INTERVENTO DEL PRESIDENTE DEL CONSIGLIO AL
“CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES”
(CSIS)

“Security in the Mediterranean as a cornerstone of global stability: the common engagement of Italy and the US”

President Hamre,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

thank you for hosting me at the prestigious CSIS Headquarters today. I am honored to have the opportunity to present the topic of “Security in the Mediterranean as a cornerstone of global stability”.

The Mediterranean, as the etymology of the name itself suggests, has played traditionally a central role in human history.
The sea “in between the lands” has favored the rise and flourishing of some among the most advanced and significant civilizations since ancient times (Egypt, Greece, Rome, to name but a few); it has witnessed the birth and spread of the three monotheistic religions which are still the most influential in the world today.

Over the centuries, it has preserved its long standing character of a political, economic, social and cultural crossroad between Europe, Africa and Asia; between East and West; between North and South.

As such, it continues to exert a fundamental influence on human societies.

In the last few years, however, the greater Mediterranean area has increasingly come to be associated with “waves” of chaos, fragmentation, volatility, and loss of life. These “waves” are hitting
the European shores. And they entail consequences on a global scale. How to mitigate the storm is a fundamental question that requires a comprehensive answer. Until recently, too many Europeans have been living under the illusion that they could separate their destiny from the Mediterranean and from the crises originating from this region.

Massive migration flows from Africa to Europe; widespread instability and/or open conflict; increasing terrorist threats against western targets and interests; new conflicts with a religious basis or excuse: these issues have been confronting our governments and societies for some years now and, if not adequately addressed, may imperil the very core of the western political model founded on democracy, pluralism and market economy. Italy is committed to tackle the root causes of these challenges. But we have to do it all together.
From our perspective, these challenges correspond to a set of priorities: 1) effectively managing migration flows coming in to Europe; 2) stabilizing areas of crisis in the Middle East and Africa (Libya, Syria, Iraq, etc.); 3) succeeding in the fight against terrorism and in particular eradicating Daesh.

To address these challenges, reaffirming the centrality and robustness of the transatlantic bond between America and Europe is of the essence.

Italy, as a key international security provider, is assuring a significant contribution to counter-terrorism.

We are present in several international missions with over 7,000 military engaged, with NATO, the European Union, the United Nations. We are the second troop-contributing Nation in Iraq (as well as in Afghanistan), after the United States.
At the same time, we must have the capacity and wisdom to address the lack of economic perspective in many regions around the Mediterranean, by actively promoting development and social inclusiveness.

This falls into the priorities of the current Italian G7 Presidency, which focuses among other things on management of human mobility; stability in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region; inclusive growth; education; prevention of terrorism.

Indeed, the Mediterranean should be perceived also as an important market with major growth potential. Consequently, gradual integration of the economies of the region should be pursued, as a means to boost growth and job creation in the entire Euro-Mediterranean Region. In this process, besides the regional
partners other major actors are involved: starting from the Gulf countries, Sub-Saharan Africa and extra Regional players.

I will now go more into the details of the three set of priorities outlined before, which currently mark the Mediterranean region.

1) Managing the dramatic increase in migration flows from Africa to Europe. This is of the essence for Italy.

The figures are impressive. Around five-hundred thousand migrants were saved from death at sea by the Italian Navy and Coast Guard and by European rescue teams over the last three years.

This dramatic situation requires renewed efforts, in a short and long term perspective. Indeed, there is space for a more vigorous international engagement, based on a reinforced American and European (in particular, Italian) leadership, aimed at stabilizing the States of the Southern Mediterranean.
In the short term, more balanced burden sharing among European Union countries and more efficient control systems on arrival are fundamental, combined with more effective identification and return mechanisms. At the same time, long-term policies should be promoted to foster stabilization and economic development in countries of origin and transit, especially in Central Africa and in the Horn of Africa.

That is the idea behind Italy’s proposal for the “migration compact” launched by the European Union in 2016, which should be upheld and broadened in scope. It has been the basis for the agreement I have signed last February with the Libyan President Sarraj as well as for the one I have concluded with the President of Niger, Issoufou. It is also at the origin of the inclusive approach we are promoting with regional partners in view of the G7 Taormina summit.
2) We should continue to address the broader political and security challenges coming from areas of crisis around the Mediterranean.

Libya remains on top of our priorities. In this country where more evident have been the mistakes of our past lack of vision, the clearer should now be our common engagement. I deem that upholding joint Italy-US leadership is not only an opportunity, but a political must. Indeed, over these last years, we have achieved results together, both in terms of advancing the political process and in the fight against Daesh. An inclusive political process could safeguard the unity of the country to the benefit of all Libyans, as well as of the entire region.

The major crisis in the Mediterranean is Syria, of course, now going through its seventh year of horrific violence. We look at renewed US engagement as an opportunity to bring new momentum
to the political process and to find a durable solution to the Syrian drama, also by encouraging a more constructive approach from Russia. Italy will continue to work closely with like-minded partners and Allies to foster a political solution.

3) The fight against terror and against Daesh. The multi-dimensional approach implemented by the US led coalition in Syria and in Iraq is proving effective. This year could be the year of the defeat of Daesh in control of territory.

Our strategy should continue to insist on the military campaign, as well as on counter narrative, increased exchanges among relevant intelligence agencies; de-radicalization, contrast to financial networks.
To be successful, cooperation with regional actors remains key, as well as with local Muslim communities inside our boundaries.

Radicalization in these communities has been at the origin of some of the bloodiest terrorist actions. The horrific acts of violence we have witnessed over the years have been carried out very often by Islamist elements who were born, raised and became radicalized in Europe; they did not arrive from outside our borders.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to cooperate to contain conflicts and to better manage crises. At the same time, however, we should start working at the definition of a new order for this region, that exerts such a profound influence on global order.

Some sort of new Peace of Westfalia or some sort of a ‘Helsinki agreement for the Mediterranean’ have sometimes been
suggested. The limits of tracing such ambitious historical parallelisms are evident. Nevertheless, I believe that the consciousness that should guide us in this process has very much in common with the spirit that led the way to ending the wars of religion in Europe and, during the last century, to overcoming the Cold War.

I am profoundly convinced there are a number of possible and necessary steps that we have to take: implementing measures of mutual trust; following a multilateral and comprehensive approach to conflict resolution; recognition of borders; fostering interreligious dialogue; enhancing economic cooperation in a perspective of joint exploitation of natural resources (from water to natural gas).
Italy is determined to give a decisive contribution to this path. I am confident that through our joint efforts we can make a difference in re-affirming the role and the perception of the Mediterranean as a region of renewed opportunities and vision – and as a solid cornerstone of global stability.

Thank you.