evolution was the European EUNAVFOR Atalanta operation to counter Somali piracy, which was launched in 2008. The operation is fully in line with the logic — shared by postmodern

⁶¹ Some reflections are contained in Fabio De Ninno, Francesco Zampieri, *Oltre gli stretti. La proiezione oceanica e il potere navale italiano*, “Limes, Il mare italiano e la guerra”, n. 8, 2022, pp. 71–84. See also the speech by Roberto Domini at the centenary of the Institute of Maritime Military Studies and the inauguration of the 2021/22 academic year, starting at approximately 2:20:00 www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqAr07Sj8Pc&t=9500s (last accessed 4 September 2023).

⁶² See, for example, *L’Italia è il mare*, “Limes”, n. 10, 2020, or the ISPI series dedicated to the wider Mediterranean [/www.ispionline.it/it/tag/mediterraneo-allargato](http://www.ispionline.it/it/tag/mediterraneo-allargato) (last accessed 4 September 2023).

⁶³ Basil Germond, *The Maritime Dimension of European Security: Seapower and the European Union*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, p. 153.

⁶⁴ For example, there could be a connection with strategies for the country’s naval projection in the 1930s and 1940s, although these have developed since then. See Giuseppe Fioravanzo, *Il Mediterraneo centro strategico del Mondo*, Verona, Mondadori, 1943.

⁶⁵ Fabio De Ninno, *Ue, potere navale e le Marine europee: tra modernismo e postmodernismo. Alcuni spunti dalla letteratura internazionale*, “Rivista marittima”, January 2020, pp. 27–33.

states — of maintaining good order at sea, but it also marked a turning point in the relationship between the European Union and maritime security. In fact, it led to unified planning, command and control, and resource sharing on a scale never before achieved independently of NATO.⁶⁶ Unlike national research, which has tended to focus on diplomacy and cooperation in the armaments sector, the analysis of supranational naval cooperation could also offer food for thought on European integration in the field of military integration.⁶⁷

The issue of piracy reminds us that, in the first two decades of this century, new security issues have emerged that go beyond traditional naval operations involving military confrontation. Indeed, maritime institutions have increasingly had to adopt their missions to address phenomena such as piracy, organised crime and migration, in line with the new multidimensional nature of security and the maintenance of good order at sea.⁶⁸ In Italy, this challenge first manifested itself in the 1990s, when the Navy was prompted to respond to the large-scale arrival of refugees from Albania (1997), leading to the decision to start patrolling Albanian waters (Operation Alba). The problem resurfaced in 2011, following the Mediterranean migration crisis caused by the Arab Spring, which revealed the deep interconnection between the territorialisation of the Mediterranean and the responsibility of states for maritime security, as migration flows largely affected the waters off the country's maritime borders.⁶⁹

This brings us to a final potential area of research on the post-1975 period: the 'hybridisation' between defence, security and humanitarian issues, a process that tends to remove the barriers between these areas.⁷⁰ A notable example of this trend was Operation Mare Nostrum (October 2013–October 2014). Conducted primarily by the Italian Navy, Coast Guard and Guardia di Finanza, the operation officially involved rescuing migrants crossing the central Mediterranean. However, it bore all the hallmarks of a security operation aimed at preventing illegal activities, especially human trafficking. The

⁶⁶ Trineke Palm, *Cooperative bargaining in the EU's common security and defence policy: EUNAVFOR Atalanta*, "Contemporary Politics", 2019, n. 2, pp. 129–149; Marianne Riddervold, *Finally flexing its muscles? Atalanta — The European Union's naval military operation against piracy*, "European Security", 2011, n. 3, pp. 385–404.

⁶⁷ Some examples include: Chiara Bonaiuti, Debora Dameri, Achille Lodovisi, *L'industria militare e la difesa europea*, Milan, Jaca Book, 2008; Marco Clementi, *L'Europa e il mondo. La politica estera, di sicurezza e di difesa europea*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005; Pieri Luigi Ballini (ed.), *La comunità europea di difesa (CED)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2009.

⁶⁸ An introduction to the problem of this transformation can be found in Francesco Zampieri, *Fondamenti di strategia marittima*, Rome, Nuova cultura, 2020, pp. 167–183.

⁶⁹ Alessandro Marrone, Michele Nones, Alessandro R. Ungaro, *Italian Defence Policy, Armed Forces and Operations in the Mediterranean*, in Alessandro Marrone, Michele Nones (eds.), *Italy and Security in the Mediterranean*, Rome, IAI/Nuova cultura, 2016, pp. 109–124.

⁷⁰ See the observations of Giorgia Bevilacqua, *Exploring the Ambiguity of Operation Sophia between Military and Search and Rescue Activities*, in Gemma Andreone (ed.), *The Future of the Law of the Sea: Bridging Gaps between National, Individual and Common Interests*, Vienna, Springer, 2015, pp. 165–189.

migration crisis emphasised the importance of the Coast Guard's and Navy's operational capabilities in managing it. Paradoxically, these capabilities were lacking in the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), established in 2004, which took over crisis management with Operation Triton (November 2014–February 2018). Interestingly, 58,499 of the 207,619 migrants who landed in Italy were rescued by the Coast Guard.⁷¹

A more thorough analysis is necessary to understand similar operations in subsequent years, which cannot be discussed here, as they were the result of changes in Europe's defence and security policy and its relationship with the sea. They include Operation Sophia (April 2015–March 2020), which sought to combat migrant trafficking, and Operation Irini (January 2020–present), which aims to block arms trafficking to Libya. The two missions are part of a convergence of the process of European integration and defence, marked by the launch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation at the end of 2018.⁷² Finally, further changes are being implemented by both states and non-state actors, such as those relating to cybersecurity,⁷³ or maritime territorial disputes, as analysed by Deborah Paci.

In conclusion, the operational capabilities of the military and other security agencies have also converged in Italy. They have proven to be an integral part of the postmodern transition of maritime power. However, as Nicola Labanca recently pointed out, studies on the police forces and the history of security in the Italian Republic need to be explored further, but without the Italian model being considered as an exceptional case, even if it has some distinctive traits.⁷⁴

The Coast Guard and the Guardia di Finanza have important maritime policing and security tasks. It is difficult to reconstruct the Coast Guard's institutional history, given that only few, mainly self-referential studies exist (see the comments at the end of this essay).⁷⁵ Once again, historical studies are not the place to look for analysis, although research is still in its infancy in other areas as well. In this regard, Alessandra Giada Dibenedetto reminds us that, although the Navy and the Coast Guard are two separate maritime security

⁷¹ On the nature of 'Mare Nostrum' as a security operation, see Alessio Patalano, *Nightmare Nostrum? Not Quite, Lessons from the Italian Navy in the Mediterranean Migrant Crisis*, "Rusi Journal", July 2015, pp. 16–17. On the actions of the Italian Navy and Coast Guard, see Giuseppe Campesi, *Policing Mobility Regimes, Frontex and the Production of the European Border Space*, London, Routledge, 2021, pp. 162, 239; figures can be found at page 240.

⁷² Antonio Missiroli, *L'Europa come potenza. Diplomazia, sicurezza e difesa*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2022, pp. 136–150.

⁷³ For a general introduction, see Lisa Otto (ed.), *Global Challenges in Maritime Security*, Cham, Springer, 2020.

⁷⁴ Cfr. Nicola Labanca, *What Republic without police?*, "The Journal of Modern Italian studies", 2022, n. 2, pp. 163–177.

⁷⁵ One example is Stefano Vinani, Claudio Bernetti, *Dai prefetti del mare a Guardia Costiera. La storia di un corpo al servizio del paese 1865-2021*, Rome, Ministero delle infrastrutture e dei trasporti, 2021.

agencies, reciprocity, interdependence and — at times — overlapping functions are evident.⁷⁶ Officially established in 1989 as an offshoot of the previously existing port authorities, the Coast Guard remains part of the Navy and is subject to the control of the Navy General Staff. However, it carries out its tasks in partial functional dependence on other civil agencies, particularly those responsible for infrastructure and the environment.⁷⁷ Like the Navy, the Coast Guard has also sought to develop a dual-use role, engaging in activities that support civil and environmental protection, the control of fishing activities, and safety and rescue at sea. Given that some of these operations have a security dimension, as highlighted by Operation Mare Nostrum, there is a risk of overlap.⁷⁸ Conversely, the Guardia di Finanza has gradually taken on important maritime police tasks. The expansion of its naval service began in the mid-1960s. In 2001, it was assigned economic, financial and illicit trafficking policing functions,⁷⁹ followed by the acquisition of control of the nautical teams of the State Police, the Forestry Corps and the Carabinieri in 2016. Finally, all security institutions have increasing responsibilities relating to environmental security and underwater cultural heritage.⁸⁰

Clearly, this is not enough to formulate comprehensive hypotheses. Further investigation — including from a historical perspective — of this branch of maritime security is therefore required if we want to fully understand the peculiarities and characteristics of the global, postmodern transition of Italian maritime security.

Translated by Andrea Hajek

⁷⁶ Alessandra Giada Dibenedetto, *Ensuring Security in the Mediterranean Sea: The Italian Navy and Coast Guard*, in I. Bowers, S.L.C. Koh, *Grey and White Hulls*, cit., pp. 159–180.

⁷⁷ Reflections on environmental protection can be found in Santo Altavilla et al., *Environmental training of the Italian Coast Guard between tradition and innovation*, in Donatella Carboni, Matteo De Vincenzi, Laura Bonora (eds.), *Monitoring of Mediterranean Coastal Areas. Problems and Measurement Techniques*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2020, pp. 156–163; Roberto Patruno, Marco Mancini, Andrea Malfatti, *The activities of the Italian Coast Guard in the field of airborne remote sensing and the eventual use of satellite platforms in marine pollution abatement activities*, “Spill Science & Technology Bulletin”, 1996, n. 1–2, pp. 25–31.

⁷⁸ Stefania Panebianco, *Mediterranean migration governance and the role of the Italian coast guard: varying political understandings of maritime operations in the 2010s*, “Contemporary Italian Politics”, March 2022, n. 1, pp. 43–59.

⁷⁹ Nino Di Paolo, *La tutela strategica nel Mediterraneo*, in Bernardino Quattrocchi (ed.), *Economia del mare e processi di internazionalizzazione*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2011, pp. 17–26.

⁸⁰ Nicolò Carnimeo, *Tutela dell'ambiente marino, risorse marine e patrimonio culturale sommerso*, in Fabio Caffio, Nicolò Carnimeo, Antonio Leandro, *Elementi di diritto e geopolitica degli spazi marittimi*, Bari, Cacucci, 2013, pp. 153–210.