

# **The Evolution of Maritime Security in the Mediterranean Sea: Past, Present and Future Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

The Mediterranean basin is a geographic area that encompasses more than 20 maritime states. Over the centuries, its geographical position has turned the Mediterranean into a real channel of communication and exchange of goods and services. The Cold War gave back centrality to the Mare Nostrum, as the Romans called the Mediterranean. The current Mediterranean scenario is characterised by a series of asymmetric and hybrid threats. The maritime environment lends itself to actions carried out by hybrids actors. Good examples are any terrorist actions with high media impact, such as those against vessels and offshore installations. In future, besides the already mentioned worsening of the hybrids threats, the Mediterranean scenario could see the return of a conventional actor with hegemonic ambitions in the area, namely the Russian Federation. Such a scenario would likely slow US disengagement from the Mediterranean.

**Keywords:** The Mediterranean, Islamic State, Sea Lines of Communication, Russian Federation, Italy

## **The Mediterranean: A Historical Perspective**

The Mediterranean Basin is a geographic area that encompasses more than 22 maritime states. Defined as an intercontinental sea, the Mediterranean is located at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, and covers an area of approximately 2.5 million square kilometres. Around 480 million people inhabit the states bordering these important

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waters.<sup>1</sup> Over the centuries, its geographical position progressively turned the Mediterranean into a real way of communication, as well as an essential element in exchanging goods and services. This role in the world trade was the main characteristic of this geopolitical area in ancient times. This centrality, however, gradually diminished. Furthermore, the onset of globalization has slowly marginalised the smaller seas in favour of oceans. Moreover, the unceasing technological evolution has made possible to cover ever greater distances and connected, in a shorter span of time, places that once travellers believed almost unreachable. From political and economic perspectives, several other elements have also contributed to the loss of the Mediterranean's centrality in the world geopolitical scenario, such as the rise of the European continent, comprising nation states dedicated to trading and exporting goods; the expansion of the British Empire and its economic system based on the exploitation of its worldwide colonies and the subsequent rise of the US. However, from a strategic and military point of view, the Mediterranean was doomed to historical and political isolation. It is certainly true that the Second World War was a testing ground for the development of new naval doctrines increasingly related to large oceanic spaces, such as those of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. However, the Cold War, with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members and the countries in the Warsaw Pact on the opposing sides of the divide, gave back centrality to the Mare Nostrum, as the Romans called the Mediterranean.

### **The Mediterranean Basin during the Cold War**

During the Cold War, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the other members of Warsaw Pact had deployed tens of thousands of armoured tanks along the Iron Curtain, in order to be ready to invade western Europe in case of some hypothetical escalation of tensions with NATO. The armoured division would have gone through the Fulda Gap, a strategic point located in Germany. This one was a unique land route to enter France and invade continental European NATO territories.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.eea.europa.eu/soer-2015/countries/mediterranean](http://www.eea.europa.eu/soer-2015/countries/mediterranean)

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The Soviet Navy could count on a huge amount of submarine platforms. These were both small size, like conventional propulsion submarines, and big size, like SSBN Akula project 941 (TYPHOON for NATO nomenclature). During the last years of the Cold War, Moscow was focused on developing and operating these high tonnage platforms for the strategic deterrence. Given their importance in the soviet naval strategy, Moscow decided to empower the North Sea Fleet and the Pacific Fleet with the direct access to the oceans. On the contrary, because of its geographical location between Dardanelles and Bosphorus Strait, Black Sea Fleet was viewed by Moscow as extraneous and hence not worth modernising. Both the Black and the Baltic Sea Fleet were employed for auxiliary tasks in support of amphibious and land operations, acting in concert with the Red Army involved in the invasion of Central Europe. The Soviet naval group in charge for operations in the warm Mediterranean Basin formed the so-called 5th Operational Squadron (Sovetskaya Sredizemnomorskayae Skadra). The naval task force consisted of up to 50 ships. It remained operational between 1962 and 1992, when it was dismembered after the fall of the USSR. Parts of its equipment and naval units were redistributed to newborn Ukrainian and Russian navies.

As for the US Navy, its units have been in the Mediterranean since the nineteenth century. Indeed, American vessels were involved in countering piracy that flourished along North African coasts, especially those that nowadays are part of Libya. Since then, the US has always maintained its presence in the Mediterranean. During the Second World War, the American naval units came under the command of the “Sixth Task Fleet” tactical group that, in 1950, changed its name to “Sixth Fleet.” With the end of the World War and the heightening of tensions between East and West, the Mediterranean became more and more important for the US strategy. Since 1949, the significance of this sea has grown for NATO as well, because of the presence of several Mediterranean states in the Alliance. According to the action plan, in case of war with the USSR, the Alliance would counterattack the Warsaw Pact states using air and naval assets located in the Mediterranean. Therefore, the Sixth Fleet gained greater importance, thanks to the aircraft carriers. The strategic value of the Allied Navy in the Mediterranean Sea increased as well. During the Cold War, Italy played a crucial role in

controlling maritime traffic due to its particular geographic position, enabling the country to enhance the role of its air and naval instruments. A great attention was then paid to counter the Warsaw Pact's submarine threat in the area, which had its main base in Sevastopol (Crimea), in the Black Sea.

In those years, the security domain in the Mediterranean Sea was characterised by what was known as “good order at sea”: a pure “State on State” related threat perception concept. At that time, the only threat was conventional: the enemy was a well-defined state actor, which, operationally, was identified as the Soviet Navy. As already mentioned, the Italian Navy highly empowered its anti-submarine warfare component (ASW) by purchasing ASW frigates and maritime patrol aircraft that were dedicated to build the security screen for the US Navy Task Force in the Mediterranean Sea. At the same time, Italy improved the role of the anti-ship capabilities of its Air Force. In fact, the Italian peninsula would be a perfect airport to project airpower against enemy fleet in the Mediterranean. In particular, the Air Force adopted the Kormoran anti-ship missiles as a specific weapon for Italian Tornado fighter-bombers. These aircraft, located in Gioia del Colle air-base, had been an instrument for Italian sea-denial and maritime interdiction strategy throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In order to comprehend the broader Mediterranean chessboard, it is important to recall the role played by Adriatic Sea during the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> Its low seabed and the easy-to-control choke point at its southern entrance (the Otranto Channel) make it a perfect scenario for hybrid and unconventional threats. During the conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries, the asymmetry of Adriatic scenario would materialise through the use of missile boats and small tonnage vessels aimed at conducting sea-denial missions. A sort of asymmetric strategy still remains. Today, the main threat to the security of the Adriatic is from the presence of structured criminal organisations, capable of handling illicit trafficking. Moreover, the threat of infiltration of terrorists to attack

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<sup>2</sup> The Adriatic Sea is an arm of the Mediterranean Sea, lying between the Italian and Balkan peninsulas.

coastal infrastructure in the area, such as tourist resorts or the vital energy hubs, cannot be discounted. In this regard, a particularly sensitive target would be Italy's planned LNG Terminal offshore Porto Levante, a fundamental infrastructure for the needs of the country and its national energy strategy.

With the end of the Cold War and the competition between the two blocks, a high intensity conventional military clash became unlikely within the Mediterranean security scenarios. Consequently, since the 1990s, NATO has gradually reduced its naval presence in the area, by closing bases and outposts and dismissing a large number of its military assets. In the same way, the states at the southern side of the Mediterranean Sea have reduced their fleet, together with their sea-denial skills, due to the end of funding from the former USSR

### **The Role of the Mediterranean in the Era of Globalised Trade**

The fall of the Berlin wall, and the spread of the globalization, enabled some former European colonies to rise both economically and politically. Indeed, nowadays more than 90% of the transportation of goods on a global scale goes by sea. With the delocalisation of productive centres in Asia and the Pacific region, the Mediterranean has become a crucial node, linking the commercial routes from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The so-called Mare Nostrum became an important point for long-range intermodal transportation, which resulted in stealing big market shares from the Northern European historical ports.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the economic progress made by the littoral states, especially those of Maghreb region, the number of containers handled in the Mediterranean area is expected to rise in the near future. As an example, 17 million TEUs are estimated to be in transit in various ports of the Mediterranean

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<sup>3</sup> An example of this is the fact that the maritime component of the new "Silk Road," proposed by the Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, will have its final landing in the port of Venice (Italy) and one of its key junctions is the port of Piraeus (Greece).

in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Among the historical and extremely important ports are Port Said (Egypt), Gioia Tauro (Italy), Tangiers (Morocco) and Algeciras (Spain).<sup>5</sup>

Altogether, EU member states can boast around 1200 ports of which 764 are major ports. European ship-owners run 30% of the total number of vessels worldwide, as well as 35% of the total tonnage.<sup>6</sup> In particular, the maritime trade has always been strategic for Italy: lack of raw materials has always pushed Italy to look for trading partners, wherever those may be. The imported raw materials are first consumed inside the country and the remaining part is sold again in the international market. The free movement of goods by sea is a strategic component for economic security and, consequently, for national security. This is true not only for littoral states but for all other European countries. Therefore, the protection of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) has always been a crucial point in the international agenda of NATO and the European institutions.

### **The Actual Threats to Maritime Security**

The evolving characteristics of the globalization process have created a number of asymmetric and hybrid challenges for the Mediterranean Basin. Nowadays, the old concept of “good order at sea,” which was limited to the conventional perception of threats and security in the maritime domain, has evolved into the broader acceptance of “maritime

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<sup>4</sup> Today, much of the intercontinental sea cargo travels in containers. This has eased handling whilst increasing intermodal operations. TEU (Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit) is the unit for measuring the capacity of a container, a container ship, a container terminal and the statistics of the container transit in a port. A forty-foot container is regarded as two twenty-foot containers or 2 TEUs.

<sup>5</sup> [www.srm-maritimeconomy.com/it/news/intra-mediterranean-container-traffic-17-million-teu-by-2017.html](http://www.srm-maritimeconomy.com/it/news/intra-mediterranean-container-traffic-17-million-teu-by-2017.html)

<sup>6</sup> “The EU Maritime Security Strategy and Action Plan: INFORMATION TOOLKIT,” [http://eeas.europa.eu/maritime\\_security/docs/maritime-security-information-toolkit\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/maritime_security/docs/maritime-security-information-toolkit_en.pdf)

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security.” It is so because the concept of “security” itself has expanded in several ways, to include maritime terrorism, pollution, trafficking, piracy, local wars, etc.

The specific characteristics of geopolitical scenario in the Mediterranean area have drawn the attention of the EU and NATO to maritime-oriented strategies. This growing realisation of the strategic importance of maritime issues has resulted in two fundamental documents: NATO Alliance Maritime Strategy (AMS), of 2011, and the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS), of 2014.

During the past decade, NATO forces have operated mostly in contexts characterised by the presence of irregular armed groups, mainly engaged in indirect and guerrilla style fights. This approach was determined by the considerable technological asymmetry, which implied a scenario characterised by “Irregular Warfare” (IW) and asymmetrical strikes. Moreover, doctrinal and strategic improvisations made by some “conventional weak” actors when confronted with the overwhelming power of Western technology, culminated in the use of “Hybrid Warfare.” This method combines conventional and irregular aspects but is characterised also by a constant manipulation of information. It entails exploitation of the political and ideological components of the conflict, through an extremely aggressive narrative. The first manifestation of this “Hybrid Warfare” was seen in the Iranian actions, which took place in the 1980s in the waters of the Persian Gulf. Subsequently, it was promoted by the famous Chinese theory of “war without limits” and, finally, it reached its peak in the Ukrainian crisis. Perhaps, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took it even further.

The maritime environment lends itself to actions carried out by hybrids actors. A good example is terrorist actions with high media impact, such as those against vessels and offshore installations. These actions are likely to be easily conducted because, in most cases, ships follow fixed routes, which must go through the mandatory choke points. In the Mediterranean Sea, these entry and exit routes are the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal and the Strait of the Dardanelles/Bosporus, as well as others, such as the Strait of Messina. Underwater oil and gas

supply lines, which allow gas pipelines to reach the Sicilian coast from Libya, as well as submarine cables used for broadband, essential for European economies and societies, have enormous importance for Italy. The main target of this kind of attacks are loading and unloading ports or cruise ships. Indeed, besides the importance of the psychological impact, these kinds of attacks damage economic interests of the target state and affect public opinion. When applied in the maritime sector, the underlying asymmetry of terrorist or hybrid actions favours the sea-denial operations and Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), which are cost-effective and can generate extensive media coverage.

The group which used terrorist techniques in naval context in the most innovative way was certainly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), especially their maritime branch, the Sea Tigers. By building mini-submarines for offensive operations, as well as by using Submersible Improvised Explosive Devices against ports and hubs of Sinhalese commercial maritime routes, LTTE performed real maritime interdiction operations against the Marina of Colombo.<sup>7</sup> Al Qaeda too has sought to strike the economic heart of the so-called “Far Enemy,” through attacks against naval vessels standing for the Western presence in the Middle East. Moreover, the group has also exploited oceans as a way for it to survive. Indeed, oceans offered al Qaeda the opportunity to hide and move their resources by ship and, in doing so, evade surveillance by state actors and naval task forces. The most significant attacks from al Qaeda were against the destroyer USS Cole in port of Aden, Yemen in 2000, and against the tanker Limburg in 2002, off the coast of Yemen. Other terrorist groups operating in Middle East, such as the Gama al Islamiyya, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine also have been involved in sea activities. However, they are focused on smuggling and illegal activities, in order to find resources to ensure their survival.

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<sup>7</sup> Seth G. Jones, *The Future of Irregular Warfare*, Testimony presented before the House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities on March 27, 2012, [www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2012/RAND\\_CT374.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2012/RAND_CT374.pdf)



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A different case is that of Hezbollah. The operational capabilities expressed by the military wing of the group have taken a big leap forward during the 2006 war against the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). On July 14, 2006, a type C-802 Chinese-made anti-ship missile hit the Israeli Corvette INS Hanit and killed four crew members and severely damaged the ship. The Hezbollah action took ship's crew off guard, as the intelligence information regarding the Lebanese group's arsenal at the time did not consider it able to possess such anti-ship capability/sea-denial.

A similar incident occurred on July 15, 2015, when an Egyptian military boat was hit by a Soviet-made anti-tank missile, launched by Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, a militant group active in Sinai. The group is believed to be one of the most lethal and better trained militant organisations in Egypt. It had already become known for its terrorist activities in the maritime domain. In November 2014, when a military patrol boat was in the Egyptian port of Damietta, Ansa Bait al-Maqdis managed to take its control in an operation apparently aimed at testing the feasibility of this type of actions. The ultimate goal was to launch a series of suicide bombings against oil installations or offshore gas platforms in the area. These episodes show that reusing boats for offensive purposes has now become an option for many terrorist or insurgent groups. Moreover, this has become feasible for anyone who can count on a good budget and on control over some territory. The case of Somali piracy is a striking example of this modus operandi.

The presence of groups affiliated to the Islamic State in some Mediterranean littoral countries has raised the level of risk of incidents similar to those carried out by Ansar Bait al-Maqdis in Egypt. In particular, the political and security situation in today's Libya draws great attention of states like Italy, which has strong economic interests in the region and would be directly and heavily exposed to a possible worsening of the situation. Following the foreign intervention in Libya in 2011, sea control capabilities of Tripoli have greatly eroded, leaving control of the territorial waters to the mercy of various tribes and militias. In this regard, groups operating in Derna and Cyrenaica, most of them trained by Islamic extremists, would represent the biggest problem. Therefore, in the area, the threat of a terrorist attack against offshore oil and gas

installations and the SLOCs, which pass in front of the Libyan coast, seems real. However, in the Libyan scenario, characterised by the presence of several tribal factions as well as Islamist militias, the risk of attacks against oil facilities seems unlikely, primarily because at the moment the extraction of crude oil for these groups is the main source of earning.

The Bardo Museum in Tunisia was hit by a terrorist attack on March 18, 2011. Three months later, on June 26, a tourist resort in Sousse was also hit. Both attacks are an example of how real is the terrorist threat in the area. Terrorist actions with important reverberations in the maritime security domain could also be perpetrated by the so-called lone wolves. These people act and kill, motivated by extremist beliefs and ideologies but without a proper involvement in any terrorist organisation. Such a threat cannot be underestimated, especially in light of Islamic State's ability to stress the high emotional impact of its actions and to gain media attention for them. In this sense, the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts by militias affiliated to the IS in February 2015, or the attacks against Tunisian tourism, the vital sector of the country's economy, constitute an important source of debate and study to help predict terrorist organisations' future strategic posture.

Moreover, the war-ravaged Libyan land is facing another problem, which has negative repercussions for the Mediterranean, namely the phenomenon of illegal migration. The interaction between complex economic, social, political and territorial phenomena, characterising the geopolitical area of the Sahel and, broadly speaking, of the sub-Saharan Africa, has generated a growing migratory pressure towards the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in recent years. The Mediterranean Sea is not only a transit channel for goods and services but, unfortunately, it has also become a conduit for trafficking in human beings.

The problem of illegal migration by sea has grown exponentially since the 1990s, when European countries began to adopt restrictive regimes concerning visas and licenses for immigrants from poor countries. In this case, the security threat is no longer a military matter, but rather a humanitarian and public order issue. In particular, for these

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countries bordering the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the issue is related to fighting criminal organisations that benefit from human trafficking. However, economic problems and the lack of means and training often undermine the efficiency of the efforts by these countries. Some states are also suffering from rampant corruption in their security services, which affects the fight against these illegal activities.

This new political instability near the southern borders of Europe has incubated and created a series of hybrid threats against the Mediterranean states, which are directly exposed to them. The new US focus on the Pacific Ocean resulted in the reduction of its naval presence in the Mediterranean area which, in turn, increased this perception of instability. The loss of importance of Mediterranean's context in international agenda has allowed non-state actors, the transnational criminal networks and extremist organisations to gain margin of manoeuvre and to have more impact within the political dynamics of the area. Behind this, the heavy economic crisis, which recently hit Europe, affected NATO countries' budgets, with a consequent contraction of the forces' capability to project in the maritime sector and to control the sea.

In particular, hybrid conflicts or low intensity conflicts have extensively engaged, and profoundly influenced, the European armed forces during the last five years. Therefore, navies have progressively equipped themselves with tools and platforms suitable to counter a wide range of threats that fall within the Maritime Irregular Warfare (MIW). For example, most of the vessels that operate in dangerous waters have onboard Special Forces detachments and teams of sailors that are trained to use machine guns and other defensive systems onboard the ships. The reduced US presence in the Mediterranean has increased the liability of the European Navy, which until 2000, could count on the reassuring presence of the US military in the region. The budgetary difficulties arising as a result of the economic crisis have resulted in reduced number of naval platforms available for a single state. This has naturally resulted in declining operating performances and operational capabilities. The necessity to increase the presence on the water led several military chiefs to put a limited number of wide modularity and flexibility ships into service as a measure to ensure the wide and varied operating output possible.

Therefore, classes of ships and submarines appeared, which were able to cope both high intensity tasks and a wide range of constabulary operations. Notable developments in this regard have been the Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV), boats which are perfect to carry out the tasks before being exposed. Also the amphibious and aircraft components are not left out, which, despite the constraints imposed by budgetary resources, remain among the priorities for the major navies of European NATO countries. The possession of these advanced machines makes it possible to carry out those operations of maritime power projection which are considered essential for the security and prosperity of the continent.

### **Reaction by NATO and Europe**

In the face of these challenges, the Mediterranean countries have reacted first by increasing cooperation within their respective supranational organisations and subsequently by using their military and public policies.

Following the attacks on September 11 2001, NATO responded by launching the operation “Active Endeavour,” aiming at demonstrating solidarity, cohesion and steadfastness of member countries of the Alliance in countering asymmetric threats and exercising a credible deterrence against any possible terrorist activity in the Mediterranean.

So, once again, the security and safety of the SLOCs became a priority for the Alliance, which engaged itself in protecting these routes, no longer from the Soviet fleet but from al Qaeda. Since 2003, monitoring activities and boarding have significantly contributed to the increased perception of safety on the part of the civil and commercial ships operating in the area. These operations have evolved from collective actions based on Article 5 of the NATO Charter to a wider cooperation. These operations covered also non-NATO countries present in the Mediterranean Basin. Since 2004, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Israel and Jordan have enhanced their cooperation, thanks to a programme called “Mediterranean Dialogue.” Moreover, the results of the operation “Active Endeavour” are perfectly in line with the principles contained in the Alliance Maritime Strategy approved in

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January 2011. This strategy envisages deterrence and collective defence, crisis resolution, as well as maritime security cooperation. The operation “Active Endeavour” is based at Maritime Command Headquarters (HQMARCOM), in Northwood, the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

Europe’s maritime security is an essential element for the European Union, since it guarantees the prosperity of each individual member state. With the adoption of the EU Maritime Security Strategy on June, 24 2014, this importance has been reiterated. The innovative approach of this strategy provides an increased opportunity for substantial dialogue and cooperation between member states’ military and police forces in dealing with problems concerning maritime safety. It is in the interest of both the EU and NATO to increase and expand cooperation with all Mediterranean countries. So, each coastal state, under the auspices of Brussels, should not be a mere spectator, but should aim at becoming security producer and consumer with its availability in terms of both human resources and hardware. The founding principles underlying the EU Maritime Security Strategy are the same as those underpinning other institutions of the European Union, namely multilateralism, respect for human rights and promotion of the rule of law.

These principles were pronounced by Brussels in order to define an action plan, which was adopted on December 16, 2014, is based on five pillars: External Action; Maritime Awareness, Surveillance and Information Sharing; Capability Development; Risk Management, Protection of Critical Maritime Infrastructure and Crisis Response and Maritime Security Research and Innovation, Education and Training. The principle of multilateralism and international cooperation remains the cornerstone of the EU action plan, since importance has been given to the cooperation between various government agencies, and also at international level.<sup>9</sup> One of the examples of this approach is the European

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<sup>8</sup> “Operation Active Endeavour,” March 26, 2015, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_7932.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_7932.htm)

<sup>9</sup> “EUROPEAN UNION MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY,” *Council of the European Union* (June 24, 14),

Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation, better known as FRONTEX. FRONTEX was established with the aim of coordinating the efforts of the EU member States in the fight against illegal migration. Its tasks are not limited to operational coordination, but also include a more extensive involvement in planning, training, and information sharing. The latter aspect is essential to ensure the overall effectiveness of the efforts against illegal activities, especially in maritime environment. Italy has a driving position within these operations, thanks to its geographical position at the centre of the Mediterranean, its long experience in the field of out-of-area operations and its historical and cultural ties with the littoral countries. As an example, we can mention the Mare Nostrum operation. This operation was launched unilaterally by the Italian Navy after a tragic shipwreck on October 3, 2013, to strengthen national arrangements for patrolling the Strait of Sicily. Starting from November 1, 2014, Mare Nostrum was replaced by operation Triton, which is placed under the coordination of the European agency, FRONTEX.

The unabated illegal migration prompted the European Council to launch the operation EU NAVFOR MED on June, 27, 2015. By utilising the concerned littoral states' capacities, the operation aimed to reduce the migrant influx by destroying criminal networks involved in migrants' exploitation and trafficking in south-central Mediterranean flux. Italy is at the vanguard of this operation that is being carried out at the strategic and operative level by the European Italian Headquarters (IT EU-OHQ), based in Rome Centocelle. EU NAVFOR MED is led by Admiral Enrico Credendino. 14 European Nations are currently involved in this operation, which are Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Slovenia, Greece, Luxembourg, Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands and Sweden. Its first phase intended to conduct intelligence missions and to patrol the high seas in accordance with international law. It started on June 27, 2015, by deploying assets in the operations area of the Central Mediterranean, just in front of the Libyan coasts. It was under the command of Rear-Admiral Gueglio. With the beginning of phase two, renamed "Operation Sophia," naval units have been engaged in

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<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2011205%202014%20INIT>

fighting the traffickers. Being implemented since the beginning of October, the operation has expanded not only in quantitative terms (9 vessels in total), but also in terms of nature of activities which now involve boarding vessel seizure operations.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The current maritime security scenario in the Mediterranean is characterised by a number of asymmetric and hybrid threats. These menaces had important consequences both for the organisation of national navies and for redefinition of roles and training necessary to counter those threats. For example, we can recall how the Italian Navy, as well as other state bodies, have long been engaged in fighting these challenges which, in the near future, could drastically worsen if the internal security in the Maghreb countries deteriorates further. The most emblematic case is Libya, whose internal developments and their repercussions for maritime security will have a major impact for Italy's internal public order and energy supplies. The inherent dual capabilities of naval platforms can address both conventional and asymmetrical missions. The most recent assets are further expanding these capabilities. One of the crucial factors is the need for increased interaction between the police bodies with the respective armed forces. This need has become contingent with the appearance of phenomena related to the MIW in the Mediterranean Sea. For the near future, it would be desirable to keep pushing towards greater integration at supranational and European community levels on patrolling and sea-control operations and broadly against asymmetric threats. Two good examples in this respect are Triton and Sophia operations. With a high degree of operative and humanitarian value, these operations present an opportunity to raise awareness among Northern European countries about the issues concerning the Mediterranean.

In future, besides the already mentioned hybrid threats, the Mediterranean scenario could see the return of a conventional actor with hegemonic ambitions in the area, namely the Russian Federation. If its

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<sup>10</sup> [www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/operazioni-in-corso/Pagine/EUNAVFORMED.aspx](http://www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/operazioni-in-corso/Pagine/EUNAVFORMED.aspx)

recent intervention in Syria is to go by, Moscow's plans to restore a stable presence in the area cannot be ruled out. These could involve strengthening and turning the current port of Tartus into a real operational base for permanently accommodating its naval and underwater assets. Such a scenario is likely to slow the US disengagement from the Mediterranean.