

The United States, Italy and the Cold War: Interpreting and Periodising a Contradictory and Complicated Relationship

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INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, three goals informed US policies in Italy, shaping the relationship between Washington and Rome. The first goal was to find, or help to build, a reliable, robust and trustworthy anti-communist ally: in particular, a government which could contribute both to the broader international strategy of containment of the Soviet Union in Europe and to the anti-communist struggle in Italy against the forces—initially the socialists, represented by the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI) and the communists' *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI)—which supported Moscow. The second aim was to anchor Italy to the US-led Western security system, constructed and consolidated in the

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early post-war years. While the Italian peninsula was subordinate to other theatres—in other words, it was never at the core of the Soviet–US geopolitical antagonism—it still represented one of the front lines of the Cold War, due to its north-eastern borders with Yugoslavia and occupied (then neutral) Austria, and—more importantly—to the strategic relevance of its position in the Mediterranean. The latter factor was soon emphasised by the US joint chiefs of staff, who exerted pressure on the Truman administration to include Italy among the founders of the Atlantic Alliance.¹ For the United States, the geopolitical importance of Italy varied, derivatively, according to what was happening in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. The former's increasing importance in the Cold War accentuated both the importance of Italy as an ally and that of the military installations which Washington soon came to control in the country.² Lastly: this security system was complemented and sustained by the other US-engineered pillar of the post-World War II system: an international, albeit far from global, liberal order based on the gold/dollar standard, and the unusual compromise between a gradual (but theoretically inexorable) liberalisation of trade on one hand and a high degree of state intervention on the other. Italy occupied a specific place in this peculiar form of 'embedded liberalism':³ it was part of the increasingly integrated West European component of such a regime and was presumed to be among the main beneficiaries of the transformations that this order promised to bring. For the USA, 'embedded liberalisation' was both a goal and a tool. It aimed at fostering trade and economic interdependence, thus helping growth and generating profitable opportunities for US investors; but it was also a device meant to anchor a substantial cluster of allies around the US–Atlantic pole and to help democratic

¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), 1948, vol. III, Western Europe, doc. 476, Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal), March 10 1948, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v03/d476> (Accessed 9 October 2015).

² Alessandro Brogi, *L'Italia e l'egemonia americana nel Mediterraneo* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996); Elena Calandri, *Il Mediterraneo e la difesa dell'Occidente 1947–1956. Eredità imperiali e logiche della guerra fredda* (Florence: Il Maestrale, 1997); Effie Padaliu, *Britain, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³ John G. Ruggie, 'International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order', *International Organisation* 36, no. 2 (1982): 379–415; John G. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

transitions in former authoritarian states, such as Italy. Economic liberalisation and democratic stabilisation—so the argument went—were concepts which had to proceed together, for mutual reinforcement.⁴

Vis-à-vis these three objectives, several variables converged (and often collided) in the equation which informed US–Italian relations from 1945 to the end of the Cold War, determining forms and consequences of the US presence in Italy – and also much of the country’s political life – during that period. The first variable was the foreign policy and grand strategy of the USA itself; or, rather, the mutability of its policies and grand strategies, which were often altered according to evolving circumstances, electoral cycles and changes of administration. To put it plainly: while the fundamental goals remained more or less unchanged over the years, the ways in which they were achieved varied, sometimes profoundly.⁵ The second variable involved the agency that Italy—like other greater and lesser US allies during the Cold War—could display, and the use various Italian governments made of it. It was not so much the ‘tyranny of the weak’, as it has sometimes been called, as the relationship remained highly unbalanced and asymmetrical. However, like many other ‘minor’ Cold War actors, Italy and some of its political forces, *in primis* the ruling party, the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC) did their best to extract the maximum advantage from the Cold War, exploiting their quasi-indispensability while often trying to limit, influence and reduce US pressures and demands. The game played by the Italian side of this relationship was thus constantly informed by the attempt simultaneously to temper, exploit and negotiate the forms by means of which the Cold War (and the US presence) were to affect the Italian political and economic landscape.⁶

The last variable was the Cold War itself and the broader international environment, which passed through various transformations, with moments of high tension and *détente*, of escalation or attenuation of this

⁴Federico Romero, *Storia della Guerra Fredda: l'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009); Charles S. Maier, *The Cold War in Europe* (New York: M. Wiener Pub, 1991); John L. Harper, *America and the Reconstruction of Italy, 1945–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁵Mario Del Pero, ‘Containing Containment. Re-thinking Italy’s Experience During the Cold War’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8, no. 4 (2003): 532–555.

⁶Mario Del Pero, *L’alleato scomodo: gli USA e la DC negli anni del centrismo (1948–1955)* (Rome: Carocci, 2001).

bipolar antagonism.⁷ Since the position of Italy depended on more general trends and dynamics—its geopolitical role clearly being conditioned by the evolution of the broader context—these Cold War fluctuations greatly affected the country. In other words, there was a close although not necessarily synergic correlation between the transformation of the Cold War at large and the more specific ‘Italian Cold War’: between the general and the particular, the global and the regional.

With all these elements in mind—the variables and constants which concurred to determine the forms and consequences of the policies promoted by the USA with regard to Italy during the Cold War—we suggest a tripartite periodisation-and-modelling which helps to define a few key elements and provides a general interpretative framework. This periodisation involves two crucial turning-points which subdivide the conventional 1945–89 chronology of the Cold War: the first in the early- to mid-1960s, and the second in the mid- to late-1970s. We believe this can clarify some of the paradoxes produced by the interaction between the particular and the general during the various phases of the Cold War.

TRANSFORMING ITALY, CONTAINING US PRESSURES: THE EARLY COLD WAR YEARS

However much the US top military echelons emphasised the strategic importance of the Italian peninsula, Italy was not among the immediate concerns of the Truman administration in the immediate post-World War II years. The heart of the dilemma the USA faced—the early initiator and driver of the clash with the Soviet Union—was Central Europe, and Germany in particular. With military demobilisation in full swing and US public opinion reluctant to support endless and costly obligations in Europe, a series of priorities had to be established—and Italy did not initially appear high on that list. Nevertheless, US commitment to Italy (and Washington’s attention to Italian matters) increased inexorably.

⁷Romero, *Storia della Guerra Fredda*; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Several factors contributed to this. It was a consequence of the more general decision to drop some of the minimalist strategic and political plans of the war years, reverse the early demobilization and accept a quasi-permanent presence in Western Europe. It was the byproduct of a concern with credibility, bound to become an obsession, that would saturate US foreign policy during the Cold War and gradually erase any practical and conceptual geopolitical hierarchy, each area being equally important, and thus “un-losable”, in a zero-sum game view of the Cold War in which the credibility of the anti-Communist/Soviet commitment had to be constantly reaffirmed and demonstrated. In other words, Italy became important not in itself but for what it represented: for its symbolic value in the larger scheme of things, as the ‘loss of Italy’ could do great damage to the credibility of the USA *vis-à-vis* its allies and enemies, emboldening the latter and demoralising the former. All of this was made more plausible, and strategically rational, by the active presence in Italy of the largest communist and pro-Soviet party in the soon-to-be formalised, US-led, Western bloc. That Italy might ‘go communist’ by electoral means was a definite possibility. Equally clear was US anxiety about a possible domino effect in Southern and Western Europe.⁸

In this first phase of the Cold War, what was particularly striking was not so much the fears of the Truman administrations—exaggerated or based on a simplified interpretation of the Italian situation as they undoubtedly were—but the timidity and sluggishness of the initial response. At least until the crucial parliamentary elections of 1948, there was a gap between rhetoric and action, words and deeds, epitomised by the limited economic aid provided by the USA to an interlocutor—the Italian government led by the Christian Democrat Alcide De Gasperi—eager to make use of its newfound strategic significance.⁹ The convergence between the US and Italian governments was slow to develop, impaired as it was by mutual suspicion, reciprocal stereotypes, frequent misunderstandings and a very slow awakening to the new, radical realities of the nascent Cold War competition.

⁸Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power. A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

⁹Guido Formigoni, *La Democrazia Cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale: 1943–1953* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1996).

The two-year period of 1948–49 was in many ways a watershed, destined to crystallise some fixtures in both US–Italian relations and Italy’s domestic Cold War. The Italian elections in April 1948 granted the Christian Democrats and its allies an uncontested majority in the new parliament. It was not a straightforward success for the USA, which mistrusted the clericalism and conservatism of the DC and had placed its bets on its smaller allies which, in fact, had fared quite poorly at the polls. And it was an election in which domestic factors and actors, including the Catholic Church and its broad networks of groups and associations, had played a decisive role. Nevertheless, the perception in Washington was that of a clear-cut success, vindicating US involvement in the electoral campaign through the use of overt and covert channels, transparent public diplomacy means, and new, unorthodox forms of psychological warfare. Based on the double assumption that the USA had identified ways and means of waging an unconventional battle with the Soviet Union and its local proxies, and had crafted the tools to shape the electoral processes in other countries, this misunderstanding was bound to have major long-term repercussions, in Italy and elsewhere. Although the Italian precedent in 1948 acquired model status, becoming a timeless analogical lesson deemed to be applicable to other national contexts, the relationship with the electorally empowered DC ally immediately became more tense and fragile.¹⁰

We shall soon return to this latter aspect. Let us now examine the other two poles of the 1948–49 turning-point, which themselves had the paradoxical double effect of consolidating the relationship between the two governments while at the same time exacerbating their misunderstanding of each other. The first pole was, of course, the Marshall Plan, the announcement of which in June 1947 and later approval by Congress, although not decisive, certainly helped pro-US forces at the polls. Much has been written about this plan, the US projects—in Italy and elsewhere in Europe—and their diverse, partial reception by the many nations.¹¹ With all its peculiarities, the implementation of the plan

¹⁰Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War: Waging Political Warfare, 1945–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); James E. Miller, ‘Taking Off the Gloves. The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948’, *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 1 (1983): 35–56.

¹¹Alan S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–51* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America, and Postwar Reconstruction* (London/New York: Longman, 1992).

in Italy certainly helped to further the internationalisation and progressive Europeanisation of the Italian economy: it was a key tool in constructing the post-war liberal international order and defining Italy's role in that order. In the short term, however, it also injected additional poison into the relationship between the USA and its junior ally. Italy often resisted pressure from US officials in the country, who urged expansionary use of Marshall Plan aid in order to stimulate the economy, promote significant reforms and help to develop the fixed social capital which Italy sorely lacked.¹²

All these difficulties were somehow compounded by the third problem, the institutionalisation of a common Western sphere of security through the creation of a North Atlantic defensive alliance. Many questions influenced the talks preceding the ratification, in April 1949, of the North Atlantic Pact. Whether to admit Italy or not was one of the most contentious. Italy's military weakness, accentuated by the punitive clauses of the 1947 peace treaty, and the country's past diplomatic unreliability, seemed to point against its inclusion. In fact, from the US president to the senior members of the Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee, most US policy-makers opposed the admission of Italy. In the end, the decisive factors in the discussion were Italy's fragility and France's intense lobbying. Italy was accepted, not for what it could bring to the alliance (relatively little, at least in 1949), but for what it lacked (political solidity) and what it risked losing—a solid anti-communist, Western-leaning government—if its de facto application were rejected. Political and psychological considerations were thus paramount in the decision. Anchoring Italy to the 'West' via the Atlantic Alliance meant strengthening the De Gasperi's government, preventing neutralist temptations and further reinforcing the path undertaken by the country as a consequence of its inclusion in the US sphere of influence and liberal capitalist order.¹³

¹²Among the vast literature on the Marshall Plan in Italy, see Carlo Spagnolo, *La stabilizzazione incompiuta* (Roma: Carocci, 2001); Stefano Battilossi, *L'Italia nel sistema economico internazionale* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1996); Mauro Campus, *Gli Stati Uniti, l'Italia e il Piano Marshall* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 2008).

¹³Timothy E. Smith, *The United States, Italy and NATO, 1947-52* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Antonio Varsori, 'La scelta occidentale dell'Italia 1948-1949', *Storia delle relazioni internazionali* 1, no. 1 (1985): 95-135 and 1, no. 2 (1985): 303-368; Mario Del Pero, 'When the High Seas Reached the Italian Shores. Italy's Inclusion in the Atlantic Communitas', in *Defining the Atlantic Community. Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. Marco Mariano (London: Routledge, 2010), 161-173.

Again, however, the time was ripe for fomenting misunderstandings, frictions and clashes. A militarily weak country, still marked by the legacy of the war, with domestic public opinion harbouring pervasive anti-militarist and pacifist feelings, was included in a structure which, in the atmosphere of an intensified and globalised Cold War, would soon ask its members to contribute to common defense.

It is here that we can see the most important contradiction of the 1948–49 turning-point: the different significance that this progressive ‘Atlantisation’ or ‘Westernisation’ of Italy had, or was meant to have, for the two sides, Washington and Rome. For most US officials and policy-makers, the choices made were intended to lay the foundations of a profound transformation of Italy, by the liberalisation and modernisation of both its economy and its political system, and a U-turn conversion of a strategic culture still imbued with pre-Cold War assumptions and geopolitical nationalism. For the Italian counterparts, and certainly for many sectors of the DC and the state apparatus, the decisions taken in 1948–49 meant that the country had immunised itself against the risk of Soviet-directed communist contagion, securing both US protection and economic aid. The aim was now to consolidate these gains while minimising the commitments, costs and obligations which its inclusion in the Western *communitas* inevitably entailed.¹⁴

This basic dialectics remained in play for the subsequent four decades. Washington solicited its Italian partners to accept the duties which came with the benefits (economic aid and military protection) resulting from having become ‘Atlantic’. Rome maintained that in what was a very unequal rapport, Italy was already offering a lot, first and foremost the local containment of communism and some quasi-imperial privileges the United States would soon enjoy thanks to the accords disciplining the presence of US troops and bases on the Italian territory.¹⁵

¹⁴Federico Romero, *Gli Stati Uniti in Italia: il Piano Marshall e la NATO*, in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, vol. I, ed. Francesco Barbagallo (Torino: Einaudi, 1994), 231–289.

¹⁵Simon Duke, *United States Military Forces and Installations in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 194–213.

This kind of dialectical tension was to intensify when some of the above variables increased their effect and pressure on the system and its various actors. This was the case for most of the 1950s, particularly when Clare Boothe Luce was Eisenhower's Ambassador in Rome (1953–1956). From 1951, Washington began asking the Italian government to adopt more resolute action against what it considered to be Moscow's 'fifth columns' in Italy. The measures contemplated by the USA included the possibility of outlawing the Italian Communist party. This request was matched by insistent demands to intervene in some structural features of the Italian economic system, through combined action against both its protectionism and its inefficiency. The proposals changed, sometimes radically, as a consequence of who was in power in Washington: Truman's 'New Dealers' had stressed the importance of adopting Keynesian, expansionary fiscal policies, whereas the Eisenhower–Luce years were marked by a *laissez-faire* approach which highlighted Italy's delay in opening up its economy to private foreign investments. However, the underlying assumption was the same—that is, the need for (and inherent possibility of) a profound transformation of Italy, rendered necessary by Cold War imperatives and made feasible by the Cold War actions undertaken in the previous years. This somewhat ambiguous logic was that, having made Italy 'Atlantic' in the first place would guarantee making it more 'Atlantic' in the following years.

Frustrations and conflicts inevitably ensued, marking the history of US–Italian relations during the Cold War. Italian interlocutors, particularly the DC leaders who succeeded De Gasperi after 1953, competed among themselves in attempts to be, and publicly present themselves, as Washington's most reliable partners. The relationship with Washington became, or at least was perceived to be, a sort of 'litmus test' which politicians and political parties needed in order to validate their governmental credentials. In other words, 'Atlanticism' became the yardstick by which to measure the quality and reliability of those who aspired to govern in Italy. The inner ambiguity of what such 'Atlanticism' was really meant to be and how it should be identified, led to both frequent and inevitable short-circuits. Within the USA, the late 1950s and early 1960s were marked by discussions on whether (or not) to enlarge the governmental majority of the PSI, which had abandoned its original pro-Sovietism and embarked on a half-hearted, contradictory, yet sustained trajectory towards 'Atlanticism', in both the economic sphere (the liberal capitalist order) and the strategic/security realm (the Atlantic

Alliance and its organisation, NATO).¹⁶ Although Ambassador Luce had supported an opening of the DC-led majority to the right, and had even flirted with neo-authoritarian solutions to the chronic instability of the Italian governments, many in the US government (including liberal-oriented analysts in the CIA) believed that it was only by shifting the government's centre of gravity to the left could Italy undertake those pressing reforms necessary to its modernisation and, indeed, 'Atlanticisation'.

These conflicting strategies reflected the differing interpretations of what Atlanticism meant in the Italian context. For Clare Boothe Luce and other conservatives, it meant preventing any defection of Italy, accepting if necessary even a trade-off between the unfolding of the democratic process and Italy's loyalty to NATO and the USA. For those liberals like future presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who embraced the cause of an 'opening to the Left', as the alliance between DC and the PSI became known, for an effective and productive transformation, Italy had to adopt the significant modernising economic reforms which the conservative Christian Democrats had proved unable to promote on their own. These reforms were thought to have an intrinsic Cold War value: only through them—it was argued in purely US liberal fashion—could the country tackle those problems of poverty and underdevelopment on which the Communists capitalised, politically and electorally.

The faction supporting the 'opening to the Left' somehow simplified a much more complex situation and anchored itself to a binary, stereotyped view of Italy and of its structural problems. The success of the PCI was due to a multiplicity of factors and could not be reduced to a single, easily identifiable cause. The potential redeeming effect of a DC–PSI alliance was clearly overestimated, and disillusiones and recriminations soon followed. A modernisation of sorts – an Italian 'economic miracle' which macro-economic indicators (notwithstanding US observers) were remarkably slow to detect and appraise—was already well under way. Strongly supported by US social sciences at the time, the universal and teleological reproducibility of the US path to industrial modernity

¹⁶Leopoldo Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 1999); Pietro Nenni, 'Where the Italian Socialists Stand', *Foreign Affairs* 40, no. 2 (1962): 213–223.

was clearly overstated.¹⁷ Equally overestimated was the effective leverage which Washington had at its disposal in dealing with its unruly Italian junior partner, as the previous years had abundantly demonstrated.

ABANDONING ITALY'S MODERNISATION: THE PRIMACY OF GEOPOLITICS

In 1965, McGeorge Bundy, national security advisor to both President Kennedy and President Johnson, bitterly complained about the propensity of Italian actors to exploit the Cold War and extract aid and concessions from Washington while offering little in return. Bundy urged a drastic reduction in covert US funding for anti-communist parties: 'We have not been getting our full money's worth', he wrote to Johnson.¹⁸ The opening to the Left, strongly supported by liberals in the two democratic administrations, had finally taken place, but actual reforms were slow to come. The Communists' strength in Italy remained almost intact. The country's ambiguous 'Atlanticism', embodied by its desire to count for more in the alliance and by its frequent (if ineffectual) 'free-riding' in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, had not diminished; on the contrary, it had become a distinctive trait of Rome's foreign policy. Bundy's outburst certainly reflected the exasperation of US officials with their Italian ally. But it was also symptomatic of the overestimated possibilities that Cold War imperatives had bestowed on the USA in relation to its junior partners, and of the US tendency to oversimplify the intricacies of the Italian political system.

At the same time, some of the key variables informing US-Italian relations were undergoing a significant change bound to alter the unfolding of the Cold War in the peninsula. Both US foreign policy choices and the

¹⁷See Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁸FRUS, 1964–1968, vol. XII, *Western Europe*, doc. 116, *Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson*, August 4, 1965, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v12/ch3> (Accessed 13 October 2015).

Cold War context were side-lining Italy in the US hierarchy of geopolitical concerns. The 1960s were marked by profound changes in the geopolitical priorities of the USA. Notwithstanding the Gaullist challenge, Western Europe appeared to be stabilised once and for all, particularly after 1963 and the rapid evaporation of a possible Franco–German challenge to the USA within the Atlantic Alliance. US military involvement in Vietnam further accentuated this trend. Meanwhile, the opening of the long season of *détente* between the USA and the Soviet Union was inevitably affecting Italy and Washington's other European allies.

There are many ways in which bipolar *détente* can be interpreted and explained. Most historians now stress its intrinsically conservative geopolitical character, in the sense that both Washington and Moscow conceived it as a way to uphold the *status quo* in Europe and crystallise the bipolar division of the continent—in order to reduce tensions, to limit the risk of war and, in perspective, to reduce defence expenditures which were running out of control.¹⁹

There was a kind of paradox, however, in the European theatres most affected by *détente*, and this soon became evident in the Italian case. A conservative strategy aimed at preserving and consolidating a specific geopolitical order entailed the fundamental erosion of the ideological confrontation upon which that order had been founded. This paradox was particularly acute in Italy, where a strong, pro-Soviet Communist party still operated. How could the delegitimisation and containment of this party continue, if the ideological premises of such actions were no longer essential to the relationship between the superpowers?

Under Johnson's successors, the Republicans Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, the tensions produced by this fundamental contradiction of *détente* became almost impossible to manage, particularly when it coincided with (and contributed to) a kind of domestic thaw between the PCI and the DC. The late 1960s and early 1970s thus witnessed the renewed attention of Washington to Italian domestic matters. As in the past, what actually accentuated or reduced US interest in Italian affairs

¹⁹Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2013); Wilfried Loth and Georges-Henri Soutou (eds.), *The Making of Détente: Eastern and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965–75* (London: Routledge, 2008); Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

was the state of Italian politics and, in particular, the extent of its political instability. Italy was, or became once again, important for what it was, more than for what it did or did not do: for posing a problem rather than for constituting an asset. At this point, the issue had ceased to be the transformation and modernisation of Italy—all the more so, in view of the general discredit and unpopularity of the liberal modernising crusades in the late 1960s. The US approach to the Italian question was now guided primarily by geopolitical concerns, following the more general philosophy informing US foreign policy choices and discourses during this period. What Nixon, Ford and their national security *czar* Henry Kissinger wanted was to contain the effects of *détente* in Italy, ‘immunising’ the country from the danger of a DC–PCI *rapprochement*. They did this by channelling funds to right-wing groups, supporting the conservative wing of the Christian Democrats, and making clear their preference for the formation of a centre-right government and those groups within the DC who favoured a similar solution.²⁰ Once again, the details of the Italian situation were interpreted through the prism of the Cold War and particularly of its potential reverberations throughout Southern Europe. Preventing a reconciliation between the Communists and the Christian Democrats appeared to Washington to be both symbolically and strategically vital. It was a matter of reducing the risk that Italy might gradually slip into a lukewarm Atlanticism bordering on neutrality. It was also meant to send an unequivocal message to other countries in a similar situation, which would be looking at the Italian precedent to gauge how much latitude they actually had from the constraints of the Cold War framework. US academic and political pundits debated the possibility that the PCI was in the process of freeing itself from the Soviet yoke, and was perhaps even on the road to social-democratisation, but this was not really the problem. If possible, such a prospect rendered the situation even more troubling: a fully emancipated Communist party, free from any discipline imposed by Moscow, could actively contribute towards destabilising the *status quo* which the two superpowers were so eager to

²⁰Lucrezia Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana negli anni Settanta* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2014); Roberto Gualtieri, ‘The Italian Political System and Détente’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 4 (2004): 428–449.

maintain solidly in place. Henry Kissinger, at the time secretary of state, put it with his characteristic bluntness:

When you imagine what communist Governments will do inside NATO (...) it doesn't make any difference whether they [the Italian communists] are controlled by Moscow or not. It will unravel NATO and the European community into a neutralist instrument. And that is the essence of it. Whether or not these parties are controlled from Moscow—that's a subsidiary issue (...) A Western Europe with the participation of communist part—ies is going to change the basis of NATO (...) [and] bring the communists into power in Western Europe (...) would totally reorient the map of postwar Europe.²¹

As in the past, however, there was a clear gap between rhetoric and possibilities, words and deeds. The Italian political forces certainly noted the adamant hostility of the US partner to any Italian internal version of *détente*: to what became known as the possible 'historical compromise' between the PCI and the DC. The public and political debate was shaped by discussions on the limitations of Italy's autonomy (and sovereignty) within the rigid boundaries imposed by the Cold War geopolitical straight-jacket: by the risk, to mention the most widespread and frightening analogy of the time, that there could be a replica of the Chilean military coup in Italy, as in other countries of Southern Europe, starting with Portugal.

The reality was quite different. The Cold War straight-jacket had indeed been loosened; Cold War imperatives had lost most of their grip. But something new had arisen and, paradoxically, it was not making Italy more capable of protecting itself from international dynamics and structural constraints. While the focus of the US administration was on geopolitics, and both sides still appeared obsessed with Cold War logics and their highly simplified rhetorical antinomies (communism vs. anti-communism; anti-fascism vs. new Cold War fascism; Allende vs. Pinochet), the general context—one of the key variables introduced at the beginning of this analysis—was radically transforming itself and the way it could influence the Italian scene.

²¹National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA), RG59: General Records of the Department of State, Lot File 78D443: Transcripts of Secretary of State Kissinger's Staff Meetings, 1973–1977, Box 6 and Box 10, Meeting Secretary of State's Staff, 12 January 1975 and 1 July 1976.

A NEW INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE INTERNATIONAL: AN EARLY POST-COLD WAR IN ITALY?

While attention focused entirely on the US senior partner, on what it was doing and what (in the phobic fantasies of many) it could do to damage Italy's frail democracy, deeper and more structural trends were at work, and new actors were benefitting from them to increase their influence in the international system. The post-Bretton Woods transition to a world of fluctuating currencies and decreased barriers to capital flows made a mockery of those who cried 'wolf' to a threat—the US meddling in Italy's domestic affairs—now far less effective and relevant as an agent limiting national sovereignty.

The new economic dynamics greatly influenced Italy. The progressive exhaustion of the long season of the 'economic miracle' and the drastic impact of the 1970s' 'stagflation' proved both the fragility of the country and its vulnerability to (and dependence on) exogenous patterns and agents. Italy was not just part of the 'soft underbelly' of the Atlantic Alliance—one of the most popular geopolitical metaphors of the period and the one which best explained Nixon's and Kissinger's attitude towards its problems. It was also one of the 'sick men' of a Western liberal and capitalist order whose basic structure was now shaken and redefined. The liberally embedded structure of the post-war years had offered the ideal environment for the albeit uneven industrial modernisation of Italy: it had represented the key stabilising (and, one could argue) 'Atlanticising' factor of Italy's chronically unstable post-1945 political and social life. The disorder of the 1970s, deriving first and foremost from a 'shock of the global' to which Italy was particularly exposed, shattered this condition and imposed new and sometimes painful forms of interdependence between the national and the international, revealing the greater fragility of the former to the new *modus operandi* of the latter.²²

²²Niall Ferguson et al. (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Federico Romero, 'Refashioning the West to Dispel Its Fears: The Early G7 Summits', in *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G-7 and the European Council*, eds. Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and Federico Romero (London: Routledge, 2014), 117–37; Gérard Bossuat (ed.), *L'Europe et la mondialisation*, (Paris: Soleb, 2007); Andreas Wirsching (ed.), *The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History? A Forum with Göran Therborn, Geoff Eley, Hartmut Kaelble, Philippe Chassaigne*, *Journal of Modern European History* 9, no. 1 (2011), 8–26.

Awareness of these changes developed slowly. Few at the time realised the essential features of what was happening, and even less of what was to come. Cold War intellectual and geopolitical certainties still dominated and fixed the perimeter of the political and public discussion on US–Italian relations, US attitudes towards the Italian ally and how all this impaired Italy’s sovereignty, if not its very freedom. Anxieties regarding possible Chilean solutions were soon replaced by unmotivated hopes of a possible change of direction in US foreign policy towards Italy, after the election of Jimmy Carter in 1977. Domestic political actors still thought that ‘Atlanticism’ constituted the key medium of political legitimisation, as the Euromissiles discussion clearly revealed.²³

Although the late 1970s and 1980s are still being investigated by historians, and the documentary record—particularly on the Italian side—is very fragmentary and incomplete, a few hypotheses can be advanced. The first is that of a gradual ‘multilateralisation’ of the external management of Italy’s problems and fragilities. This emerges clearly from the discussions on Italy among the main Atlantic powers during the mid-1970s, when the Italian political and financial crisis became particularly acute. What had previously been mainly a US task, the international ‘guardianship’ of post-1945 Italy, was now increasingly socialised—not within formal Atlantic structures, but among Atlantic actors, a particular role being taken by the Federal Republic of Germany. Quadripartite (that is, French–US–British–German) summits on Italy became a customary feature of intra-Atlantic diplomacy. The second hypothesis is that this kind of external intervention—occasionally linked to the concession of much needed financial support—was part of a policy of conditionality aimed at intervening in some particular fragilities of the Italian economy, thus paving the way for its transition into a more globalised (and less protected) system. Whereas geopolitical concerns had previously been linked to the imperatives of modernisation, it was now the dismantling of the embedded liberalism of the post-war order which

²³Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey and Bernd Rother (eds.), *The Euromissiles Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

stimulated these new forms of external pressure on the country and in some ways conditioned geopolitics itself. Obviously, concern about the possible accession of the Communists to power did not vanish overnight, as was made abundantly clear, particularly by the West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt (1974–1982). But in many ways—to simplify matters a little—priorities and causalities were now reversed, the internationalisation (and increasing Europeanisation) of Italy being instrumental to its transition to a new global order, rather than to the strengthening of its inclusion in the Atlantic sphere. The Cold War had not disappeared (and was even to make a radical, albeit very short, comeback in the early 1980s), but it no longer represented the main element driving the various external pressures converging on Italy, nor the fundamental variable determining the interests of international actors with regard to the Italian case.²⁴ Among such actors, the USA, while still inevitably central, was not alone, nor did it represent the only interlocutor to which Italian political forces looked in search of support and legitimisation. Atlanticism was still perceived as an important ‘litmus test’, as proven by the behaviour of various Italian governments during the Gulf War and the Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s.²⁵ But the story of Italy’s relationship with the USA, and of US policies in Italy during the Cold War, do seem to indicate that, at a certain point, this crucial factor of the history of the ‘Italian Cold War’ ceased to operate. Italy was progressively detaching itself from the Cold War, and the very factors which had driven US policies regarding it became if not irrelevant, certainly much less important. Italy’s deeper involvement in the growing web of European integration was gradually becoming the key determinant of its political, economic and cultural life.²⁶

²⁴Roberto Gualtieri, *L'impatto di Reagan*, in *Gli anni Ottanta come storia*, ed. Simona Colarizi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004); Pier Luigi Ballini and Antonio Varsori (eds.), *L'Italia e l'Europa (1947–1979)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004); Federico Romero, ‘L'Italia nelle trasformazioni internazionali di fine Novecento’, in *L'Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, vol. I: *Globalizzazione*, eds. Silvio Pons, Federico Romero and Adriano Rocucci, (Roma: Carocci, 2014), 15–34.

²⁵Luca Ratti, *Italy and NATO Expansion to the Balkans* (Roma: Carocci, 2004).

²⁶Antonio Varsori, *La Cenerentola d'Europa? L'Italia e l'integrazione europea dal 1947 a oggi* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2010); Id., *L'Italia e la fine della Guerra Fredda. La politica estera dei governi Andreotti (1989–1992)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between Italy and the USA during the Cold War, and the ways in which the actions and interventions of the latter influenced the life of the young democracy have often been studied and discussed in a unilateral way: as an example of a typical quasi-imperial dynamic between a powerful centre and a kind of 'client-state'; or as another example of a lesser Cold War ally ably manipulating its indispensability to extract benefits and concessions from its senior partner. The story of post-1945 US–Italian relations is in fact much less neat and unambiguous. Overall, it is a story which evolved over time according to a specific set of dynamics and variables which are identified in the Introduction. In particular, the transition from the first to the second phase—from a policy aiming at structurally transforming Italy to one informed by the primacy of geopolitics over social and political engineering—was caused mainly by a change in the attitude of the US governments towards Italian affairs. In the first phase, the swift alteration and liberalisation of Italy's political and economic culture was deemed necessary, in order to 'inoculate' it against communism, and was therefore part and parcel of the strategy of containment as it was implemented in Italy. However, from the mid-1960s onwards, this approach was abandoned because it was deemed ineffective, frustrating and even potentially counterproductive. Causality was somehow reversed: geopolitical stability—that is, Italy's irrefutable allegiance to the Atlantic security regime—came before political and economic reforms, and was no longer considered a result of them. Instead, the second transition of the mid- to late-1970s appears to have been driven by a systemic change, by a mutation of the global context which, for more or less a decade, created a paradoxical condition: the international system was clearly moving beyond the Cold War, but some of its main features—the bipolar arms race, the division of Europe into two blocs, and the existence of the Soviet Union and its allies—still remained.

In discussing the case of Italy, we have highlighted a second contradiction: after years of intense and sometimes hysterical debates on how the Cold War and the relationship with the USA were hindering the country's autonomy and sovereignty, Italy saw their significant curtailment. This was not, however, the consequence of deeper, more extreme interference by the USA in Italy's affairs, as many had long feared and predicted. Chilean (or Greek) solutions did not materialise. And yet Italy

found itself even more embroiled in a web of multiple forms of interdependence which limited its options, often imposed painful decisions and ultimately constrained its opportunities and freedom of action.

That all this took place while the influence of the USA in Italy—and the interest of the USA in Italy—was on the wane simply adds paradox to paradox. Choosing sides in the Cold War and being part of the bipolar divide imposed on Europe, by falling into the US-dominated orbit, were long considered to be quintessential forms of political dependence and subordination: examples of how the international dominated and constrained the national. When their grip began to loosen, when the presence of the USA in and over Italy became more tenuous and distant, the sovereignty of the country and the range of possibilities available to its leaders did not increase but were, in fact, further diminished by the profound set of interdependencies which, in the following years, started to be associated with the concept of globalisation and the corresponding deepening of European integration. It is from this paradox that we must start if we want to make sense of the post-1970s' experience of Italy, and how it was influenced by international dynamics and external constraints.²⁷

²⁷Historians are just beginning to grapple with these topics, but some key issues are already emerging quite clearly: see Pons, Romero and Roccucci (eds.), *L'Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*; Antonio Varsori, *L'Italia e la fine della Guerra Fredda*.

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End of the Cold War

The Underrated Ally

Varsori, A.; Zaccaria, B. (Eds.)

2018, XV, 309 p. 5 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-65162-0