

## 4 Italian public opinion and the international use of force

*Pierangelo Isernia*

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Since the end of the Second World War Italy has, in all respects, ceased to play a role as a major power in the international political system. Instead, it has adopted enthusiastically a 'trading strategy' (Rosecrance 1986) to promote its national interests. The Fascist attempt to shape Italian fighting character not only missed the mark completely, leading to the tragic experience of the army's collapse in 1943, but it also backfired. National symbols and appeals were seen as politically incorrect and were widely unpopular in the post-world war Republic. The utter failure of the Fascist experience brought home at least two important lessons. First, it was realised that Italy lacked the organisational capacity, the economic resources and the 'martial' spirit needed to pursue a great power strategy. Second, the close association established by Fascism between the nation and the Fascist regime discredited patriotic values among the leading political currents of Italian political culture, to the point of making the Italians the most 'European' in Europe, largely because of the bad reputation of Italian public institutions.

The alleged unwillingness of Italians to fight has to do with a more general and crucial bone of contention in democratic theory: the alleged reluctance of democracies to use force even when this would be amply justified (since Munich 1938 this is pejoratively known as 'appeasement' policy). This chapter explores the veracity of this assumption by focusing on Italian support for the international use of its military force in the pursuit of foreign policy goals, under various conditions. Does Italian willingness to fight change with international conditions?

This chapter addresses the impact of the fundamental changes in the problems of war and peace briefly outlined in Chapter 1 on the willingness to fight by comparing specifically the Cold War and post-Cold War environment.

### Potential explanatory factors

The analysis will proceed on the assumption that the willingness to use force is shaped by a number of specific factors, including: (1) the nature of the event in which the use of force is contemplated (international crisis, war or peacekeeping operation), (2) the actual or rather the prospective use of force, (3) the duration (both actual and expected), (4) the perceived interests involved (threats to national security, humanitarian mission or respect for international law), (5) the 'closeness' to the country (in both geographical and political terms), (6) the immediacy of the threat, (7) the role of real or expected casualties, (8) the prospect of success and (9) the bilateral or multilateral nature of the operation. Of course, not all these factors are operative in each of the cases involved. Yet, it is expected that, on the basis of a comparison between this widely different set of experiences, some conclusions can be drawn on the conditions under which Italians are more, or rather less eager to support the use of military force.

### Support for the use of force in nine historical cases

In order to examine Italian attitudes on the use of military force, the available survey data on all cases of crises and interventions in which Italy was actually involved since the end of the Second World War were collected. This chapter focuses only on operations abroad. Cases in which the Italian armed forces have been used for domestic problems, either to help in natural calamities, or for domestic order in connection with the struggle against organised crime in the southern regions, have been excluded from the analysis.<sup>2</sup> The absence of data on many cases implies that only a subset of those instances in which the use of the armed forces was decided or considered in the period under review can and will be considered here.

Restricting us to only survey data explicitly referring to the use of *Italian* armed force and directed to measure the individual preference for the use of force, nine cases could be selected. They refer to both the Cold War and post-Cold War period. The set spans from the early 1950s up to the Kosovo War of 1999. Only one case is from the 1950s: the Trieste crisis of 1953; three are from the 1980s: Libya, the patrolling of the Gulf by the Italian navy and the use of force to ensure the flow of oil; and five are from the 1990s: the Gulf and Serbia/Kosovo Wars, as well as the peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Albania and Bosnia.

### Support for the use of force in different situations

Based on the nature of the cases involved we have, fundamentally, three sets of cases: wars, crises and peacekeeping operations. During the Cold War, Italy has never fought a war.<sup>3</sup> The first and only actual wars in

which Italian armed forces have been involved since 1945 are in the post-Cold War international system: the Gulf War and the Serbia/Kosovo War. However, in both wars Italy participated only with its air forces, be it more limitedly (only eleven aircraft) in the Gulf War and more extensively (around fifty) in the Serbia/Kosovo War. Italy moreover has been directly involved in only one bilateral international crisis,<sup>4</sup> the Trieste crisis of October–December 1953, in which the use of force was only threatened. In three Libyan–United States crises during the 1980s over the Gulf of Syrte, Italy was only involved as a concerned spectator.<sup>5</sup> However, in the second of these crises following the American air attack, Libyans fired a missile against the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa (although it missed its target and ended in the sea close to the island). As far as the third category is concerned, Italy participated in several peacekeeping operations, and increasingly so after the end of the Cold War. Altogether, Italy took part in thirty-one peacekeeping or peace-enforcing operations between 1949 and 1999, of which the operation in East Timor of 1999 is the most recent.<sup>6</sup> Of all operations in this group, survey data are only available on the Somalia, Albania and Bosnia operations. In addition, two miscellaneous cases are included in Table 4.1. One question was asked in 1988 about the Italian navy participation in the re-flagging of Kuwaiti oil tankers and its contribution to keeping sea-lanes open to allow for oil to reach Western countries. Another question, in which the military option was explicitly mentioned, was asked in 1984 on a theoretical case: what to do in case of a blockade by oil-exporting countries. Following Jentleson (1992), a ‘mean support score’ based on the available surveys was calculated for each case and reported in Table 4.1, in which the cases are ranked according to the mean support score.<sup>7</sup> All questions concern the use of force and do not include other and different policy options (e.g. economic sanctions or boycotts).

Table 4.1 shows quite clearly that support for the use of force, in those cases for which data are available, varies considerably, depending apparently on the kind of crisis and the interests and goals involved. Measured by the level of support, we can distinguish three kinds of situations. In the first group support for the use of force is clearly a minority option, because, on average, no more than one-fourth of the population supports it. Four cases fall in this category: one peacekeeping (or rather peace-enforcing) operation: Somalia in 1994; two quite different international crises (Trieste and Libya) and one hypothetical situation: the oil blockade threatening to strangle the flow of oil to Italy.

In a second set of cases majorities were in support of the use of force. This group consists of both wars in which Italy has been involved in the 1990s: the Gulf War (1990–91) and Kosovo (1999). Unlike the former cases, it is characteristic of this group that almost everybody took a position in these two situations. Indeed, these two operations were carefully monitored by Italian public opinion, which was well aware of the conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

Table 4.1 Support for the use of force in different conflict situations (Italy) (average support in %)

	Type of conflict	Total	Without Dks
<i>Minority support</i>			
Oil (1984) (1) <sup>a</sup>	–	6	6
Trieste (November 1953) (1) <sup>a</sup>	crisis	8	18
Somalia (1994) (1)	peacekeeping operation	13	29
Libya (1986) (3) <sup>a</sup>	crisis	15	–
<i>Plurality support</i>			
Kosovo (1999) (29) <sup>a</sup>	war	38	41
Gulf war (1990–91) (9) <sup>a</sup>	war	47	51
<i>Majority support</i>			
Gulf patrolling (1988) (1)	peacekeeping operation	58	62
Albania (1997) (1)	peacekeeping operation	59	61
Bosnia (1993–96) (16) <sup>a</sup>	peacekeeping operation	69	74

Mean support score in per cent; the number of surveys is given in parentheses.

a Cases analysed in detail in the text.

The third group of cases consists of those in which a majority of the respondents favoured Italian participation. In this category we have two recent peacekeeping operations, Albania and Bosnia, and the patrolling of the Gulf at the end of the 1980s.

### Some case studies of public support

In order to explain differences and similarities between these three sets of cases and to establish which factors explain the different degree of support, it is necessary to examine them in more detail. Of the nine selected cases three do not allow such an in-depth examination of the motivations behind support or opposition for lack of sufficient survey data. They are: the naval patrolling of the Gulf in 1988,<sup>9</sup> the Albania operation and the Somalia mission. Let us now look at each of the six remaining individual cases, starting with the case of Trieste.

#### *Trieste*

Trieste, on the contested eastern border between Italy and Yugoslavia, was one of the most important problems of Italian foreign policy at the end of the Second World War. The Italian peace treaty of December 1946, on the suggestion of the French Foreign Minister Bidault,<sup>10</sup> divided the border area into two Zones, A and B, entrusted respectively to the Allied forces and to

Yugoslavia, and it internationalised Trieste, creating the Free Territory of Trieste (in Italian the TLT). Lacking an agreement among the four Big Powers over the name of the Governor, the United States and Great Britain transformed the military administration into the Allied Military Government (AMG). At first (1948), the three Western Powers declared their intention to return the TLT to Italy.<sup>11</sup> But when Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform in June 1948, its position changed in the eyes of the Americans. Under Western Allied pressures, Italy and Yugoslavia started talks between November 1951 and January 1952 which, however, led nowhere. In May 1952, after clashes between the Allied police and the Trieste population, Italy, Great Britain and the United States enlarged the Italian administrative responsibilities in Zone A.

After elections in June 1953, the new Italian government (in which Prime Minister Pella also held the Foreign Affairs portfolio) adopted a more militant and nationalistic posture on the problem of Trieste, which affected Yugoslav attitudes in return. In August, Tito announced a possible annexation of Zone B to Yugoslavia, stirring Pella to urge the Allies to prevent any unilateral move from Yugoslavia and to threaten to occupy Zone A. Early in September, Tito moved 250,000 partisans into Zone B. On 8 October 1953 a bipartite declaration by the US and the United Kingdom terminated the Allied Military Government in Trieste and passed the administration into the hands of Italy. Two days later, Tito lodged a formal protest, closed the frontier and threatened to enter Zone A if Italian troops took it over. In return, the Italian government moved three army divisions onto the eastern frontier and deployed anti-air guns along the Isonzo river. At this point, the UK and US governments decided to postpone their withdrawal. After clashes had taken place between the Italian population and the AMG police in Trieste, killing and injuring a number of inhabitants, Pella sent new troops to the eastern borders. The Allied Powers, relaunching their diplomatic efforts, put forward a proposal for a tripartite conference on Trieste, which Italy accepted. This relaxed the Italian-Yugoslav tensions. The conference led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Yugoslavia in October 1954, which finally produced a settlement by dividing Zone A and B between the countries.

There is no question that Trieste was a very important issue for the Italian political forces and, to a more limited extent, for public opinion as well. Polls at the time showed that the majority of the public was both interested and informed on this matter.<sup>12</sup>

At the time of the October–November 1953 confrontation, DOXA carried out a national survey to probe preferences for a solution to the Trieste problem if a return of the whole territory to Italy were not possible. Only 8 per cent mentioned the use of force (the proportion going up to 18 per cent if one excludes those who did not know); 31 per cent mentioned other diplomatic or political solutions (e.g. plebiscite or a

division of the two Zones), while 57 per cent were uncertain or not willing to accept any solution other than a return of both Zones to Italy. Support for the military solution was concentrated among extreme right-wing voters, with low or no education. While only 7 per cent of the Communists and 18 per cent of the Democratic Christian supporters would take Trieste by force, as many as 45 per cent of the neo-Fascist supporters would do so.<sup>13</sup>

The dramatic events in early November 1953 had only little impact on the attitudes towards the use of force. Support for the military solution moved from 15 per cent to 20 per cent after the clashes between Trieste population and the AMG police, and to 19 per cent after the Pella speech in which he announced that more troops would be sent.<sup>14</sup> This small increase is within the margin of random error. However, this general outcome hides a difference between two subgroups of the population. Among those with no more than a secondary school diploma, support for the use of force went up from 16 per cent to 23 per cent. Among the better educated there was no change. There was, in other words, a certain 'polarisation of commitment' (Larson 1996: 53) among the less educated, asking for 'escalation'. They were likely propelled by the harsh consequences of the clashes to ask for more of a military action. This polarisation had a slightly negative impact, however, on the overall assessment of the government's policy towards Trieste. Public approval of it declined over time, from 65 per cent before the clashes to 56 per cent after 7 November. The critics of the government's position split between 35 per cent, who asked for more energy (i.e. the use of military force) and 29 per cent who were rather worried about the possible risks of escalation. However, these percentages hide a reversal of attitudes among those who did not approve. Among the respondents who did not approve of the government's position, those worried about a possible escalation of the crisis changed from 48 per cent before the crisis to 25 per cent after 8 November. An opposite trend can be found among those who wanted more action. In other words, support for the government position declined as a consequence of polarisation and a demand for escalation among the less educated and more right-wing voters.

Overall, the Trieste crisis was a case in which the use of force was generally not seen as an appropriate instrument to solve the crisis. Diplomatic solutions were thought to be more adequate, even though a strong majority had no clear idea of what kind of solution was really feasible. Moreover, the government position gained vast support among the mass population, and those who were negative about the government's stance consisted mostly of people who wanted the government to have a more aggressive position rather than a more conciliatory one. However, this was also the group that was more volatile in its attitude, being mostly composed of respondents with little education, ready to stiffen their position as soon as Italians started being beaten by the AMG police in Trieste.

**The Middle East and Libya**

In the 1980s the problems of the Middle East and Libya especially, and the threats emerging from these areas, were high on the list of the Italian public's worries. Thus in one poll, of September 1987, concerning perceived threats to Italian security, 31 per cent mentioned Libya first, 12 per cent Iran, and 10 per cent, more broadly, countries of the Middle East or Persian Gulf.<sup>15</sup> These views persisted in 1988 through to 1991. In 1990, with the USSR at a low of 6 per cent, not surprisingly Iraq was at the top (20 per cent), followed by Libya (8 per cent) and the Middle East countries in general (11 per cent).<sup>16</sup> In January 1991, the Middle East had certainly replaced the Soviet Union as the most threatening area for Italian security.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there is no question that these threats were related to issues that were important in the eyes of the public. We shall discuss two of these specific issues in more detail below. In February 1984 it was asked whether a stop in the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf would hurt Italy: 83 per cent of those interviewed thought that an oil embargo would hurt the country very much or somewhat.<sup>18</sup> Even though interests involved were very high and the perception of the threat quite acute, the popularity of the use of force to defend these interests or to cope with such a threat was extremely low. In the oil case (which, as has to be stressed again, was a hypothetical and not an actual situation) the low popularity of a military option was probably due to a low assessment of its effectiveness compared to other kinds of, especially diplomatic, actions, rather than to any superficial attitude. Only 6 per cent thought that Italy should threaten or actually use force if the need should arise (evenly divided between the two options),<sup>19</sup> while 80 per cent thought that Western Europe should react with diplomatic action in such an event.<sup>20</sup>

The Libyan threat and the possible responses were also discussed in the framework of the threat of terrorism, a crucial concern for Italians at the time. In June 1986, as many as 95 per cent of the Italians thought terrorism to be a serious or very serious threat to Italian security. There was also no doubt as to the perceived linkage between terrorism and Libya. No less than 84 per cent thought that Libya was supporting terrorist groups in Italy.<sup>21</sup>

Among the options for dealing with continuing support for terrorist activities by the Libyan government, the use of force was not very popular, however. In June 1986, two months after the second Gulf of Syrte crisis between Libya and the United States, in which the United States made a series of air raids against Tripoli and Benghazi, probably aimed at killing Qaddafi as well, Italians were asked whether they would support military actions against Libya, if it did not stop its support of terrorism. On that occasion only 11 per cent chose the military option. In the same survey it was asked whether, in case of a new missile attack against the Italian island of Lampedusa, Italians would support military reprisals

against Libyan targets. Again, only 18 per cent supported this option. In assessing a wider set of policy response to Libyan terrorism, Italian public opposition grew as one moved from American non-military actions towards Italian military actions. A slight majority (56 per cent) would support an American blockade of Libyan ports, but as soon as either military action or Italian involvement entered the question, support dropped. Other American military options found even less support. Only 16 per cent would approve if Italy joined the United States in military operations against Libya.

Sanctions found slightly more approval, even though there were apparent divisions on their merit. In June 1986, only 42 per cent would approve if the Italian government imposed economic sanctions on Libya, with 45 per cent disapproving and 13 per cent with no opinion. The most frequently mentioned option was to sever economic, diplomatic and political links to Libya. One should notice that it was not a matter of reluctance to use Italian force only. Italians also opposed the use of force by the United States. Only 30 per cent approved (very much or somewhat) the recent American air raids against terrorist targets in Libya; 66 per cent did not approve (very much or somewhat). Still in June 1986, 67 per cent would not have supported renewed American bombing of Libyan airports in the case of repeated terrorist attacks supported by this country.<sup>22</sup> Even in the case of evident Libyan involvement with terrorist activities, approval of an American military operation would rise only to 42 per cent, while 26 per cent would disapprove very much or somewhat and 25 per cent gave no answer. This limited support for the military options is possibly dependent on three considerations. First, a pessimistic view of the ability of air raids to reduce terrorist activity and, more generally, of the appropriateness of the military hand to deal with terrorism (only 24 per cent thought that the April 1986 air raid would succeed in reducing terrorist activity. 33 per cent believed it would rather increase this activity and 34 per cent thought it would have no effect). Italians tended to emphasise that they were against the use of force as such to combat terrorism; 41 per cent thought for one reason or another that military means were not the best way to deal with terrorists. Only 13 per cent would use force if all the other measures did not succeed. This shows a quite stable opposition to the use of force in this case.

A second possible reason for the opposition was the indiscriminate killing of innocent people that the air raids involved, which may find its origins in the memories of the severe Allied air bombing of Italian cities in the Second World War; 29 per cent of those who opposed a new air raid did so because they feared that this would kill innocent civilians. Third, fear of escalation on their doorstep was a factor in play; 51 per cent believed that a new American attack would make a wider war more likely.

The cases of Trieste and Libya were both crises in which the use of force was never really at the forefront of the political discussion. In the

Libyan crisis the government was apparently caught by surprise by the missile that nearly struck Lampedusa and no real discussion of a military option ever took place. In Trieste, again, the government adopted a more nationalistic and militant policy, but there is no convincing evidence that it even considered the idea of actually using force to expel the AMG or, worse, to enter Zone B. In the latter case, apparently, the government increased slightly the proportion of those who were willing to use force, but this had no positive effect on its popularity, because this same pro-force group became more and more dissatisfied with the government's position because it was too diplomatic. What we know is that a large majority of the population was against any military intervention in both cases, and the government's decisions reflected this mood.

### *Two cases of war*

The two cases that will be examined next implied a direct participation of Italian armed force in a war. The Gulf and Kosovo Wars, the two wars in which Italy has been involved since the end of the Second World War, show a quite different picture. In these wars support for the use of Italian armed forces was higher and found among a greater number of the population. Overall, 46 per cent of the Italians supported the use of force in the Gulf War (1991) and 46 per cent in the conflict over Kosovo (1999). However, the overall mean score overlooks two radically different trends in support for the two wars. In both wars, support for the employment of Italian armed forces was low at the beginning. In the Gulf War, however, it grew over time, reaching a majority when the ground operation started. In the case of Kosovo, support stayed low and slowly eroded even further. Let us examine first the Gulf War trends.

### *The Gulf War*

In the Gulf War, as Figure 4.1 clearly shows, attitudes towards the employment of Italian forces shifted considerably during the conflict. At the beginning of the crisis, Italians were mostly opposed to the idea of direct participation by the deployment of the military as well as the actual use of force to repel Iraqi aggression. On 7 August 1990 58 per cent of the Italians were in favour of an intervention by Western countries, but first in their mind were diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions (48 per cent), followed by a peacekeeping force (34 per cent) and only 4 per cent would have supported an armed intervention. They were not opposed, however, to the show of force in principle. Contrary to the Libyan case, the American decision of 7 August to deploy military forces in Saudi Arabia met with the support of 65 per cent of Italians.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, when Iraq took hundreds of foreigners as hostages in August 1990, 49 per cent were in support of military action against Iraq to get them out and

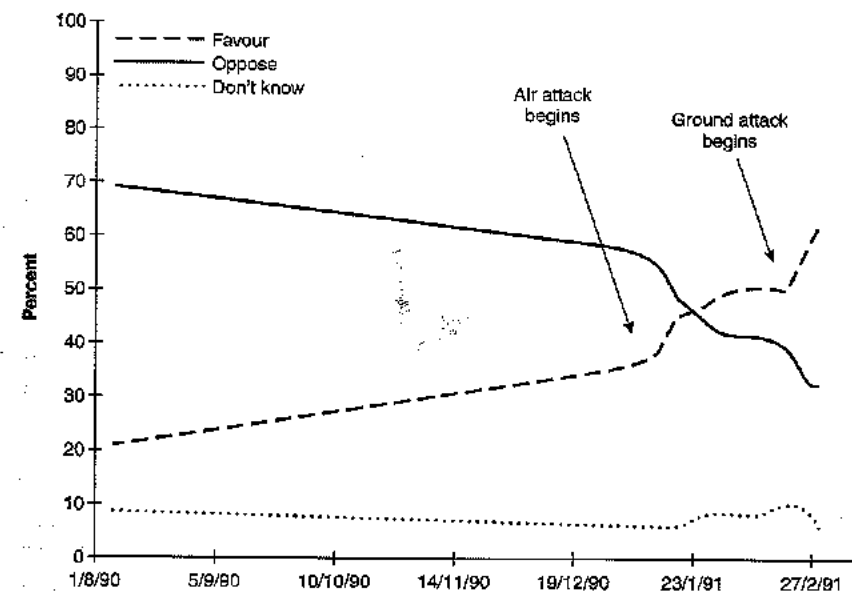


Figure 4.1 Support for Italian participation in the Gulf War.

Source: SWG Gulf War Polls. CIRCaP Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Archive.

57 per cent favoured an economic boycott against oil and other Iraqi products.<sup>24</sup> In December 1990, DOXA found that 59 per cent of those interviewed approved the UN Security Council Resolution 678 authorising 'the use of all necessary means' to secure Iraqi compliance with all previous resolutions and setting 15 January as the final deadline for the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. At the same time, 49 per cent also approved the Bush decision to send the troops in the Gulf and in February 1991 – with the war going on – 63 per cent approved this American deployment.

What made the Italians more wary in their attitude was the idea of using *Italian* force to secure Iraqi compliance with the array of UN resolutions. At the beginning of the crisis (7 August 1990) only one out of five Italians (22 per cent including and 24 per cent excluding those who gave no answer) was in favour of Italian participation in the expeditionary force. On 4 January 1991, when the US-led coalition was almost completely deployed but diplomatic initiatives were still on the move, only 36 per cent supported Italian participation in the multilateral force. The actual war started on 16 January and in the first post-attack poll, on 18 January, only just a majority of Italians were in support of the war (45 per cent including and 48 excluding the don't knows). Support for the war hovered around that level until 26 February, two days after the ground attack, when support climbed to 59 per cent. At the end of the war 62 per cent

were in favour of Italian participation, thus demonstrating a certain 'halo' effect.<sup>25</sup>

Italian public opinion was very prudent. There was only a narrow majority in favour of war when it started and support increased only when it appeared clear that a victory could be achieved at low costs and without risk of escalation. Supporters became a clear majority only in the second half of February, after almost a month of air raids and with the approach of the ground operation:

In the period from August 1990 to mid-January 1991, Italians showed themselves strong supporters of diplomatic initiatives, of deploying force as a deterrent against Saudi Arabia and as an incentive for Saddam to negotiate, but rather cool on the idea of the actual use of force. Between 4 January and 14 January 1991, three surveys were carried out that shed some light on Italian attitudes before the outbreak of actual hostilities.<sup>26</sup> Apparently, the failure of the last, unsuccessful, meeting between the American Secretary of State Baker and the Iraqi Foreign Minister Aziz on 9 January did not affect the Italian willingness to negotiate. On 4 January, 80 per cent were in favour of negotiations and on 14 January this figure became 79 per cent. At the same time, Italians were not ready to give in to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. On 4 January, asked under what conditions they would deem a suspension of the UN deadline for the use of force justified, 53 per cent chose a total Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Only a quarter of those interviewed felt that an international conference on Kuwait would be enough to postpone the deadline. Nevertheless, 62 per cent of those interviewed on 14 January felt that negotiations should continue after the ultimatum's expiration. Only slightly less than one-fifth thought that a military attack should follow upon the ultimatum's expiration. This stubborn inclination to negotiate at any cost is also shown in other survey data (13 January) which show that, even among those 47 per cent who felt that Iraq was most to blame, no more than 40 per cent were supportive of Italian participation in the intervention.

Belief in negotiation at all costs declined as the war proceeded and the final defeat of Iraq appeared inevitable. In a set of questions asked between 25 January and 26 February (Table 4.2), those who wanted to continue the attack up to the complete defeat of Saddam Hussein went from 29 per cent to 34 per cent ten days later, and ended, via 46 per cent on 20 February, at 58 per cent when the ground war started.

This is quite a reversal from the majority opinion of 5 January, when, to a hypothetical question on what to do in case Saddam Hussein offered to stop fighting in exchange for his withdrawal from Kuwait, 74 per cent would have chosen a truce and only 23 per cent would have supported continuation of the fighting.<sup>27</sup> The number of those who favoured a negotiated solution of the crisis declined steadily over time, even though it was quick to increase again as soon as an opportunity for negotiations arose.

Table 4.2 Support for attack or negotiation (in %)

25 January 1991

At this point of the Gulf War, do you think it is better to intensify military action or to negotiate?

Intensify military action	28
Negotiate	65
Don't know	6
Total	100
(N)	(1000)

1 February 1991

At this point in the conflict, according to you, should we:

Offer Saddam a truce in exchange for his withdrawal	28
Stop the fighting only if Saddam withdraws from Kuwait	30
Continue the war until the complete defeat of Saddam	29
Don't know	14
Total	100
(N)	(800)

At this point of the war, if you had the power to decide what to do, you would aim at which of the following goals?

	11-12 February	20 February	26 February
The complete defeat of Saddam	34	46	58
Stop the fighting only after Saddam's withdrawal	22	na	na
Negotiations	30	37	28
A unilateral truce	6	8	7
Don't know	8	9	8
Total	100	100	100
(N)	(800)	(800)	(800)

na = not asked.

Sources: SWG Gulf Polls. CIRCaP Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Archive.

To examine more carefully the determinants of support for the use of Italian force in the Gulf War, I shall use poll data from 25 January 1991.<sup>28</sup> This was a good period in which to examine the mood of the people because war had started more than ten days earlier, but at the same time it was not completely clear how long it would last. So, it was a period of genuine uncertainty, in which considerations of duration and possible

consequences most likely affected the interview more than at the end of the war – when it was clear that it would end soon – or at the very beginning – when the expectations were high that it would finish quickly. Three factors possibly affecting the calculation of costs and risks of war were explored, together with a set of control variables. (This being a secondary analysis of data produced for other purposes, it is not possible to assess in detail all the different factors impinging on the decision whether to support the use of armed forces discussed in the Introduction to this chapter, such as, for example, the impact of possible casualties.) The three factors are: the possible consequences of the war, the expected duration and the effectiveness of bombing Iraq. As to the consequences, three questions were asked, having to do with the personal, day-to-day activities of the respondents, as well as the risk of escalation to either a world war or to a Middle East war (including Israel). Of the three questions, only the latter is included as significant, since only 29 per cent thought that the Gulf War could possibly escalate to a world war on the scale of the Second World War.

Second, the effect of the possible duration of the war on the support for the use of force was examined. It is hypothesised that support is inversely related to the expected duration of the war. Third, a question was asked on the perceived effectiveness of bombing Iraq (which was in full swing at the time of the survey). An assessment of the role of this factor in explaining support is relevant because the appropriateness of bombing was at the core of the argument in support of air strikes: their surgical character and the reduced risk of friendly casualties. Finally, sex, age and education were used as controls. Table 4.3 shows the results of a logistic regression on support for the Italian participation as a dummy variable, with and without introducing background controls.

The results of the regression show that, independent of the use of age, education and gender as control variables, duration, bombing and the risks of escalation all exert a significant impact on the support of Italian participation in the war. Looking at the coefficients without controls, the expectation of war duration has the strongest impact. Among those who expect the war to last between fifteen days and two months, the odds of favouring Italian participation are 2.62 times higher than for those who think the war will last more than 6 months. Among those who expect the war to last between two and six months, the odds are 1.62 higher. Comparing those who expected that the war would ignite a Middle East conflict with those who did not expect such consequences, the odds of favouring Italian participation in the Gulf War for the latter group were 0.46 times those of the former. Clearly, the risks of escalation depressed support for Italian participation, as much as the moral revulsion or ineffectiveness of air strikes. When bombing is deemed morally acceptable or militarily useful, the odds of favouring Italian participation are higher than among those who thought that the bombing was either morally unacceptable or military ineffective. Introducing controls, only gender appears to exert an autonomous significant effect.

Table 4.3 Determinants of support for Italian participation in the Gulf War – logistic regression 25 January 1991; Maximum Likelihood Estimation

Variables	With control		Without control	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Intercept	1.17	0.638	1.27 <sup>b</sup>	0.434
Bombing depends	-0.181	0.399	-0.166	0.389
Bombing not acceptable	-1.42 <sup>c</sup>	0.387	-1.56 <sup>c</sup>	0.379
War last 2-6 months	0.457	0.241	0.485 <sup>a</sup>	0.231
War last 15 days-2 months	0.924 <sup>c</sup>	0.266	0.962 <sup>c</sup>	0.258
War last less than 15 days	-0.524	0.451	-0.666	0.434
Middle East uncertain	-0.639	0.393	-0.943 <sup>a</sup>	0.369
Middle East involved	-0.739 <sup>c</sup>	0.243	-0.766 <sup>c</sup>	0.234
Age 26-35	-0.044	0.301	-	-
Age 36-45	-0.307	0.310	-	-
Age 46-55	0.381	0.367	-	-
Age 56-65	0.007	0.396	-	-
Age > 65	0.374	0.494	-	-
Gender (female)	-0.527 <sup>b</sup>	0.197	-	-
Education low-high school	0.873	0.323	-	-
Education high school	0.953	0.321	-	-
Education university	1.312 <sup>c</sup>	0.389	-	-
	N = 554		N = 554	
	$\chi^2=131.36$		$\chi^2=104.46$	
	Significance = 0.000		Significance = 0.000	
	Model log-likelihood = -316.58		Model log-likelihood = -330.03	
	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = 0.172		Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = 0.137	

Support: 0 = No; 1 = Yes.

- a.  $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed.  
 b.  $p < 0.01$ , one-tailed.  
 c.  $p < 0.001$ , one-tailed.

Source: SWG, Trieste.

Among women, the odds of favouring Italian participation are half that of men.

Using for sake of simplicity the second equation (without controls),<sup>29</sup> Figure 4.2 shows the impact of war duration on the likelihood of supporting Italian participation, among those who deemed bombing immoral and were worried about an escalation in the Middle East, on the one hand, and those who deemed bombing useful and were not worried about an escalation, on the other.<sup>30</sup> War duration has a quite different impact on the likelihood of supporting Italian participation in these two groups. Among those who saw bombing as immoral and perceived a risk of escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, the likelihood of supporting the war is highest when they expected the war to last between fifteen days and two months (by the way, the expectation closest to the real evolution of the war). On the other hand, for those who perceived the bombing as useful and saw no risk

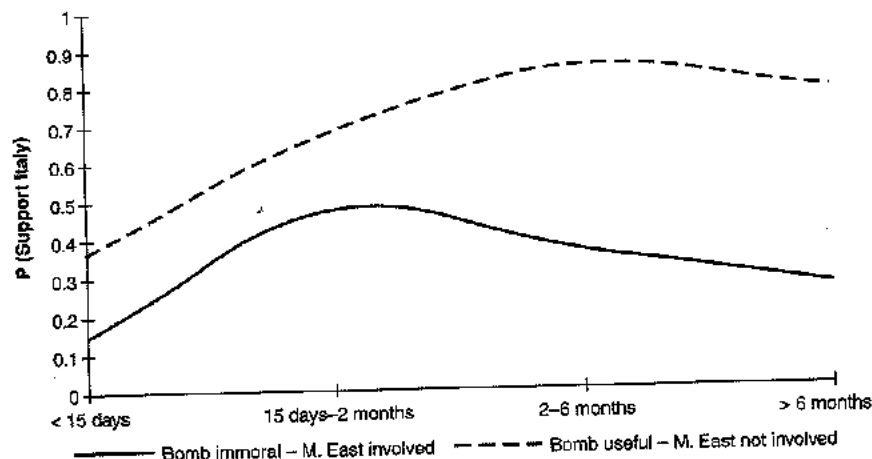


Figure 4.2 Likelihood of support for Italian participation in the Gulf War by expected duration.

Source: SWG, Trieste, January 25, 1991.

of escalation in the Middle East, the likelihood of supporting Italian intervention was highest if they expected the war to last between two and six months. In other words, for those who deemed bombing immoral and perceived a risk of escalation, support for Italy's participation increased only if they thought the war would be quite short (around one to two months). For those who thought the bombing useful and saw no risk of escalation, support grew with the expected duration.

Contrary to common expectations, people apparently calibrated their support for the use of force on the basis of their own assessments of the expected duration, the likelihood of escalating the conflict and the perceived benefits – either moral or political – of the instruments employed. This does not only confirm the reasonableness of the people in these matters, but it also points to a more complex picture of the factors involved in the support for the use of force than that depicted by the bivariate casualties-support thesis. As in the case of Libya, we find that the air instrument is deemed, among Italians, more debatable than in other countries (e.g. the United States). What is crucial is not only the effectiveness of the bombing, but also its morality dimension, a consideration generally overlooked by those who consider the air weapon a 'tech-fix' to the problem of the Western public reluctance to use force.

### Kosovo

The Kosovo War has been the most important engagement of the Italian armed forces since 1945. Several navy units and a total of 54 aircraft went

into action (approximately 10 per cent of the total allied air contribution, excluding the United States). Italy made available twenty air and naval bases to the allies. A special and costly humanitarian mission, called *Missione Arcobaleno*, was started to help the Albanian and Macedonia governments deal with the refugee problems. Finally, Italy deployed 2,287 men of the Garibaldi brigade in the eastern Kosovo area of Italian competence in the framework of KFOR.

The Kosovo War had never been popular, however, among the Italian public, as shown in Figure 4.3, with respect to participation in the bombing in Serbia or to a military ground operation. On average, only 44 per cent of the Italians favoured NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo and 45 per cent opposed it, with 11 per cent that did not know. On the question of whether Italian troops should take part in a NATO ground operation in Kosovo, on average only 33 per cent were in favour, 63 per cent opposed and only 4 per cent gave no answer. Of course, there are effects of question wording to be

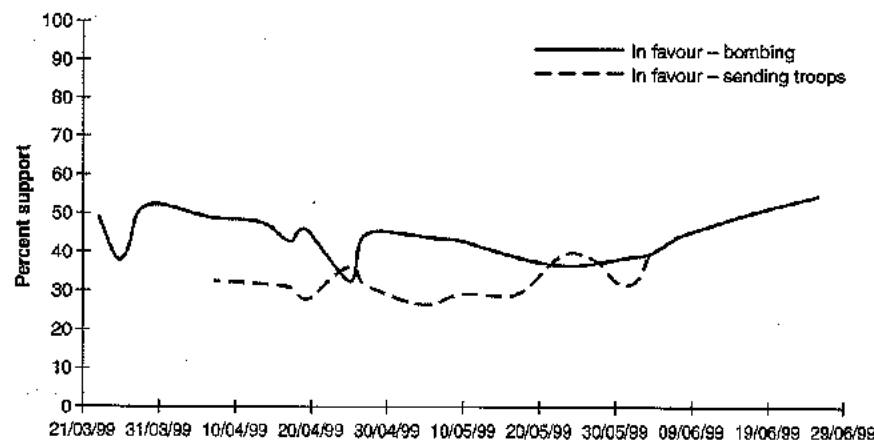


Figure 4.3 Support for Italian bombing and deployment of ground troops in Kosovo.

Source: Various SWG surveys.

Question wording:

Bombing question wording: 23 March: 'If NATO decided to bomb Serbia, should Italy according to you support the NATO action; oppose it or do you not know?'; 26 March and 7, 13, 19, 27 April, 5, 10, 17, 24, 31 May: 'As to the war in Serbia and Kosovo, NATO is bombing Serbia. Should NATO according to you be definitely supported or opposed, or do you not know?' 15-25 April 'Are you very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat opposed, or very much opposed to NATO bombing in Serbia and Kosovo?'; 25 June 'As you might know, Serbia has accepted the NATO peace proposal. In view of this, do you think that the NATO decision to bomb Serbia and Kosovo was a mistake or not?'

Ground operation question wording: 7, 13, 17, 19, 27 April, 5, 10, 17, 31 May: 'Presently the possibility of sending NATO ground troops in Kosovo is being discussed. Are you in favour or opposed to the Italian participation in such a mission?' 15-25 April, 24 May: 'In regard to the possible Italian participation in such an operation [ground operation], are you very much in favour, somewhat in favour, somewhat opposed or very much opposed?'



considered. Apparently, shifting the wording of the question from supporting bombing only to supporting the bombing by NATO increases support by some 10 percentage points. These effects will be mentioned when deemed relevant for the interpretation of data.

The time series available on both the bombing and the ground force questions shows on the one hand a remarkable stability over time, with 6 percentage point standard deviation in the bombing question and 4 in that on the ground operation. On the other hand, there are different trends for the bombing and the ground troop questions. The support of bombing shows a slight decline as time goes by. With regard to support of a ground operation, the opposite is visible with a slightly positive trend.<sup>31</sup> Before examining these somewhat puzzling outcomes in more detail, especially if compared to other countries as reviewed by Everts in Chapter 10, let me first describe the evolution over time.

Our bombing time series starts on 23 March, one day after the failure of the final attempt by the special American envoy Richard Holbrooke to convince Milosevic to agree to the NATO terms and the rejection of these by the Serb parliament. On the evening of 23 March, a survey was made, asking whether NATO should continue to search for diplomatic solutions or whether more drastic measures were needed: 68 per cent favoured further diplomatic efforts, while 27 per cent deemed more resolute means necessary and 5 per cent did not know.<sup>32</sup> However, in case NATO should decide to strike Serbia, a majority of 49 per cent felt that Italy should support NATO, while 33 per cent thought Italy should oppose it and 18 per cent did not know.

Acting on the basis of activation orders agreed upon earlier, the NATO council decided to launch an air attack against Serbia. NATO planes from eleven countries and nearly 100 sea- and air-launched cruise missiles hit about forty military targets. The first post-war survey is of 26 March. The net result of the strikes was to strengthen the support for a negotiated solution among Italians. In fact, two days after the war started, 72 per cent were in favour of giving space to a diplomatic effort and only 22 per cent supported continuing air strikes until Milosevic signed the peace agreement. Moreover, only 38 per cent thought that NATO should be uncritically supported, while 29 per cent felt that Italy should assume a critical position in NATO and 18 per cent definitely opposed the NATO decision. One of the effects of the initiation of the air strikes was progressive reduction of the proportion of those uncertain (explaining in all likelihood the increase in the proportion of the public willing to support NATO action). On 29 March, in fact, those who thought that NATO should be supported at any cost moved to 52 per cent (14 percentage points more than three days before), while those who thought either that Italy should have a critical position (27 per cent) or that Italy should refuse NATO policy (14 per cent) stayed at the same level as three days before. Between the end of March 1999 and the beginning of May the propor-

tion of those who were in support of the NATO policy declined steadily from the height of 52 per cent to the low of 24 May.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, the hitting of civilian targets and the killing of civilians did not affect support for the war. Opposition to NATO and support for diplomatic efforts did not increase after a series of incidents creating 'collateral damage' between 7 and 17 April.

Cool attitudes towards the war are not a consequence of the perceived risks of being involved in an escalation of the conflict. Asked on a scale from 0 to 100 how likely it would be for Italy to become involved in the war, on 26 March 21 per cent thought this likely (more than 50 per cent likelihood), 10 per cent did not know and 69 per cent thought it not likely (less than 50 per cent). These proportions changed respectively to 16 per cent, 5 per cent and 79 per cent on 29 March. Nor is it a question of sympathy for Milosevic. There is no question in the Italians' mind that the war aimed to stop a brutal repression against the ethnic Albanians. To a question about the main motivations behind the NATO attack against Serbia 36 per cent mention stopping massacres in Kosovo, 27 per cent toppling the Milosevic regime and 19 per cent pushing the Serbs into serious negotiations over autonomy in Kosovo.<sup>34</sup> Only 13 per cent chose the Serbs' expansionist military threat, pointing to the fact that this was not perceived as a war in which direct Italian interests were involved. In another poll, 65 per cent of those sampled agreed with the statement that 'the decision to bomb Serbia is needed to stop repression in Kosovo'. The main reason for Italians' opposition to the war seems to be the conviction that negotiations could have been more effective in bringing the repression to a stop. Support for a diplomatic solution was the most preferred option.

However, Italians were not ready to support any step in the direction of a negotiated peace. Thus, 56 per cent of those interviewed agreed with NATO's rejection of the Serb proposal of a unilateral truce on the occasion of the Orthodox Easter of 6 April, while 34 per cent opposed it. More than one month and a half later, when the air campaign was dragging on, support for a NATO unilateral suspension of air strikes was much higher. In a poll of 24 May 1999, 68 per cent expressed support for such a move. Tied to an acceptance by Milosevic of the withdrawal of Serbian troops from Kosovo, support for a unilateral NATO suspension of air strikes even went up to 90 per cent. Hence it is no surprise that in the week between Milosevic's acceptance of the NATO peace proposal and the final halt of the air strikes (3-9 June 1999) only 15 per cent wanted to continue bombing if Serbia did not stop repression against ethnic Albanians; 70 per cent then wanted to start peace negotiations and 15 per cent favoured sending ground troops. Contrary to the Gulf War, the conviction of many Italians that the war was not worthwhile remained even after the war. There are contradictory results on a possible 'halo effect' in the Kosovo War. On the one hand, when asked in June whether NATO bombing had been a mistake, 41 per cent answered yes, 46 per cent no and 12 per cent did not

know.<sup>35</sup> On 24 June 1999, to the same question the figures were 33, 55 and 12 per cent respectively. On the other hand, on 24 June, to a question as to why the war had ended, 53 per cent mentioned that a diplomatic solution was found, 22 per cent attributed it to the bombing and 13 per cent to both causes. Underlying these attitudes was a basic uncertainty about the entire process. To the question as to who won the war, 58 per cent simply answered that they did not know, while only 17 per cent mentioned NATO and another 11 per cent the United States.

In the Kosovo War, opinions were quite clearly divided from the very beginning and there is evidence to show that they became even more polarised as the war went on. The group of supporters of the bombing probably formed the basis of support for *any* kind of NATO action. On 7 April, 34 per cent wanted NATO to continue bombing until Milosevic signed for peace; 33 per cent favoured a ground operation, 33 per cent were in favour of Italian participation, and 29 per cent (31 per cent excluding 'don't knows') were in favour of this even in the event of casualties among Italian soldiers. The likelihood of casualties does indeed not make much of a difference. On 24 May, 38 per cent were in favour of bombing (and 41 per cent thought that NATO should be supported in its bombing actions), while 42 per cent were in favour of sending Italian ground troops if NATO should decide to send troops in the event that Milosevic did not withdraw. Asked then to consider what to do if repression were stopped but ten Italian soldiers killed, 41 per cent were still in support of sending Italian troops. The data of 24 May point to a possible polarisation of attitudes among the Italian public. While a sizeable minority was apparently prepared to go 'all the way', on the other side of the spectrum as the war was dragging on and lacked a clear deadline, a growing proportion, but still a minority, of the sampled population, was at the same time becoming disillusioned with the bombing and began to think that either a ground operation or a negotiated peace was the solution.

### **Bosnia**

In the Bosnia case, the evolution of support differed from both the Gulf and Kosovo Wars.<sup>36</sup> The available surveys show clearly that Italian public opinion, as that of other European publics (Sobel 1996), quite early supported greater commitment in the Bosnia crisis and was strongly disappointed with the way international organisations and national governments were dealing with the conflict there. In November 1992, 67 per cent of the Italians thought that both the European Community and the United States were doing too little to stop the fighting in Yugoslavia. In June 1994, 72 per cent deemed that the European Community and 70 per cent that the United Nations were doing too little to stop the struggle, but only 57 per cent considered that Italy was not doing enough. This harsh judgement on the commitment of the multilateral bodies is linked to two factors.

On the one hand, it was felt that international organisations have a real influence on the political situation in the former Yugoslavia. In February 1994, in one poll (DOXA) 73 per cent thought that if international diplomacy made a real effort, it had many or some possibilities to stop the war in Bosnia. In May-June 1994 to a question on who should resolve the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the UN, European Union and NATO were all given first place by a majority. Only one country reached a similar position: the United States, with 55 per cent of the interviewed thinking it had a role in solving the crisis.

On the other hand, there was a genuine desire to see peace established in that area at (almost) any price. The slow and progressive engulfing of Yugoslavia in the civil war slowly convinced Italians that a more active military intervention, not only for humanitarian purposes but also to actually end the conflict, was a desirable option. In September 1991, at the beginning of the Yugoslavia crisis, a sample of Italians was asked what action Western countries should have taken to solve the Yugoslavian conflict.<sup>37</sup> Only 6 per cent chose the military option; 75 per cent preferred the diplomatic solution, and 17 per cent flatly answered that it was none of our business. In March 1993, however, 92 per cent of those interviewed favoured the use of multilateral military force to protect humanitarian aid and 79 per cent were in favour of such use to impose a solution, no matter what. In June 1994, 53 per cent were in favour of 'decisive military intervention for a definite solution of the present situation in Bosnia'. In 1994 no more than 7 per cent on average favoured letting things continue and no more than an average of 34 per cent were in favour of withdrawing troops. Two-thirds of the polled population felt that force should have been used to ease the passage of the humanitarian aid convoys.

A slightly different question was asked immediately before and after the mortar attack of 5 February 1994, in the Sarajevo market square, which killed at least 68 and wounded up to 200.<sup>38</sup> It allows an examination of the impact of an increase in the level of violence on the resolve of public opinion. The mortar attack increased the number of supporters of an armed intervention by UN troops to stop the fighting in Bosnia by 6 percentage points (from 51 to 57 per cent). The data suggest that the major impact of the mortar shelling was on the uncertain rather than on those opposing it. The effect of the indiscriminate killing on support for Italian intervention is much greater among those who are already in favour of multilateral intervention: 73 per cent of those favouring an armed intervention were also supportive of the idea of sending Italian troops on 31 January. The support for Italian intervention, four days after the Sarajevo market shelling, increases among these to 85 per cent. In other words, if you support an intervention, you want Italy to be part of it as well.

Since March 1993 the Italian public had been in favour of military intervention by the United Nations, and by the end of December 1994

this resolve had stiffened and widened. In November 1994, 54 per cent of the population polled wanted to end the war by any means if it were to continue until Spring next year, and 68 per cent were against removing UN troops if, following an arms embargo, war should escalate. The level of support increases if the question mentions explicitly that the troops are sent to implement a peace agreement.

The war also had an effect on the support for NATO air strikes, and it shows the willingness of public opinion to go along with the UN decision to threaten air strikes to deter attacks against the UNPAs (United Nations Protected Areas). Between February and June 1994, no more than one-third of public opinion was in support of launching air attacks. However, in one poll 67 per cent of those interviewed expressed support for NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb forces around Gorazde. This support was related to the conviction that strikes would be effective in stopping the fighting: 61 per cent thought that these would be more likely to lead to peace than prolonging the fight in Bosnia.

Looking at the evolution of support of Italian (participation in) armed intervention, we find, as in earlier cases, a remarkable stability, as shown in Figure 4.4. Although questions are not always worded identically, the overall trend is overwhelmingly positive. The only change occurs in the middle of 1995, when the gloomy situation of the UN troops taken as hostages and the patent inability of the UN to curb Serbian attacks on Sarajevo seems to have temporarily depressed the level of support for an intervention.

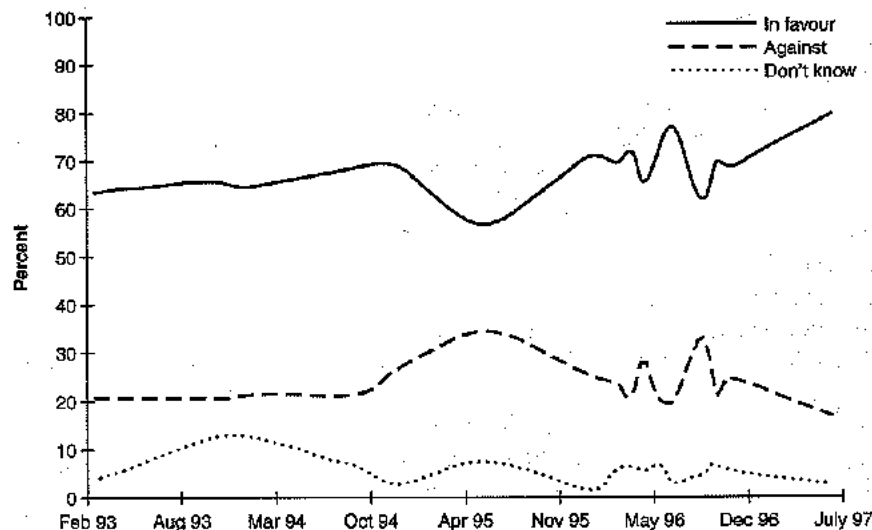


Figure 4.4 Support for Italian armed intervention in Bosnia (in %).

Source: Various DOXA, UNICAB and SWG surveys.

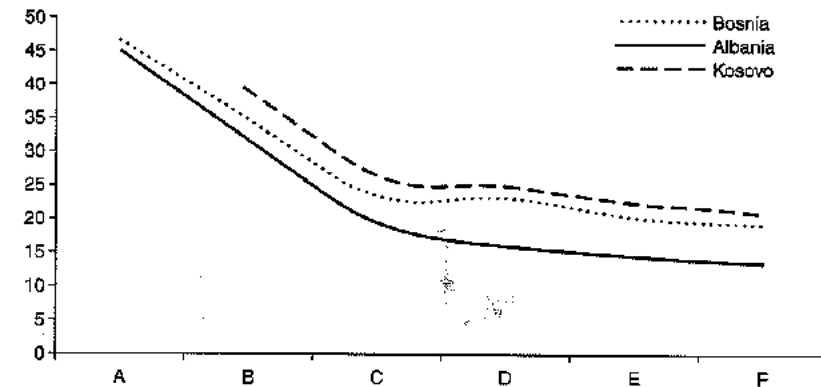


Figure 4.5 Support for use of force in different conditions in the Gulf War, Bosnia and Kosovo.

Source: Difebarometro 4, 5 and 6.

Question wording:

**Bosnia:** A = Do you consider the threat to use force by the Italian contingent in Bosnia justified? B = Do you consider the use of force by the Italian contingent in Bosnia justified? C = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent justified if this would lead to losses of human life among Kosovars? D = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent justified if this would lead to losses of human life among the soldiers? E = And do you consider such use of force justified if this would lead to losses of human life among your friends or family? F = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent on Bosnia justified if you would risk losing your own life?

**Albania:** A = Do you consider the threat to use force by the Italian contingent in Albania justified? B = Do you consider the use of force by the Italian contingent in Albania justified? C = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent justified if this would lead to losses of human life among the Albanians? D = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent justified if this would lead to losses of human life among the Italian soldiers? E = And do you consider such use of force justified if this would lead to losses of human life among your friends or family? F = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent on Albania justified if you would risk losing your own life?

**Kosovo:** B = In case there would be a military ground operation, would you consider the use of force by an Italian contingent in Serbia justified? C = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent justified if this would lead to losses of human life among the local population? D = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent justified if this would lead to losses of human life among the Italian soldiers? E = And do you consider such use of force justified if this would lead to losses of human life among your friends or family? F = And do you consider such use of force by the Italian contingent on Kosovo justified if you would risk losing your own life?

The data show a strong support for an armed intervention and this contradicts the image of the public that was held by the Western political elites (Sobel 1996). But how strong was this support? Since the beginning, in fact, Western politicians claimed that public support for an armed intervention was not only shaky, but would also drop as soon as casualties occurred. At a first glance, as shown in Figure 4.5, which brings together the Albania, Bosnia and Kosovo cases, support for Italian armed

Table 4.4 Support for an armed Italian intervention in Bosnia and Somalia with or without casualties

Question: 'Looking at the Somalia [Bosnia] situation, are you in favour or against an Italian armed participation to a mission in a country with severe domestic problems?'

	Somalia			Bosnia		
	Without losses	With losses <sup>a</sup>	Difference	Without losses	With losses <sup>a</sup>	Difference
Very favourable	8	4	-4	13	9	-4
Somewhat favourable	20	13	-7	21	16	-5
Somewhat opposed	28	32	+4	23	27	+4
Very much opposed	44	51	+7	43	48	+5
Total	100	100		100	100	
(N)	(603)	(603)		(619)	(619)	

a Only those who answered: 'Very or somewhat favourable' were asked: 'Would you continue to be favourable if the mission implied Italian casualties?'

Source: CeMIS, 7-20 January 1994.

intervention seems indeed to decrease as the level of sacrifice required increases. This trend is similar to that observed in other countries (Everts 1996a). The degree of support is crucially affected by the actual possibility of the use of force, the likelihood of casualties among friendly and enemy troops and eventually the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the country.

Table 4.4 explores the issue of casualties from another angle. A slightly biased question was asked in two different formats to a split-half sample of Italians. Support for an armed intervention moves down from 28 per cent when the issue of Somalia (1984) is mentioned to 34 per cent when Bosnia (1994) is the case. This is not surprising in view of the conflicts underlying these operations and the risks involved. When the risk of casualties was mentioned specifically, support drops to 17 per cent and 25 per cent respectively, but still the difference between the two cases remains the same. This indicates that, even when casualties are brought into the picture, the public is able to differentiate between cases and whether risking lives is worthwhile or not.

### Concluding observations

In the Introduction several factors potentially affecting the willingness to support the use of force were spelled out. Comparing the six cases, three factors stand out as relevant in shedding some light on the different degree of this support: the nature of the situation in which the use of force is contemplated (international crisis, war or peacekeeping operation), the nature of the interests involved (threats to national security, humanitarian

mission or respect for international law), and the prospect of success, as seen by public opinion. Other factors do not play a clear role in explaining differences in support across cases. Support for the use of force is high both when force is actually used and when it is not. And in the two cases in which force is used (namely Kosovo and the Gulf) there are significant differences. The duration of the operation does not affect the support either. Bosnia dragged on quite extensively (and it is still going on as far as the Italian troops are concerned), but support never wavered. Kosovo was shorter than the Gulf War, but support during the war was much lower. In the Gulf, the average support score during the war (79 days) was 52 per cent. In Kosovo it was 38 per cent. Also the historical period (Cold War or post-Cold War) does not show a clear pattern. In general, use of force in the Cold War is less supported than during the post-Cold War period, but in this latter period there is a wide margin of variation. The bilateral or multilateral nature of the operation makes a difference in the sense that support for bilateral operations seems lower than for multilateral ones; but this variable quite perfectly matches with the Cold War-post-Cold War distinction and the nature of the situation (being that peacekeeping operations and wars are all of a multilateral nature). Geographical closeness is difficult to assess but clearly does not exert a clear-cut role. Trieste is the closest event we have and still force is much less enthusiastically supported than the patrolling of the Gulf, the farthest mission away from Italian borders. As to the threat's immediacy, there is not enough variation among our cases to allow for a conclusive answer. Assuming that the Libya incident in 1986 and the Trieste crisis of 1953 are the two closest to a threat to national security, it turns out that this variable plays no appreciable role in increasing support.

Three factors stand out as of more relevance. First, the humanitarian nature of the mission. Italians, like French public opinion examined by La Balme in this book, find in humanitarian considerations a powerful motivation to support the use of force by Italian armed forces. International law considerations also play a role, as the Gulf War showed. The clearer the humanitarian considerations behind an operation, the higher the support for it. Albania in 1997 is a possible example. A mission to bring rescue and comfort to Albanians in a difficult political transition, together with the consideration that it is better to assist a population in need before they become refugees (especially if they tend to search for a refuge in Italy), bring support for the use of force to 59 per cent. In Bosnia, months of massacring and violent internecine strife brought the support for a mission to bring an end to this to 69 per cent. International law considerations play a somewhat weaker role, even though they are still one of the issues behind support for the use of force. When the humanitarian issues are not clear, seem a rationalisation for other purposes, or are altogether absent (as in Libya and Trieste), support is much lower. In other words, Italians seem inclined to consider the possibility of using force when a clear and

persuasive humanitarian argument can be made. Where there is a lack of clear and present dangers to Italian national security, other considerations do not elicit that much support. Two other considerations, however, are important in explaining support for the *Italian* participation in such an operation: the expected duration and the likelihood of success.

Of course, this conclusion has to be reached with prudence because of the limited number of cases involved. As an example, the inclusion of Somalia would shed some doubt on the influence of the humanitarian considerations. Somalia was a peacekeeping (and then peace-enforcing) mission with humanitarian reasons. This would lead us to expect a higher level of support than that actually recorded. Nevertheless, the Somalia data are not a very reliable measure of the actual level of support to take under consideration. On the other hand, the case of Albania, which I did not analyse either, comes out according to expectations: high level of support for a peacekeeping humanitarian mission, with clear and quite promising prospects of success.

These conclusions bring us to a second set of considerations: the exact scope of this 'permissive mood'. The results show that Italians are, at least in principle, ready to support force for humanitarian considerations. The question that immediately arises is how strong and stable is this commitment. The available evidence points to three factors that might possibly affect the support for the use of force in these missions. First, Italians have a lower level of tolerance to casualties than public opinion in other countries. The role of casualties in peace operations is difficult to assess because they were all operations without casualties (excluding two Italians killed in an accident at the beginning of the SFOR mission). Table 4.5 shows to what extent Italians were willing to support hypothetical casualties in a foreign military intervention, applied to three military operations in which Italian armed force was actually employed: Bosnia (1996), Albania (1996) and Kosovo (1999). The Italian data are also compared with an analogous question asked in 1991 (four months after the Gulf War) in the United States, having in mind a generic military operation (Larson 1996).

On the basis of Table 4.5, it appears quite clear that Italians are not willing to support more than ten casualties altogether, while among Americans only 34 per cent identify that number as an acceptable threshold for casualties.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as shown in Figure 4.5, often the real issue at stake is the sacrifice of human life, no matter on which side of the conflict. Figure 4.5 shows quite clearly that the most dramatic drop in support for the use of force is when you move from the threat of use of force to the real use of force, i.e. killing people. Having your relatives, Italian soldiers, enemy soldiers or civilians killed does not affect the level of support for the use of force that much.

Second, Italian governments do not benefit from any 'rally round the flag'. For several reasons linked to the nature of the Italian parliamentary system, once the Italian government decided to participate in a mission or once the actual fighting breaks out, there is no dramatic jump in support.

Table 4.5 Number of Italian casualties deemed acceptable in Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo (in %)

*Questions:*

*For Italy: 'In particular, how many Italian casualties would you be ready to accept before thinking it necessary to withdraw from such operation?'*

*For US: 'I would like to get some idea of what you think "too much loss of life" is in a military intervention. What would be the rough figure you would use as an acceptable number of US deaths?'*

Casualties	Italy Bosnia (1996)	Italy Albania (1996) <sup>40</sup>	Italy Kosovo (1999)	US Generic
Less than 10	84	80	77	36
10-100	11	15	10	27
101-1000	3	3	8	17
1001-10,000	1	1	2	11
More than 10,000	1	1	3	9
Total	100	100	100	100

*Sources:* For Italy: Difebarometro 4, Difebarometro 5, Archivio Disarmo/SWG/Università di Siena, 1999. For United States, *American Talks Issues* as quoted in Larson 1996, Table A.1, p. 107.

Otherwise put, once the mission gets going Italians have to be thoroughly convinced to take action. And this relates to the last consideration.

Third, the quality of the information and the rational nature of the arguments seem to make a lot of difference in persuading the public to support an operation. In this connection the Gulf and Kosovo Wars are useful to compare, even though the Gulf was not considered primarily a humanitarian mission but rather an attempt to restore national sovereignty and to affirm respect for international law. Support for the use of force is more or less at the same level at the beginning, but then it shows different trends. In the Gulf War, it becomes progressively higher; in the Kosovo War it stays low throughout the conflict (with an increasing polarisation of positions at later stage). Several factors could possibly explain the two different trends. Particularly relevant appears the prospect of success and the nature of the mission. The purpose at hand in the Gulf War was quite clear from the very beginning. To liberate Kuwait was the clear and well-defined paramount goal of the entire operation. The operation was well planned and executed after all diplomatic alternatives were explored. Prospects of success were quite high from the very beginning and they became progressively even brighter as the war progressed. Italian reluctance at the beginning of the war was mainly due to the fear of escalation, the possible duration and, for some, the strategy involved (bombing). However, as the war progressed and the fears were allayed, support became stronger, ending up with a clear 'halo effect' after the war.

Much different was the situation in Kosovo. No such clarity of purpose was perceived among the public in the Kosovo War. The lack of clarity of goals affected the prospect of success as well. As the bombing strategy evolved, extending progressively to civilian targets and less discriminating hits, frustration for the bombing strategy increased, leading to a polarisation in public attitudes among those against and pro NATO intervention. The pro-interventionists were asking for more, namely the ground operation, and those opposed to intervention were increasingly sceptical about the feasibility of the 'bombing and talking' strategy of the Italian government. Moreover, the flood of refugees leaving Kosovo owing to the bombing and the apparent stability of Milosevic confused the humanitarian reasons behind the Kosovo War.

This also raised some interesting considerations on the interaction between public opinion and political elite in foreign policy. Public opinion can be seen by policy makers either as a resource or as a constraint. In the first case, public opinion can be exploited to increase the power and influence of political leaders against opponents both in their own government or in the political opposition. In the second case, public opinion limits the room for manoeuvring of politicians in their political bargaining. To what extent public opinion is one or the other depends, of course, on the preferences of politicians, but also on other considerations that are factored in the politicians' calculations. Among these considerations, for a medium-size power like Italy, are the policy positions of the United States and other Western European countries on the issue at stake. Taking these facts into account, the cases examined show different ways through which politicians interacted with public opinion.

Trieste, Libya and the oil cases are situations in which public opinion's reluctance to use force, lack of clear preferences of the main allies and the Italian government's position basically coincide. It is not far from the truth to say that on these occasions Italian governments followed public opinion. On the other hand, Bosnia is a situation in which public opinion was clearly a resource. Italians had since 1983 a 'permissive mood' towards the use of force in the former Yugoslavia. The Italian governments, for several domestic reasons, were not willing to exploit such a resource and the European allies, even though willing to see Italy more involved in the UN operation in Bosnia, did not press that much. This is a case in which public opinion and the political elite basically did not interact (Russett and Graham 1989).

Finally, Kosovo and the Gulf are two situations in which public opinion constrains Italian political leaders. Support for the use of force in these situations is low at the beginning. Italian governments do not benefit from the 'rally round the flag' syndrome. However, the government reacts differently in the two cases. In the Gulf War, there is an attempt to follow a narrow path conciliating the public mood with the political need to participate in the US-led coalition. The result is a symbolic participation in the

war with only a few planes. In Kosovo, where both the logistic exigencies brought about by the geographical closeness and the greater American pressure make a symbolic participation impossible, Italy builds its position – negotiation and bombing – taking expressly into account the public mood.

## Notes

- 1 I thank Teresa Ammendola for allowing me to use her data on both domestic and foreign Italian armed forces operations. I am also grateful to Archivio Disarmo-Polimettrica and SWG, Trieste for allowing me to use the Difebarometro series and data on the Gulf War, Bosnia and the Kosovo War. All other Italian surveys used in this chapter have been made available by the Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Archive at the Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca sul Cambiamento Politico (CIRCaP), Department of Political Science, University of Siena.
- 2 The Italian government employed armed forces to support the police in eight operations between July 1992 and the end of 1997.
- 3 Italy participated in the Korean War – after a long political debate – with a single medical unit, operating in Seoul with the mandate of aiding only Koreans and *not* the military units fighting in Korea. Small and Singer (1982) are correct in not reporting Italy among the participants.
- 4 All information on Italian participation in international crises is drawn from Brecher *et al.* (1988), Brecher and Wilkenfeld (1997) and the ICB Project Data Bank.
- 5 Brecher and Wilkenfeld (1997) record three Libyan–US crises. The first lasted from 12 August to 1 September 1981; the second from 24 March until 21 April 1986; and the third from December 1988 until 12 January 1989. Italian polls data are available only for the second Syrite crisis in 1986.
- 6 Of those, twenty took place under the United Nations' aegis: Somalia (February 1950–July 1960, Trusteeship administration); Palestine (June 1958, in progress, UNTSO); Lebanon (June–December 1958, UNOGIL); Kashmir (June 1959, in progress, UNMOGIP); Yemen (July 1963–September 1964, UNYOM); India–Pakistan (August 1965–February 1966, UNIMOP); Lebanon (July 1979, in progress, UNIFIL); Afghanistan (March 1989–October 1990); Iran–Iraq (August 1988–February 1991, UNIIMOG); Namibia (March 1989–April 1990, UNTAG); Iran (February 1991, in progress, UNOSGI); Iraq–Kuwait (April 1991, in progress); Iraq (May 1991, in progress, UNSCOM); Iraq–Kurdistan (May 1991–October 1991, Humanitarian aid missions 'Airone 1' and 'Airone 2' within the 'Provide Comfort' operation); Western Sahara (July 1991, MINURSO); Cambodia (May 1992, UNTAC); Somalia (August 1992–April 1994); Mozambique (December 1992–October 1994, missions 'Albatros 1' and 'Albatros 2' within UNOMOZ); El Salvador (August 1991, ONUSAL); Albania (March–August 1997). One operation was a European Union mission: Mission of observers of the European Union to control the cease-fire between the Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republics of Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia (July 1991, in progress). One operation was a NATO mission: the NATO IFOR–SFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina to control the Dayton agreement (January 1996, in progress). Five operations were bilateral initiatives at a foreign request: Malta (August 1973, in progress, military-technical assistance); Morocco (January 1977, in progress, military-technical assistance); Kuwait (September–December

- 1991, de-mining assistance); Albania (September 1991–December 1993, Humanitarian aid 'Pellicano'); Somalia (June 1983–September 1990, military-technical assistance). Two operations were multilateral operations: Lebanon I and II (August 1982–April 1984) and Rwanda (March 1994, Operation 'Ippocampo' to rescue civil personnel in Rwanda during the civil war). Two operations were autonomous initiatives of the Italian government. They were both directed either to rescue Italian citizens as in the Somalia–Ethiopia conflict (January 1991 and March 1991 respectively in Somalia and Ethiopia) or to rescue Rwandese children (operation 'Entebbe') in June 1994.
- 7 Contrary to Jentleson, mean scores excluding the so-called 'halo effect' were not calculated (even though in at least one case, the Gulf War, this is clearly present).
  - 8 UNICAB, P.065.
  - 9 In July 1988 DOXA (S.88110) asked whether those interviewed were in agreement with the use of Italian navy to help with guaranteeing freedom of sea lanes and security of Italian ships in the Persian Gulf: 58 per cent were in agreement with such a government decision, while 35 per cent opposed it and 7 per cent did not know.
  - 10 Quartararo claims (1986: 90) that the source of this proposal was the Italian government, who put it forward the first time in a meeting between the Italian and American ambassadors in Moscow, after the election of 2 June 1946.
  - 11 Quartararo (1986: 204–6) again claims that the Italians asked for a Western powers' statement (apparently on 1 March) in a meeting between the Italian foreign minister, Sforza, and the American ambassador to Italy, Dunn, (Quartararo 1986: 226) and that the Americans (contrary to the French, who would have preferred a statement referring to the entire TLT) left it to Italy to choose whether the declaration should make reference to the entire TLT or to Zone A only.
  - 12 DOXA, October 1946, N = 5013.
  - 13 DOXA, S326, S327, S328.
  - 14 These figures were computed excluding the don't knows.
  - 15 DOXA, S87100.
  - 16 UNICAB, P065.
  - 17 UNICAB, P105.
  - 18 UNICAB, P105.
  - 19 If we include those who answer that Western European governments should react with all the listed actions (including therefore the use or threat of use of force), the proportion of those in favour of the military option would rise to 8 per cent.
  - 20 DOXA, S84022.
  - 21 DOXA, S86070.
  - 22 DOXA, S86070.
  - 23 UNICAB, P065.
  - 24 UNICAB, P065.
  - 25 In a vivid example of *post hoc* rationalisations, following the question on their attitude towards Italian armed participation to the war, respondents were asked on 1 March if 'now that the war stopped, you are of the same opinion as before, you changed it in favour of the participation of Italian military forces in the Gulf War or changed it in opposition to the intervention'. 85 per cent answered that they had been of the same opinion all along, only 6 per cent declared that changed his/her opinion positively and 2 per cent negatively.
  - 26 Surveys held by SWG of Trieste.
  - 27 UNICAB, P105.
  - 28 Telephone survey carried out by SWG, Trieste on 25 January 1991 (N = 781).
  - 29 Testing whether the model with controls significantly improves upon the simpler model without controls, the additional coefficients are barely significant at the 0.01 level.
  - 30 The equation is  $L_i = 1.27 - 0.17X_{s1} - 1.56X_{s2} + 0.49X_{s3} + 0.96X_{s4} - 0.67X_{s5} - 0.94X_{s6} - 0.76X_{s7}$ . Where,  $X_{s1}$  = bombing depends;  $X_{s2}$  = bombing immoral;  $X_{s3}$  = war last 2–6 months;  $X_{s4}$  = war last 15 days–2 months;  $X_{s5}$  = war last 15 days;  $X_{s6}$  = Middle East uncertain;  $X_{s7}$  = Middle East involved.
  - 31 The regression of support for air strikes against time is  $Y = 44.6 - 0.018$  (days). Excluding the time points in June, when Yugoslavia accepted the peace plan proposed by the Russian and EU envoys, the declining trend in support for the bombing becomes starker, with a regression equation as follows:  $Y = 48.6 - 0.72$  (days). On the contrary, support for the ground operation is related to time as follows  $Y = 30.3 + 0.088$  (days). Excluding again the June time points, the positive trend is depressed as follows:  $Y = 30.9 + 0.048$  (days).
  - 32 Telephone survey by SWG (N = 607).
  - 33 The drop in support of 25 April is, in all likelihood, due to the different wording of the question.
  - 34 SWG, 25 April 1999.
  - 35 Poll of 10–13 June 1999.
  - 36 This section draws on a chapter of the Italian case written together with Paolo Bellucci for a book edited by Eric Shiraev and Richard Sobel (forthcoming).
  - 37 UNICAB, P163.
  - 38 DOXA on 31 January and 9 February 1994.
  - 39 Of course, several elements make the Italian and American questions not exactly comparable. Most of the issues raised elsewhere in this book by van der Meulen and Konijk on the complexity and ambivalence of questions on prospective casualties apply here as well.