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ESSAY

THOUGHTS ON THE NATO SUMMIT IN ANKARA: THE UNWANTED SUMMIT

Gábor Marosfi – Péter Stepper

ABSTRACT

The Ankara NATO Summit of 7–8 July 2026 will convene at a moment when transatlantic unity is under strain, allied expectations are subdued, and the Alliance is seeking to avoid renewed confrontation while still producing a credible political outcome. The summit is expected to test whether Europe can move from burden-sharing toward burden shifting, with greater responsibility for the continent's conventional defence while remaining under the American strategic umbrella. The Ankara Summit offers a focused opportunity to examine how NATO manages unity, allocates burdens, and addresses the strategic significance of its southern flank under conditions of heightened uncertainty.

Keywords: NATO, Ankara Summit 2026, Donald Trump

INTRODUCTION

The Ankara NATO Summit of 7–8 July 2026 will convene at a moment when transatlantic unity is under strain, allied expectations are subdued, and the Alliance is seeking to avoid renewed confrontation while still producing a credible political outcome.[1] As earlier scholarship on NATO's evolution suggests, the Alliance remains central to Europe–US security cooperation even as unresolved questions persist about Europe's role, military spending, and the future scope of American engagement.[2] The meeting's symbolic significance is heightened by its location: Ankara is intended to remind Allies that NATO's "360-degree" approach should extend beyond the eastern flank to the southern neighbourhood, where terrorism, instability in the Middle East, migration pressure, and the growing influence of Russia and China continue to affect European security.[3] At the same time, the summit is expected to test whether Europe can move from burden-sharing toward burden shifting, with greater responsibility for the continent's conventional defence while remaining under the American strategic umbrella.[4] This challenge is especially acute given uncertainty over the United States' commitment, internal disagreements over Ukraine and Iran, and the broader need to sustain allied cohesion through further increases in defence spending, expanded defence industrial capacity, and more durable support for Ukraine.[5] Turkey's role is central to this discussion: Ankara is both indispensable to NATO because of its military capabilities, geographical position, and strategic control of access routes to the Black Sea, and persistently difficult to manage because of long-standing tensions with Allies and a recurring strategy of linking support to other security issues.[6] In this sense, the Ankara

Summit offers a focused opportunity to examine how NATO manages unity, allocates burdens, and addresses the strategic significance of its southern flank under conditions of heightened uncertainty.

THE TRUMP FACTOR

NATO summits do not only serve consultation and decision-making purposes; they also have symbolic and protocol functions. Their main purpose is to discuss current issues affecting common security issues relevant to NATO's agenda, review the implementation of earlier decisions, and adopt new political initiatives, which create pressure to produce tangible results for both the host country and the Alliance as a whole.[7]

The choice of venue is itself highly symbolic. Although hosting is voluntary for member states, the decision is collective and often made years in advance, while the burden of organisation is a concrete form of burden-sharing that also brings political attention to the host. The agenda is determined by consensus, but the host's priorities are usually taken into informal consideration, reflecting NATO's "360-degree" approach.

The rotation of Summit venues is notable: after Madrid, Vilnius, Washington, and The Hague, Ankara follows as the easternmost capital of a NATO member state. The previous NATO summit in Turkey was held in Istanbul in 2004, where the main outcomes were the launch of the NATO Training Mission-Iraq and the establishment of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.[8] By contrast, similar-scale decisions in Ankara now seem highly unlikely.

The 2026 Ankara Summit is expected to take place at a low point in transatlantic relations. Allies have become more accustomed to absorbing pressure since the second Trump administration took office,

and the atmosphere has grown more resigned in the face of tariffs, territorial claims involving Canada and Greenland, and repeated anti-NATO statements from the president.[9] The present context has therefore made NATO and the "transatlantic family" more willing to tolerate Trump than in 2016.

Washington's behaviour is often described as "predictably unpredictable," with rapid policy shifts closely tracked by the administration's senior leadership.[10] The second Trump administration is said to lack the circle of senior figures that once provided control and feedback, and one NATO diplomat is quoted as saying that there is "an American-shaped hole in NATO" that no other member state can fill.[11] In this environment, European Allies and Canada are cautious about reopening settled NATO positions because they fear outcomes that could be less favourable than the present ones, including on Russia or Ukraine's NATO prospects.[12]

The 2025 Hague Summit agreed that member states would raise defence and security spending to 5% of GDP by 2035, with 3.5% for military capabilities and 1.5% for infrastructure, resilience, innovation, and dual-use technologies. This decision is partly read as a response to Donald Trump's long-standing demands, while the United States reaffirmed its commitment to NATO's collective defence.[13] Yet the compromise remains difficult in practice, since NATO now treats security as extending beyond conventional military hardware to include technological innovation, industrial capacity, critical infrastructure protection, cyber defence, and resilience.[14]

The feasibility of the 5% target is therefore expected to be a central issue in Ankara. Many governments still face uncertainty over how defence spending can rise to that level without damaging welfare systems, increasing public debt unsustainably, or turning defence

policy into a domestic political target.[15] Some Allied capitals are already tempted to use creative accounting to meet the targets, and NATO has a tradition of adjusting methodology to political reality.[16]

The war in Ukraine has fundamentally transformed the Euro-Atlantic security environment, and NATO now regards Russia as a long-term threat.[17] At the same time, Ukraine's prospective membership has moved into the background, with the Hague declaration emphasising continued military support rather than the earlier language of an "irreversible path". Ukraine is thus becoming more deeply integrated into NATO's strategic system without receiving full membership, allowing the Alliance to appear both committed and cautious.[18]

Another important message from The Hague was that Europe must assume greater responsibility for its own defence. While the United States remains NATO's leading power, its attention is increasingly shifting towards the Indo-Pacific region. European states therefore remain heavily dependent on the United States for strategic capabilities such as aerial refuelling, air defence, intelligence, satellite reconnaissance, and long-range strike.[19]

NATO continues to focus primarily on northern and eastern threats, while the southern neighbourhood receives less attention. This is particularly sensitive for Turkey, given that terrorism, instability in the Middle East, migration pressure, and the growing influence of Russia and China in the south directly affect European security. These issues appeared only marginally at The Hague, which gives the Ankara venue symbolic significance as a reminder that NATO's "360-degree" approach should be more than rhetorical. Turkey remains an indispensable ally because of its strategic geographical position, military capabilities, and regional role. It has

one of the largest armed forces in the Alliance, and controls access routes to the Black Sea.[20]

At the same time, Turkey has remained an increasingly autonomous and sometimes difficult-to-manage ally. Its relations with the United States and several European allies have been marked by a persistent crisis of trust.[21] In the academic literature, Turkey is also described as using an "issue linkage strategy,"[22] linking its support within NATO to other political or security-related matters, as seen in episodes ranging from Greece's return to NATO structures to the accession of Finland and Sweden. The core of this strategy has been to raise political costs inside the Alliance in order to secure greater consideration of Ankara's own priorities.

Turkey's veto threats over Finnish and Swedish accession showed that Ankara can delay Allied decisions, but only temporarily and ultimately at the price of compromise. It secured some political and military concessions, including on F-16 negotiations and counterterrorism cooperation, but these outcomes were partial rather than systemic. More broadly, NATO's internal logic remains one in which bargaining, delay, and political pressure are possible, but where the costs of full confrontation are usually avoided – but not always forgotten.

Against this backdrop, the Ankara summit is expected to be shaped by efforts to sustain transatlantic unity under heightened strain.[23] Meaningful progress is expected, or at least a presentable political product, in three areas: further defence spending, expanded defence industrial capacity, and more sustainable and equitable support for Ukraine. The summit also offers Turkey an opportunity to present itself not as a problem within the Alliance, but as a contributor to possible solutions.

NATO summits also have an important communiqué function, allowing member states to record joint positions on issues affecting the Alliance's security and, more broadly, international security. A shorter declaration may be issued instead of a full communiqué, especially where consensus is limited or a shorter public statement is needed.[24] The Hague Summit in 2025 produced a short declaration, whereas a detailed communiqué had last been adopted in Washington in 2024.

The present mood is therefore one of trying to "get through the summit without trouble." In that sense, the situation resembles 2019, when NATO quietly marked its 70th anniversary in London – calling the event a 'Leaders' Meeting' instead of a 'Summit' – amid controversy over the alliance's political condition. It is possible that the next 'full summit' may not occur until 2029, with virtual consultation or 'Leaders' Meeting' remaining an alternative if circumstances require it. With the inherent danger of repeating the near-catastrophic 2018 Brussels Summit and further deepening the transatlantic rift, many allies consider the Ankara Summit more of an obligation rather than an opportunity for frank discussion and moving ahead NATO's agenda. As summed up strikingly by an unnamed NATO-official: "We are one tweet away from disaster". However, when it comes to strategic communication, every NATO Summit in history has been successful, and Ankara will not be an exception to this rule.

TURKEY'S NATO POLICY

Turkey's NATO policy has become more ambivalent over the past two decades, moving from a largely interests-based but still alliance-compatible approach toward a more assertive search for strategic autonomy. In the early AKP period, Turkish foreign policy was shaped by the logic of interdependence, while in the second decade this logic

was gradually replaced by interventionism, unilateralism, and coercive diplomacy under the banner of autonomy.[25]

This shift has been accompanied by growing mistrust between Turkey and NATO, especially in relation to the United States, as Turkish policymakers have increasingly questioned NATO guarantees and feared abandonment. At the same time, allies have become more skeptical of Turkey's intentions and of whether its strategic orientation still fits with NATO's. The resulting relationship is better described as a continuing crisis of confidence than as a simple rupture.[26]

A recurring feature of Turkey's conduct within the Alliance has been the use of issue linkage (sometimes derided as the "Grand Bazaar" by other allies) and veto threats to press for greater attention to its security concerns. Ankara has repeatedly tried to raise the political costs inside NATO so that its own geopolitical and security priorities receive more consideration. Yet these tactics have rarely produced lasting structural gains, because Turkey has usually ended up compromising in the end.

The strain in Turkey's NATO policy is also visible in its dealings with Russia. Turkey has sought to diversify its security strategy by improving ties with Russia and reducing dependence on the United States and NATO, while still trying to contain Russian military expansion in places such as the Black Sea and Syria.[27] Turkish-Russian rapprochement has therefore not become a stable long-term alternative to NATO, but rather a fragile balancing effort that has produced ambiguity in the regional security environment.[28]

The purchase of the Russian S-400 system sharpened these tensions by raising doubts about Turkey's future intentions within the Alliance. Turkish officials presented the purchase as a way to gain

greater autonomy and better bargaining power with Western allies, but the result has instead been a dual dependence: vulnerability to Russia and a greater need for assurances from NATO.[29] More broadly, Turkey's search for autonomy from its Western allies and its move toward the Russia–China axis have contributed to isolation and new forms of dependence rather than genuine independence.[30]

Despite these tensions, a break with NATO remains unlikely.[31] Turkey continues to be an indispensable Alliance member because of its geography, military capabilities, and regional role, and NATO remains the most important security framework for Ankara. Turkey's large armed forces and its control over access routes to the Black Sea also ensure that its membership retains strategic value for the Alliance.

At the same time, Turkey's defense modernization has become part of its autonomy-seeking strategy, with domestic military-industrial projects serving as political symbols of reduced external dependence. The war in Ukraine has further increased Turkey's geopolitical importance because Ankara has remained in NATO, maintained functional relations with Russia, and taken on a mediating role in key negotiations. This dual-track posture is difficult for many Western allies to accept, but it is also difficult to disregard.

Overall, Turkey's NATO policy is best understood as a continuing attempt to reconcile alliance dependence with a growing desire for strategic autonomy.[32] The result has been not a clean break with the Alliance, but a strained and often contradictory relationship in which Turkey remains both a crucial member and a difficult ally.

AFTER THE HAGUE BEFORE ANKARA

The Hague Summit signalled that NATO is now treating defence spending not as a narrow accounting issue, but as a broader test of Alliance credibility and political will.[33] The 5% target for 2035, with a large share reserved for military capabilities and another share for infrastructure, resilience, innovation, and dual-use technologies, reflects that expanded understanding of security.[34] It also echoes a longer pattern in the Alliance in which burden-sharing debates intensify when the United States presses Europeans to do more and when doubts about U.S. staying power become harder to ignore.[35] The point is not simply that members should spend more, but that they should build the industrial and technological capacity to sustain deterrence in a more volatile strategic environment.[36] In that sense, the new spending benchmark is as much about strategic autonomy as it is about alliance cohesion.[37]

Ukraine has pushed this logic further, because the war has made Russia the central reference point for NATO's planning and political messaging.[38] The Alliance has therefore combined strong rhetorical support for Kyiv with a more cautious approach to membership, preferring sustained assistance over an explicit timetable for accession.[39] This intermediate formula reveals the tension at the heart of NATO policy: Ukraine is increasingly tied to the Alliance's security architecture, but not yet brought fully inside it.[40] It also reflects the practical reality that military support for Ukraine now intersects with wider debates about European responsibility, defence production, and the limits of American bandwidth.[41]

That wider debate has made European burden-sharing more urgent, but also more politically contested. European NATO members have increased spending since 2014, yet the distribution remains

uneven and often shaped by geography, threat perception, and domestic political constraints.[42] For many Allies, the problem is not a lack of formal commitment but the difficulty of translating commitment into durable capabilities, especially where air defence, intelligence, logistics, and industrial depth are concerned.[43] The result is a familiar contradiction: Europe is encouraged to assume greater strategic responsibility, while still relying heavily on the United States for the most demanding military functions.[44] This is why the burden-sharing debate has become inseparable from arguments about strategic autonomy, even though the latter remains constrained by the institutional and constitutional limits of European defence-industrial policy.[45]

The southern flank remains the area where this imbalance is most visible from Turkey's perspective.[46] NATO's strategic attention has again been pulled toward the eastern front and the war in Ukraine, while the security pressures emanating from the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and adjacent theatres receive less sustained political emphasis.[47] For Turkey, that matters because instability to the south is not abstract but directly connected to terrorism, migration, border management, and regional power competition.[48] Ankara's own security policy has long been shaped by these concerns, including efforts to manage threats emerging from northern Syria and Iraq.[49] The broader point is that NATO's 360-degree language is only politically meaningful if the Alliance gives comparable attention to both its eastern and southern security environments.[50]

This is one reason why Ankara carries particular symbolism as a summit venue.[51] A NATO meeting in Turkey does more than mark diplomatic rotation; it signals that the Alliance still recognizes the strategic significance of its southern member and the security

concerns that flow from its geography.[52] It also offers a useful reminder that Turkey has never been a passive Ally, but one that has repeatedly sought to shape NATO debates on deterrence, regional security, and alliance priorities.[53] The choice of Ankara therefore has political meaning beyond logistics: it places the question of Turkey's place in the alliance system at the centre of the same conversation about burden-sharing and strategic adaptation.[54]

That conversation is also shaped by transatlantic tensions that have intensified in recent years.[55] The more the United States signals that Europe must take greater responsibility, the more European governments seek ways to reduce dependence without severing the transatlantic link.[56] Turkey, meanwhile, has pursued a mixed strategy of alliance loyalty, selective autonomy, and pragmatic bargaining within NATO.[57] Its expanding defence-industrial ambitions strengthen that posture, because indigenous production and procurement capacity give Ankara more room to manoeuvre in a fragmented security order.[58] At the same time, this autonomy remains relational rather than absolute, since Turkey continues to depend on NATO's institutional framework and on its own ability to navigate divergences with the United States and European partners.[59]

The war in Ukraine has also reinforced Turkey's relevance as a mediator and strategic intermediary.[60] Turkey's position between the Black Sea, the Middle East, and the wider Euro-Atlantic space gives it leverage in crises that affect NATO but are not reducible to NATO alone.[61] This has made Ankara important not only as a host city, but as a political statement about the Alliance's need to accommodate different threat perceptions and regional priorities.[62] At the same time, the symbolism should not be overstated, because hosting a summit does not eliminate the structural frictions that continue to

shape alliance politics.[63] What it can do is keep those frictions within a shared institutional framework rather than allowing them to harden into open rupture.[64]

For Turkey, this is especially important because NATO membership remains central to its broader security architecture even when relations with allies are strained.[65] Article 5 continues to matter symbolically and politically as an assurance, even if its practical meaning is filtered through alliance bargaining and selective attention to regional crises.[66] That is why Ankara's role should be read less as ceremonial hosting than as an index of Turkey's enduring, if contested, strategic centrality.[67] In the current moment, NATO needs Turkey's geography, military weight, and diplomatic flexibility, while Turkey needs the Alliance as a stabilizing framework amid regional chaos and shifting great-power competition.[68] The summit between The Hague and Ankara therefore marks not a rupture but a transition: from the politics of spending promises to the harder question of how the Alliance sustains cohesion across Europe's east, south, and strategic periphery.[69]

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ESSAY

ITALY'S DECISION-MAKING IN RELATION TO THE IRAQ WAR (2002-2006)

Leopold Adalbert Weihrauch Di Pauli von Treuheim

ABSTRACT

The article examines Italy's foreign policy decision-making during the Iraq War (2002-2006). Italy was involved due to alliance credibility, national prestige, and transatlantic positioning rather than national security threats, a finding supported by Two-Level Game Theory and Alliance Theory. Domestic opposition and mass demonstrations played crucial roles. The decision-making was rather the result of long-term management of domestic constraints. These findings notably challenge Putnam's expectation that democratic opposition necessarily results in effective policy constraint.

Keyword: Putnam, Snyder, Italy, Iraq war

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how Italy managed domestic constraints in alliance-based foreign policy decisions during the Iraq War (2002-2006). The Italian government maneuvered under intense external pressure to align with the United States and NATO, while simultaneously negotiating under considerable domestic resistance rooted in popular opinion and questions of the intervention's legitimacy. The analysis focuses not on Italy's actual military involvement but on the strategic interpretation and adjustment of that involvement to fit domestic political constraints.

Italy's actions in the Iraq War reveal that medium powers embedded in asymmetric alliances rarely face binary decisions about involvement or non-involvement. Their ability to make decisions is constrained. They continually reconstruct commitments through legal language and institutional practices that help maintain domestic legitimacy. The Italian example illustrates how governments can publicly encourage international intervention while reassessing their domestic presentation to mitigate political costs. Strong domestic divergence and weak coalitions increase the need for such strategies.

The generalization of foreign policy decision-making under the influence of domestic political pressures is broad. By focusing on the interaction between international commitments and domestic political pressures, this paper examines policymaking during the Iraq War. The study appropriately predicts the applicability of this policymaking to other circumstances of foreign policy behaviour. Italy's case is an interesting example of how alliance loyalty and the consideration of internal political survival interact to produce various outcomes. These outcomes are neither purely autonomous nor purely foreign imposed. To comprehend how international and domestic restraints have

affected the foreign policy behaviour of any democratic medium power, it is important to understand this dynamic.

This study explains how democratic states pursue foreign policy amid both international pressure and domestic opposition. Italy is an analytically relevant case, having engaged in the Iraq War without a clear domestic consensus and amid constant questioning over the war's legitimacy.

The Italian example demonstrates that external strategic factors alone do not determine the decision to engage in international military action. Additionally, there is a continuous intervention by internal political factors, such as public opinion and parliamentary caution. It complicates simplified theories of alliance politics that treat medium powers as followers of dominant states.

Furthermore, this research extends beyond the Iraq War to a broader analysis of the conflict. The same tensions between alliance solidarity and domestic legitimacy can be seen in current foreign policy debates. These debates include military support for conflict regions or even involvement in multinational security affairs. A contemporary example can be observed in Italy's position on military and financial support to Ukraine following Russia's invasion in 2022. The study of Italy's involvement contributes to evaluating the credibility and effectiveness of democratic foreign policy, especially for medium powers that are engaged in asymmetric alliances.

Although much has been examined regarding the U.S. and U.K. decision-making, little has been researched regarding Italy. Therefore, the study is a significant addition to comparative foreign policy analysis. It provides insight into how European medium powers can manage external alliance pressure and still maintain internal political legitimacy.

This study hypothesizes that Italy's decision to participate in the Iraq War was primarily driven by alliance pressures from the United States, while the extent and framing of its involvement were constrained by domestic political opposition and legitimacy concerns. The research question that guides this paper is to what extent domestic political constraints limited Italy's alliance-based decision-making during the Iraq War (2002–2006). This question is appropriate because of various factors. Firstly, it connects Foreign Policy Analysis and constructivist approaches of legitimacy and identity in foreign policy. Secondly, the lessons of the Iraq War in Italy can be applied to the present-day Italian foreign policy in the face of a similar dilemma (i.e., relations with the U.S. and NATO in external conflicts). Lastly, substantial literature is devoted to major powers. The study of Italy as a middle power introduces a new "twist" to the literature on alliance behaviour and autonomy in decision-making.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND: ITALY'S POST–COLD WAR MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS

The scholarly discussion of Italy's post-Cold War foreign policy period centres on a crucial analytical contrast between continuity and change in domestic politics. Furthermore, the discussion is grounded in the alternation between centre-left and centre-right governments. In this context, Davidson[1] assumes a continuity-based interpretation, grounded in bipartisan agreement that focuses on prestige, peace, and the trans-Atlantic balance. This approach provides an essential reference point for assessing Italy's role in the Iraq War.

Scholarly opinion is divided on whether alternation between the centre-right and the centre-left brought about substantive foreign-policy change. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi represented the

centre-right, while Prime Minister Romano Prodi embodied the centre-left. Davidson[2] and Croci[3] emphasize continuity in policies. They claim that continued rhetorical divergence masks the continuity of these policies. On the other hand, Carbone[4] and Andreatta[5] bring out strategic distinctions: the centre-right sharing bilateral relations with Washington, while the centre-left sharing them with Europe. Davidson indicates that a structural agreement existed among the three administrations on three pillars: international prestige, Italy as a peacemaker, and the trans-Atlantic balance (United States (US) + European Union (EU)).

According to the literature, one of the driving forces is prestige, which is defined as the awareness of status by the peer states. In a unipolar system with the United States leading the way, being an active participant in their missions turns into a currency of power. Consequently, Italy expanded its international security responsibilities after the Cold War, particularly in nearby regions and NATO missions.[6] Italy's increasing participation in multinational military operations can be seen as a tool of international status and alliance credibility.[7] Davidson mentions[8] that Italy made contributions in the 1991 Gulf War, Somalia (United Task Force (UNITAF)), Bosnia (Implementation Force (IFOR)), Kosovo (Operation Allied Force), and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)). These missions were more based on reputational concerns and prestige than on tangible interests in the target states. Italy did not have direct national interests, nor did it consider that it would be a free-rider in a coalition victory. Within this framework, the mission in Iraq can be understood as crucial to increasing the position of Italy in the Western alliance hierarchy.[9]

Furthermore, the literature focuses on the normative limitation of Article 11 of the Italian Constitution. This article renounces aggressive war. Being seen as a promoter of peace served as a legitimizing and limiting discourse of politics. The government made participation politically feasible by securing the authorization of the United Nations (UN), presenting it as a stabilization and peace mission, and ensuring minimal exposure to combat. Davidson also notes[10] that even governments that endorsed Washington's views sought to restrict their contributions. Their objective was not to become an explicit warfighting participant. This was visible in the deployment of ground forces in Afghanistan and was directly indicative of domestic sensitivity. In the case of Iraq, it was presented as an unconditional peace mission to secure parliamentary abstention rather than opposition. In this manner, peace identity does not exclude its participation; rather, it frames its scope and content.

The third pillar deals with the structural position of Italy between the United States and Europe. Both centre-right and centre-left governments accepted the strategic importance of being aligned with Washington. Additionally, they acknowledged the significance of the economic and political need to be anchored to the EU. Thus, Italy had a dual strategic orientation toward the EU and the United States.[11] According to the literature, the government avoided any policies that could irreversibly destroy the European alignment of Italy. Even though the government was led by Silvio Berlusconi (a strong pro-American), the diplomatic support of the war in Iraq was limited to intra-European considerations, without supplying pre-war fighting troops. Accordingly, Iraq was considered in terms of a balancing logic: maximizing the credibility of the alliances while minimizing the level of European estrangement.

Moreover, the Italian Parliament didn't have much power over defence policy. Coticchia and Moro emphasize[12] that, even though the Parliament had to approve laws, its participation was mostly after the mission. Furthermore, the Parliament focused on the financing of the mission and not on deciding its exact details or how it should be carried out. The Parliament voted after troops were sent, turning the votes to be more about reacting than preventing. As a consequence, Italian leaders had notable freedom to decide if and how to send troops to other countries. Due to this internal setup, the executive could prioritize alliance considerations and international reputation over public opinion or legitimacy. This strategic orientation explains Italy's actions during the Iraq War.

Finally, these repeated deployments affected military institutions and preferences. Research on Italian military missions highlights the progressive normalization of overseas deployments and the professionalization of the armed forces since the 1990s.[13] These "normalized" military missions make it easier to understand why Italy stayed militarily active even when public support dropped, and mission results were unclear.

In short, these scholars strengthen the idea that Italy's military involvement in alliance operations, like in Iraq from 2002 to 2006, was not just about outside pressure. It was about internal institutional pressure and a perspective that valued alliance loyalty and international legitimacy. These studies connect explanations of Italian foreign policy and internal decision-making under international pressure.

KEY DOMESTIC ACTORS: THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT AND PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI

In this chapter, the study examines the political composition of the Italian Parliament and the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. This way, the driving force behind Italy's support for the deployment of Italian troops in the Iraq War, known as Operation Ancient Babylon, can be clarified.

The ruling coalition was supported by various parties that had a conservative orientation. These parties traditionally fall at the centre-right of the political spectrum. The party of the Prime Minister Berlusconi, Forza Italia, had the greatest number of Members of Parliament in the majority. It was followed by the historic far-right party, Alleanza Nazionale, the heir of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, and Unione di Centro, as well as the Lega Nord of the leader Umberto Bossi.[14]

The opposition was led by the Democratici di Sinistra of Massimo D'Alema, who was Prime Minister two years before Berlusconi, and Margherita, led by Francesco Rutelli. Out of the minority deputies, 21 were elected as the list of openly communist parties. Eight others were from the Federation of Greens.[15]

The Italian centre-right has long been a supporter of Italian military interventions, ever since the collapse of the First Republic. In addition to the overwhelmingly favourable position of the government, Operation Ancient Babylon had the unanimous support of Lega Nord, Unione di Centro, and Forza Italia. The most critical opposition groups that were against the troop deployment were the Communists and the Greens. The two major opposition parties, Democratici di Sinistra and Margherita, did not vote in key parliamentary votes. They defended

their abstention by referring to the government's humanitarian framing of the military operation.[16]

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Recent research[17] on foreign policy decision-making demonstrates that domestic-level variables are essential to explain state behaviour. The so-called "domestic turn" in international relations highlights the importance of parliamentary institutions and coalition politics in influencing external action. This turn challenges the traditional structural realist concept where the state is a unitary actor. The study of foreign policy indicates that domestic political processes and leadership alignments ultimately shape military interventions.[18]

In this context, three strands of literature are closely applicable: Foreign policy partisanship and ideology, Coalition politics and executive legislative interaction and Institutional control and parliamentary influence over war decisions.

Foreign policy partisanship and ideology: Early scholarly thought has represented foreign-policy disagreement as a traditional left-right polarization, where left-wing parties are viewed as "doves" and right-wing parties are viewed as "hawks". However, current literature challenges this linear model. Empirical evidence indicates that support for military operations is curvilinear. Centrist parties endorse them more than those occupying the two extreme ideological positions. Various indications demonstrate that centre-left and centre-right parties are the most consistent supporters of military operations.[19] The far-left and far-right parties are more sceptical. This trend indicates both underlying ideological commitments, including pacifist tendencies on the left, and sovereignty-oriented or isolationist

tendencies in some right-wing parties. Furthermore, it demonstrates strategic election considerations.

Coalition politics and executive legislative interaction: A second school of thought focuses on coalition politics. In parliamentary systems, the negotiations on foreign policy take place in governing alliances. Kaarbo and Beasley indicate that junior coalition partners can moderate or radicalise foreign policy.[20] This depends on issue importance and coalition fragility. Other related literature on coalition governance states the following observations. Firstly, governing parties are more influential on foreign-policy votes. Secondly, opposition parties can be strategic in fighting the deployments to weaken the government. Thirdly, issue framing (e.g., humanitarian versus combat) has an impact on coalition stability.

Institutional control and parliamentary influence over war decisions: The literature on parliamentary war powers studies how institutional structure shapes executive action in military deployments. Peters and Wagner categorize states based on the strength of parliamentary ex ante approval rights.[21] The Italian case has been thus described as an ambiguous one. Firstly, before 2016, Italy did not have a formal and structured ex-ante veto. Secondly, governments relied on decree-laws to (re) finance and renew missions. Lastly, votes in the Parliament frequently combined multiple missions that prevented the refusal of a single mission. This institutional non-transparency might have promoted executive autonomy. Nevertheless, it constrained fundamental ex-ante control. Thus, even though institutional rules did not create a strong veto, parliamentary politics still had the possibility of enforcing political limitations, especially when public opinion was sceptical.

The combination of these elements establishes the analytic framework for evaluating Italy's role in the Iraq War. Coticchia and Vignoli present valuable empirical evidence[22] based on parliamentary voting data between 1994 and 2016, and especially during the Iraq War. The discussion aims to evaluate the degree to which Italian domestic politics limited decision-making influenced by alliances. Across 96 counts of parliamentary votes on military operations in foreign countries, average support reached 80.1%, with opposition at 15.24% and abstentions at 4.56% (Figure 1):

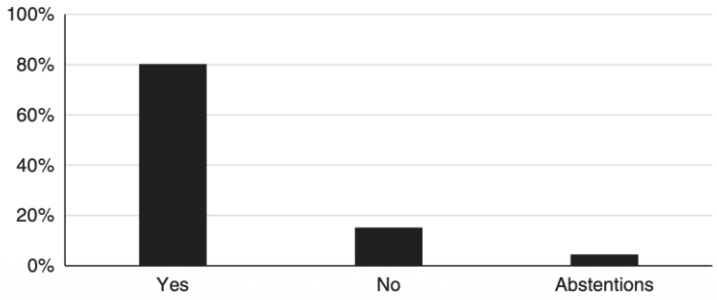

Figure 1. Parliamentary Support for Military Operations Abroad.[23]

These indicators imply that there is considerable parliamentary support for military deployments. Consequently, this suggests that the institutional structure does not inherently hinder foreign military involvement. However, the Iraq War constitutes a clear deviation from this pattern. Under the centre-right coalition, parties ruling the government were united. The centre-left opposition had opposed the deployment in Iraq or abstained every time. This proves the theory that parliamentary alignment strongly follows coalition status.

However, the opposition parties were not unanimously united in their opposition to military deployments; they strongly opposed the Iraq War. This implies a case-specific limitation, not broad-based anti-militarism.

The votes gained further reflect a curvilinear pattern (Figure 2): far-left parties exhibited extremely low support, centre-left parties showed medium to high support, but way less for the Iraq case, centrist and centre-right parties provided the highest support, and far-right parties also showed relatively high support (backed by nationalist arguments).

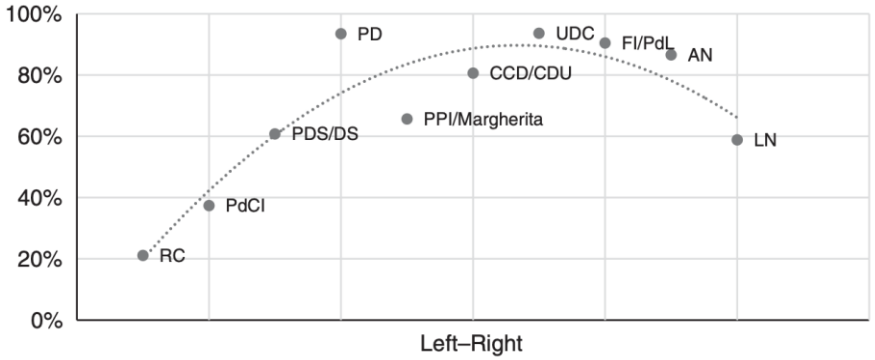

Figure 2. Average of Parties' Parliamentary Support for Military Operations Abroad.[24]

Thus, Iraq increased ideological polarization, especially on the left. Notably, far-left pacifism was politically significant, which put the governing coalition under pressure.

Institutional procedures also mattered. Crucial votes on Iraq were discussed as single-mission resolutions and not as refinancing packages. Empirically, the support rates in the single-mission votes were lower than in the decree-based refinance votes, and the debates were more visible. As a result, most of the votes on Iraq were particularly contested. In the eight votes regarding involvement in the Iraq War, parliamentary support oscillated around 60%, significantly below the overall average (Figure 3).

Overall, the evidence suggests that the Iraq War caused stronger political constraints. These constraints did not prevent involvement but significantly shaped its political management, confirming the importance of domestic factors in alliance-based decision-making.

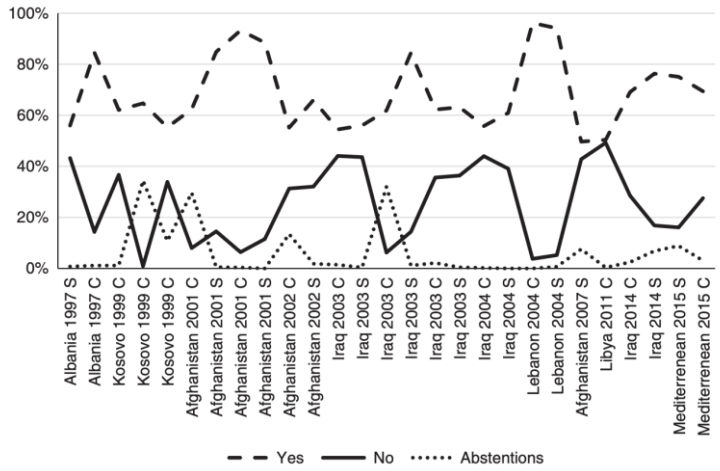

Figure 3. Parliamentary Support in Key Votes (1994–2016).[25] *Note: Country of mission, year, chamber, with C and S standing for Chamber of Deputies and Senate, respectively.*

ITALY'S IRAQ WAR STRATEGY

The literature describes Italy's position towards the Iraq War as one of controlled uncertainty, not active support or opposition. Italian diplomacy in early 2003 framed the Iraq crisis as a technical issue of weapons compliance and was managed under UN authority. This stance was crucially influenced by the meetings between Italian Foreign Minister Frattini and Iraqi Vice Prime Minister Tareq Aziz.26 Italy did not support regime change and avoided explicit support of the use of force. Rather, Italy endorsed the UN Resolution 1441, which "decides to afford Iraq […] a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations".[27] Consequently, Italy upheld the legitimacy of the UN Security Council. Public rhetoric aligned with EU positions and UN inspection mechanisms. However, Italy unofficially acknowledged the increasing likelihood of coercive action. Subsequently, they rapidly adopted a post-hoc legitimation strategy after the invasion by supporting the UN Resolution 1483,[28] which included the lifting of trade sanctions against Iraq.[29]

Italy presented Resolution 1483 as a restoration of international unity and a re-centering of the UN after alliance divisions. In fact, the government was already operationally integrated into humanitarian efforts and stabilization activities before formal UN endorsement.

Literature treats Operation Ancient Babylon as a distinct phase of involvement. Parliamentary and governmental narratives framed the mission as a peace operation aimed at protecting civilians and maintaining order. The framing emphasized parliamentary approval and UN legitimacy, despite the mission being militarily structured and conducted in a conflict zone. Operation Ancient Babylon is therefore often cited as a case of legitimacy-building, which was driven by the executive. It combined legal references with humanitarian discourse.

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNIQUÉ 2003

The Presidency of Italy issued an official communiqué the night before hostilities began in Iraq.[30] It was triggered by a general pressure from the Members of Parliament and extra-parliamentary political and civic movements. These demands concerned Italy's attitude toward the imminent conflict and the possibility of a Presidential intervention as a political mediator.

However, the communiqué explicitly denied any revision of Italy's position on Iraq. In fact, the Presidency stated the national stance was already unequivocal and defined before the outbreak of military operations. This communiqué outlined a strict institutional structure. Firstly, government negotiations were seen as the primary decision site. Then, the decisions were presented to the Supreme Defence Council, which formally acknowledged them. Subsequently, both Houses of Parliament were involved. The President was not portrayed as a decision-maker but functioned as an institution that formally

acknowledged decisions taken by the government. The Presidency was excluded from any alternative interpretive or corrective function and disqualified as a political mediator. The communiqué defined the President's role in strict constitutional terms. The Presidency allowed the resumption of dialogue with parliamentary groups and party leaders only under regular constitutional practice. There was a key analytical distinction: dialogue was permitted, but political renegotiation was not. Collectively, the communiqué reinforced institutional consolidation before the beginning of the hostilities in Iraq. By 21 March 2003, the Italian policy on Iraq was framed as politically closed and shielded from extra-parliamentary pressure. Lastly, the timing was crucial since the policy was completed immediately before the outbreak of hostilities.

SUBSEQUENT PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

Parliamentary discussions on Iraq represented a moment of institutional contestation. They occurred after the consolidation of Italy's strategic orientation. The debates were structured around government communications and multiple opposition motions and were focused on legitimacy and moral framing. Moreover, they occurred during an already ongoing military commitment. Conversely, government communications delivered by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi reaffirmed the continued Italian military presence in Iraq. The executive justification centred on stabilization and support for a sovereign Iraqi government. Future-oriented benchmarks have been used, including a greater UN involvement and the gradual transfer of authority to Iraqi institutions. The mission was framed as conditional, progressive, and not open-ended.

However, the opposition motions expressed a fundamentally different normative interpretation. Multiple parliamentary groups demanded immediate troop withdrawal. Their arguments were grounded in humanitarian principles and moral responsibility. They strongly emphasized alleged abuses by U.S. forces and ethical concerns arising from continued military engagement. Moreover, the war was portrayed as not just strategically flawed, but incompatible with Italy's declared values.

EXTENSION OF ITALY'S PRESENCE IN IRAQ

On 12 July 2004, Parliament debated the Decree-Law renewing Italy's mission in Iraq.[31] It marked a formal legislative renewal of Italy's military presence in Iraq, occurring after the initial invasion and stabilization phase. Unlike earlier debates, the focus was not on strategic orientation or institutional legitimacy; it centred on financial and legal considerations.

Government supporters framed the extension as necessary for international stability and essential to Iraqi institutional development. They emphasized the responsibility to provide security conditions and enable reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. The military presence wasn't presented as an occupation force, but as a precondition for peace-building. Nevertheless, the government maintained a semantic distinction between combat and stabilization and continued with earlier justifications.

In contrast, the opposition's criticism was sharper than in earlier parliamentary sessions on financial, legal, and moral grounds. The mission was increasingly described as a continuation of an illegal occupation. The legitimacy was questioned due to the contested legal basis of the original intervention. The humanitarian critique

foregrounded the disparity between military spending and civilian aid. Dissent expanded beyond norms into material and budgetary considerations. Financial costs became a central issue for the first time. The economic burden of the mission and prioritization of military over civilian engagement were analysed. The government justified its actions by stating that costs were unavoidable and strategically necessary. Despite intensified criticism, the Decree-law approval passed, and the executive control over foreign and security policy remained intact.

THE CALIPARI CASE

The parliamentary debate over the renewal of Decree-Law of 15 March 2005 marked a critical moment in Italy's military involvement in Iraq. It happened after a notable national trauma[32]: the recent death of Italian intelligence officer Nicola Calipari, combined with the release of a kidnapped Italian journalist. Unlike prior renewal debates, this session was conducted amid heightened ethical sensitivities. The debate was framed by expressions of national mourning and institutional solidarity, blending questions of legitimacy, responsibility, and procedural approval. Government officials explicitly connected ongoing participation to honouring the fallen and maintaining Italy's credibility abroad. Supporters argued that a military presence was essential to combat terrorism and uphold international obligations. References to UN Resolution 1511 were used to legitimize the multinational force and place Italy's role within a collective security framework. This resolution "authorizes a multinational force under unified command to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq".[33] Humanitarian goals were again highlighted alongside rising

security concerns, emphasizing the dangers involved in the continued deployment.

Opponents responded by emphasizing the changed context. They viewed Calipari's death not as a reason to persist but as proof of the risks and contradictions of the mission. They challenged the original justifications for the war, which included the lack of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, the opponents questioned the morality of sustaining a humanitarian mission with military means. The ongoing escalation of terrorism and Iraqi internal conflicts were seen as signs of failure rather than progress. Importantly, the debate increasingly incorporated discussions of exit strategies and political solutions. The Members of Parliament called for Iraqi ownership of governance and international diplomacy, while indicating growing unease with an open-ended military presence.

FURTHER PROTEST OF THE OPPOSITION

Allegations of violations of humanitarian law, legislative strategies, and mass protests all created moments of pressure on the legitimacy of Italy's Iraq policy. The most notable ones were claims about using chemical agents like white phosphorus during the U.S. assault on Falluja in November 2004.[34] Opposition deputies' parliamentary questions framed these claims as potential war crimes. They suggested that Italy was indirectly involved by participating in the coalition. In response, the government consistently highlighted the lack of formal reports and stated that Italian forces were not belligerents in U.S. operations. The executive framed the matter as a question of epistemic uncertainty.

A similar approach was seen in parliamentary questions about torture allegations at Iraqi detention centers[35] The government again

denied awareness of responsibility. Instead, the government shifted attention to institutional processes by mentioning the responsibility of the International Committee of the Red Cross. This committee had formal monitoring authority over these allegations. These moral issues were reinforced through actions that limited Parliament's ability to turn dissent into decision-making power. A notable example was the legislative bundling of international missions in decree-laws like 160/04.[36] By grouping Iraq with other military operations—some widely supported— the executive effectively prevented selective opposition. Within Parliament, approval of the Iraq mission proceeded without true consensus, relying instead on fragmented votes and abstentions.[37]

Beyond institutional politics, mass protests were the most visible challenge to Italy's Iraq policy.[38] The Rome demonstration against the war was one of the largest in recent Italian history, with a diverse crowd framing the issue as unethical. According to organizers, at least 27 special trains and thousands of buses from all over Italy arrived in Rome.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

The following study adopts a qualitative single-case study. The core research objective is to explain how executive authority and alliance commitments interact to produce policy continuity despite domestic controversy. The qualitative approach is the most suitable because it captures interpretive and institutional dynamics. The aim is not to measure support or opposition levels, but to reconstruct decision-making processes and justificatory strategies. The case study allows a thorough description and strong contextualization and is well-suited for analysing executive dominance and containment of dissent.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework is supported by the Two-Level Game Theory.[39] According to this theory, foreign policy decision-making occurs simultaneously on two levels. Level I involves international negotiations and alliance commitments, such as the relations with the U.S. and NATO. Level II encompasses domestic political constraints, such as coalition dynamics, parliamentary debates, and public opinion. In Italy's case, its Iraq policy is shaped by dual-level pressures. On the one hand, it is constrained by the expectations of the U.S.-led coalition, NATO, and alliance credibility. On the other hand, it is constrained by internal coalition politics, parliamentary opposition, constitutional norms, and widespread public dissent. The Iraq policy created a central tension between external alignment and internal acceptability. This explains why Italy aligned with the coalition and carefully limited the scope of engagement, the language used, and the legal framing of its participation.

The analysis of the study is supplemented by the Alliance Theory,[40] which explores the tension between alliance loyalty and autonomy. It helps explain the prioritization of alliance credibility, the willingness to bear political and material costs, and the unwillingness to withdraw once commitment was made.

These concepts allow us to systematically trace the interaction between domestic political survival and international alliance pressures. The analysis focuses not on the existence of constraints, but on how they shaped the form of participation and institutional management of commitments. The framework combines interpretive and discourse-oriented institutional analysis. The focus lies on legal language and humanitarian narratives. Furthermore, it has been used to identify causal mechanisms behind policy continuity. The key

events treated as critical stages of the Iraq policy were the UN Resolutions, the Presidential communiqué of 2003, the Calipari Case, the Nasiriyah attack, and some of the most crucial legislative renewals. Furthermore, the study focuses on the role differentiation between the executive, the Parliament, and the presidency. The study does not assume institutional equivalence, but examines formal procedures, constitutional, and agenda-setting practices. It reflects literature on constitutional minimalism and procedural containment of dissent.

Overview of Findings

This research demonstrates that Italy's role in the Iraq War from 2002 to 2006 was shaped by ongoing management of domestic political constraints. It indicates that there was no unequivocal decision for or against participation. Italy's foreign policy reflected a balancing pattern of international alliance pressures and domestic legitimacy concerns. This aligns with the Two-Level Game Theory,[41] which emphasizes simultaneous international and domestic pressures. On the one hand, the Italian government consistently prioritized maintaining alliance credibility, especially with the United States. On the other hand, it limited the political and symbolic exposure of the alliance domestically, aligning with the Alliance Theory.[42]

Domestic opposition did not stop Italy from participating in the Iraq War or notably change its strategic direction once committed. Instead, domestic constraints influenced how Italy justified and handled its involvement legally and institutionally. Italy did not fully endorse the invasion nor completely oppose it. This ambiguity was a deliberate and stable strategy to keep flexibility at both international and domestic levels.

Empirical findings identify five interconnected patterns: (1) early strategic ambiguity before the invasion; (2) rapid post-invasion "normalization" after the invasion through multilateral legitimation; (3) strengthening of executive power via institutional closure; (4) parliamentary debate without decisive action; and (5) long-term containment of domestic opposition using procedural and discursive tactics. These patterns explain how Italy maintained its participation in a highly controversial war despite widespread domestic opposition and repeated legitimacy crises.

ALLIANCE PRESSURE

First, the Iraq invasion was strictly speaking not a formal NATO operational decision — NATO as an organization did not formally conduct or authorize the invasion. Their official website states that "NATO as an organization had no role in the decision to undertake the campaign or to conduct it."[43]

In fact, the U.S. government created a separate temporary military coalition, including states that supported or contributed forces to the invasion and post-invasion stabilization, called the Coalition of the Willing. Furthermore, the invasion was not conducted under NATO's Article 5, which officially states that "[…] an armed attack against one NATO member shall be considered an attack against them all".[44]

This means that Italy's involvement was based on its own parliamentary authorization to contribute to the multinational force cooperating with the U.S. It was not based on a NATO collective defence deployment. Moreover, Article 5 does not automatically require the use of military force. Instead, it establishes a collective defence obligation. Allies must "take action" they believe necessary to assist another member only if that member is attacked. Importantly,

a coalition of the willing is not a formal alliance with explicit treaty-bound legal obligations. It is a group of nations agreeing to act together, especially with military involvement. Membership in that coalition did not create legal obligations like in NATO. Rather, it reflected states' political choices to support the U.S. invasion and contribute forces or other forms of assistance. This indicates that Italy's military support was not only a request from the US but ultimately a strategic decision driven by its perceived need to maintain alliance credibility and position within the Western security framework.

Additionally, the US's acknowledgment and solicitation of Italy's participation functioned as an appeal for their allied support for the Iraq invasion. In a press release from the White House after a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on July 21, 2003, President Bush publicly thanked Italy for joining the U.S.-led effort. He framed Italian participation as part of the broader coalition the U.S. had worked to assemble.

…My country is especially grateful to the Italian troops and police who are serving with skill and courage in Afghanistan and Iraq…

…defending freedom requires cost and sacrifice, and the United States is grateful for Italy's willingness to bear the burdens with us.[45]

Empirical data suggest that Italy's main interest in the Iraq War was maintaining its alliance with the US, rather than its independent strategic interests. Between 2002 and 2006, executive behaviour was largely driven by the need to uphold Italy's credibility within NATO, especially with the United States. This is evident in several ways:

Firstly, diplomatic support for Washington, which did not prioritize the United Nations or inspection regimes, indicated the alliance's credibility at Level I of Putnam's theory. Simultaneously, uncertainty

persisted on Level II regarding how to address domestic backlash. The government did not explicitly support a regime change, but it remained silent on the on-record protests of the European governments that openly rejected U.S intervention.

Secondly, Italy sent its troops to Iraq when Baghdad had fallen, despite massive demonstrations, which indicates that the credibility of the alliance was more significant than the internal political constraints. According to the statistics (mentioned in the literature review), based on public opinion and parliamentary discussions, a vast scepticism existed. However, it didn't stop Operation Ancient Babylon. In accordance with the Alliance Theory, this can be seen as the logic of abandonment avoidance. Following a joint letter of support for Washington,[46] not contributing would have hurt Italy as a reliable ally.

Thirdly, the Italian military and intelligence assistance, which was domestically framed as stabilization/humanitarian interventions, contributed to the promotion of the coalition goals. However, once Italy took control of the relatively unstable city of Nasiriyah (Iraq), it led to operational risks and consequent casualties. These operations involved physical, political, and military expenses. This assistance reinforced the understanding that Italy's involvement was not of a "common nature" but one based on credibility.

Fourthly, another factor that contributes to the structural explanation is the continuity of policies between different administrations. The shift from Prime Minister Berlusconi (centre-right) to Prime Minister Prodi (centre-left) did not lead to an immediate disengagement. Even though Prodi later went ahead to start withdrawal, it was done in a slow manner and in a multilateral approach. Had the Iraq mission been motivated by ideological or

leader-driven interests, the change of the government would have probably resulted in a sudden policy change. Rather, withdrawal was reputationally controlled.

Collectively, these conclusions indicate that the Iraq policy of Italy was based on prestige, reliability of alliances, and trans-Atlantic positioning. Italy was not confronted with a threat to national security concerning Iraq. The main motivations to take part were relationship-oriented: the need to retain access, power, and position in the U.S.-dominated security structure.

Between Caution and Commitment

Analysis of government statements and multilateral behaviour indicates that Italy intentionally avoided clear support or opposition. It framed the Iraq crisis mainly as a technical matter concerning UN inspections, not as a political issue of regime change. This allowed the government to appear supportive of international law and multilateral efforts while avoiding explicit support of military action.

This strategic ambiguity is explicitly visible in parliamentary and executive discourse. During a parliamentary debate about the Iraq conflict, responding to an interrogation, the Italian government declared: "Since the beginning of the Iraqi crisis, the Italian government has reiterated the central role of the United Nations Security Council and the need to protect international law. The positions taken by Italy do not seem to contradict this premise […]"[47] [48] This underscores, therefore, the emphasis on international legality and the role of the UN in the decisions on the crisis.

Notably, no endorsement of military action was offered. Similarly, Foreign Minister Franco Frattini emphasized inspections rather than regime change, declaring on 4 May 2004: "Italy, in accordance with

Resolution 1441 and in line with other European Union countries, urges the authorities in Baghdad to actively provide UN inspectors with definitive proof of the disarmament demanded by the United Nations."[49] [50]

These statements illustrate a deliberate avoidance of binary alignment, reinforcing that ambiguity functioned as a hedge strategy rather than indecision - preserving future alignment options while limiting immediate domestic criticism.

At the international level (Putnam's Level I), Italy had strong incentives to stay aligned with the U.S., its main security partner. But at the domestic level (Level II), public opinion was largely against war, and the governing coalition was internally divided.

Diplomatic signals to Washington hinted that Italy privately accepted the possibility of war and wanted to position itself as a cooperative yet cautious ally. This dual approach—reassuring its international allies while maintaining internal ambiguity—allowed Italy to avoid crossing a public political threshold. Consequently, they minimized reputational risks. The official discourse presented the crisis as a technical problem of Iraq complying with the inspections of the United Nations, as opposed to a political or strategic problem of regime change. This framing allowed Italy to put its position in the framework of multilateral legality publicly and leave the choice of post-invasion alignment. This example indicates that ambiguity may be a useful instrument and leaders can use it to stabilize the domestic politics without compromising the external credibility, until domestic or international commitments require adjustment.

Additionally, the actions of Italy can be analysed based on the Alliance Theory, as an example of various implications. Snyder argues that alliances are influenced by the interplay of both external threats

and internal alliance dynamics.[51] This can be similarly applied in the case of the Iraq War, where alliances are influenced also by external (alliance pressures) and internal (domestic political limitations) factors. States face a credibility dilemma by not committing to an alliance, which risks the guarantee of security. Consequently, domestic resistance can worsen this dilemma. By creating a public shift to position the Iraq crisis as an issue of pure technicality of the United Nations, Italy escaped the dishonour of defection. Thus, they maintained the credibility of the alliance and, at the same time, incurred fewer costs in its domestic politics.

Moreover, Snyder states that the reliability of alliances is not always defined by just a declaration at the formal level.[52] Alliances are reliable if there is a perceived intent and signalling between the members. The discreet signalling Italy made to Washington can be used to represent the way states can express their promises without direct domestic retaliation. The Italian case highlights that alliances are not fixed tools of power projection but need constant adjustments of internal and external forces. This aligns with Snyder's theory.

CENTRALIZED DECISION MAKING AND PARLIAMENTARY SUBORDINATION

An analysis of the March 2003 Presidential communiqué reveals a key outcome: the swift institutional closure of the decision-making process right before the beginning of the hostilities. The President explicitly declined to serve as a political mediator or veto actor, emphasizing a strictly constitutional and procedural role. "On the basis of the above, the President of the Republic – in accordance with his constitutional powers – does not consider it possible to accept the requests for a meeting that have been made"[53][54] The timing of this

closure is crucial. By confirming institutional alignment before the beginning of the war, the executive shielded itself from last-minute domestic mobilization and outside pressure. The presidency's minimal constitutional role effectively eliminated a potential obstruction from the opposition. This resulted in a highly centralized decision-making structure, where political responsibility was concentrated in the Parliament, but interpretive authority remained with the executive. Furthermore, it reinforced the imbalance between formal democratic procedures and actual policy control.

Referring to the Two-Level Game Theory, this event can be regarded as the purposeful blockage of Level II access points just before an irrevocable Level I commitment. The executive minimized the domestic players that could affect international alignment by giving the Presidency a strictly constitutional and procedural role. This narrowing of domestic rivalry minimized uncertainty on the international front and gave the allies a sense of unity. Furthermore, the case further highlights that institutional actors do not simply bind or facilitate bargaining, but can lock it by preventing future domestic interference.

Moreover, there is a visible extension of this development in the Alliance Theory. Domestic disruptions may create doubt between alliance members and advance the issue of abandonment. By aligning its institutions before the outbreak of hostilities, Italy minimized the threat that the domestic rivalry would undermine its international reputation. The balance between credibility and constraint was overwhelmingly moved to an issue of reliability. The expectations in the alliance became a primary priority, and the domestic system was organized in such a way as to reduce disruptive feedback. In general,

the Italian example demonstrates that internal political consolidation may be encouraged by alliance politics.

Despite frequent, intense, and normatively charged parliamentary debates, they did not serve as instruments for policy change. Instead, they were mostly symbolic, expressing dissent without impacting strategic decisions. Research indicates that opposition was focused on morals and legality. The government countered these by framing ongoing engagement as an ethical choice, portraying withdrawal as abandonment, irresponsibility, or even moral failure.

During the Nasiriyah debate on the 19th of March 2003, MP Oliviero Diliberto stated the following.

The war had already been decided upon, a war waged not to overthrow a tyrant, who had been aided and financed by the United States when Saddam was useful against another enemy. The war serves to occupy a strategic area of the world and its oil wells. You have already conceded, in defiance of the Constitution, which requires a vote by Parliament that has not yet taken place.[55] [56]

Despite rhetorical intensity, such critiques did not translate into institutional leverage, highlighting Parliament's role as a place of expression rather than constraint.

Voting data confirms this. Motions for withdrawal were consistently defeated, while renewal decrees passed with predictable majorities or abstentions. The Decree-Law of 2005 was passed in February in the Senate and in March in the Chamber of Deputies (Figure 4).

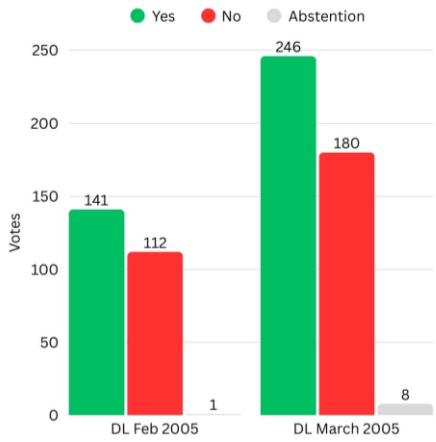

Figure 4. Motions for withdrawal. Adapted from "Ieri maggioranza di "SÌ" al Senato nei confronti del decreto-legge che proroga la missione italiana in Iraq" (2005) & "Camera: ok a proroga missione Iraq" (2005).

Parliament essentially validated executive decisions post hoc rather than influencing them beforehand. Opposition objections were acknowledged rhetorically but institutionally neutralized, reinforcing executive autonomy.

This is backed up by statements of the government officials: the executive had substantial freedom when it came to defense policy. Crucial choices like sending troops were presented as an essential alliance commitment, which limited how much the Parliament could argue about it. Even when the matter got controversial, the opposition in Parliament didn't result in much real resistance. It seems the rules didn't actually restrain the actions of the government.

Official communications kept framing Italy's role in Iraq as peacekeeping or stabilizing the country. This standpoint stuck around even when the executive realized the situation was getting worse and Italian troops were facing more danger. Avoiding a world war seemed to make it acceptable to be involved, lowering opposition from the public. The media mostly repeated this story, showing that what the government stated matched what people generally thought about the

mission. Being a dependable ally was a common reason given for the participation. Italy's reputation as trustworthy, especially to the U.S., was prioritized over real threats to Italy's safety. Joining the Iraq War was often portrayed as backing up allies and not a vital strategic move. This indicates how much following other countries matters in Italian foreign policy. All in all, this suggests that Italy joined the Iraq War because domestic politics allowed it to a certain degree: there wasn't much opposition to sending troops, and the Parliament didn't have much power to stop it.

Referring to the Two-Level Game Theory, such results imply that Level II domestic constraints in Italy were weak in structure and could be dealt with politically. Instead of limiting international engagements, local institutions increased the win-set of the government by facilitating post-hoc authorization and reframing discourses. The parliamentary debate and media did not limit the executive, but served as the mechanisms of legitimization once the international commitments were already operationalized.

Furthermore, the domestic tolerance has other implications according to the Alliance Theory. In the Italian case, the political importance of abandoning the U.S-led security system overshadowed the importance of entrapment in an unpopular war. Additionally, due to the institutional weakness of domestic veto players, the executive was facing lower costs in terms of showing the reliability of alliances. Subsequently, this led from a balance between credibility and constraint to a balance between credibility and compliance.

In addition, the model by Snyder indicates that the cohesion of an alliance is not only dependent on the formal treaties but also on the demonstrative readiness to share costs.[57] The Italian Parliament's post hoc verification implied credibility to the United States without

having to rely on an internal process of consent. Accordingly, the executive can turn domestic opposition into an internationally seen compliance through a narrow range of means.

In the case of procedural and substantively weak domestic institutions, alliance expectations are generally more apt to dominate foreign policy results. Within this alignment, alliances produce asymmetric pressure. They influence decision-making more decisively than domestic politics.

FROM GRIEF TO COMMITMENT

The attack on Nasiriyah was a crucial test of resilience for Italy. Evidence suggests it didn't weaken but strengthened executive determination. In fact, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi stated the following on 12 November 2003.

No intimidation must deter us from our desire to help that country rise again and build self-government and a situation of security and freedom. Since a fierce war was declared by terrorist fanaticism on the whole of humanity with the September 11 attacks, this government, strengthened by your vote and the vote of Parliament, has acted to ensure that Italy remains loyal to its historic allies, confident in itself and its role within the European context to which it belongs as a founding member, always capable of proposing useful solutions to a coalition of democracies, as broad as possible, in favor of democracy and freedom.[58] [59]

The attack was further framed as a surrender to terrorism and a betrayal of international solidarity. Domestic costs rose sharply, yet the executive successfully linked sacrifice to credibility. International support and alliance expectations reinforced this framing, raising the political and reputational costs of withdrawal. Thus, even severe

shocks did not lead to strategic reversal. Nasiriyah demonstrated that once Italy's involvement was effective, withdrawal was politically unthinkable.

Referring to the Two-Level Game Theory, the Nasiriyah incident illustrates that domestic shocks reduce the space of a government's maneuver rather than enlarging it. The attack reduced the scope of the politically feasible alternatives by ensuring that the symbolic and reputational costs of withdrawal were notably high. At Level I, this framework meant that withdrawal carried reputational costs for alliance unity and counterterrorism conventions. At Level II, the executive politically controlled public grief, preventing its conversion into disengagement pressure. This demonstrates that the theory should take into consideration instances where shocks reinforce executive bargaining positions, instead of undermining them, trapping governments into further commitment as costs increase.

The death of Nicola Calipari added an emotional aspect to the parliamentary discussions. However, the evidence demonstrates that this magnified ethical debate did not change policy outcomes. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, in memory of his death, stated the following on 9 March 2005.

Despite the persistence, brutality, and violence of the kidnappings, which have led to the murder of hostages and the dissemination of videos showing the violence, the countries currently committed to supporting the legitimate Iraqi government and the work of building democracy in that country have not allowed themselves to be intimidated and have not given in to the kidnappers' blackmail.[60] [61]

Instead, renewal was framed as honoring sacrifice. Citing Undersecretary Gianni Letta, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi continued (directing his speech to Calipari).

You have restored confidence to the whole of Italy. You have brought to the surface those hidden virtues that enable a country to live and move forward. Like the fallen soldiers of Nasiriya, you have given Italy back to the Italian people. You have helped us rediscover the Italy that exists, that fortunately does exist.[62] [63]

Conversely, opposition demands for exit strategies increased but remained symbolic and non-binding. The renewal of the mission indicates Italy's Iraq policy had become largely isolated from domestic shocks.

Applying it to the Two-Level Game Theory, at Level I, suspicion and counter-terrorism co-operation still prevailed among the alliances. At Level II, democratic contestation got more rhetorically amplified, but was institutionally limited. The general observation is that once formalised by procedural repetition and discursive re-packaging, the Iraq policy of Italy was resilient to the shock of in-depth national trauma.

POST-INVASION "NORMALIZATION"

Another major finding is Italy's policy shift after the invasion. Once hostilities started, Italy quickly moved from ambiguity to "normalization". This was not due to domestic consensus but was achieved through legal and discursive reframing within multilateral institutions.

UN Resolution 1483 was central here. The research indicates it did not serve as a legal authorization for Italy's involvement, since its military and humanitarian actions had already begun. Instead, UN Resolution 1483 acted as a retroactive legitimization tool. It allowed Italy to frame its participation as part of an internationally approved reconstruction effort rather than an illegitimate invasion.

Italy's leaders portrayed UN re-engagement as evidence that the international community had moved past the war's controversy. Domestically, this narrative shifted focus from the war's origins to the moral need for post-conflict rebuilding. The findings demonstrate that this framing was effective. Parliamentary debates and public discourse centered more on humanitarian aid and reconstruction, while the invasion faded from political debate.

In terms of the Two-Level Game Theory, Italy expanded its domestic win-set by redefining the scope of the debate. At Level I, international cover through the multilateral endorsement of the United Nations alleviated the reputational risks in the alliance. At Level II, this redefinition was exploited to counter national discontent without the need to rehear the original ruling to join the war. Therefore, the case of Italy can be used as an example of how international institutions could be tactically used to rebrand controversial military operations into politically viable domestic policies. Consequently, this strengthens executive independence in intervention through alliances.

The "normalization" stage, in accordance with the Alliance Theory, explains the logic of alliance credibility and constraint. In particular, post-invasion "normalization" in Italy clarifies that the alliance commitments continue after making the first intervention decision. This determination was achieved by different mechanisms of discursive reframing and institutional adaptation. They all played the role of stabilizing commitments across time.

Another key outcome is the repeated renewal of decree-laws extending Italy's military presence. Each renewal shifted the debate from the original participation decision to issues of cost and duration. By linking Iraq to other international missions, the executive limited

Parliament's ability to oppose individually; rejecting one mission implied rejecting all. This procedural tactic increased the political cost of dissent and maintained continuity. Findings show these renewals gradually normalized Italy's presence in Iraq. What started as an exceptional measure became routine, not through renewed consensus but through institutional inaction.

FROM COMBAT TO HUMANITARIAN MISSION

Despite being conducted in a highly militarized setting, Operation Ancient Babylon was strategically and rhetorically presented as separate from the war. Government discourse consistently emphasized civilian protection, humanitarian aid, and stabilization efforts, while minimizing references to combat operations.

This semantic distinction was vital. Calling the mission peacekeeping allowed the government to avoid constitutional challenges associated with offensive warfare. Parliamentary approvals were framed as routine renewals rather than as endorsements of war. Semantic reframing is particularly evident in the parliamentary description of Operation Ancient Babylon. In presenting the mission renewal on 18 May 2004, Defense Minister Martino declared

> *But "the dramatic escalation of clashes in recent days […] does not change the overall purpose and nature of our military presence," which is in Iraq "to bring peace, not war." The ongoing violence […] does not change the mission, but "if anything, it strengthens our commitment." […] "There are no aggressive, belligerent tasks that do not respect human beings; rather, they are*

> *essentially protective, to ensure security and provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance."*[64] [65]

Despite escalating hostilities, this denial of combat status functioned as a legal and political shield. It enabled mission continuity without triggering constitutional debate on war involvement. This approach increased executive discretion. Once labeled peacekeeping, questions about rules of engagement, operational risks, and alliance coordination were largely avoided in public debate. Italy could deepen its coalition commitments while maintaining a narrative of limited and morally justified involvement. Operational data confirm Italy's significant responsibilities and costs, indicating tangible commitments. Yet, politically, these costs were absorbed into a discourse emphasizing responsibility and international solidarity. Ultimately, Operation Ancient Babylon became less a debated policy choice and more an institutionalized fact.

Based on the Two-Level Game framework, this operation explains how executives can proactively re-invent Level II constraints by redefining issues. The redefinition of military involvement as peacekeeping can be associated with the Italian government cutting down domestic political expenditure and remaining in total alignment at Level I with the coalition partners. In this case, the Two-Level Game Theory demonstrates that decision-making is not just based on bargaining between levels but on manipulating the other level: domestic restrictions do not just constrain international action but can be managed, softened, or neutralized by discursive strategies that redefine commitment.

This case has additional implications for the Alliance Theory. The cohesion of the alliance might be dependent not only on the material contribution but on the domestic classification of the same. To manage

an alliance, governments use tools such as semantic and institutional framing. They may reset the actual meaning of credibility instead of alternating it with constraint.

Summary Table

Event / Vote	Domestic Constraint	Alliance Pressure	Italian Response	Outcome
UN Resolution 1441	Public skepticism	US expectation of alignment	Framed Iraq as a technical issue	Ambiguous support
Operation Ancient Babylon	Opposition motions, media scrutiny	US military requests	Peacekeeping & humanitarian framing	Troops deployed despite debate
Nasiriyah attack	National grief, protests	Alliance solidarity	Reinforced military commitment	Domestic opposition minimized
Decree-Law renewals	Weak veto power, parliamentary abstentions	Multilateral legitimacy (UN)	Semantic reframing as peace-building	Long-term presence normalized

Comparison to Other Military Missions

By comparing the military mission in Iraq to military missions in other countries, there are visible and crucial differences. These dissimilarities explain why Iraq's invasion was highly controversial.

Firstly, during the 2000s, Italy deployed much larger numbers of troops to Iraq than to most other missions, with thousands of personnel in both combat and training roles — whereas most peacekeeping deployments are mid-to-small scale, long-term, and under UN/EU mandates.[66]

Secondly, missions such as UNIFIL (Peacekeeping in Lebanon (UN) or KFOR (Kosovo (NATO) operated primarily under peacekeeping mandates focusing on stability and ceasefire monitoring. Moreover, they typically had broader international legitimacy due to their clear UN/EU mandates.[67] By contrast, the Iraq invasion was controversial domestically and internationally. As a matter of fact, the invasion was conducted as a U.S.-led war (Coalition of the Willing) rather than a strict UN peacekeeping mission — a key difference in terms of opposition at home and abroad. While other missions often had clearer UN/EU authority, Iraq lacked broad UN Security Council support.

Thirdly, peacekeeping and EU training missions emphasized limited use of force and adherence to neutrality under international mandates.[68] Although Italy's deployment was largely in training and stabilization roles, Iraq was part of a combat environment with higher risks and engagement intensity than typical UN/EU missions. This operational difference is reflected in how Italy structured its participation.

Looking at the parliamentary votes regarding the military missions in Lebanon and Libya, clear differences are visible. In October 2006,

the Italian Senate approved the decree financing Italy's peacekeeping mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with a large majority (Figure 5).

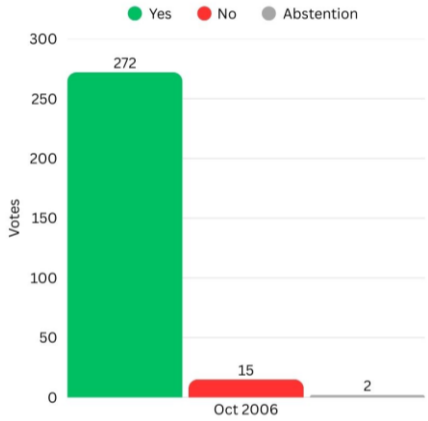

Figure 5. Financing of the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon. Adapted from "Senato approva missione in Libano" (2006).

Parliament debates on UNIFIL noted the broad political support for the mission and emphasized its peacekeeping nature under a UN mandate. This contrasted with the controversial wartime deployments in Iraq. In July 2020, the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House) approved a government resolution extending Italy's mission in Libya. It included training and support to Libyan forces. Likewise, there were only 23 votes against and 1 abstention (Figure 6).

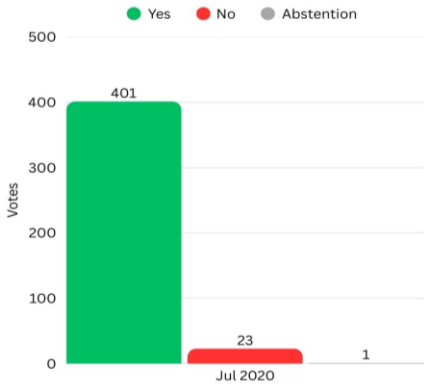

Figure 6. Financing of the peacekeeping mission in Libya. Adapted from "House OKs extension of Italian mission in Libya" (2020).

In conclusion, Italy's military mission in Iraq was significantly different from the other missions and remains until today one of the most controversial.

CONCLUSION

The results show that Italy was involved in the Iraq War because of alliance-based reasons as opposed to national strategic interests. The necessity to keep credibility with the United States, to preserve Italy in the Western alliance hierarchy, and to avoid reputational damage were core forces of Italy's executive behavior throughout the war. Iraq did not represent an isolated foreign policy deviation but was in line with a larger foreign policy trend of prestige and transatlantic reliability. This finding can be linked to the Alliance Theory, particularly to debates on credibility signaling and bandwagoning within asymmetric alliances. In this context, Italy's behavior reflects a form of strategic loyalty, which was prioritized over autonomous policymaking. The mechanism underpinning these dynamics lies in the fear of potential exclusion from high-level strategic coordination and the loss of influence in future NATO/EU decision-making processes, aligning with Italy's long-standing foreign policy goals of maintaining transatlantic reliability and prestige. In comparison to other more autonomous powers such as France or Germany, Italy's stance highlights a preference for alignment over independence.

Domestic politics did not restrict Italy's participation; rather, it influenced the form of its involvement. While skepticism in the general population, parliamentary opposition, and mass demonstrations produced rhetorical pressure, they had no institutional power to obstruct executive decisions. The presidency refused to mediate; Parliament approved deployments largely post

hoc; and procedures like renewing decree-laws restricted selective opposition. This led to a structurally permissive domestic policy that did not narrow, but instead enlarged the win-set of the government by allowing it to manage domestic dissent while maintaining international commitments. This outcome explicitly deviated from Putnam's expectation that domestic opposition constrains executives. The implication is that democratic opposition does not necessarily result in effective policy constraint.

Before the war, strategic ambiguity acted as a hedge strategy. More specifically, this ambiguity allowed Italy to delay its commitment and preserve flexibility. Given the uncertainty about the potential success of the US-led intervention and its legitimacy, such a strategy minimized domestic backlash. As soon as the invasion took place, Italy shifted rapidly in the direction of normalization. The UN Resolution 1483 gave a sort of discursive "cover". This form of international authorization played a critical role in providing legitimacy for Italy's involvement, both externally and domestically. The government could mitigate accusations of illegality and align its actions with multilateral norms. Instead of being seen as a country that participates in the war, the government was able to reposition itself as one involved in reconstruction and stabilization. Operation Ancient Babylon was generally brought out as a humanitarian and peace-oriented operation despite being in a highly militarized environment. A major instrument of governance was semantic reframing. From a conceptual perspective, this reflects insights from framing theory and constructivist approaches, which emphasize how a specific use of language shapes the perceived reality. Targeting the domestic public as well as the international partners, it effectively minimized the

constitutional pressure and diminished the exposition of the cost of war to the public.

The Nasiriyah attack and the Calipari case were critical points in time; yet, they did not lead to disengagement. While the literature on casualty sensitivity typically assumes significant losses increase withdrawal pressure, Italy deviated from this expectation. They increased the level of commitment by associating sacrifice with alliance commitment and national credibility. These instances indicate a notable theoretical refinement: domestic shocks can narrow exit options and increase the reputational cost of withdrawal rather than empower opposition. As casualties accumulated, withdrawal risked being interpreted as a failure to honor prior sacrifices, thereby damaging both domestic legitimacy and international credibility. In Two-Level Game terms, Level II constraints were institutionally contained and politically controlled, while Level I commitments strengthened with time.

The Iraq operation was significantly more controversial and polarized than other Italian military interventions, especially UN-sanctioned peacekeeping missions. Yet in this exceptional case, the autonomy of the executive proved to be resilient. By comparing the Iraq operation with other Italian engagements, such as Lebanon or Libya, this contrast is highlighted more clearly. While these missions were based on a stronger multilateral legitimacy, Iraq lacked both consensus and clarity. Nevertheless, despite higher controversy, the institutional outcomes governing executive autonomy remained similar across cases.

In conclusion, Italy did not completely support the Iraq War or fully oppose it. Instead, it created a sustainable compromise: devoted enough not to give signs of fragility, limited enough to be internally

manageable. This can be understood as a middle-power strategy operating under asymmetric alliance conditions. It was a strategic measure and not ideological conformity or outside pressure that persisted in the continuation of the Italian involvement between the year 2002 and 2006 in Iraq. More broadly, these findings suggest that alliance politics, executive autonomy, and discursive strategies play a decisive role in shaping the foreign policy decision-making of middle powers. However, the analysis is subject to certain limitations, such as the focus on a single case study and a specific geopolitical context. Future research could extend this framework through comparative analysis with other missions, such as Afghanistan or Libya, or by examining whether similar dynamics apply to other US allies operating within similar alliance structures.

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[35] Camera dei Deputati. (2004a). *Seduta n. 466 - Mercoledì 12 maggio 2004*. https://leg14.camera.it/chiosco.asp?sMacrosezione=Docesta&source=&position=Organi%20Parlamentari\L%27Assemblea\Resoconti%20dell%27Assemblea&content=/_dati/leg14/lavori/stenografici/framedinam.asp?sedpag=sed466/pdfel.htm

[36] Camera dei Deputati, 2004b

[37] *Sì del Parlamento alla missione italiana in Iraq.* (2003, April 15). Corriere della Sera. https://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Politica/2003/04_Aprile/15/parlamento.shtml

[38] *Siamo tre milioni contro la guerra.* (2003, February 15). Corriere della Sera. https://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2003/02_Febbraio/15/corteoroma.shtml

[39] Putnam, R. D. (1988). Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games. *International Organization*, 42(3), 427–460. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785

[40] Snyder, G. H. (1990). Alliance theory: A neorealist first cut. *Journal of International Affairs*, 44(1), 103–123. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24357226

[41] Putnam, 1988.

[42] Snyder, 1990.

[43] *NATO and the 2003 campaign against Iraq.* (n.d.). North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Retrieved March 30, 2026, from https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/nato-and-the-2003-campaign-against-iraq

[44] Article 5 of the Washington Treaty

[45] *Bush thanks Italian PM for support in war on terrorism.* (2003, July 21). DVIDS. https://www.dvidshub.net/news/532825/bush-thanks-italian-pm-support-war-terrorism

[46] Kitchen, V. M., Gordon, P. H., & Shapiro, J. (2005). Allies at war: America, Europe, and the crisis over Iraq. *International Journal*, 60(4), 1188. https://doi.org/10.2307/40204120

[47] Il Governo italiano, sin dall'inizio della crisi irachena, ha ribadito la centralità del Consiglio di Sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite e la necessità di tutelare la legalità internazionale. Le posizioni assunte dall'Italia non sembrano smentire tale premessa[…]

[48] Camera dei Deputati. (2003b). *Seduta n. 323 - Lunedì 16 giugno 2003.* https://leg14.camera.it/chiosco.asp?sMacrosezione=Docesta&source=&position=Organi%20Parlamentari\L%27Assemblea\Resoconti%20dell%27Assemblea&content=/_dati/leg14/lavori/stenografici/framedinam.asp?sedpag=sed323/pdfel.htm p. 33.

[49] L'Italia, in conformità con la risoluzione 1441 e in sintonia con gli altri paesi dell'Unione europea, sollecita le autorità di Baghdad a fornire attivamente agli ispettori dell'Onu le prove definitive del disarmo richiesto dalle Nazioni Unite.

[50] *Italia sostiene Onu per pace.* (2004, May 4). Tgcom24. https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/articoli/107404/-italia-sostiene-onu-per-pace-.shtml

[51] Snyder, 1990.

[52] Snyder, 1990.

[53] Sulla base di quanto sopra richiamato, il Presidente della Repubblica – nel doveroso rispetto delle proprie competenze, così come definite dalla Costituzione – non ritiene di poter accogliere le richieste di incontro avanzate.

[54] Precisazione sulle richieste di incontro, 2003.

[55] La guerra era già decisa, una guerra intrapresa non già per rovesciare un tiranno, a suo tempo peraltro aiutato e finanziato dagli Stati Uniti quando Saddam serviva contro un altro nemico. La guerra serve ad occupare un'area strategica del mondo ed i suoi pozzi di petrolio. Avete già concesso, in spregio alla Costituzione che prevede un voto del Parlamento che ancora non c'è stato.

[56] Camera dei Deputati. (2003a). *Seduta n. 283 - Mercoledì 19 marzo 2003.* https://leg14.camera.it/chiosco.asp?sMacrosezione=Docesta&source=&position=Organi%20Parlamentari\L%27Assemblea\Resoconti%20dell%27Assemblea&content=/_dati/leg14/lavori/stenografici/framedinam.asp?sedpag=sed283/pdfel.htm. p.56)

[57] Snyder, 1990.

[58] Nessuna intimidazione deve smuoverci dalla volontà di aiutare quel paese a risorgere ed a costruirsi un autogoverno e una situazione di sicurezza e di libertà. Da quando una guerra feroce è stata dichiarata dal fanatismo terrorista all'umanità intera con la strage dell'11 settembre, questo Governo, forte del vostro voto, del voto del Parlamento, ha agito perché l'Italia fosse leale con i suoi storici alleati, sicura di sé e del suo ruolo, nel contesto europeo a cui appartiene come paese fondatore, capace

sempre di proporre soluzioni utili ad una coalizione delle democrazie, la più vasta possibile, in favore della democrazia, appunto, e della libertà.

[59] Camera dei Deputati. (2003c). *Seduta n. 388 - Mercoledì 12 novembre 2003. https*://leg14.camera.it/chiosco.asp?sMacrosezione=Docesta&source=&position=Organi%20Parlamentari\L%27Assemblea\Resoconti%20dell%27Assemblea&content=/_dati/leg14/lavori/stenografici/framedinam.asp?sedpag=sed388/pdfel.htm. p. 6)

[60] Nonostante la continuità, la brutalità, la violenza dei sequestri, giunta fino all'assassinio degli ostaggi e alla diffusione dei video della violenza, i Paesi oggi impegnati a sostenere il legittimo Governo iracheno e l'opera di costruzione della democrazia in quel Paese non si sono lasciati intimidire e non hanno ceduto al ricatto dei rapitori.

[61] Senato della Repubblica. (2005, March 9). *Resoconto stenografico dell'Assemblea seduta n. 759*. https://www.senato.it/show-doc?leg=14&tipodoc=Resaula&id=130898&idoggetto=0&part=doc_dc-ressten_rs

[62] Tu hai ridato fiducia all'Italia intera. Tu hai saputo riportare in superficie quelle virtù nascoste grazie alle quali un Paese vive e va avanti. Tu hai ridato, come i caduti di Nasiriya, la Patria agli italiani. Tu hai fatto riscoprire un'Italia che c'è, che fortunatamente c'è.

[63] Senato della Repubblica, 2005.

[64] Ma "il drammatico crescendo di scontri di questi giorni […] non modifica le finalità e la natura complessiva della presenza dei nostri militari", che sono in Iraq "per portare la pace, non la guerra". La violenza in atto […] non modifica la missione, ma "rafforza, semmai, il nostro impegno." […] "nessun compito aggressivo, bellicoso, non rispettoso della persona umana; bensì essenzialmente protettivo, per consentire sicurezza ed assistenza umanitaria e di ricostruzione."

[65] *Il ministro Martino: le regole d'ingaggio non si cambiano.* (2004, May 18). La Gazzetta Del Mezzogiorno. https://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/mondo/14112/il-ministro-martino-le-regole-d-ingaggio-non-si-cambiano.html

[66] Mazziotti Di Celso, M., Coticchia, F., & Reure, J.-M. (2025). Italy's foreign military deployments: Theories, gaps, and future research. *International Peacekeeping*, 32(3), 647–676. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2025.2481269

[67] Mazziotti Di Celso et al., 2025.

[68] Mazziotti Di Celso et al., 2025.

ESSAY

SOVEREIGNTY IN QUESTION: THE TRNC AND THE LIMITS OF THE WESTPHALIAN MODEL

Nefeli Orthodoxou

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this paper is to show that the Cyprus conflict provokes the Westphalian notion of sovereignty. The paper is divided into three main parts; its historical context, the theoretical foundation of sovereignty, and legitimacy and the primary research which focused on the case study of the TRNC. The study revealed a significant number of challenges raised by the Cyprus conflict but also revealed that the conflict stems from not only the tension between the two countries and their divergent ideologies, but from a deep-rooted legacy of colonialism by the British Empire and involvement of Turkey. The fundamental issue leading to conflict is political rather than interpersonal between the two communities.

Keywords: Cyprus, statehood, IR theories

INTRODUCTION

Cyprus showcases how the Westphalian notion of sovereignty is put to test when two countries with divergent ideologies and desire, reside on one land with no resolution on going forwards. Hence, Cyprus is one of the many examples of not only frozen conflicts, but how the division of one land raises an international issue concerning sovereignty, legitimacy, and the right to 'own' the territory. Moreover, its history also showcases how colonialism and decades of conquest have a long-lasting legacy on the island.

This paper will be divided into three sections. Firstly, it will shed light on Cyprus' historical context. Subsequently, it will deal with the theoretical foundation of the Westphalian treaty, sovereignty, and legitimacy. Lastly, it will showcase through the primary research the question of how the division poses a challenge to the Westphalian notion of sovereignty through the case study analysis of the TRNC and the subsequent interviews conducted. It is hypothesised that the continued isolation of the TRNC discourages reconciliation and deepens further division, indicating that strict adherence to Westphalian sovereignty can impede conflict resolution.

Therefore, the main research question of this thesis is: How does the ongoing division of Cyprus provoke the Westphalian notion of sovereignty in world politics of the 21st century?

To address this question, the study combines secondary research alongside primary research in the form of a case study and purposive data collection through qualitative interviews. The secondary research is based on a systematic review of academic literature, historical records, and international legal documents, which provides the theoretical and contextual foundation for the analysis. This is

complimented by primary data collected through the case study and the interviews, allowing the study to incorporate personal perspectives and lived experiences into the discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of the literature review is to demonstrate how and if a de-facto state, such as the TRNC, can function in the international sphere and what consequences such an action has. Furthermore, the aim of this research is to highlight how the ongoing isolation of the TRNC discourages reconciliation and deepens further division, indicating that strict adherence to Westphalian sovereignty can halt conflict resolution.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the secondary research is conducted through a careful selection of peer-reviewed academic articles, archived historical records such as magazines and broadcasts, UN documents and most importantly the works of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Furthermore, as the primary research, a case study and six interviews are conducted to better understand Cyprus' history, the events of 1974, personal sentiments, and the TRNC's legitimacy. Researching these sources is fundamental in the development of Cyprus' history, the pivotal events that lead to the 1974 division and most importantly, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' contested legitimacy and sovereignty.

Research brings forth how British colonial administration from 1878 to 1960 has an important influence on the island's political and ethnic dissimilarities. Scholars such as Bouleti[1] and Ioannides[2] emphasise that the British government contributes to intercommunal tensions as they prioritise Cyprus' position in the Middle East for their strategic interests. However, research also highlights that religion on

the island is a pivotal element, through the Archbishop-ethnarch Makarios III as their leader, which showcases a complex intertwined relationship between religion and politics. Nonetheless, scholars[3] highlight how the presence of a religious leader fuels nationalistic Enosis sentiments whilst it reinforces Turkish-Cypriots' support for Taksim. Similarly, Faustmann[4] and Braat[5] support the argument by highlighting incidents such as the 1931 protest that further fuel Taksim as Greek-Cypriot Enosis sentiments increase. Thus, building onto the increasing inter-communal conflict which results in the 1974 division.

After Cyprus' independence in 1960, following decades of intercommunal tensions through organisations such as EOKA and TMT, research of historical archives shows that the situation turns violent. Following Makarios' attempted constitutional changes in 1963, violence broke out on the island, resulting in events such as "Bloody Christmas" and the establishment of Turkish-Cypriot enclaves.[6] However, Mirbagheri[7] contradicts the argument emphasising that Makarios' attempts at modifying the constitution only highlight the weakness of the Constitution and expose internal structural flaws rather than causing the conflict itself.

Subsequently, contradictions in the literature regarding the invasion and division are found. Whilst Kıralp[8] argues that the Turkish military rightfully intervenes according to the Treaty of Guarantee (1960)[9] and as a result of the Greek junta's coup, Georgiou[10] counterargue that the intervention is violent and illegal as it violates various elements such as mass displacement, sexual assault, and the illegal occupation of 36% of the island. Such a vast contradiction highlights how the two communities recall the events differently through contradicting stories and propaganda. This

argument is further supported by the primary source of the interview results. Moreover, it is deemed necessary to study theoretical literature as it can give insight into the TRNC's illegitimacy. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) is seen as a pivotal foundation for modern international relations regarding the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international recognition. However, much academic research argues that this notion in modern international relations is challenged by de-facto states such as the TRNC.

What is more, examining Hobbes' theory of effective control and order and Locke's theory on popular consent may show that the TRNC possesses international legitimacy and practical sovereignty despite lacking international recognition. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the difference between de-facto and de-jure states. The Montevideo Convention of 1933 argues that a state can exist if it fulfils all four criteria of territory, population, governance, and the capability of entering relations. The TRNC seems to fulfil these criteria; however, due to its lack of international recognition following the 1974 invasion and UN Resolution 550/1983, it faces challenges in establishing international relations.[11] However, Pegg[12] argues that the lack of legitimacy is often due to political interests between sovereign states and respect for international norms such as territorial integrity, as mentioned in the UNSC Resolutions of 1983 and 1984.

Further research showcases the difference between external and internal legitimacy with the implementation of the theories of effective control by Hobbes and popular consent by Locke. In doing so, it is established that despite a functional internal legitimacy, the TRNC's lack of external and international legitimacy renders it incapable of functioning as a fully recognised state.

Subsequently, much academic literature showcases recognition as a political tool in modern international relations.[1314] Recognition is used as a tool for strategic interests rather than purely based on international law.

This argument is exemplified by the TRNC, as it is still not recognised in aims of maintaining regional stability and upholding UN principles such as territorial integrity. For example, this is highlighted by Pakistan and Bangladesh's withdrawal of recognition of the TRNC after mounting international pressure.

Whilst research highlights notions that have not been widely brought forth before, the literature studied exposes how the TRNC's non-recognition and debates on legitimacy are based on both historical context and theoretical foundations.

It is important to note that much of the literature focuses on legal recognition and geopolitical dynamics rather than how personal memory and lived experience influence perceptions of legitimacy and sovereignty. Thus, this becomes the thesis' main objective, supported by the additional conduction of interviews with Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots and a thematic analysis.

Review of the Historical Background

To understand how the legitimacy of the TRNC is perceived, it is important to analyse the historical background of Cyprus, which many researchers argue is central to the events of 1974. The events of 1974 established the TRNC, and a comprehensive historical background helps explain the debate around its legitimacy and contested sovereignty. Cyprus came under British colonial control in 1878, through the Congress of Berlin in 1879.[15] Ioannides presents two contrasting debates, suggesting that the Cyprus conflict cannot be

explained[16] solely by external intervention but also by deep-rooted internal debates of identity and legitimacy. He argues that British use of Cyprus for strategic and economic interests in the Middle East reinforced ethnic divisions, as colonial powers often disregarded local ethnic communities. He also emphasises the significance of religion, particularly the Greek Orthodox community, with the archbishop acting as ethnarch, a representative of the Church and a political leader.[17] This highlights how politics and religion were closely intertwined in Cyprus' history.

This is exemplified by Archbishop Makarios III (1913–1977), who served as both ethnarch and archbishop while leading the Enosis movement.[18] Braat suggest[19] that after Cyprus became a Crown Colony in 1925, nationalist sentiments such as Enosis intensified. These findings reinforce the idea that divergent ideologies contributed to tension between the two communities concerning legitimacy and national identity. Faustmann argues[20] that the 1931 uprising against the British strengthened Enosis sentiments while also increasing Turkish-Cypriot support for Turkish-led ideology under the name of Taksim (division). Similarly, Braat views[21] the uprising as an early precursor to the island's later invasion and division in 1974. These arguments reinforce the view that divergent nationalistic interests were one of the main causes of the division and contrasting perspectives of legitimacy.

Various authors[22] suggest that Greek-Cypriots viewed Enosis as the sole path to independence. This debate further indicates that nationalist sentiments deepened the divide between the two communities. In 1946 the United Kingdom proposed a new constitution[23] to increase Cypriot self-administration, which the Greek-Cypriots rejected, taking the disagreement to the United

Nations.[24] By 1955, Greek-Cypriot nationalists had established EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) in pursuit of Enosis, and they carried out numerous violent operations. This further shows how the conflict developed through competing political aspirations and historical grievances.

The Cyprus conflict was shaped not only by colonial rule but also by diverging systems of views and ideas. The island's division reflects competing interpretations of identity, legitimacy, and sovereignty. Scholars emphasise[25] that British administration from 1878 to 1960 contributed to intercommunal tensions because Cyprus was treated as a strategic asset in the Middle East. At the same time, religion remained a major force in shaping political identity, especially through the role of Archbishop Makarios III and the Greek Orthodox Church.

Nationalism also played a central role. The growth of Enosis and Taksim intensified competing visions of Cyprus' future and deepened mistrust between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. The 1931 uprising strengthened these divisions, and the rejection of constitutional arrangements in the 1940s and the rise of EOKA in the 1950s further escalated the conflict. As a result, the historical background of Cyprus shows that the division was not the result of a single event, but of a long process of colonial administration, nationalism, religious-political leadership, and mutually reinforcing communal fears.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF SOVEREIGNTY AND LEGITIMACY

The notion of sovereignty transformed in the 16th century when philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke developed distinctive

interpretations of the concept. The Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years' War and laid out its main principles for sovereignty and international law. Baylis et al.[26] argue that the treaty created a decentralised system in which states became supreme within their territories, replacing the divided authority of medieval Christendom that included feudal lords, kingdoms, and peasant communities. However, in modern international relations, Westphalian principles are challenged by real-life conflicts.

A distinctive example is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which declared unilateral independence on 15 November 1983 after the invasion.[27] Thus, to comprehend such cases, it is crucial to revisit not only philosophical but also theoretical notions and studies of sovereignty. The 21st century has significantly challenged the Westphalian concept of sovereignty, which remains a pivotal foundation for modern international relations. Originally, a state meant the status of the ruler; however, by the 16th century, it had shifted to a matter of abstraction. Hobbes and Locke's ideas showcase how sovereignty and legitimacy encounter contrasting origins. The case of TRNC highlights how a state, despite lacking de-jure recognition, can function as a de-facto authority, thus demonstrating de-facto sovereignty.

The Treaty of Westphalia established the principles for international norms, including non-intervention, the principle that states cannot legally intervene in another's domestic affairs.[28] It also established the principle of territorial integrity, which emphasises the right of a state to exercise power within its borders and is now fundamental in the UN Charter.[29] Nevertheless, the existence of de-facto states complicates the Westphalian model: some entities conduct affairs as states without international recognition, a central element

for uncontested statehood under the Constitutive theory and international norms.

The TRNC showcases exactly this challenge to the classical Westphalian notion. Krasner brings forth[30] the fact that modern states prioritise power over preserving international Westphalian principles, possibly indicating that recognition could serve as a political tool in modern international relations. The TRNC case therefore illustrates how a political entity can exist within the paradigms of internal legitimacy while lacking external legitimacy through non-recognition.

It is fundamental to understand the difference between external legitimacy and internal legitimacy. Conventional international law norms argue that external recognition establishes the legitimacy of statehood, enabling a state to join organisations such as the UN or ICJ and establish diplomatic ties. Talmon described this as the constitutive theory and argued that "a state is, and becomes, an International Person through recognition only and exclusively," [31] creating a profound disparity between Article 3 of the Montevideo Convention,[32] which allows a state to exist independently of recognition.

Conversely, Locke[33] accentuates that without consent a government loses legitimacy. Applying Locke's theory, the TRNC showcases internal legitimacy through its population's acceptance of government, administration, and stability. Nonetheless, its unavailability to foreign aid and international organisations, and thus its high dependence on Turkey's sole aid, exposes the limitations of a de-facto state's functioning without recognition. This case with the examples of sanctions and embargoes from Greek-Cypriots and international companies.[34] Furthermore, as Turkey is the sole UN

member that recognises the TRNC, it provides military aid, financial support, and remains its closest and sole ally.

The case of the TRNC exposes a complex yet challenging circumstance in which the question of sovereignty existing without proper recognition arises. While traditional international law argues that external recognition is necessary for a state's proper functioning, the existence of internally accepted and functioning entities suggests that legitimacy and sovereignty may function in a way that contests the Westphalian model. Thus, a political entity such as the TRNC could exist within the paradigms of internal legitimacy whilst lacking external legitimacy through non-recognition.

To comprehend the notion of sovereignty in modern international relations, it is pivotal to analyse an entity's capabilities to maintain order and provide security to its citizens. Hobbes, in Leviathan,[35] established a modern notion of sovereignty in which it is created upon security and order. Hobbes argues that without a supreme authority to keep order, people live in "a war against all," naturally bound to become violent to protect themselves. Through a Hobbesian perspective, the TRNC illustrates this theory.

Despite lacking international recognition, it maintains autonomous institutions, government, and security. Thus, it functions as a de-facto state, a notion primarily studied by Scott Pegg.[36] Applying the Hobbesian model could prove that the TRNC possesses actual sovereignty because its citizens submit to it and the state provides functioning order. Furthermore, the theory developed by Hobbes indicates that for a state to be internally legitimate, it must exercise functioning order and provide security to its citizens.

In understanding this, a conceptual framework can be made. For example, a state that possesses both high internal and external

legitimacy is considered the classical sovereign state, as it maintains stable functioning alongside internal acceptance and external recognition. However, if a state possesses high internal legitimacy but lacks external legitimacy (recognition), it is categorised as a de-facto state, which possesses internal acceptance, per Locke's model, and functioning order, per Hobbes, but no international recognition. This distinction helps explain why the TRNC remains central to debates on sovereignty and legitimacy.

Moreover, the existence of de-jure and de-facto statehood brings forth the question of what makes a state sovereign. Recognition remains one of the pivotal elements for a state, yet the TRNC suggests that a de-facto state may have internal legitimacy whilst lacking external legitimacy due to international norms. Thus, the case challenges the Westphalian notion of sovereignty and shows that recognition is not only a legal issue but also a political one.

Pegg's claims that a de-facto state can not only be dysfunctional but also operate within an international legal system show the inconsistencies within the Westphalian model and its disturbance to the notion of sovereignty. Therefore, sovereignty must be examined in a more inclusive manner where cases such as the TRNC are considered. To do so, it is significant to analyse the TRNC through theoretical frameworks such as Hobbes' theory, internal legitimacy, its lack of international recognition in accordance with the Westphalian model, and the tensions between these elements. These criteria serve as the foundation of the case study and the empirical analysis conducted.

METHODOLOGY

To obtain results that could be implemented in this research, firstly, a case study was conducted in which the TRNC was thoroughly analysed as a de-facto state through Hobbesian and Lockesian lenses and in accordance with the Westphalian notion of sovereignty and legitimacy. In doing so, the case study of the TRNC served as an analytical tool to gain in-depth knowledge about the functioning and external recognition of a non-recognised de-facto state, which could then further provide pivotal information for the interview results. The interviews were conducted as the second primary research, to further support the TRNC's existence as a challenge to the Westphalian model. In doing so, a qualitative method was applied.

The reason for this choice was the topic itself, since qualitative method gains much more insight into personal experiences and feelings than quantitative method could. Thus, the data obtained from qualitative method provided numerous results regarding personal experiences, memories, feelings, and perceptions that go beyond results that could be obtained through literature or quantitative research itself. The usage of qualitative method also provided the researcher with a much more flexible interviewing process and data gathering process than quantitative method. For example, interviewees in the study brought forth new perceptions that had not been researched before. It was believed that with quantitative method, which rather focuses on numerical data, challenges would be faced because it does not allow the participating individual to freely express themselves and thus provide in-depth information.

The data collection process was divided into three parts in attempts of gaining pivotal in-depth knowledge about the research results conducted. Thus, the case study served as a pivotal element to the

upcoming interview results. For example, some of the answers could be understood or answered due to the case study conducted, as it served as background information to the upcoming interviews and thematic analysis. The study conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews in attempts of gaining in-depth results. Four Greek-Cypriot participants were interviewed, ranging from 70 to 85, in addition to one 25-year-old Turkish-Cypriot participant, in order not to limit the study to one perspective and to gain as many divergent perspectives, memories, and sentiments as possible. Furthermore, as debates of legitimacy and sovereignty are fundamental in international law and relations, it was deemed necessary to interview two International Relations experts who provided a broader and legal understanding surrounding these topics.

To ensure the relevancy of the research, participants were selected based on their nationalities, preferably staying within the Greek/Turkish-Cypriot community. More precisely, a purposive data collection sampling was applied. In addition, the study implemented the interviews of International Relations experts as it was deemed important to research the perceptions of participants outside of the Cypriot community and who had studied International Relations. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were contacted via text messages and, upon their agreement to participate, they were given an in-depth explanation of the thesis and the research topic and a brief introduction of the questions. The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, to ensure maximum relaxation and a sense of comfort. To establish a sense of trust, each participant was informed that the interviews were confidential, with no names needed to be provided, and the audio recordings were to be destroyed after

transcribing and analysing them. Furthermore, each interview was set to last a maximum of 35 minutes.

The present study implied the conduction of two separate primary research. Firstly, the implementation of a case study of the TRNC served as an analytical tool which applied the Hobbesian and Lockesian theory alongside international norms. In doing so, the case study of the TRNC served as a tool to gain in-depth knowledge and as further support to the interview results, with which some answers regarding memory, personal experience, contrasting perspectives and legitimacy obtained from the interviews could be explained. The interview questions were composed as semi-structured open-ended questions, allowing participants to freely answer and further add onto the questions asked. Questions ranged from asking participants to recall 1974, their sense of trust, and the topic of legitimacy and the TRNC, thus attempting to gain as many results as plausible for the topic. The data analysis included the transcription of the interviews, allowing the researcher to gain a clean insight into the information gathered.

Secondly, similar results were thematically organised into the same groups whilst also comparing them to the results found in the literature research. Lastly, the results were thematically analysed with identical patterns such as acceptance, legitimacy, fear, and memory to facilitate the understanding of the results obtained. In doing so, the creation of a thematic content analysis table was implemented with the usage of Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT). The usage was conducted in a deductive way ChatGPT was given code words to analyse such as divergent perspectives, safety, legitimacy, and then to categorise them into clear and concise themes. In doing so,

an in-depth analysis was conducted in hopes of gaining further pivotal data from the interviews that may have been previously overlooked.

The qualitative method also had its limitations. As the research focused on one singular group, the usage of a purposive data collection sampling posed the risk of sample bias and limited generalisability. Furthermore, as the interviews were conducted in person and dealt with sensitive topics such as participants recalling the 1974 events, there was a risk of psychological trauma being brought to surface. There was also the possibility that some information may have been lost in the translation process, as the interviews were conducted in Greek. However, participants were assured that if they felt uneasy, they did not have to answer any question and had the freedom to stop at any moment. They were also further assured and comforted at the end of each interview. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the qualitative method provided personal and deep understanding of the topic that quantitative method could not have provided. As it was a semi-structured open-ended interview, it allowed the participants to freely and openly express themselves in their own words with no limitations.

CASE STUDY: BETWEEN FUNCTIONALITY AND NON-RECOGNITION – THE ANOMALY OF THE TRNC'S EXISTENCE

The case of the TRNC offers an interesting example of a de-facto state that has effective control over a given territory and has achieved popular consent while also holding administrative capabilities over its population.[37] The TRNC can therefore be understood as an entity that functions internally, despite its lack of international recognition. Following the 1974 intervention, the TRNC unilaterally proclaimed

itself as an independent entity on the island with 36% control over the Northern territory.[38]At the same time, its status remained contested internationally, as the UN declared it invalid in Resolution 541.[39]

Studies show how marginalised and dependent the entity can become when it lacks recognition from the international community. Since Turkey is the only political entity that recognises it as a legitimate state, the TRNC is highly dependent on Turkey militarily, politically, and economically.[40] For example, Cyprus uses the euro as its currency, whereas the TRNC uses the Turkish lira; in 2018, the lira crisis resulted in inflated interest rates and increased everyday costs for citizens of the TRNC. This highlights how non-recognition does not prevent internal functioning, but it does severely restrict external stability and development.

The TRNC also raises questions of legitimacy, especially in relation to popular consent. *De-facto* states may have functioning political institutions and population consent even when they lack recognition in international law.[41] This aligns with Locke's theory, in which legitimacy is linked to the consent of the governed. In the case of the TRNC, the existence of elections, a constitution, and governmental institutions suggests a degree of internal legitimacy, even if this is not translated into external legitimacy.

However, the lack of recognition limits this internal legitimacy in practical terms. The TRNC cannot fully participate in international organisations, enter treaties, or establish diplomatic relations in the same way as recognised states can. Thus, while it may function internally as a political entity, its exclusion from the international sphere demonstrates the tension between internal acceptance and external legitimacy.

The TRNC maintains institutions, administrative structures, and political order, which supports the argument that it functions as a state in practice. From a Hobbesian perspective, this is significant because sovereignty is tied to order and security. Hobbes argues that without a supreme authority, people live in a state of disorder and violence; the TRNC, despite its non-recognition, nonetheless sustains governance and security within its territory.

At the same time, the TRNC remains constrained by its dependence on Turkey. Its external functioning is limited because it cannot freely develop diplomatic relations or integrate into global institutions. The TRNC therefore illustrates how a political entity may possess internal order while remaining structurally weakened by non-recognition. This makes it a useful example for understanding de-facto statehood in modern international relations.

The limitations of the TRNC's statehood are directly connected to its non-recognition. As the UN declared it invalid in Resolution 541, the TRNC cannot create or enter treaties, diplomatic relations, or join international organisations such as the UN, IMF, WHO, or UNESCO.[42] Although it attempts to establish representative offices abroad, these do not function as full diplomatic missions. The TRNC therefore faces exclusion from the international sphere despite its internal institutions.

This exclusion also has economic and political consequences. The TRNC seeks bilateral relations in places such as Doha, Manama, Kuwait City, Abu Dhabi, Belgium, China, and Canada, but these efforts remain limited by its non-recognition.[43] In practice, this means that the TRNC may function domestically, but externally it is heavily restricted and dependent on Turkey. The findings suggest that

international recognition is significant for a state's overall functioning and poses a challenge to the Westphalian paradigm.

In modern international relations, recognition has become more of a political instrument than a simple test of statehood. Rather than being determined only by the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention, recognition is often shaped by strategic interests, territorial integrity, and broader international norms. The TRNC supports this argument, as its non-recognition reflects political choices as much as legal reasoning.

Recognition is often used to preserve territorial integrity and maintain stability.[44] In the case of the TRNC, this means that international actors have treated recognition as a means of discouraging secession rather than as a neutral legal judgment. The TRNC therefore demonstrates that recognition functions as a political tool in the international system.

The Montevideo Convention (1933) provides four criteria for statehood: a permanent population, a defined territory, a functional government, and the capacity to enter relations with other states. In theory, the TRNC meets these criteria. It has a population, a defined territory in the North, a functioning government, and attempts to establish relations externally. Under the declarative theory, this could support the claim that it is a legitimate state.

However, in practice, the TRNC lacks the broader recognition needed to operate fully in the international sphere. Apart from Turkey, it remains unrecognised by states and international organisations. This shows the gap between declarative statehood and political reality. While the Montevideo Convention remains important, the TRNC illustrates that fulfilling these criteria is not enough on its own.

The UN and the EU have both reinforced the non-recognition of the TRNC. The UN Security Council Resolutions 541 and 550 declared the TRNC's independence invalid and called on member states to refrain from recognising it.[45] The EU likewise recognises only the Republic of Cyprus, and the TRNC remains outside the scope of full EU law and institutions.[46]

This exclusion has concrete consequences. The EU acquis does not apply in the North, and Turkish-Cypriots are restricted in access to movement, trade, and economic benefits.[47] The TRNC is also affected by travel and border controls, which further limit its external functioning. These findings show how non-recognition affects not only diplomacy but also everyday life and economic development.

Overall, the non-recognition of the TRNC by the UN and the EU stems not only from legal invalidity but also from political motives.[48] International actors appear to use non-recognition to maintain regional stability and avoid legitimising secessionist entities. At the same time, the TRNC continues to function internally, which creates a contradiction between political practice and international norms.

The case of the TRNC therefore shows that sovereignty in the modern international system cannot be understood only through recognition alone or through internal functioning alone. Instead, it must be analysed through the tension between functional statehood, internal legitimacy, and external non-recognition. The TRNC remains a clear example of a de-facto state whose existence challenges the Westphalian notion of sovereignty.

Participants were selected mainly on the basis of nationality, with Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot interviewees included, except for the International Relations expert, whose role was to provide a perspective beyond the two communities. The first interviewee was

81-year-old Eleni, who was 29 at the time of the conflict and had two children. Because she lived through the inter-communal conflicts before and after the division, her insights, together with those of 70-year-old Panayiota, were considered especially important for the research.

It was decided that two female Greek-Cypriots and two male Greek-Cypriots would be interviewed to compare how men and women experienced the 1974 events differently, and how those different experiences shaped their perspectives more than fifty years later. Sotiris, aged 77, had served in the military for two months during the conflict and remained actively involved in discussions about the division of Cyprus, while also adding insight into his friends' experiences. Theoharris, called Harris, was 85 and had served in the military for three to four months, giving a broader understanding of the military side and the Turkish invasion.

Alongside the Greek-Cypriot interviews, one 25-year-old Turkish-Cypriot was included to bring in the other side of the island's divided experience. He shared his grandmother's memories of the 1974 invasion together with his own views on the TRNC, its legitimacy, division, and possible reunification. It was considered important to include both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots because both communities were affected by the conflict and had lived through very different experiences. In addition, one International Relations expert, Aysel, who was working in the field, was interviewed to deepen the discussion of legitimacy, sovereignty, and the validity of the TRNC in modern international relations.

There were, however, clear limitations. The number of Greek-Cypriot participants was higher than the number of Turkish-Cypriot participants, largely because it was difficult to find Turkish-Cypriots

willing to take part in an interview about the TRNC and its legitimacy. In addition, no participants with pro-Enosis or pro-Taksim views were interviewed, even though such views were present at the time of the conflict. This means the results could have looked different if those perspectives had been included.

Participants were interviewed about their memories of the 1974 conflict, and although all four of the direct eyewitnesses were Greek-Cypriots, the results were still striking. Since 1974 is seen as the turning point in Cyprus' conflict and affected more than 200,000 citizens, the topic had to be handled sensitively, with attention to the wellbeing of the participants. To reduce bias, the researcher also tried to include both women and men, since they may have experienced the conflict differently.

The female participants' responses brought out details that could not be captured through literature alone. They described witnessing acts committed by the Turkish military, including bombings, destruction of property, violence, and mass displacement. Their memories show how the events are still tied to loss and forced movement, and how propaganda remains present on the island through attempts by both sides to shape the narrative. Their recollections reinforce the view of 1974 as an illegal occupation and show that legitimacy is strongly influenced by personal experience rather than by legal analysis alone.

The male participants focused more on the military aspect of the invasion, but their answers broadly supported the same picture. They also described Turkish military violence against Greek-Cypriots and their property, which further strengthened the view that the TRNC is illegitimate from the Greek-Cypriot perspective. One participant also noted that the Cypriot military was unprepared after the Junta

returned to Greece and took the weapons that had been supplied to Cyprus. This supported the idea that the coup may have been planned to enable Turkey's occupation of the island. Another account described a friend being taken to a prison camp in Turkey for three months after being injured, which again reinforced the view that the invasion was illegal.

Overall, the interviews suggest that knowledge of 1974 is essential for understanding both legitimacy and relations between the two communities. The responses also show that emotional attachment to the events remains strong: some participants tried to avoid the topic, while the male participants often answered only briefly when asked about military service. This indicates that personal experience continues to shape how legitimacy and sovereignty are understood in relation to the TRNC. The interviews also show that literature alone cannot fully capture these memories, because it does not reach the same depth of lived experience.

The legitimacy of the TRNC is a complex issue that requires close examination. To explore it, the interview included four Greek-Cypriots and one 25-year-old Turkish-Cypriot. Since the TRNC is widely rejected by the UN, the EU, and Cyprus itself, it was important to understand why Cypriot citizens reject it and how the memory of 1974 shapes that rejection. One Turkish-Cypriot was also interviewed to reduce sampling bias.

The key question in this section was whether the TRNC is valid, and all four Greek-Cypriot participants answered no. Their responses were similar enough to be grouped together, although there were some differences in emphasis. For the Greek-Cypriots, the TRNC is invalid because it was created through illegal invasion and the division of the island. Since only Turkey recognises it, they also described it as a non-

recognised entity internationally. Several participants argued that the TRNC functions like a puppet government for Turkey, a view also reinforced by Aysel, who described it as an attempted extension of Turkey.

The interview responses also pointed to the importance of recognition. One participant asked how a state could be legitimate if it was created through illegal occupation and depends heavily on Turkey. This dependency was linked to the TRNC's lack of recognition under UN Resolutions 541 and 550, which makes diplomatic relations difficult and prevents full statehood from developing. In this sense, recognition became central to the question of legitimacy, because without it the TRNC remains contested and politically limited.

The Turkish-Cypriot participant offered a different but still revealing view. He argued that Turkish-Cypriots are also Cypriots and have the right to self-determination, but he also acknowledged that the TRNC's dependence on Turkey is tied to its lack of international recognition. He therefore accepted that the TRNC functions internally as a state, with government, territory, nationality, police, and elections, but only within a very limited external framework. He avoided directly answering whether its creation was legitimate, instead returning to its dependence on Turkey.

Aysel, the International Relations expert, offered an outsider perspective that was useful because it was less likely to be shaped by direct lived experience of the conflict. She recognised the TRNC's creation as a response to a threatened ethnic minority and saw this as part of the logic behind the Turkish-Cypriot account of a "Peace Operation" rather than an invasion. She also believed that coexistence is possible, pointing to similarities between the two communities in culture and tradition. At the same time, she stressed the importance

of international recognition and respect for international norms, arguing that recognition is politically significant and that recognition of the TRNC could create wider instability.

Aysel's response also echoed broader theories of statehood. She suggested that the TRNC is partially legitimate internally but still depends on international recognition to become fully legitimate. Her argument therefore both supports and challenges the Westphalian model, because it shows that a state can function internally while still lacking external legitimacy. She also emphasised that Turkey is highly state-centric and uses recognition in line with its own interests, which helps explain why it is the only UN member recognising the TRNC.

Overall, the interview results show a strong consensus among Greek-Cypriots, the UN, and the EU that the TRNC is not valid, because it emerged from illegal occupation and remains highly dependent on Turkey. The Turkish-Cypriot participant and Aysel both recognised this dependency, even if they framed it differently. The declarative theory would say that the TRNC fulfils the basic criteria of statehood, but the constitutive view shows that without recognition it remains contested. The interview therefore suggests that the TRNC is internally functional but externally illegitimate.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, and attempts at reunification have repeatedly failed because the parties have not reached a common consensus. Many people on the island, especially those affected by the conflict and the next generation, hold mixed views about whether reunification is still possible. Some interviewees hoped for a unified Cyprus, while others were much more pessimistic.

Eleni was the first participant to be interviewed. She said that people were not fully informed about the severity of the situation,

although they could sense it through the Turkish military's actions. At first, she hoped to return, but she later became pessimistic and said reunification might not happen for another 500 years, or perhaps never. Panayiota also did not believe reunification was possible. She stressed that the two communities had repeatedly reached negotiation stages without coming to an agreement, and she linked this failure to the presence of Turkish troops in occupied villages and areas they did not allow people to enter.

At the same time, the two women's responses show how emotional exhaustion can deepen pessimism over time. Their answers suggest that repeated failure may eventually lead people to accept the situation as it is, even if they do not fully agree with it. This fits with Pegg's argument that a de facto state can become a practical solution when no other settlement is found.

The male participants were more hopeful. Sotiris believed reunification was possible and pointed to the opening of the borders and the fact that many Cypriots have returned to visit old friends, neighbours, and family in the North. Still, he thought reunification would take many years, perhaps decades, and said that the two sides would have to negotiate without the Turkish government and identify common ground. Harris also believed reunification could happen, but only in the long term. He suggested that if it did not happen within the next twenty or thirty years, another civil war could break out because frustration was growing and the Turkish military presence was seen as increasingly provocative.

Across the interviews, one issue appeared again and again: the Turkish military presence. All four Greek-Cypriot participants said reunification was not possible while Turkish troops remained on the island, and they all wanted the military removed before any

meaningful first step could begin. They also made a distinction between Turkish-Cypriots, whom they viewed as similar to themselves, and Turkish citizens transferred from Turkey, whom they saw as outsiders. In their view, the military presence intensifies tensions and obstructs trust between the communities.

These responses suggest that the foreign military presence is central to both division and distrust. As Sotiris put it, "military is going to be military," and the participants repeatedly described the Turkish government and military as the main obstacle to peace. At the same time, they acknowledged that the military presence is justified by Turkey as protection for Turkish-Cypriots. The interviews therefore show both the persistence of hope for reunification and the depth of the barriers that still stand in the way.

The interviews produced one of the clearest findings in the study: the two communities interpret 1974 in fundamentally different ways. All four Greek-Cypriot participants described the events as an invasion and an occupation. In one interview, when the interviewer referred to the North as the "Turkish part," Eleni quickly corrected this to "the occupied zone." The other Greek-Cypriot participants made similar corrections, which suggests that the language used to describe the North is itself politically charged. They never referred to it as the TRNC or the Turkish part.

By contrast, the Turkish-Cypriot participant offered a very different account. Because there was no opportunity to interview a Turkish-Cypriot who had lived through 1974, he drew on his grandmother's memories as well as his own views about the TRNC and its legitimacy. He explained that many Turkish-Cypriots lived in enclaves before 1974 because they feared Enosis, and he linked this

fear to Bloody Christmas, Makarios' proposed amendments, and a constitution that they believed favoured Greek-Cypriots.

He also said that Turkish-Cypriots generally refer to 1974 as the "Cyprus Peace Operation" rather than as an invasion or occupation. In their view, the intervention was carried out in protection of Turkish-Cypriot citizens and against the threat posed by pro-Enosis nationalism. This shows that the same event is remembered in opposite moral terms: Greek-Cypriots see it as occupation, while Turkish-Cypriots often see it as safety and rescue.

These contrasting narratives reinforce the wider argument of the thesis: historical memory on Cyprus remains divided, and that division continues to shape attitudes toward legitimacy and reunification. The conflict is not only about territory, but also about how the past is named, remembered, and justified. In that sense, the interview findings show that any future reconciliation will have to address not just politics, but the deep clash between historical narratives as well.

CONCLUSIONS

The Turkish-Cypriot participant's responses suggested that the TRNC functions as a political entity through its institutions, elections, law, and police, and that its creation was seen as a safety measure meant to protect Turkish-Cypriots. These findings can be read through Hobbes, because the TRNC appears to provide order and security to the citizens who submit to it. At the same time, the interview results also show that the TRNC depends heavily on Turkey for financial, military, and political support, which limits its sovereignty in practice. In other words, the TRNC may function

internally, but its reliance on a patron state means it does not function independently in the international sphere.

The Greek-Cypriot participants rejected the TRNC as an invalid entity because they associated it with illegal invasion, occupation, and mass displacement, and they also stressed its lack of international recognition. By contrast, the Turkish-Cypriot participant described the TRNC as a protective response to fear, violence, and discrimination before 1974, and he presented it as a functioning political entity that people inside the community accept. This supports Locke's idea that consent matters for legitimacy, but the interviews also show that legitimacy is divided across the island rather than shared. The TRNC may be accepted internally, yet that acceptance is not enough on its own because its legitimacy remains contested externally.

A major finding from the interviews was that the TRNC is not recognised internationally except by Turkey, and this limits its diplomatic and institutional options. Because it cannot easily establish relations with other states or join international organisations, it becomes more dependent on Turkey for support, including military support. The presence of Turkish troops on the island also appears to heighten tension between the two communities. The results therefore suggest a cycle in which non-recognition produces dependence, and dependence in turn reinforces contested sovereignty. This shows the tension between internal functionality and external legitimacy, and why recognition remains central in the Westphalian model.

The interviews show that Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots interpret the events of 1974 in fundamentally different ways. Greek-Cypriots describe them as an illegal invasion and occupation, while

Turkish-Cypriots frame them as a legitimate peace operation carried out to protect Turkish-Cypriot citizens and restore order. This difference shows that legitimacy is not universal, especially when a state is created on territory that was already under dispute. Instead, legitimacy is shaped by memory, ideology, and personal experience, which continue to influence how each community understands the conflict.

The responses suggest that non-recognition of the TRNC discourages reconciliation and deepens division, which in turn makes reunification harder. Participants pointed to repeated negotiation failures, ongoing military tension, and the continued involvement of external actors, especially Turkey, as major barriers to peace. While some interviewees still hoped for reunification, they also saw the Turkish military presence as one of the main reasons the conflict remains unresolved. The findings therefore suggest that continued isolation and external involvement sustain division rather than resolve it.

A thematic analysis of the interviews was carried out to identify recurring patterns and overlooked insights. Using key concepts such as acceptance, legitimacy, perspective, and security, the analysis grouped the data into broader themes and distinguished between what participants stated directly and what their answers implied. It showed that the conflict is tied not only to fear, displacement, and emotional trauma, but also to negative views of foreign political actors, especially Turkish involvement. The analysis also reinforced the thesis's main argument: the TRNC may have internal legitimacy, but its lack of external recognition and the continued division on the island challenge its sovereignty and make reunification more difficult.

This study aimed to explore how a de-facto state, such as the TRNC, challenges the Westphalian notion in the 21st century. In addition to showcasing its ongoing isolation resulting in further division and obstacles to reunification.

The study begun with an in-depth analysis of the historical background of Cyprus and the root cause of the 1974 conflict. In doing so, the research provided substantial knowledge of the reasoning behind the non-recognition and reunification obstacles.

Subsequently, the literature review applied a theoretical foundation in which philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes and international relations experts were analysed on sovereignty, legitimacy within the Westphalian model and the different justifications of a de-facto state.

The primary research phase included a case study of the TRNC to showcase the TRNC as a functioning state despite its non-recognition whilst highlighting its limitations and challenges to the Westphalian notion of sovereignty.

Moreover, it included the conduction of semi-structured interviews with four Greek-Cypriots, one 25-year-old Turkish-Cypriot and a 22-year-old International Relations expert.

The results obtained from the interviews provided valuable insights into the perception of legitimacy of the TRNC not only by outsiders but by individuals who have experienced the 1974 conflict.

Furthermore, the analysis of the primary research brought forth intriguing patterns and differences amongst the participants. These provided valuable insights into the complexity of a de-facto state and its existence in world politics of the 21st century. These were further explored in section 5 under the analysis section.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the continued isolation of the TRNC fosters further division and obstacles of reunification.

The research suggests that internal legitimacy alone cannot be enough for a state to function on the bigger sphere. International recognition is necessary for a state. Hence, it is rendered dependent on Turkey which acts as its patron state. Resulting in further questions about the TRNC's legitimacy as a functioning state. The continued isolation of the TRNC, as it was revealed, is mainly supported and protected by Turkey, further reinforces division and discourages unification. Territorial integrity is pivotal for a functioning state; however, the continued existence of the TRNC challenges the Westphalian notion of sovereignty.

As part of the research process, it was pivotal to gain in-depth knowledge about the historical context as it allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the root cause of the conflict as well as an objective perspective of it.

Research further revealed that international organisations attempt at non-recognition nowadays serves as a political tool. Such a tool is exercised in accordance to maintaining relations or discouraging a political secessionist entity from further escalating its actions.

Such findings reveal that meeting the Montevideo's Criteria in modern international relations is not sufficient to be recognised as a state. However, further findings revealed that a de-facto state can in fact serve as a positive cause. It can serve as a temporary solution to a conflict which cannot be solved if it were not for the establishment of the *de-facto* state.

Moreover, the study revealed that even though, the RoC is the sole entity recognised on the island, the TRNC further attempts to establish itself as a state on a territory that has been illegally occupied through the establishment of a constitution, elections and governmental institutions. However, due to its non-recognition on the international sphere it is hindered by its dependence on Turkey and mainly its invalidity that was called upon by UN Resolution 541/1983.

Furthermore, due to its heavy dependence on Turkey financially and military wise, findings revealed that may be the root cause that prevents reunification. The thematic analysis suggested that the issue on the island may rather be political through the involvement of external actors, rather than an interpersonal one.

The findings suggest that the international spheres attempt at non-recognition has contributed to the worsening of division of the island rather than its reunification. These findings provide valuable insights for international relations experts who seek to understand the TRNC in world politics as of the 21st century.

The research aimed to identify whether the ongoing division of Cyprus provoke the Westphalian notion of sovereignty in world politics of the 21st century. In addition to proving that the continued isolation of the TRNC discourages reconciliation and deepens further division, indicating that strict adherence to Westphalian sovereignty can impede conflict resolution.

It was anticipated that the research would support the research question in addition to the hypothesis. To achieve results, the combination of a comprehensive literature review alongside the primary research with a case study and a semi-structured interviews was applied.

The interviews combined four individuals who experienced the 1974 conflict, alongside a 25-year-old Turkish-Cypriot who could not only provide details of the previous generations experience, but his insights into the present generations' perspective of the TRNC. Furthermore, one International Relations expert was interviewed to obtain an objective perspective.

Analysis of the results obtained provided valuable data into the provocation of the Westphalian notion of sovereignty through the existence of the TRNC. However, it is significant to note that the analysis of the results obtained in comparison to the TRNC must be done through various elements including Hobbes' theory of functionality and order, Locke's popular consent and how the lack of international recognition due to the Westphalian paradigm creates a complex tension between these elements.

Based on the study's conclusion, future analyses should consider that the involvement of international organisations such as the UN or EU is simply not enough for a solution. Findings obtained highlighted that the conflict of Cyprus has turned into a frozen conflict with no solution as the two communities cannot come to equal terms. The involvement of foreign actors such as Turkey, the EU or the UN hinders reunification possibilities as mainly the Turkish government's presence fosters sentiments of hostility between the two community. Thus, creating a cycle. Furthermore, it is pivotal to understand that decades of tensions on the island and divergent historical narratives should be considered when studying cases such as the TRNC.

Future studies could analyse whether the application of a flexible notion of sovereignty applied by the United Nations or the European Union could facilitate resolution in the case of frozen conflicts. Furthermore, future studies could investigate partially recognised

states such as Kosovo or Taiwan and research whether its recognition or lack of, automatically reinforces division. This could provide a broader understanding of the impact of non-recognition on division and the possibilities of reunification across divergent (*de-facto*) states other than the TRNC.

APPENDIX

Interview questions 1 – prepared for participants who share personal memories to Cyprus

1. How old were you in 1974?
2. Did you or your family have to leave your home?
3. What has been the hardest part of the division for you personally?
4. What did you lose because of the conflict?
5. How has your view of the conflict changed over time?
6. Did you ever imagine the division would last this long?
7. Do you trust the other side today? Why or why not?
8. Did the division change how you see people from the other community?
9. Can the Northern Cyprus (TRNC) function like a country even if most of the world doesn't recognize it?
10. Do you think reunification is realistic?
11. What would need to happen for the conflict to finally end?
12. Do you think of Cyprus as one country or two separate countries? Why?
13. If the TRNC would be internationally recognised, how do you think the situation would change?
14. How old are you now as of 2026?

Interview questions 2 – prepared for the International Relations experts

1. What does "sovereignty" mean to you?
2. Do you believe sovereignty should depend on international recognition? Why or why not?
3. Do you think the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) qualifies as a sovereign state? Why/ why not?
4. Is international recognition necessary for legitimacy?
5. Do you believe Northern Cyprus should be recognised as its own country?
6. What does it say that only Turkey recognises the TRNC?
7. Do you think the non-recognition of the TRNC helps or harms prospects for reunification?
8. Is international isolation helping the matter of reunification or does it deepen division?
9. Do you see similarities between Cyprus and other divided places?

10. Do you think the traditional Westphalian notion of one territory is equivalent to one sovereign state is challenged by the Cypriot case?

** The English transcript of the six participants is available via this link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cBCkM44QE6aZep8zeAm_bCmeht2F2nF_ArHAniogUwk/edit?usp=sharing

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