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"The major international security challenges in 2010: Italy's role and vision"

Intervention of:
Franco Frattini,

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Ladies and gentlemen,

in 2010 we face an “arch of instability” which stretches from the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula to Central Asia. A challenge that poses serious threats to international security and means that we cannot manage the regional crises – Somalia, Yemen, Iran and Afghanistan – as completely separate issues. They present some common aspects on which to reflect.

Afghanistan: for a civil surge – I shall begin by commenting briefly on Afghanistan, an issue you are well familiar with. As you know, Italy reacted positively and promptly to President Obama’s speech at West Point and to his proposal for a new counter-insurgency approach. Our government has decided to increase its military contingent by 1000 units as part of a transition strategy whose fundamental aim is to progressively restore Afghanistan to the Afghans.

The United States, NATO and the international community have now set



themselves a realistic and credible goal in Afghanistan, not least to illustrate in a transparent and effective manner to our various public opinions the reasons for our massive commitment in that country. In this context, the London Conference is a first step and an important opportunity to set the collaboration between the international community and the Afghan government on a new track. A new pact that will be completed - we hope - by a Kabul Conference. A new pact that sees the authorities in Kabul take on more responsibility and which will enable those supporting them with financial and human resources to measure the concrete results achieved, especially in key sectors such as governance, development and fighting corruption.

While the country's security naturally remains our utmost priority, Italy has long been convinced that it is also essential to strengthen our commitment in the civilian and regional cooperation sectors. In other words, we need a comprehensive civil and political reconstruction strategy that makes cooperation between the military intervention and the civilian dimension more fruitful and better coordinated.

Strengthening the civilian component of our strategy and the civilian commitment at international level means placing the protection of the population at the centre of our actions and doing everything we possibly can to prevent civilian victims in ISAF actions against the insurgency. It means placing UNAMA in a condition to play its pivotal civil coordination role to best effect. It means strengthening the civil dimension of NATO. It means enhancing training and mentoring activities for the Afghan security forces through NTM-A and EUPOL. In this sector - as we know - Italy plays a leading role. It means facilitating the process, which must be guided by the Afghan authorities, of reconciliation with and re-integration of the insurgents. It means, as emerged at the G8 meeting in Trieste, improving regional integration in sectors such as border management, fighting illicit trafficking, and social and economic development. It means, finally, having a greater impact on the Afghan people's daily lives by making an additional effort for economic reconstruction, institution-building and consolidation, and good governance.

The lessons we have learned in Afghanistan (more ownership, a comprehensive approach and the involvement of the regional actors concerned) should also help us in tackling other highly important challenges - such as Yemen - for international security.

Yemen: not only a new frontier of terrorism - Italian policy has for some time now been focused on Yemen, in the conviction that the country's stability is a crucial challenge in combating terrorism and piracy and a vital factor for the security of the Middle East, the Gulf and the Horn of Africa. We drew international attention to this issue already in the context of our G8 Presidency. In addition, at the bilateral level we are also developing important capacity-building programmes in the maritime security sector (by reinforcing the radar coastal-monitoring system and training Yemeni coastguards).

But we must not view Yemen simply as a new frontier of terrorism. The question is a much broader one, caused by the general state of fragility of its institutions and those of its neighbours. This is a region characterised by a weak capacity to control its territory and by highly permeable borders. An area where illegal trafficking, uncontrolled migrations, terrorist activity and piracy can easily develop and be interconnected. Therefore, if we wish to succeed in tackling the destabilising factors that are present in Yemen, we should intervene not just on their external manifestations but also - and especially - on the context producing them, by seeking to remove their deeper causes.



To achieve this result, our approach should be twofold. On the one hand, we have to acknowledge a national and regional ownership of the initiatives aimed at re-stabilising the country. Rather than giving the impression of imposing solutions from the outside, we should help local and regional actors (Yemen, all the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the Arab League) to find their own solutions. And on the other, we need to effectively support Yemen's re-stabilisation process

through a coordinated effort by the international community, especially in the following areas of intervention: social and economic measures; institution building; security; coastal monitoring and patrolling; and combating smuggling and trafficking.

To implement this approach, however, we need an operational tool. And Italy, in view also of the London Conference scheduled for 27 January 2010, has advanced a proposal in this respect. Italy's vision is that Yemen, together with the GCC countries, should work out a re-stabilisation strategy which could be shared by a group of countries and organisations named "Friends of Yemen". The Group should be result-oriented and could meet in the region in the weeks following the London Conference. Alternately, we are ready to host it in Rome.

Somalia: the dangerous spill-over effect – As I have just said, there is a connection between the various forms of fragility found in Yemen, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa. One source of this instability is most certainly the situation in Somalia, a question that was the focus of the talks I had during my recent mission to Africa.

On this issue, the underlying message was clear: the crisis in Somalia has a dangerous spill-over effect throughout the wider region, as well as for Europe. It represents a clear and present threat to international security, due mainly to terrorism as well as piracy. In the region there is a widespread feeling – backed up by anecdotal evidence – that the upper layers of the Shabaab leadership are predominantly constituted by foreign fighters, with strong ties to Al Qaeda.

Italy has been in the forefront in raising international awareness on Somalia. In my recent visit to Africa I also met with President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed in Nairobi and restate our full support to Transitional Federal Government (TFG). There is no alternative to a consolidation of the TFG. In close cooperation with it, we are providing our contribution to strengthening its institutions. The urgent priority now is security: Italy committed a total of nearly 13 million euros in 2009 to the Somali security forces and the African Union peacekeeping mission, AMISOM. We will continue our engagement this year by providing training to security forces. Two more factors are crucial to promoting peace and stability in that country: improved living conditions for the population and continued national reconciliation efforts. In this respect, the international community needs to fulfil its pledges and concretely support the Somali government through a comprehensive approach that encompasses security on the ground, stable and democratic institutions, humanitarian assistance, and rebuilding the Somali economy.

Iran: an inadequate response; double track still valid; discussion on further measures started – A nuclear Iran is, for Italy, an unacceptable prospect. In Italy's view, an Iran with nuclear weapons would be a grave threat to regional security in the Middle East. A threat both for Israel, and for the moderate Arab countries that we are relying on to build a stable peace in the region. A nuclear Iran would also pose a critical threat to global security. It would trigger a nuclear race by other countries and increase the risk to the security of each and every one of us. The Iranian question is, therefore, also a crucial test of the credibility of the current multilateral non-proliferation regime.

In order to prevent this threat from materialising we believe that the “open hand” policy advocated by President Obama was the right one to choose. Even if Iran has, unfortunately, still not responded to this gesture as we would have hoped, the “open hand” policy did achieve results, at least two. First, it increased and cemented international solidarity on the Iranian question (we need only look at Russia's position, which today is much closer to the Western one than it was a year ago). Second, it awoke Iranian society to reality: the protests in the streets of Teheran are an expression of the Iranian people's growing awareness that “the problem lies not in Washington but in Teheran”.

That said, the latest signals from Teheran do not give us cause for optimism. Quite the contrary. Iran's nuclear counter-proposal is unacceptable. The transfer abroad of a significant amount of Iranian enriched uranium would have certainly represented an important confidence building measure, which could have given the negotiation a new diplomatic space. Yet another lost opportunity.

In addition to this, we continue to witness the violent repression of the opposition. Italy has reacted firmly to this repression and has urged a joint European response. We do not intend to interfere in Iran's domestic political issues, but we firmly believe that every government has an obligation to uphold certain fundamental rights, which include the protection of its citizens' lives.

Nevertheless, vis-à-vis Iran and the nuclear issue we remain committed to our dual track approach. The “open hand policy” is still valid but we cannot go on waiting indefinitely for a positive response. We are therefore discussing with our partners and allies which further measures to take in the face of the Iranian government's refusal to cooperate. All the options are on the table, starting with economic sanctions. But such a form of pressure on the Iranian government will be much more effective if it is approved by a large number of countries and targeted at those members of the Iranian government who refuse to cooperate. Iran is not just a Western problem. The emerging powers, including China and India, will also need to shoulder their responsibilities. At the same time, if it proves to be impossible to reach agreement in the United Nations Security Council, we need to be prepared to consider the possibility of sanctions adopted by a smaller group of like-minded countries.

In both these scenarios, Italy will play, as always, a constructive part in the debate and apply the decisions adopted, coherently and in full agreement with our allies and partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

allow me to conclude on a methodological note: in managing all these security challenges transatlantic cooperation is and remains crucial. When global security is at stake, although we need to count on the responsibility and contribution of all, there is only one indispensable G2: the G2 of the United States and Europe. A different Europe. With a global role and a global mindset. A Europe that speaks with a single voice on the international stage. A Europe with the ability to produce peace and security.