

Reviewer comment-1

The topic—Italy’s policy adaptation to Libya’s prolonged fragmentation, and the energy–security nexus linking hydrocarbon dependency, irregular migration, and transnational crime—is substantively important and policy-relevant. However, in its current form the manuscript does not meet basic scholarly conventions of a scientific article (clear research question, theory-driven contribution, transparent methodology, and properly formatted references). As a result, the scientific value is substantially weakened and the manuscript reads more like a well-informed narrative report than an academic study.

Materials and Methods: The manuscript does not provide a standalone “Materials and Methods” section and does not transparently specify data sources, selection logic, analytic steps, or how “results” were derived. This prevents evaluation of validity and replicability.

The current title signals description rather than explanation.

The current title emphasizes “managing” and “status quo,” which frames the paper as descriptive. The manuscript would benefit from a title that signals a theoretical/explanatory contribution and clarifies the analytic lens (e.g., foreign policy adaptation under entrenched fragmentation; energy–security nexus; strategy under dual governance).

The abstract is too long, does not clearly communicate (a) the research question, (b) the theoretical/analytic contribution, (c) what “structural analysis” specifically means, and (d) the key findings. It also includes unexplained abbreviations, which is inappropriate for an abstract. Suggestions (actionable):

Reduce length and use a standard structure: Background → RQ → Data/Method → Main findings → Contribution.

Define terms such as “structural analysis” operationally (e.g., “a comparative analysis of mandate–tools–constraints across missions X/Y, based on official documents and secondary sources”).

Explicitly state 2–3 concrete findings (not only broad claims).

Remove or define all abbreviations at first mention.

Language is readable and mostly suitable, but scholarly tone would improve by tightening claims and replacing journalistic phrasing with analytic wording (e.g., clearer causal language, fewer rhetorical flourishes, and more precise attribution).

Answer: Sections/format are not appropriate and do not meet journal standards.

- The “Introduction” does not clearly state research question(s), puzzle, and problem statement, nor does it specify the paper’s intended contribution to the international relations / geopolitics literature.
- A dedicated Materials and Methods section is missing, so the reader cannot evaluate what evidence supports which claims.
- Because methods are unclear, the “Results” appear as narrative assertions rather than analytically-derived findings.
- “Discussion/Conclusion” should explicitly connect findings back to theory and specify scope conditions and limitations.

Required structural revision (minimum):

- Introduction: RQ + puzzle + contribution + roadmap
- Literature/Theory: define “strategic adaptation,” “risk governance,” “entrenched dualism,” and the energy–security nexus; specify expectations
- Materials and Methods: data types; inclusion criteria; coding/analysis strategy; triangulation limits
- Findings: organized into 2–3 testable claims with evidence
- Discussion/Conclusion: theoretical implications + policy implications + limitations

Answer: No.

- Citation style is not in APA format.
- Use of endnotes/footnotes as the primary citation mechanism is not acceptable for many journals unless explicitly allowed; the manuscript should comply with the journal’s referencing guidelines.
- Several core claims lack attribution. For example, the central framing that Italy faces a “dual strategic imperative” (economic/energy safeguarding + security threat mitigation) must be grounded in scholarship and/or official policy documents, not presented as authorial assertion.

Suggestions:

- Replace endnotes with in-text citations and a properly formatted reference list in APA style.
- Add citations to key conceptual claims and to factual assertions (trade dependency figures, mission mandates, migration/crime estimates, etc.).
- Ensure recency and relevance: integrate recent IR/foreign policy adaptation literature and updated policy/energy/migration sources.

Specific Comments:

Major comments

1. Clarify the research design. State the research question(s) explicitly and specify whether this is a qualitative case study, process tracing, structured-focused comparison, or another design.
2. Define and operationalize key concepts. Provide precise definitions for “entrenched dualism,” “strategic adaptation,” and “calculated operational response,” and specify observable indicators for each.
3. Methods transparency. Create a full Materials and Methods section detailing:
 - empirical trade data sources (which databases, time windows, variables, how dependency is measured)
 - “intelligence assessments” (what documents/reports, how reliability is treated, how used analytically rather than rhetorically)
 - “structural analysis of missions” (what constitutes structure—mandate, resources, constraints, outputs? what documents? what comparison logic?)
4. Convert narrative into findings. Organize results into a small number of claims (e.g., 2–4) and for each: present evidence, then interpret. Avoid mixing descriptive background with analytic inference.
5. Strengthen theoretical contribution. Identify the IR literature(s) the paper speaks to (e.g., foreign policy adaptation under uncertainty, risk governance, externalization of migration control, energy security geopolitics) and specify what the paper adds (new mechanism, boundary condition, or typology).
6. Fix references and attribution. Convert to APA in-text citations; ensure every major conceptual claim and factual statement is attributed.

Minor comments

1. Define all abbreviations at first use, including in the abstract.
2. Reduce abstract length and remove rhetorical language.
3. Improve consistency in terminology (dualism vs fragmentation; operational response vs missions).
4. Add a short limitations paragraph: data constraints, inferential limits, potential bias of security sources.
5. Provide a concise timeline table (2020–2024) of key events (energy disruptions, mission milestones, major diplomatic engagements) to improve readability.