

# Lynchpin of stability

BY RICHARD GRECO

Over the years, Italy has proven itself to be a crucial partner in crisis management all over the world. Its track record in international flash points, has made it a point of reference in any institution-building endeavor, especially now with strife across the Mediterranean.

An Italian soldier at the Tirana airport stands behind the ballot boxes for the general elections in Albania, June 26, 1997. An example of the long history of Italian contribution to crisis missions abroad.

In 1997, while still a student of business and international affairs, I gave a talk at the City University of New York about the modern relationship between Italy and the United States. The three points of the talk were: 1) *Italy was a competent and experienced coalition builder.* After a national stock market pyramid scheme had just failed, Albania collapsed into civil chaos. While Europe was helpless, Italy resolutely responded by assembling a peacekeeping mission, delivering needed food and aid to Tirana, stemming the crisis, and building unprecedented goodwill with its neighbors. 2) *Italy was stable and dependable.* The only act of violence against Italy since World War II was Libya's 1986 reprisal for the US bombing of Tripoli. Italy's restrained response was a sign of strong friendship with the United States. In addition, frequently the stage of political instability, Italy had moved towards a viable, stable, bi-polar political system. 3) *Italy was global.* Italy had taken a lead in developing relationships with countries of the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, building on foundations that were centuries, if not millennia, old.

My conclusion was that in a post-Cold War world – one where the US struggled to find its own direction amid percolating forces of nationalism and terrorism, and one where the EU had made economic progress but had not yet achieved a common foreign policy – Italy was an important and serious bilateral relationship for the US, on which the Americans could depend in the event of another global conflict. Global conflict did arise, and 14 years later these observations remain true – even more so. Regardless of one's views on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Italy and the US have forged their relationship by fighting together a serious threat to our collective security and to West-

ern civilization, which Italy – perhaps more than any other country – helped define. Italy has been part of numerous military and civil crisis management missions since 1997 when it led Operation Alba in Albania, which at the time, and to this day, is considered one of the first large and modern international efforts to contain a crisis before it turned into a conflict. For the past five years Italy has been the largest G-8 member troop contributor to UN peacekeeping missions while participating with significant forces to the NATO military missions in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan, as well as providing civilian peacekeepers and military personnel to several EU missions. Currently the largest Italian military units operate in Afghanistan, under NATO's command; in Lebanon, where since 2006 Italy has been the largest contributor to the UN mission there; and in Kosovo, operating within both NATO and EU missions. In Lebanon, for example, the five-year long UNIFIL mandate requires a constant political dialogue with all political actors, including the Lebanese and Israeli armies, to support the security role of the multinational forces consisting of 12,000 UN personnel operating in South Lebanon. Italy currently contributes to international peacekeeping and stabilization missions with more than 9,000 soldiers and 300 civilian experts. Italian experts in rule of law, governance building, and security sector reform have contributed to more than 25 EU, NATO and UN led missions in South Europe, Africa and Asia. It was also no surprise that Italy, with its rich cultural heritage, was chosen in 2003 to lead the cultural restoration efforts in Iraq immediately after the end of major hostilities. Italy has also acquired a remarkable experience in security sector reform. The performance of the Carabinieri, a national police force, in several international missions is particularly noteworthy. For decades Carabinieri have learned to work side by side with local communities in both villages and cities to enforce and keep security. It is considered a national rule-of-law and security-enforcement institution, which implements and guarantees national security and stability even in small local communities. Since modern Italy's unification 150 years ago this year, the system of policing by the Cara-



binieri has been one of the most important factors that contributed to building a stable, unified state. Crisis management, though, is much more complex than simply responding to a conflict after it begins. It is also about analyzing possible global flash points, running scenario analyses, planning diplomatic and possible military responses – usually multilateral – and then executing. Member states of regional or global organizations committed to peacekeeping operations need to assist states and communities emerging from war or civil conflicts not only by deploying troops to prevent the use of violence and to enforce security. They must encourage political reconciliation and a sustainable process which aims at building or restoring good governance and basic services, including an efficient civil administration, paving the way for sustainable economic development. Here, too, Italy has been forward thinking. In 2010 a joint Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense document was published outlining a uniquely Italian vision of whole-government approach to peacekeeping. Under Italian diplomatic missions, local authorities, international organizations and experts would work together at all stages of a crisis. Their collective assessment at an early stage would help lay the ground for planning short and medium term assistance both at national and international levels. This forward-thinking, whole-government approach to crisis-management was organized into a Directorate General for Political and Security Affairs which financed urgent missions that sent civilian experts to crisis areas in order to monitor, assess, and plan eventual responses to possible flash-point situations.

The new Directorate General and financing mechanism were approved just in time for the next major global crisis – Libya – which erupted while Italy was still engaged in supporting other large international peacekeeping efforts. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was among the first agencies to dispatch, as early as June 2011, key civilian experts to support and coordinate international assistance to Libya. These efforts are ongoing and are producing real results in full collaboration with the new Libyan government, the EU, NATO, and the UN.

Italy's participation in the international coalition effort to help rebuild civil service in Iraq and now its success in advising the new Libyan government have brought to the attention of many world observers the extraordinary and potentially central role of Italian crisis management capability and successful international stabilization efforts. Italy's experience – more than any other European country – reaches far beyond Iraq and Libya. Sustaining governance, sustaining civil institutions in countries emerging from conflicts, generating new economic activity, creating jobs and helping to establish adequate rule of law are the key elements for stabilization. These are the factors which can lead to reconstruction and help local communities to engage in complex political processes necessary to reconcile and rebuild.

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