

Department of Political Science

Course of History and Politics of USA

**The US and Arab terrorism in 1980s: conflicts, negotiations
and the Sigonella Affair**

Ch.mo Prof. Gregory Alegi

RELATORE

Ch.mo Prof. Rosario Forlenza

CORRELATORE

Emanuele Filippone

CANDIDATO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	p. 1
THE SITUATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN IN THE SEVENTIES	p. 3
CHAPTER I	
US AND ITALY: TWO DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE ARAB WORLD	p. 9
1. The connection between US, Italy and PLO	p.9
2. “The Lodo Moro: An Italian Approach to Palestinian Terrorism”	p. 16
3. Libya	p. 24
CHAPTER II	
THE SIGONELLA CRISIS	p. 33
1. The <i>Achille Lauro</i> hijacking	p. 33
2. The facts happened in Sigonella	p. 40
3. Why did this situation lead to a diplomatic conflict?	P. 47
CHAPTER III	
“DEAR BETTINO”: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS	p. 52
1. The impact of the “Sigonella Case” on the Italian and American public opinion	p. 52
2. Reagan and Craxi: a comparison among two strong foreign policies	p. 57
3. The diplomatic relation between US and Italy after October 12, 1985	p. 61
CONCLUSION	p. 66
BIBLIOGRAFY	p. 68
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	p. 72

INTRODUCTION

What I set out to describe in the following pages is the most serious diplomatic crisis, which occurred between the United States and Italy, since World War II. A crucial moment in which two countries, friends and allies, found themselves pitted against each other for a few hours. On the Italian side, in fact, perhaps the most obvious level of autonomous decision-making in foreign policy was achieved. On the American side, on the other hand, certain claims had to be renounced in order to respect the territorial sovereignty of a foreign state within which events were taking place.

The crisis will be recomposed in a short time, for reasons that, almost forty years later, are still not entirely clear. It will certainly have contributed a certain esteem, enjoyed by Italian political leaders in the United States, confirmed by the events that occurred later, particularly in the Tokyo summit, during which Craxi, with Reagan's support, will obtain the enlargement of the G5 to G7 and the consequent inclusion of Italy among the Greats of the Earth. There is no doubt, however, that it was in the primary interest of both to find an understanding, taking into account an international situation that was still strongly polarized, despite the fact that from beyond the curtain came the first wisps of a change, which just four years later, would lead to the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the prefiguration of a new world order, still not fully defined.

The exposition of what happened on the fateful night of October 10-11, 1985, could not, however, be separated from the seizure of the Italian cruise ship "*Achille Lauro*," from which it all began, and above all from Italy's foreign and economic policy in the Mediterranean and its role in the entangled and contested Middle East peace process. Circumstance in which, once again, Rome's position will not entirely collide with that of Washington and Tel Aviv. On the one hand, the desire to preserve the safety of its citizens, within its national borders and abroad, and on the other, the need to meet energy needs, will push the Italian government to take pro-Arab positions and to maintain cordial diplomatic relations with despotic regimes, such as Libya and Syria, which are accused of heavy compromises with Islamic terrorism.

The reconstruction of the affair was drawn from Italian parliamentary acts, from the testimonies of those who were on the spot or were able to closely follow the evolution of the situation, and from the publication of the proceedings of conferences, organized to shed light on the events. Valuable was the interview, kindly provided to me by my colleague Ashley Reynolds, with Lieutenant Commander Steve Weatherspoon, one of the pilots of the American fighter jets, which surrounded the Boeing, carrying the ship's hijackers.

There was also a desire to focus on the personalities of the two protagonists, Ronald Reagan and Bettino Craxi, hinting at their political careers, the great popularity they both gained at home and abroad, and their successes and failures.

THE SITUATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN IN THE SEVENTIES

The Yom Kippur War attaches to the 1973 oil crisis, and it becomes one of its triggers. It constitutes the fourth phase of the long Arab Israeli conflict, which began in 1948, immediately after the birth of the Israeli state, which had seen, until then, the predominance of Israelian citizens, who revealed themselves to be an efficient military power, despite having recently established in a nation. Surely the war of '73, marked a watershed within the long dispute between Arabs and Israelis. Scholars think that it was the most important of the wars and that the year it was fought marks the true start date of the crisis in Israel. There are many reasons underlying this judgment, but it is necessary to examine the events occurred in the Yom Kippur war and why it broke out.

Before it, Arabs and Israelis had clashed for the first time in 1948. The hostilities ended the following year with the armistice of Rhodes, which, by not respecting the previous UN resolutions, had created the premises for a new war. This exploded in 1956, following the Suez Canal crisis, due to its nationalization by the Egyptians and the following Anglo-French occupation. That circumstance led to a Western European political failure, even bordered on an intervention by the USA and the USSR but confirmed Israeli supremacy over the Arab coalition.

The “six-day war” of 1967 marked Israel's triumph because of the speed with which, thanks to the surprise effect, its military forces, especially its air forces, were able to prevail over the Arabs, to the point of almost annihilating them. It became the second shortest conflict in history, which saw an effective affirmation of Israel as a military power of the highest level within the international panorama. The political success was also enormous, and at the end of the conflict, the geographical extension of the State tripled, with the conquest of very important territorial areas both at a strategic and symbolic level, such as East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the peninsula of Sinai, the West Bank and especially the Gaza Strip. For the Israelis, the war should have lasted only two days without any extraterritorial conquests, with the aim of destroying the Egyptian air force, taking it by surprise, and the three defensive lines that Egypt had in the Sinai. The total unpreparedness of the Arab defense, and the favorable conditions that consequently arose, made the Israelis take advantage of the situation. The losses in the Arab ranks were many, for a total of about 18,000 soldiers who fell in battle with as many as 10,000 Egyptians who lost their lives during the campaign in the Sinai, despite about 800 losses among the Israelis. Undoubtedly it was an event that shocked the Arab world and that could not go unpunished. It caused a radical and sudden change in Egypt, aggravated by the death of President Gamal Abd el-Nasser, struck down by a sudden heart attack on September 28, 1970. The latter, architect of the coup against the monarchy in 1952 and a great supporter of anti-

colonialism and pan-Arabism led by Egypt, was succeeded by its vice-president Anwar al-Sadat. A former colonel, Sadat imprinted a big change on Egyptian policies both inside the Middle East and towards the West. He decided to restart operations in the Suez Canal, to recover the Sinai Heights and its oil wells, to finally abandon the idea of pan-Arabism, which had not brought the desired results, and, moreover, to turn clearly and distinctly to the United States, the only ones, in his view, who could help him achieve his goals. Then, he fired the fifteen thousand Soviet consultants, who were present in Egypt, in retaliation against Moscow for not supplying the requested weapons. Before doing this “transformation”, however, it was necessary to “avenge” the humiliating defeat of the “six-day war”, a necessary step for Cairo to regain international credibility and to be able to assert its position internally. To this end, on October, 6, 1973, a combined surprise operation between Syria (in the north) and Egypt (in the south), shook Israel on the holiday of Yom Kippur, or “Day of Atonement”, the holiest Israelian holiday. For the Egyptians, the use of armed force was the only way to regain what they had lost in 1967. The Israelis had not expected an Arab attack of this magnitude, and the impact was considerable. Within 24 hours “the Egyptians had put 100,000 soldiers, 1,020 tanks, and 13,500 vehicles across the Suez Canal”.¹ The Syrians did the same on the Golan Heights. The massive use of artillery by the Arabs and the almost total unpreparedness of the Israelis led to an initial success of the Syrian-Egyptian deployment, which seemed ready to recover its old territories. The lack of readiness in the reaction to the hard blow suffered, however, did not last long. In fact, after the bewilderment of the first days, during which the use of unconventional weapons would also have been taken into consideration,² the forces of Tel Aviv, thanks to the massive help provided by the United States, managed to reorganize themselves and launch two counterattacks, both in the area occupied by the Syrians and in the one towards which the Egyptians had moved, i.e. on the Sinai. So much so that on October 12, the Syrian threat had been completely averted and indeed the intention of the Israeli army was to head towards Damascus. Also on the anti-Egyptian front, the coordination of the Israeli defense forces, both on land and in the air, made it possible not only to resist the offensive, but even to push back the Egyptian troops and counterattack until planning a march towards Cairo. Indeed, after about a week, it was clear that if the conflict continued it would inevitably lead to another Israeli victory. However, the ambitions of the Israeli state were stopped by the intervention of the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who, following threats of intervention by the Soviet Union,

¹R. P. Givens, *Turning the Vertical Flank: Airpower as a Maneuver Force in the Theater Campaign*, 2012, BiblioScholar, in < https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13973.9#metadata_info_tab_contents >, last accessed: 01.21.2023

²A. Baquis, *Yom Kippur: Israele valutò il ricorso all'atomica*, in <<https://www.analisedifesa.it/2013/09/yom-kippur-israele-valuto-il-ricorso-allatomica/>>, last accessed: 01.08.2023.

launched a diplomatic operation, culminating in the two armistices with Egypt and Syria in 1974.

The consequences for Egypt will be important, not for the result achieved on the battlefield, which in the end will constitute a stalemate regarding the disputed territories but will have an extreme international and historical importance. First of all, it constitutes the only Arab "victory", given the heavy previous defeats, and recognized for Sadat above all at home. It also marks the end of Arab Israeli struggles in the purest sense of the word. It was the last war against Israel in which Egypt participated. In fact, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute increasingly emerged. All this has projected Egyptian politics more and more toward the West, seeking purely political isolation from other Middle Eastern states. Speaking then of the end of the Yom Kippur war, in a general way, it is necessary to specify again that, very likely, the real final victory would have been for Israel. Political scientist Charles S. Liebman is convinced of this in his historiographical article *The Myth of Defeat: The Memory of the Yom Kippur War in Israeli Society*.³ Beyond the sources, which are almost all of Israeli origin, Israel objectively managed to recover the lost ground at the beginning of the war and would have obtained new conquests against Egypt and Syria, if international diplomacy had not stopped Tel Aviv troops. In addition to the UN, the United States above all demand it, as can be seen from a letter that President Nixon sent to Prime Minister Golda Meir on December 13, 1973: "I conclude with this final thought, Madame Prime Minister. I want to say to you in all solemnity that if Israel now fails to take a favorable decision to participate in the conference on the basis of the letter that we have worked out, this will not be understood either in the United States or in the world and I will not be able to justify the support which I have consistently rendered in our mutual interests to your Government".⁴

The consequences that the war caused in the West, in addition to a sudden halt in the process of détente between the USA and the USSR, mainly concerned the export of oil, the price of which was quadrupled by OPEC.⁵ It was an unprecedented way to continue hostilities with Israel and the powers that supported it, given that, in those years, oil represented about two-thirds of the raw material used as an energy source. The strategy adopted consisted, in addition to raising prices, in embargo measures and in the concertation of global production quotas.⁶ Following these measures, the consideration in which some states, dependent on Arab supplies, began to hold the Palestinian cause increased. The role of the PLO and the international prestige

³ C. Liebman, *The myth of defeat: the memory of the Yom Kippur War in Israeli society*, 1993, Middle Eastern Studies (Vol. 29, Issue 3), Frank Cass & Company Ltd.

⁴ *Letter From President Nixon to Israeli Prime Minister Meir*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Vol. XXV Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, document 388.

⁵B. Shwadran, *Middle East Oil: Issues and Problems*, Schenkman Publishing Company, Cambridge, 1977.

⁶E. Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali. Dal 1918 ai giorni nostri*, Laterza, Bari, 2008, p. 1230

of its leader Yasser Arafat also grew.⁷ There was also a significant decrease in demand and production and a general distrust developed towards the countries of the so-called Gulf area.⁸ Thus, the Arab world gained that economic relevance, which was lacking in Nasser's leadership, based essentially on nationalistic claims. Regional organizations were born which strengthened the economic interdependence between the states, reinforcing the already existing political link. In 1975, for example, the Arab Industrialization Organization was founded, made up of Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, committed to enhancing the weaponry to be used against Israel. This cooperation was destabilized by US foreign policy in the Middle East, functional to protect Israel, block the price of oil, reduce the influence of the Soviet Union in that region and, after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, stem the regime of the ayatollah. Nevertheless, Washington took Egypt and Saudi Arabia under its protection. The first agreed to start negotiations for a separate peace (from the other arabic countries) with Israel in exchange for important and substantial economic aid, the second received the military support necessary to defend itself from the Islamic Republic of Tehran.

Hostilities between Egypt and Israel officially ended with the historic signing of the Camp David Accords on September 17, 1978, reached after twelve days of negotiations, with the mediation of US President Jimmy Carter. Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed two agreements. A framework *consensus* for peace in the Middle East, which established a five-year period in which the West Bank and the Gaza Strip should gradually acquire autonomy and independence. At the end, the definitive status of the territories would be established, after further negotiations with Jordan. The second commitment consisted in the signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, with the consequent withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai and the birth of regular diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, of the two of them, only the second will be implemented when, on March 26, 1979, Egypt and Israel sign the peace treaty in Washington and Israel begins to withdraw from the Sinai. On January 26, 1980, diplomatic relations between the two countries will be inaugurated. The day after the signing of the peace treaty, the Arab League will meet in Baghdad and condemn the Egyptian policy. On October 6, 1981, Sadat will be the victim of an attack in Cairo.

An important and delicate role in the Mediterranean arena has always been played by Italy, due to its strategic position and its colonial past in North Africa. Between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, a coup d'état in Libya brought Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to power in 1969. The following year, the young dictator decreed the expulsion of the Italian community,

⁷Cf: A. Gresh, *Storia dell'OLP: verso lo Stato palestinese*, Edizioni Associate, Roma, 1988

⁸L. Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Gosport, 2013, p. 113.

arousing considerable concern in the governments of Rome, at the time firmly under Christian Democrat leadership.

Within the Catholic party, two visions of foreign policy emerged, the distinction between which consisted precisely in the different way of conceiving relations with the Arab countries. The Atlanticist current, inclined to strengthen Italy's position in Europe and, in particular, in the central-northern area of the continent. A leading exponent of this approach was Giuseppe Vedovato, journalist and parliamentarian, who from the pages of periodicals such as *International Relations*, hoped for a rebalancing of diplomacy, which he judged too biased towards North Africa, in favor of NATO. Prominent men of the Christian Democrat left belonged to the other camp, such as Giuseppe Dossetti, Carlo Fracanzani, Giorgio La Pira, particularly close to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and of Pope John XXIII, author of the famous encyclical *Pacem in terris*. Their intent was to intensify cooperation between the Mediterranean states, to foster a general climate of hope and peace.

But the real protagonists of the international relations woven by Italy between the 1960s and 1970s were undoubtedly Aldo Moro and Amintore Fanfani, both prime ministers and foreign ministers several times. An entire paragraph of the next chapter is dedicated to the first, about the second it is good to underline the close collaboration with Enrico Mattei, president of ENI, who pushed Italian foreign policy to mediate between the West and the Mediterranean. The objective of this placement, which Minister Giuseppe Pella, a few years earlier, had defined as "neo-Atlantist", was twofold: to guarantee energy supplies from the Arabs and to preserve Italy from Islamic terrorism, whose targets were often developed European and American. Enrico Mattei then succeeded in extending the interests of the Italian oil industry to the entire Mediterranean and to the Persia of Shah Reza Palhevi, with whom an agreement was signed guaranteeing Italian access to Iranian oil, but Tehran was left with 75 percent of the earnings. This earned him the dislike of the Americans, whose interests were represented by the *Sette Sorelle* (Seven Sisters), as Mattei himself called seven oil companies, constituting the "Consortium for Iran" cartel. They are: Royal Dutch Shell (Anglo-Dutch), Anglo-Persian Oil Company (British), Standard Oil of New Jersey (American), Standard Oil of New York (American), Texaco (American), Standard Oil of California (American), Gulf Oil (American).⁹ This explains the so-called "equidistance", a term used to designate Italian foreign policy during the Six Day War, which was also confirmed later, to indicate the good relations cultivated by the governments presided over by Giulio Andreotti and, in the 1980s, by Bettino Craxi, with Andreotti at the foreign ministry. They implemented forms of partnership with moderate Arab

⁹C. Hoyos, *Le nuove Sette Sorelle: i giganti del petrolio e del gas fanno impallidire i rivali occidentali*, in «Financial Times», 03.12.2007, <https://www.ft.com/content/471ae1b8-d001-11db-94cb-000b5df10621#axzz3KSBXAvfZ>, last access: 01.10.2023.

countries, such as Tunisia, with bizarre leaders such as Gaddafi and with Yasser Arafat's PLO, often treated as a real state. It is no coincidence that the former PSI secretary moved to Hammamet during the *Mani Pulite* (a scandal regarding Italian politicians corruption) years and that, after his death, Arafat wanted to pay homage at his grave.

US AND ITALY: TWO DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE ARAB WORLD

1. The connections between US, Italy and PLO

Political relations between the United States and Italy are born out of cordiality and mutual collaboration. During World War II, they fought partly as enemies but, after September 8, 1943, as allies. After that, both joined NATO, the political and military organization formed in 1949 for defensive purposes. Following the polarization of the world between the USA and the USSR, Washington has always tried to ensure and therefore to consolidate the loyalty of the precious ally. Italy, in fact, has an extremely interesting geographical position, due to its location in the center of the Mediterranean and because it has represented, for years, a sort of eastern border of Atlantic Europe. Yugoslavia, with which it bordered, although it never wanted to enter the Soviet orbit, was nevertheless the first communist country on the east side. At the same time, Italy also was cause for concern in America, having the strongest Marxist party in Western Europe, which enjoyed broad consensus among the masses, especially the workers and peasants. For the United States, this constituted a threat, which they tried to avert by any means, thus favoring the forty-year stay in government of the Christian Democrats and, until the seventies, the so-called *conventio ad excludendum* against the Party Italian Communist, cut off not only from national governments and the majorities that supported them, but also from other centers of power, such as, for example, RAI (Italian National Broadcast) or the presidency of the two parliamentary chambers. Italian democracy therefore presented a non-negligible anomaly, which over time would affect its political history: the lack of alternating government. In fact, the governments were always led by the Christian Democrats until 1992, with the sole exception of Giovanni Spadolini and Bettino Craxi, who, however, presided governments in which the DC expressed the absolute majority of ministers.

American foreign policy, which during the Cold War years was characterized by strong anti-communism and anti-Sovietism, was also marked by situations and strategies in which the secret services played a fundamental role. In Italy, the revelations of Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti who, on Oct. 24, 1990, affirmed to the Chamber of Deputies the existence of a paramilitary organization, called Gladio, which was part of the Stay-behind network, caused a stir. By the same Head of Government's own admission, in a note sent to the Parliamentary Commission on Massacres, six days earlier, the structure had been established on November 26, 1956, by an agreement between the CIA and SIFAR. The latter was the controversial Information Service of the Armed Forces, commanded at the time by General Giovanni De Lorenzo, considered by some not to be under full Italian sovereignty. According to Mario Cogliatore, a top secret protocol required the sharing of information acquired by SIFAR with the

CIA and US approval on the recruitment of Italian agents.¹⁰ A circumstance, in some way, confirmed by Paolo Emilio Taviani, defense minister from 1953 to 1958, who explained to an English newspaper how the Italian secret services were also financed by the "guys of Via Veneto".¹¹ In this way the West prepared itself for a possible communist invasion, to which it would have had to react, activating "a network of resistance capable of providing information, sabotaging the occupier's plants and providing assistance and "escape routes" to the military remained behind enemy lines.¹²

Given the fact that it was a secret structure, it is possible that it also acted in conditions of peace, following and, in some cases perhaps determining, the submerged history of the country. Some of the investigations, conducted to shed light on the main Italian mysteries after the Second World War, have suspected the action of very powerful secret bodies, in contact with subversive sectors. And it was precisely one of these investigations, the one on the Peteano massacre, that led Andreotti to the revelations of 1990, made possible in any case by a foreign policy, which seemed destined to usher in a new season of peace and cooperation international. The fall of the Berlin Wall had made possible the reunification of Germany, which had decreed the end of the tension between the USA and the USSR. Relations between the two superpowers had greatly improved, thanks to the frequent meetings between Bush senior and Gorbachev, which gave hope of a new world order, built under the flag of détente. The political scientist Francis Fukuyama, in a famous article entitled "The end of History?", which later became the title of one of his books, had no doubts: "It is hard to avoid the feeling that something very fundamental has happened in world history".¹³ The well-known Japanese-American essayist was convinced that he was "not to an end of ideology or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism".¹⁴

After all, in one of its reports in 1959, SIFAR (Armed Forces Information Service) reported to the Chief of Defense Staff that among Gladio's tasks was to intervene if an emergency situation arose in one of the NATO countries "due to internal upheavals or invasion of military forces".¹⁵ What exactly was meant by "internal upheavals"? The agreement provided that, in any case, before acting, the parties involved should consult each other. This means that it would

¹⁰M. Cogliatore (edited by), *La Notte dei Gladiatori. Omissioni e silenzi della Repubblica*, Calusca Edizioni, Padova 1992, p. 34.

¹¹«The Observer» of 11/18/1990.

¹²*Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi*. Comunicata alle Presidenze il 04/22/1992, p. 47.

¹³F. Fukuyama, *The End of History?*, The National Interest-Summer 1989.

¹⁴*Ibidem*

¹⁵ *Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

have been up to the threatened State to judge whether there were internal upheavals. Hence the need to use a generic expression, to be evaluated and contextualised on a case-by-case basis. Since its existence was made known, Gladio has been repeatedly called into question, trying to attribute responsibility for some events that have jeopardized democracy in Italy. For example, the Solo plan, i.e., the alleged coup d'état, which should have taken place in 1964, in which the aforementioned General De Lorenzo, was involved. Regarding some neo-fascist massacres, such as that of the Bologna station, it has been hypothesized a role of Gladio and his interests in preventing the growth of the Italian Communist Party and left-wing political forces.

The Bologna attack of August 2, 1980, also saw the possible implication of Palestinians and German and South American terrorists, allies of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the terrorist organization led by George Habash. According to Enzo Raisi, a member of the Mitrokhin commission, the action would have been revenge against Italy, guilty of no longer having complied with the Lodo Moro.¹⁶ As will be seen in the next paragraph, the latter consisted of a "tacit collaboration" between the Italian and Palestinian governments, which, for years, has preserved Italy from attacks of Arab origin, which in exchange has allowed free movement, inside its territory, of terrorists and of weapons intended for them. On the night between 7 and 8 November 1979, on the other hand, Carabinieri had intercepted three missiles in Ortona, in the possession of representatives of Autonomia and aimed at the Palestinian resistance. Following the incident, the Jordanian-Palestinian Abu Anzeh Saleh, mediator of the whole operation, was arrested in Bologna on 13 November. During the trial, celebrated in Chieti, the lawyer. Zappacosta, Saleh's defender, immediately informed the Tribunal of the existence "of unspecified agreements at an international level which would have acted as a cause of non-punishment for his client".¹⁷ On January 2, 1980, the judges also received a letter headed by the PFLP, which alluded to high-level international agreements, which the Tribunal should have complied with. The magistrates obviously consulted the Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga and the Italian military leaders.

Palazzo Chigi replied with an official note, dated January 12, 1980, number 36100/111-1-P, to the Criminal Court of Chieti on January 14, 1980. It stated: "In relation to the letter produced yesterday in the hearing of the ongoing trial before the Court of Chieti and the consequent news disseminated, the Press Office of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers communicates: no agreement has ever been reached between the Italian Government or ordinary or special bodies of the State Administration and Palestinian organizations regarding the storage, transport, transit, import, export or possession in any form or for any purpose of weapons of any kind in

¹⁶ Cf. E. Raisi, *Bomba o non bomba*, Edizioni Minerva, Bologna 2012.

¹⁷ Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta concernente il "dossier Mitrokhin" e l'attività d'intelligence italiana, *Relazione sul gruppo Separat e il contesto dell'attentato del 2 agosto 1980* di Lorenzo Matassa Gian Paolo Pelizzaro, p. 102.

Italian territory by or on behalf of Palestinian organizations. The Italian government does not maintain relations with the Palestinian group known as the PFLP. In carrying out their duties, the intelligence and security services – which had been particularly active in relation to the discovery in Ortona by the police of missile systems in possession of elements belonging to the organization known as Autonomia – have acquired, subsequently facts, in their own forms and methods, information elements, also resulting from declarations by the parties, according to which the missiles are owned by the PFLP, an organization different and distinct from the PLO, and have been entrusted to elements of the Autonomia organization for transit in Italy. Part of the information collected coincides with the content of the letter sent by the Central Committee of the PFLP to the President of the Court of Chieti which proceeds for the known facts; others totally contradict you. Particularly, information elements were also collected based on which the missiles would have been imported to Italy, or other Western countries. No objective evidence has been acquired by the Services on the legitimacy of all the elements collected; these Services, as is known, pursuant to the laws in force, are not bodies of the judicial police and have tasks and attributions quite distinct from those assigned to the latter. Moreover, the information elements collected came to the police bodies, as far as they are relevant for the judicial police investigations. The information and security services will continue their information activity on the subject, in order to ascertain the role of Italian subversive groups in connection with foreign organizations”.¹⁸

The court, noting the executive's pronouncement, in an order dated Jan. 22, 1980, rejected all defense claims due to the nature of the proceedings and, on Jan. 25, 1980, convicted the defendant of the crimes of carrying and possessing a weapon of war, excluding the crime of smuggling, in relation to which it acquitted him with a doubtful formula. This last passage was read as a *ploy* with which the judges did not completely deprive the convict of the hope of being released soon. Indeed, on August 14, 1981, Saleh will be released from prison, after twenty months in prison, compared to the seven years he was sentenced. The Venezuelan Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, alias Comandante Carlos, leader of the German pro-Palestinian organization Separat and the German terrorists Thomas Kram would also have played an important part in the matter and Christa-Margot Fröhlich, known as Heidi, affiliated with it. The bomb, that was supposed to detonate in Rome or in the prison where Saleh was being held, would thus have exploded in Bologna by mistake.

Another line of investigation led the Bolognese magistrates, once again, to the Middle East, precisely to Lebanon where, according to the Palestinian leader Abu Ayad, there were "training camps for foreigners held by the Kataeb near Aqura, in the east (from north-east Beirut up to

¹⁸*Ivi*, pp. 104-105.

20 km from Tripoli), controlled by the Maronite right [...] in the Aqura camp various groups were trained, for a total of about 30-35 people, including Italians, Spaniards and West Germans [...] From the Germans we learned that about eleven months ago in the Aqura camp the group had discussed with the Italians the strategy for restoring Nazi-fascism in their countries and they had come to the conclusion that the only way would have been to attack against the most important institutions. The Italian fascists claimed that their greatest enemy is represented by the Communist Party and, in general, the left parties and that therefore they would begin their operations with a major attack in the left-administered city of Bologna.”¹⁹

Finally, there is another hypothesis, which connects Bologna to Ustica, where on June 27, 1980, an ITAVIA DC. According to statements made to a television station by former President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga in 2008, the cause of the disaster would be a French Mirage, which had tried to hit the plane on which Colonel Gaddafi was travelling. A study conducted by Leonardo Tricarico and Gregory Alegi, published under the title *Ustica, un'ingiustizia civile, Perché lo Stato pagherà 300 milioni per una battaglia aerea che non c'è mai stata*, explains, however, that the radar documentation does not show that an air battle took place over Italian skies on the evening of June 27, 1980. Rather, there is probative evidence of the explosion of a device in the rear lavatory of the aircraft such as, for example, the melting of the sink, the crushing of some pipes and an interruption of electricity generation in a quarter of a second, due to a detachment of the engines, located next to the bathroom. On the other hand, there are no traces of the cracking of the plane, attributable to the action of a missile outside. The bitter observation of the authors is that the civil sentences have decided to compensate for criminal sentences, which have never condemned anyone, neither for the destruction of the plane, nor for the red herrings, including the one relating to the air battle, which we were referring earlier. The Victims' Association has never believed in these explanations, believing instead that these were misdirections, ordered by the CIA and implemented by Gladio and P2, to divert the search abroad for those responsible for a crime, which would instead all Italian. The link between the CIA and P2 is sanctioned by the presence of Howard E. Stone, CIA agent, in the lists of the Masonic lodge, card number 2183, code E.1980, group 11, file 0899, master of the third degree.²⁰ A document from the SID, dated December 4, 1972, protocol number 05/3297/72, attests that Mr. Stone, industrial manager of Stone Associates, was in contact with Vito Miceli, head of the SID and also a piduist, with card number 1.605, code E.1877, file 0491.²¹ According to the very important note, Stone informed the Italian services that Gladio would continue to operate if it could also cope with internal upheavals and that funding would be resumed if the

¹⁹*Ivi*, pp. 11-12.

²⁰G. M. Bellu, G. D'Avanzo, *Dietro Gladio c'era la Loggia P2*, «La Repubblica», 05/17/1991.

²¹*Ibidem*

Gladio operation were to suitable for the above requirements. The reaction of the Italian authorities is not known.

On the other hand, some magistrates who are experts in international terrorism, such as Rosario Priore, have not completely excluded the responsibility of Palestinian exponents.²² In 2015, the investigating judge Bruno Giangiacomo, at the request of the Public Prosecutor of Bologna, however archived the position of Thomas Kram and Christa-Margot Fröhlich.

Beyond the plots hatched by the secret services of both states, the main reasons for the friction between Italy and the USA are due to the divergence of interests with the Arab world and the position of the PCI in the Italian political panorama. The first point focused on the Palestinian question, in which America has always been on the side of Israel, the only Western-style democracy in the territory, seen as its own outpost in the Middle East. Unlike Italy, which has preferred to remain equidistant, driven by economic reasons, by the need to secure an energy supply and by the desire to act in harmony with the other European partners. In fact, Europe has supported the Palestinians economically since the days of the EEC, which in 1971 began to direct funds to UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Since November 1993, the European Union and its member states have actively participated in the AHLC, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which coordinates international donor assistance to the Palestinians. It is estimated that between 1994 and 2005, the support received from the PNA totaled €3,356.39 million, of which at least €2,058 million came from the EU, while support to UNRWA would correspond to around 57% of the UN agency's budget.²³

With the emergence of a community foreign policy through the establishment, in 1998, of a High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Italy's role has grown in the security cooperation promoted by the EU in this regard of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, it participated in the EUPOL COPPS and EU BAM Rafah missions. The first began on January 1, 2006, and it has the task of collaborating with the Palestinian Authority in matters of policing and the rule of law. The second was launched on November 25, 2005, after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, in order to ensure security at the Rafah crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. Since 2007, the year in which the fundamentalist group Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip, the mission has been contributing to the border management of the Palestinian Authority, supporting capacity building in the General Administration for Borders and Crossings (GABC).

²² Cf: R. Priore, V. Cutonilli, *I segreti di Bologna. La verità sull'atto terroristico più grave della storia italiana*, Chiarelettere, Milano 2016.

²³ Centro Militare di Studi Strategici Ricerca CeMiSS 2009 – R12, *La politica europea relativa al conflitto mediorientale: scenari politico-strategici per il 2009 e potenziale ruolo dell'Italia*, Direttore della ricerca: Dott. Diego Baliani, p. 27.

Europe's role in supplying the Palestinians has caused diplomatic tensions between the two sides of the Atlantic. Firstly, for the presidency of the AHLC, claimed by both the United States and the EU. Mutual vetoes favored the attribution of the presidency to Norway, a European country outside the EU and clearly aligned with the United States. Another issue concerned the leadership of the Organization of Donor Countries in support of the Palestinians. For the USA, it belonged to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), while the EU wanted it to be assigned to the UN because the World Bank (of which the IRBD is one of the five agencies) was judged too pro-America.²⁴

Since the mid-1980s, Italy has invested around 450 million euros in favor of Palestine, becoming, over time, one of its main donors. Currently, the funds allocated to programs and projects in progress are 187 million euros, of which 86 million in aid credits and 101 million in grants.

Italy is also engaged in the exercise of European Joint Programming, with 66 million euros (not including voluntary contributions to UN and NGOs) and leads two important sectors, Health and Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, included in the Five-Year Planning of the Palestinian Authority (*National Policy Agenda 2017 - 2022*), to which is added a third privileged sector of intervention, Economic Development.²⁵

As far as concerning Italian internal politics, the line inaugurated by Aldo Moro in the 1970s, tending to include the Communists in the government majorities, did not go unnoticed in Washington, but was the cause of bitter tensions between the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the Christian Democrat. The United States opposed that political design for obvious ideological reasons, but also out of fear that the arrival of the PCI in government could upset the international balance by decreeing Italy's exit from NATO. From the report of the Parliamentary Commission on the "Moro case" it appears that, during a trip to the United States in 1974, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs received threats which immediately caused him to have a sudden illness, felt in the cathedral of Saint Patrick.²⁶ For this reason, on his return to Italy, he decided to retire from politics, but had second thoughts after the birth of his nephew Luca, despite the opposition of his family, confirmed by his wife Eleonora: "I did everything I could; I think I made the summer of 1975 for him as one of the most terrible of his life, creating an untenable situation for him to quit and withdraw from politics. And I also deluded myself that I had managed to scratch, a little, his stubbornness; then I had to realize that there was

²⁴Ivi, p.21.

²⁵<https://openaid.aics.gov.it/recipient-country/PS> ultimo accesso: 12/04/2022.

²⁶ *Relazione della Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di Via Fani sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia*, Doc. XXIII, N. 5, Vol. primo, Roma 1983, p. 19.

²⁶ *Relazione della Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di Via Fani sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia*, Doc. XXIII, N. 5, Vol. primo, Roma 1983, p. 19.

nothing they could do".²⁷ In one of the letters written to his wife after his imprisonment, Moro expressed his regret at not having listened to her: "Of course I was wrong, for a good purpose, in defining the direction of my life. But it can't be changed now. It remains only to recognize that you were right."²⁸

2. The Lodo Moro: an Italian approach to Palestinian terrorism.

Although it was coined by Francesco Cossiga, this wording refers to a foreign policy decision, of which Aldo Moro was the main architect being the Italian Prime Minister from 1963 to 1968 and from 1974 to 1976 and foreign minister from 1969 to 1972 and from 1973 to 1974.²⁹ Actually, between the 1960s and the first half of the 1980s, Italy dialogued not only with the Palestine Liberation Organization, but also with states such as Iraq, Libya and Syria, who bankrolled international terrorism. In addition to the executive, the agreement necessarily had to involve other institutions, such as the security services, the judiciary, the police chiefs and, in some cases, even the presidency of the republic. Among the names of those who, in the field, acted in compliance with and in application of the agreement, we recall: the colonel of the carabinieri Stefano Giovannone, first part of the SID and, subsequently, of the SISMI, mentioned by Aldo Moro in the letters written during the days of his seizure; Army General Vito Miceli, director of the SID, Admiral Mario Casardi, also of the SID. For this reason, Valentine Lomellini, author of a study entitled *Il lodo Moro: Terrorismo e la ragion di Stato 1969-1986*, prefers to speak of the "Italian Lodo", to underline that the one attributed exclusively to Moro was, the expression of a much broader political will.³⁰

Among the so-called "rogue countries", accused of economically and militarily supporting terrorism, an important role must be recognized for Libya. With the latter, Italy wanted to maintain cordial relations, despite the frequent humiliating and propaganda moves, with which Colonel Gaddafi recalled the colonial past of the Giolitti and Fascist periods. The tension between the two sides of the Mediterranean culminated in the attack on Fiumicino, carried out on December 17, 1973, by a Palestinian commando, which killed thirty-two people, six of whom were Italian (Giuliano, Emma and Monica De Angelis, the engineer Raffaele Narciso, the young financier Antonio Zara and the technician of the airport services company Domenico Ippoliti), and wounded fifteen. Although the causes of the massacre still remain uncertain, the instigators are unknown and the perpetrators substantially unpunished, there are many suspects falling on the Tripoli regime, increased after the release of a CIA report, made known by the

²⁷ Audizione di Eleonora Moro in <archivio900.it> last accessed: 04/10/2020.

²⁸ A. Moro, *Lettere dalla prigionia*, edited by M. Gotor, Einaudi, Torino 2008, p. 177.

²⁹ *Interrogazione a risposta scritta 4/04005* presentata da Mura Silvana in data 14 Settembre 2009, seduta n. 213 in <https://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic4_04005_16> last accessed: 12/06/2022.

³⁰ Cf. V. Lomellini, *Terrorismo e ragion di stato raison*, Laterza 2022.

FOIA (Freedom Of Information Act), established by legislative decree n. 97 of 2016. The precious document states: “Lybia is pressing fedayeen leaders not to punish the terrorist who attacked a Pan American airliner and hijacked a Lufthansa aircraft from Rome airport in mid december (omissis). As a result, the Palestine Liberation Organization had reportedly decided not to accept responsibility for the terrorists, but to insist that they remain in the custody of Kuwaiti officials. The Kuwaitis are almost certain to release the terrorists after a short imprisonment. The Libyan government has reportedly threatened to sever financial ties with the Palestine Liberation Organization and Fatah unless they renounce their intention to deal harshly with terrorism”.³¹ Additionally, an airline ticket purchased in Tripoli was found on board the Lufthansa plane used by the terrorists to leave Italy. Some articles in Italian and foreign newspapers should also be considered heavy evidence against Libya, such as, for example, those published in *Epoca* by Pietro Zullino, who, in addition to denouncing the flaws in the Roman airport security system, called into question Gaddafi, considered center of an interweaving between his government, ENI, FIAT and the Turin newspaper *La Stampa*.³² The popular journal spoke of Gaddafi's resentment towards Italy due to a deal that ENI was conducting secretly with Saudi Arabia for the purchase of 10 million tons of oil. For this reason, the Libyan leader allegedly threatened FIAT with heavy sanctions if he did not convince the government to give up that deal and if he did not fire the director of his newspaper, "the Jew" Arrigo Levi, after the appearance of a satirical elzeviro against him, signed by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini.³³ In UK, *The Times* had also dealt with the affair, even revealing the amount of 370 million lire with which the Libyan colonel would have paid the commando in action at Fiumicino.³⁴

The embarrassment aroused by these indiscretions forced Minister Moro to report to Parliament, using his well-known oratorical ability. There are two versions of his declarations presented in the Senate, the first one, written by hand, which, while coinciding in content, have slight formal differences, that denote the Author's shrewdness, required by the seriousness of the situation. It may be useful to report both: “We have acknowledged the firm denial opposed by President Gaddafi to press reports that would have wanted him involved in the execrable massacre of Fiumicino. On the other hand, a denial that coincides with the judgment that we had given, with good reason, of the rather artificial news of the Times in a rather obscure

³¹Outgoing message. Middle East Africa Brief 004-74, 01/8/1974.

³²M. Bellacci, R. Uboldi, P. Zullino, *Fiumicino. Perché è accaduto*, «Epoca» n. 1212/1213, 12/30/1973, pp. 28-38; P. Zullino, *Fiumicino. Un ufficiale accusa il governo*, «Epoca» n. 1215, 01/13/1974, pp. 18-19; P. Zullino, *Abbiamo portato al giudice il documento su Fiumicino. Perché il capitano Corrado Narciso ha deciso di parlare*, «Epoca» n. 1216, 01/20/1974, p. 16.

³³ C. Fruttero, F. Lucentini, *Pare che...*, «La Stampa», 12/7/1973.

³⁴ *Colonel Gaddafi 'uses oil revenues to finance terrorism*, «The Times», 01/04/1974; *Evidence of Gaddafi financing of terrorism*, «The Times», 01/17/1974; *Terrorists' air tickets 'issued in Libya*, «The Times», 01/21/1974.

journalistic story, due to its content and the timing of its occurrence. It is therefore important not to allow doubts, resentments, emotional reactions to prevail, which could stop us on the common path we have begun to follow".³⁵ This first draft, written in his own hand, is followed by the one officially read to the senators: "We have acknowledged the firm denial opposed by President Gaddafi to press reports that would have wanted him involved in the execrable massacre at Fiumicino. On the other hand, a denial that coincides with the judgment we had rightly made of the Times news in a journalistic affair, because of its content and the timing of its occurrence, rather difficult to define. Therefore, it is important not to let doubts or emotional reactions prevail, which could stop us on the road we decided to take".³⁶

Also very interesting are the statements made by the aforementioned Colonel Giovannone to Judge Rosario Priore, on July 19 1983, which would confirm Libyan responsibility for the massacre: "As far as I know - however, I must specify that at the time of the massacre I was not in Lebanon, but in Rome in the clinic for an operation on the retina - the operation was organized by the Libyans and carried out by a group of elements, I believe also Palestinians, who had moved to Libya, following a certain Abdel Ghaffour, former director of Al Fatah, that he had been kicked out of the organization. The commando reached Spain from Libya and from here directly to Rome. The project was to take over a Panamerican Jumbo plane, to carry out a terrorist action to protest for the relations between Egyptians and Israelis, which should have concluded the October war. Since the plane was not at Fiumicino airport, the terrorists would have retreated to the other target, i.e., a TWA plane [evidently the colonel switched companies]. The leader of the organization Abdel Ghaffour was sentenced to death by a Palestinian court and returned to Beirut where he was killed in '74 or '75. He was intercepted on a street in the Lebanese capital and killed with machine gun fire. The execution was publicized [...] as well as in the Middle Eastern press also in the European one, certainly in the Italian one. I don't know if the Palestinian trial also affected other members of the commando. I learned that two elements of it would be killed. But I don't know under what circumstances. I know that the members of the commando that operated in Rome, after being taken to Kuwait, remained detained for some time in this country. They were then transferred to Egypt and incarcerated I don't know if in an Egyptian state facility or in one of the PLO in Egyptian territory. From this moment on, all traces of them were lost. There was a rumor about the use by the commando of Sterling submachine guns during the firefight at the airport. Despite investigations carried out

³⁵ Archivio storico del Senato, Fondo Aldo Moro, Serie 1: Scritti e Discorsi; Sottoserie 18: Anno 1974; UA 619; busta 28, A. Moro, intervento al Senato sull'andamento della politica estera, 01/23/1974, pp. 163-165.

³⁶ Archivio storico del Senato, Fondo Aldo Moro, Serie 1: Scritti e Discorsi; Sottoserie 18: Anno 1974; UA 619; busta 28, A. Moro, intervento al Senato sull'andamento della politica estera, 01/23/1974, pp. 13-14; pp. 46-47 e pp. 86-87.

by me, after Peci's revelations, I could not obtain any confirmation of that rumor. The research was done in Italy, I believe in the documents of the Fiumicino investigations".³⁷

A week later the colonel, heard again by the magistrate, added: "Still with regard to the Fiumicino massacre, I recall that the two I mentioned in the previous examination, implicated in the attack, were killed, as far as I was told, in two different circumstances and without specific motivation. I remember being told: everything is settled. I don't remember the names of the two; I certainly heard about it, either in '76 or '78, because I wasn't in Lebanon in '77. When I say I've heard of it, I mean I learned the news in service environments related to ours. It could be British services as well as moderate Arab countries. Now, however, I don't remember which service the people who told me these facts belonged to. For one of the people killed, the news also appeared in a newspaper or bulletin, in French or English, published in Beirut. In the news it was said, if I remember correctly, that one of those had been killed - the nationality was not reported - who had taken part in the Fiumicino raid. He referred generically that he had been killed in clashes without adding anything else. In the years between '76 and '78 the bulletins and newspapers in European languages were no less than a dozen and represented the various factions. Al Fatah also had one, entitled Wafa, in English and Arabic. I don't remember if I read the news in European language. I also had an Arabic-language press translation and synthesis service, so it's also possible that the news came from an Arabic-language newspaper or bulletin. In January 1974 the British press explicitly accused the Libyans, and Gaddafi in particular, of having been responsible for the massacre. The Libyans flatly rejected this accusation. We did not have a press review of Libyan publications. In Beirut, however, there was a newspaper, which acted as a mouthpiece for Libyan policy and interests in the Middle East. The newspaper was or still is – I believe at least until the autumn of '81 – As Saphir. Abdel Ghaffour (named Ahmed or Mohammed) was an Al Fatah executive in the logistical-administrative field. It did not have a fixed location. He had to get supplies from the various Palestinian camps scattered in different countries. Having clashed with the Palestinian leadership, he was placed under administrative investigation for irregularities and dismissed. He took refuge, as I said, in Libya, where he would become responsible for a group of terrorists training for operations planned by the Libyans. In this period, I was told by Palestinian circles that prior to the Fiumicino operation, Ghaffour had contacts with Abu Nidal, another head of a terrorist group, based in Iraq, and also a defector from Al Fatah. Ghaffour planned and directed the operation, presumably from Tripoli or at most from Spain. For the Arabs there has been a certain freedom of movement in Spanish territory, regardless of the successive regimes. I have to precise: I

³⁷ Tribunale di Roma, Ufficio Istruzione 2^a sezione, Procedimento 2677/77A G.I., Processo verbale di esame di testimonianza senza giuramento, giudice istruttore Rosario Priore, segretario Paolo Musio, Stefano Giovannone, 07/19/1983.

know nothing, however, of the current situation. That freedom of movement was even greater for those traveling with diplomatic passports from Libya or other Arab countries. It will be recalled that the Lufthansa hijacking which ended in Mogadishu also began in Spanish territory, precisely in the Balearic Islands. The two subsequently killed were, likely, from the commando that had operated at Fiumicino. There were two or three PLO camps in Egypt at that time. I don't know where they were located, because my jurisdiction extended to the Egyptian border".³⁸

The character introduced by Giovannone leads to the political track, linked to a rift within the Palestinian resistance between Al Fatah, the moderate faction led by Arafat, and the extremist faction supported by Gaddafi and led precisely by Ahmed Abdel Ghaffour, opposed to the Geneva Conference, scheduled for the following Dec. 21, to start negotiations between Egypt and Israel. A further hypothesis is that advocated by Miguel Godor, based on Fulvio Martini's hearing at the CTS on Oct. 6, 1999. The massacre would have been an Arab retaliation for information provided by Italian services to the Israelis during the Yom Kippur War.³⁹

This also explains why an attack such as that of Fiumicino could never take place in Italy (at the time it was the most serious that ever happened in Italy) although the "Lodo" had already been in operation for some years. Circumstance demonstrated by the fact that, since 1972, eight terrorists arrested in *flagrante delicto* were immediately released.⁴⁰ Furthermore, we understand the need to include in the agreement, only later and therefore after 1973, also countries such as Libya, in some way linked to the Palestinian cause. In fact, three months before the massacre, on September 5, the terrorist Amin el Hindy, right-hand man of the head of the Palestinian services Abu Ayad, was arrested in Ostia, surprised with dangerous weapons. In March 1974, he was released together with two of his accomplices, subject to the payment of a bail of 60 million lire, which would have been paid by the Italian intelligence.⁴¹ In the summer of 1979, Abu Ayad met with leaders of the Stasi, the security service of the German Democratic Republic. The minutes of those talks contain the following admission: "There is no systematic relationship of collaboration with the Italian, French, Spanish and British secret services. Rather, in the past there have been several concrete occasions, above all the arrests of PLO militants in those countries, which have made it necessary to establish channels of direct contact. In the specific case of Italy, these contacts begin in 1972. The Italians even allow the

³⁸ Tribunale di Roma, Ufficio Istruzione 2^a sezione, Procedimento 2677/77A G.I., Processo verbale di esame di testimoniaio senza giuramento, giudice istruttore Rosario Priore, segretario Paolo Musio, Stefano Giovannone, 07/26/1983.

³⁹ A. Moro, *Lettere dalla prigionia*, edited by M. Gotor, Einaudi editore, Torino 2008, p. 106, no. 10.

⁴⁰ Cf. S. Lodi, A. Giuseppetti, *Fiumicino 17 Dicembre 1973. Il massacro di Settembre nero*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli 2013.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

movement of weapons from Western Europe to the occupied territories, which happened in individual cases, making them pass through Italy".⁴²

In November 1974, another Palestinian commando, named after Abu Mahmoud, hijacked a British VC 10 over Tunis. The terrorists obtained from the Egyptian authorities the release of five members of the fire group, which had operated in Fiumicino. Their identity, destination, or fate will never be known. The investigations, conducted by Rosario Priore, were closed forever in July 1989.

The attitude of the Italian institutions towards the Palestinians was also recalled by Aldo Moro in some letters written in the prison in which he was imprisoned by his kidnapers. The first is dated April 22, 1978, and is addressed to Luigi Cottafavi, deputy assistant secretary general at the UN. In it the Christian Democrat statesman, complaining about the rigidity with which his affair is being managed, writes: "forgetting that in many other civilized countries there are exchanges and compensations and that in Italy itself for the cases of the Palestinians we have behaved in a completely different way".⁴³ On April 28, a letter from its president arrived at the headquarters of the Christian Democrats in which he asserted: "These obstinate DC members should be told that, in many cases, exchanges have been made in the past, everywhere, to safeguard hostages, to save innocent victims. But it is worth adding that, without at least the DC being unaware of it, in a fair number of cases Palestinians were also granted freedom (with expatriation), to avert the grave threat of retaliation and reprisals capable of causing significant damage to the community. And, it must be said, these were serious and frightening threats, but they did not have the degree of immanence of those that affect us today. But back then, the principle had been accepted. The need to make an exception to the rule of formal legality had been recognized (alternatively, there was exile)".⁴⁴ The next day, the DC group leader in the Chamber, Flaminio Piccoli, received another letter from Moro, who addressed him as follows: "Then there's Miceli and, if he's in Italy (and it would be good from every point of view to have him come) Col. Giovannone, whom Cossiga esteems. Therefore, not once, but several times, various detained and even sentenced Palestinians were released with mechanisms, with the aim of averting serious reprisals which would then have been implemented if detention had continued".⁴⁵ On the same day, Moro spoke with Erminio Pennacchini, president of the parliamentary control committee on secret services and state secrecy, and Renato Dell'Andro, undersecretary at the Ministry of Justice. He asked the first to tell the truth, recalling the "well-known story of the Palestinians that troubled us for so many

⁴²Stasi Archives - BStU, Sekretariat Neiber, no. 937, f. 22.

⁴³A. Moro, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁴⁴*Ivi*, pp. 141-142.

⁴⁵*Ivi*, p. 104.

years and that you, with my modest assistance, managed to defuse".⁴⁶ He asks the second to repeat with him "what may seem strange and is not, namely the exchange of political prisoners. Instead, it happened repeatedly abroad, but also in Italy. Perhaps you already directly know the story of the Palestinians in the darkest era of the war. The purpose of averting serious harm threatened to people, should it persist".⁴⁷

The reference to similar choices made by other States, threatened by terrorists, is confirmed first of all by the United Kingdom, in whose archives the scholar Thomas Skelton-Robinson has found documents attesting to London's recourse to the mediation of the Egyptian president Nasser, to speak with the Palestinians. After the massacres of Zurich-Klötten and Würenlingen, which in 1970 had caused fifty-one deaths, Switzerland promised the Palestinians, represented by Faruq al-Qaddumi, a diplomatic base in Geneva, in exchange for being spared from further terrorist attacks.

Germany moved during the Zarqa crisis, caused by the hijacking of four airliners in 1970. Chancellor Willy Brandt sent his emissary, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, to meet Arafat in Jordan to demand the release of Western hostages held in the desert Jordanian in exchange for the protection of German diplomats. This line also continued with Helmut Schmidt who, after the German Autumn of 1977, invited one of his diplomats, Peter Kiewitt, to participate in a secret meeting with two bigwigs of the PLO: Ali Hassan Salameh and Issam Sartawi. The three met in Vienna on November 24, 1977, with the consent of Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky. In fact, Austria too had suffered a Palestinian attack on the Marchegg station in September 1973 and, on December 21, 1975, the kidnapping of the oil ministers at the OPEC headquarters in Vienna. From that summit arose the Wischnewski protocol, which provided for the recognition of the PLO by Austria and Germany and the Palestinian collaboration to face terrorism in Europe, also using its intelligence. This would confirm the hypothesis formulated by Valentine Lomellini in his book, according to which there was a link between the Palestinian resistance and the RAF, a German terrorist organization. However, the scholar excludes contacts between Arabs and the Red Brigades.⁴⁸

Also France implemented "a policy of equilibrium", inaugurated by President Charles De Gaulle and confirmed by his successors Pompidou and Giscard d'Estaing. It consisted of remaining neutral with respect to the Palestinian and Israeli agents of the Mossad. In the 1980s, under the presidency of Francois Mitterand, the French security services undertook with Abu Nidal to pass on confidential information to prevent attacks in France.

⁴⁶Ivi, p. 107.

⁴⁷Ivi, p. 111.

⁴⁸Cf: V. Lomellini, *Terrorismo e ragion di stato 1969-1986*, Laterza 2022.

At this point, there are questions of a moral order, but also a political one, which probably can never be fully satisfied, which have challenged consciences since the existence of the Lodo Moro was made known. Was it right to guarantee impunity to terrorists and allow them a systematic supply of weapons, across the national territory? What perception may the relatives of the Italians massacred at Fiumicino have had of the State, who have never had a memory or a commemoration, like the other victims of terrorism? The matter must be traced back to the main objective that the Italian authorities intended to pursue: saving human lives. It was Moro himself who reiterated it, writing to Riccardo Misasi, president of the Justice Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, on April 29, 1978: "Dear Riccardo, a big hug and a few words to tell you that I expect you, with the eloquence and vigor that they belong to you, your effective battle in defense of life, in defense of human rights, against a petty reason of state".⁴⁹ Obviously, Moro is referring to his hostage situation in the hands of an organization, which has already expressed its willingness to release him, on condition that the State negotiates, accepting the request for release from some of his followers. Regardless, however, of the personal drama he is experiencing, Moro argues his position, evidently in favor of negotiation, by appealing to those principles which, from the point of view of a jurist, who also contributed to writing the Constitution, are foundation of the Italian political and institutional order. Two opposing visions of politics clashed: the one which, admitting the "reason of state", assigns to the latter a sort of unconditional primacy and the personalist one, in which Moro recognizes himself, also as a political philosopher and friend of Paul VI, the intellectual Pope, a profound connoisseur of Jacques Maritain who, together with Emmanuel Mounier, is the main exponent of this current of thought. According to the French philosopher "man has in him a life and goods that go beyond ordination to political society: *homo non hordinatur ad communitatem politicam secundum omnia sua*. And why? Because he's a person."⁵⁰In this assumption the Christian Democrat leader finds the reasons for his political commitment, as a man and also as a fervent Christian. After the twenty years of Fascism, therefore, which had implemented the Hegelian conception of the ethical state, the desire was to recover the primacy of the person, custodian of natural rights and, for the believer Aldo Moro, the image and likeness of God.

Naturally, the possible victims would also have been people, affected by the Palestinians who passed undisturbed through Italy. But the politicians believed, first of all, that they had to protect the lives of those they represented. Furthermore, the context in which the Palestinians acted had to be carefully considered, starting with their motivations. They were seen by the West as terrorists because, effectively, the strategy adopted sowed terror, hitting indiscriminate

⁴⁹A. Moro, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁵⁰J. Maritain, *Umanesimo integrale*, Borla, Roma 1980, p. 173-174, quote from Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 21, 4, ad. 3.

targets and often killing innocent people. Many of them fought for the sacred right of a people to have a homeland. A right that clearly cannot be exercised by denying it to other peoples. There is no doubt, then, that that of the Italian authorities was also "a thoughtful and measured political evaluation",⁵¹ encouraged, among other things, by the need to consolidate and recover prestige within the Mediterranean, after the colonial experience and from the need to guarantee the country adequate energy supplies.

As for the second question, we will have to wait for more mature times to assume in the collective memory the sacrifice of those lives, cut short very prematurely. Just as they waited and, in the end, got what was rightfully theirs, the families of the Italians who were infoibati at the end and after the Second World War. For years the story was also denied by history textbooks. From March 30 2004, with the law n. 92, it has been established a day of remembrance, which has become an important occasion not only to celebrate, but also to learn, reflect and prevent.

However, the judges of Bologna involved in the investigation into the massacre at the station of August 2, 1980 did not give much importance to the "Lodo", for a reason that Salvatore Sechi defined as "understandable, but not convincing", based on the "circumstance that the legitimation of the Lodo Moro lacked, despite the numerous proofs given of the existence and operation of our services and other courts, a sanction that is not bureaucratic, but formal".⁵² The perplexity of the scholar is based on the impossibility of signing agreements or formalizing negotiations, with terrorist groups, as happens between states. "The exchange of commitments and agreements, continues Sechi, are established in fact, on the basis of the balance of power, mutual reliability, and never through the signing of documents".⁵³ Nonetheless, on June 26, 2017 Bassam Abu Sharif spoke to the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Moro, chaired by the Hon. Giuseppe Fioroni of the existence of an official document, relating to the Lodo Moro, drawn up between Giovannone and Habash. The text would be found in the archives of the PFLP, but it does not yet appear to have been delivered to the archives of the Senate of the Republic.⁵⁴

3. Libya

Relations between Italy and Libya goes back to the early 20th century when Giovanni Giolitti, head of a liberal government, led a war against the Ottoman Empire to conquer

⁵¹Cf: S. Limiti, *Arafat. La sovranità senza Stato*, Castelveccchi, Roma 2019.

⁵² *Lo storico Sechi: "La strage di Bologna, il lodo Moro e il contesto mediorientale"*. *La riflessione dello studioso per la rivista Nova Historica*, in < <https://www.barbadillo.it/92203-lo-storico-sechi-la-strage-di-bologna-il-lodo-moro-e-il-contesto-mediorientale/>>, ultimo accesso:

⁵³ *Ibidem*

⁵⁴ Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul rapimento e l'omicidio di Aldo Moro, seduta del 26 giugno 2017, resoconto stenografico, audizione di Bassam Abu Sharif.

Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The purpose of the conflict was to resume the colonial policy, abruptly interrupted after the defeat of Adua in 1896 and to offer new lands to cultivate to southern farmers, forced since then to emigrate in search of work. The Piedmontese statesman was often criticized by southerners, such as Gaetano Salvemini,⁵⁵ who accused him of treating the south as an electoral breeding ground, neglecting it from an economic point of view. Giolitti did not intend to change the socio-economic structure in force in the South, which was based on large estates, so as not to antagonize the landowners who he relied on for votes. In 1911, aware of the peasants' need to have their own land to cultivate and taking advantage of a serious political crisis in Turkey, Giolitti initiated hostilities, which ended on October 18, 1912 with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, which formally gave Italy a kind of protectorate over Libya.⁵⁶ Under the government of Mussolini, a second treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, confirmed the annexations in North Africa, to which was added the Dodecanese. Total control of the region, however, was achieved only under the fascist regime, with a heavy military repression, conducted by Giuseppe Volpi, Pietro Badoglio and above all Rodolfo Graziani, which crushed the Libyan resistance. After the execution of 'Omar al-Mukthār on September 16, 1931, the Libyans surrendered to the hegemony of their conquerors. The atrocities committed to achieve this result remained indelible in the memory and pride of the Libyans and influenced the subsequent history of the two countries.

During the Second World War, Libya was the scene of clashes between Italian-German and British troops, who, after an initial advance, had to retreat to El Alamein where, in 1942, a decisive battle was fought, which marked the defeat of the Axis forces. After the war, in 1947 Libya was assigned by the UN to the trusteeship of the United Kingdom and France and in 1951 it obtained its independence as the United Kingdom of Libya, under King Idris al-Sanusi, who however had to submit to the decision of United States and Great Britain, to maintain on the territory of their military bases. In 1953 Libya joined the Arab League and, two years later, the United Nations. Meanwhile, the first oil fields were discovered whose earnings were shared with some major global oil companies.

On September 1, 1969, Muammar Gaddafi and other soldiers deposed the king and proclaimed the Libyan Arab Republic. The new regime abolished foreign military bases and nationalized the possessions of the Italians still residing, requiring them to leave by October 15, 1970. During his stay in Egypt, Gaddafi became a Nasser's admirer, from whom he took inspiration for his foreign policy, deploying the Country alongside the PLO, against the State of Israel. On March 2, 1977, the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was born,

⁵⁵Cf: G. Salvemini, *Il ministro della malavita*, Bollati Boringhieri Editore, Torino 2021.

⁵⁶ Italy assumed full sovereignty of the area with Royal Decree no. 1247 of 11/05/1911, converted into law on 02/23 and 02/24/1912.

with a new name attributed to Libya by its leader, to highlight the socialist inspiration of the dictatorship. The relationship with the West was initially rather hostile, due to the explicit support given by Tripoli to the main Arab terrorist organizations. Gaddafi was also very upset by the decision to install US cruise missiles in Comiso, decided by President Ronald Reagan and Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini. Although aimed at the Soviet Union, the colonel feared that they could be used against him and, therefore, threatened to bomb the base in Sicily, even at the cost of causing a nuclear disaster in the Mediterranean.⁵⁷ In this context, characterized by a certain enmity between Libya and the United States, Italian diplomacy had a very interesting task, especially when it was led by Giulio Andreotti. The latter was requested by Gaddafi to act as intermediary between him and Reagan. The two met during a visit by the Italian minister to Libya on July 30 and 31, 1984, a summary of which can be seen in the handwritten notes taken by Andreotti:

[...] Gheddafi keeps me entertained for a long time [...] He begins: I know that on the 13th you will see the Presid. Reagan and I would like you to express my thoughts to him. - He doesn't understand why Wash. must be so hostile and distrustful of Libya. Even the last violation of airspace in Sirte was a useless provocation. Accidents can happen and the consequences would be serious. - Opponent sources (he mentions the Israelis but I say – and nods – that Arab countries are equally against him) spread absurd news. As for the team sent to America to kill Reagan [I say that the same news came for Pertini] - He is not a pro-terrorist and deploras terrorism; help the movements of liberation, but that's not really the case in the United States. Why would he incite Libyan-US enmity? - He will never be «servant of the Americans» but neither of others. It's really unaligned. - Absurd to portray him as pro-Soviet. For religious reasons and political conceptions will never be Marxist. His green book contains a doctrine which is at the antipodes of Marxism-Leninism and which for many countries is perhaps the only way to fight communism. “I'm objectively on the same side as the Americans, but they hate me” - The policy of unconditional support for Israel is also harmful to the USA. Unfortunately – and he is certainly not happy about it – in this way the moderate Arab countries will fall into Moscow's orbit. - It is building better relations with its neighbors: Egypt (still difficult, but better than with Sadat), Tunisia, Morocco. A more united Arab policy can be essential for world balance. Arms do not help, but a wise policy. He is pleased with the dawning of peace in Lebanon after the departure of the multinational fleet. - Thanks me for having activated a possible contact

⁵⁷A. Del Boca, *Gaddafi. Una sfida dal deserto*, Laterza, Bari 2011, pp. 144-145.

Wilson, who met with Triki, but only as a courtesy. To speak you need to know if you want to try to understand each other. If this is the case, it is ready to receive whoever Reagan wants in the most appropriate forms [...] - It is understandable to ask something for the Palestinians (after all, like Egypt) but one is ready to maintain that Israel has the right to exist and be guaranteed? Reply]. – Your conception of simultaneous and mutual PLO-Israel recognition may be the way. If something is not done, even Hussein, a sure friend of the USA, will go into crisis. Respect the UN. - For Sirte, there is disagreement on the legal space. Wouldn't informal contact between lawyers be useful? [Answer] All right. - Are there specific requests? [Answer] The USA calm down Nimeiri. His fanaticism which causes communist penetration in southern Sudan (Christian and animist and therefore hostile to the extension of Islamic law to all) is harmful. Nimeiri is in the hands of his political adviser, who is the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim brothers are the real instigators of terrorism. Prisoners made among the infiltrators in Libya have declared that there are training camps in Sudan for foreign and local terrorists. Gaddafi compares Nimeiri to Bokassa and Amin. Before concluding, renew the hope of dialogue. The situation is delicate in the world and there are too many outbreaks of danger. We need a new effort on the part of everyone. IF I HAD SUPPORTED THE RED BRIGADES PERHAPS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LESS EASY, FOR YOU, TO DEFEAT THEM. The Red Brigades hate me because I have always refused any contact with them. I repeat: I am for liberation from colonialism, but I will always be against communism. Why don't you read my books?" And he gives me, signing them - since I said that perhaps Reagan doesn't know them - two of his books, in English text, begging me to offer them to Reagan. - No mention of Missiles (Comiso) unlike in February.⁵⁸

On August 13, 1984, while in Los Angeles for the closing ceremony of the Olympics, Andreotti met the President of the United States Ronald Reagan and his Secretary of State George Schultz, in the guise of a "postal delivery boy, with no illusions about a possible, sudden Gaddafi's come to his senses".⁵⁹ The Italian minister spoke of the Libyan leader's desire to reconnect with the United States, specifying above all that he had never been a communist, also due to the incompatibility between Islam and Marxist ideology. Therefore, Libya found it more natural to ally with the United States rather than with the Soviet Union. The conversation ended with Andreotti handing over some of the colonel's writings, translated into English and addressed to the head of the White House, in which he rejected the accusation of favoring

⁵⁸ *Autograph note by Andreotti, 31 July 1984*; the typescript on plain paper has the title Andreotti-Gaddafi, 31 July (Parte Riservata). Both in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Serie Libia, b. 1314.

⁵⁹ M. Bucarelli, L. Micheletta (Edd.), *Andreotti, Gaddafi and Italian-Libyan relations*, Studium, Rome 2018, p. 46, no. 78.

terrorism and gave his willingness to intervene in a broad process of peace in the Middle East.⁶⁰ According to the Italian ambassador in Washington Rinaldo Petrignani, who days later met Reagan, Schultz and the national security adviser Bud Mac Farlane in Dallas, it appears that the American president actually read what he received from Andreotti and showed himself "very interested in the communication on Gaddafi".⁶¹ This step became the premise for Libya's further rapprochement with America, which should have involved William Wilson, the US ambassador to the Holy See, who went to Tripoli in November 1985. However, an imprudent statement by the colonel to the press, in which he revealed the meeting with the American diplomat, raised a media fuss against Reagan, accused of not respecting his commitment not to deal with states that support terrorism.⁶²

The events of the following months frustrated the efforts made up to then and, in 1986, led to a direct clash between Libya and the United States in the Gulf of Sirte, in international waters, claimed by Tripoli. From that episode, in which thirty-five Libyans lost their lives, a few days later, the attack on the La Belle disco in West Berlin arose, in which two American soldiers and a Turkish woman died and two hundred and fifty people were injured. A former Libyan diplomat serving in East Berlin, Abdulghasem Musbah Eter, was accused of the massacre and arrested along with other alleged Palestinian accomplices. In retaliation, President Ronald Reagan, on April 15, 1986, ordered a bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, which Gaddafi narrowly escaped. Twenty-two years later, during a conference at the Farnesina, the Libyan foreign minister Abdulrahman Shalgam, ambassador in Rome at the time of the bombing, declared: "Craxi sent me a friend to tell me to be careful, because on the 14th or 15th there would be an American raid against Libya [...] two days before the aggression, perhaps on the 11th or 12th, he told us to be careful and that Italy would not allow the Americans to use the sea and the sky to conduct the raid".⁶³ Revelations confirmed by Giulio Andreotti, present at the conference, who, pressed by journalists, replied: "There was a warning, I think so".⁶⁴ The Italian Prime Minister did not like the launch of two Scud missiles, ordered by Gaddafi, which grazed Lampedusa. For this he would have meditated a counter-response, bombing Libyan targets. Craxi was allegedly dissuaded by General Basilio Cottone, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, who raised doubts about the real firing of the rockets, of which no traces had been found

⁶⁰ Petrignani to Esteri, 16 August 1984, tel. no. 77612/1571 *Interview with the Hon. Minister in Los Angeles on the 13th with President Reagan and subsequent interview with Secretary of State Shultz*, in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Libya Series, b. 1314.

⁶¹Cf: *Appunto autografo Andreotti*, «Petrignani 3/IX/84 – Atti mia – Post visita Reagan 12/8/84», in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti Serie Libia, b. 1314.

⁶²LH Gelb, *US Diplomat Reportedly Held Talks In Libya*, in «The New York Times», March, 23 1986. See also RB St John, *Libya and United States, Two centuries of strife*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002, p. 136.

⁶³V. Nigro, *1986, quando Craxi pensò di attaccare la Libia*, «La Repubblica», 10/31/2008.

⁶⁴*Ibidem*.

and whose existence had been communicated exclusively by the Americans.⁶⁵ General Mario Arpino, Cottone's successor, later explained that the real reason why the attack was not ordered was the fear of causing civilian casualties.⁶⁶

From these facts, Libya came out very isolated, even by Europe, which imposed sanctions regarding the trade in arms and military equipment, the freezing of Libyan funds abroad and the prohibition of the supply of civil goods and services linked to the oil industry.⁶⁷ The measures worsened after December 21, 1988, when the Pan Am 103 plane exploded near Lockerbie, with two hundred and seventy victims, one hundred and eighty-nine of whom were American. The Libyan secret services were accused of the massacre and, in 1991, the culprit was also identified: Abd el-Basset Ali al-Megrahi. In 1992, the UN also banned direct air links with Libya and the freezing of Libyan assets abroad.

At the end of the century Libya profoundly changed its foreign policy choices, also following Islamist threats suffered by the regime in Cyrenaica. This led Gaddafi to distance himself from the new terrorist season which, in 1998, struck the United States with attacks on the embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. For their part, the USA also reviewed their position and, with Madeline Albright, Bill Clinton's secretary of state, glimmers were opened for confidential negotiations. The Administration was also receiving pressure from the oil companies which, blocked by the standstill agreements of 1986, asked to revive their contracts before they expired.⁶⁸ In 1999, Gaddafi decided to hand over the defendants in the Lockerbie trial to the Scottish authorities and, in 2003, he also recognized civil responsibility towards the victims, compensating their families. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, it announced its intention to give up its nuclear program. The explanation would be due to excessive costs and the concern of suffering the fate of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban.⁶⁹ For this reason, the United Nations immediately lifted the penalties, followed a year later by the European Union.

On July 4, 1998, after the Lampedusa crisis, diplomatic relations were re-established between Italy and Libya, with the "Joint Communiqué", signed by the foreign ministers Lamberto Dini and Omar Mustafa Elche, which envisaged economic projects with public and private companies, Italian and Libyan. The negotiations continued with the Prodi and D'Alema governments, culminating, under the Berlusconi government, in the Treaty of Benghazi of August 30, 2008, ratified by Italy on February 6 2009 and by Libya on March 2 2009, a summary of which is reported below : "Chapter I of the treaty sets out the fundamental

⁶⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁷ A. Costa, *Relations between Italy and Libya*, Card information system - 8/2010, p. 2.

⁶⁸ L. Palma, *The fall of Gaddafi and the shattering of Libya*, 28 June 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/la-ccata-di-gheddafi-e-la-frantumazione-della-libia_-30903>, last accessed: 02/06/2023.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*

principles underlying Italian-Libyan relations: respect for international law, the principle of sovereign equality, the prohibition of resorting to the threat and use of force, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, the commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These principles are contained in the Charter of the United Nations, a document to which the agreement refers constantly. Chapter II concerns the closure of the chapter of the past and relates to the commitments that Italy assumes towards the Tripoli government. The main and most onerous commitment is the construction of basic infrastructure projects for a total value of 5 billion euros, equal to 250 million euros for 20 years. The implementation of the projects will be entrusted to Italian companies and the funds will be managed directly from Italy. The "special initiatives" are arranged for the benefit of the Libyan people and among the most important are the construction of houses, the awarding of scholarships and the restitution of archaeological finds transferred to Italy in the colonial era. Chapter III concerns the new bilateral partnership, with the aim of promoting the special relationship between the two countries, largely containing programmatic provisions. The sectors covered by the cooperation concern the cultural, scientific, economic, industrial and energy fields, the defense sector, non-proliferation and disarmament, the fight against terrorism and clandestine immigration. Sectors that deserve further discussion are defense and immigration. As regards the first, the treaty provides that the two countries undertake to create a strong industrial partnership also in the field of defence, as well as the conduct of joint military manoeuvres. As regards illegal immigration, the agreement provides for the patrolling of the waters with patrol boats made available by Italy and made up of mixed crews. Furthermore, the creation of a control system of the Libyan land borders is envisaged, to be entrusted to Italian companies possessing the necessary technological skills. The financing will be secured for 50% by Italy, for the remaining 50% by the European Union".⁷⁰

The resumption of political relations was also followed by that of economic relations, which took the form of agreements between banks and companies, companies operating in the energy sector and in the production of arms. In 2000, the Libyan Arab foreign investment company (Lafico) bought 2.6% of Fiat⁷¹ shares and obtained 3% of Capitalia, which rose shortly after to 5%.⁷² 2008 is the year in which Libya becomes the first shareholder of Unicredit, thanks to the purchase by Lafico of 4.9% of this bank, which, two years later, grows to 7.58%. Furthermore, the Libyan companies hold 0.7% of Eni's capital which, according to a 2008 agreement, can increase up to 10%. In 2002, Lafico also bought 7.5% of the shares of Juventus and there had been discussions about the possible acquisition of the majority of Milan if Berlusconi was

⁷⁰Ivi, p. 3.

⁷¹In 1976, Lafico had already acquired 15% of Fiat (Cf: A. Costa, *op. cit.*, p. 2).

⁷²Ivi, p.4

willing to relinquish control.⁷³ The Gaddafi regime has also implemented a program of military renewal and upgrading, entering the circuit of major arms producers and exporters, such as Italy, France and Russia.

Finmeccanica, the public holding company specializing in defense technologies and aerospace, benefited greatly from the restoration of Italian-Libyan relations. In 2005, the first contract was signed between Libya and AgustaWestlands, a Group company, for the sale of ten AW109E Power helicopters, corresponding to approximately eighty million euros.⁷⁴ A further 20 helicopters were subsequently sold, including the AW119K single-engine aircraft for emergency medical missions and the AW139 medium twin-engine aircraft for general safety tasks. The following year, it was agreed to set up a joint venture, the Libyan Italian Advanced Technology Company (LIATEC), shared 50% by the Libyan Company for Aviation Industry, 25% by Finmeccanica and 25% by AgustaWestlands. In January 2008, Alenia Aeronautica signed a thirty-one-million-euro contract for the supply of an ATR-42MP Surveyor, an aircraft used for maritime patrol and troops training. Finmeccanica's presence on the Libyan market was strengthened in July 2009, with an agreement, functional to the creation of a joint venture, for the management of industrial and commercial investments in Libya and other African countries. A Memorandum of Understanding was also reached for the promotion of cooperation between Finmeccanica, the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) and the Libya Africa Investment Portfolio (LAP).⁷⁵

Another Italian company, Itas srl, born in La Spezia, has become Libya's economic partner, dealing with the technical control and maintenance of the Otomat missiles, purchased by Tripoli since the 1970s. Under the Treaty of Benghazi, the Guardia di Finanza was also able to deliver patrol boats to the Libyan Navy for patrolling in the Mediterranean Sea and train its personnel. However, the agreements establish that Italian soldiers from the Guardia di Finanza are on board the boats. The ships are produced by the Intermarine company, belong to the Bigliani class, and are used to counter illegal maritime traffic.

In 2011, the Gaddafi regime was overthrown, and, on October 20th, its founder was killed after the convoy in which he was traveling was intercepted and bombed by French planes. Responsible for the colonel's dismissal were therefore his internal opponents, but also foreign powers, such as Nicolas Sarkozy's France, eager to recover international prestige, assuming visibility in the defense of human rights and hoping to derive advantages from the ongoing transition, started in the spring Arab. The president would also have had an interest in Gaddafi's

⁷³ *Ibidem*

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, p.7

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*

departure from the scene, to definitively hide the funding he received from Libya during his last electoral campaign in 2007.⁷⁶

The American President Barack Obama was hesitant about the intervention. In fact, he was committed to recovering dialogue with Muslims, after the demolition of the Twin Towers. Regarding the Libyan situation, he confided to one of his collaborators: "Not acting to prevent a massacre would have compromised the credibility and legitimacy of the USA".⁷⁷ The intervention of the USA was decided after having consulted the Arab League and it cannot be excluded that, despite having acted in the name of human rights, the Americans first asked for its support, promising, in exchange, to turn a blind eye to the repression established in Bahrain by King Ḥamad bin ʿĪsā Āl Khalīfa. Furthermore, Obama no longer recognized Libya as having great importance, either political or military, since the major oil tankers had left that country in 2010. And he also feared that a regime victory over the rebels would have badly affected the situations in Egypt and Tunisia, where a difficult period of transition was taking place.

From that moment a period of instability began, which was reflected in the whole region and also caused a fragmentation of Libya, torn apart by clashes between militias and tribes.

The behavior of Italy, Libya's main economic partner, which had invested a good eleven billion dollars in the North African country and was, for this reason, worried about safeguarding this liquidity, was varied. The government, led by Silvio Berlusconi, passed from the so-called "passive defense", in which it tried to negotiate to obtain a ceasefire, to a direct involvement in the conflict, with the use of planes. The latter decision was taken following a meeting between the prime minister, the former Libyan justice minister Mustafa Abdel Jalil and the managing director of Eni Paolo Scaroni and after Gaddafi's refusal of an exile in Mauritania, offered to him by Berlusconi: "Silvio, you have betrayed me! I am a desert Bedouin. I will never die outside my tent!".⁷⁸

⁷⁶L. Palma, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷*Ibidem*

⁷⁸*Ibidem*

THE SIGONELLA AFFAIR

1. The *Achille Lauro* hijacking

The *Achille Lauro* is an Italian cruise ship which is cruising in the Mediterranean. Departed from Naples on October 3, 1985, it was supposed to make an 11-day journey, stopping at the ports of Naples (where it docked on October 4th), Alexandria, Port Said in Egypt and Ashdod in Israel, before returning to Genoa.⁷⁹ There are more than a thousand people on board, mostly of Italian origin. On the morning of October 7th, after about four days of travel, the ship arrives in Alexandria in Egypt for a tour of the pyramids. Six hundred and fifty-one passengers disembark from the ship. The schedule calls for re-boarding the ship at Port Said, approximately 14 hours later. But, in the afternoon, around 1 pm, while the vessel was moving off the coast of Egypt, it was attacked by four Palestinian terrorists. About the finding of the latter on board, there are conflicting hypotheses. The most accredited version is that according to which the terrorists were seen by the crew while they were intent on cleaning the weapons that would have been loaded on board during their stop in Alexandria. Once discovered, the four would have improvised the assault and the consequent hijacking. In fact, it seems that the original intention of the commando was not to hijack the ship, but to carry out an attack, once they arrived at the next intended destination, i.e. the Israeli city of Ashdod. In fact, despite being heavily armed, the group did not seem to be very well prepared (even if Arafat will declare the opposite), and one of the four members was seventeen years old boy. Another version is the one reported by Abu Abbas, a not very reliable figure, who will be explored in more detail in the following lines, who in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* will instead say that the story of the "random" discovery of the weapons by the passengers it is actually false.⁸⁰ It will also later turn out that the leader of the armed team on the ship, Youssef Majed Molqi, had told the Commander of the *Achille Lauro*, Gerardo De Rosa, that the hijackers on board were actually twenty. On the ship, those left after the stop in Port Said were 450. Only later did the officers realize that there were only four terrorists. But who did these extremists belong to and why did they hijack the *Achille Lauro*? The four told the crew that they were part of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Actually, the situation was a little more complicated than that. The group belonged to the FLP, i.e. the Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which was a branch of the PFLP, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist-Leninist movement, founded in 1967 by George Abash. FPLP was a political group that had had several

⁷⁹ Cf: M. K. Bohn, *The Achille Lauro Hijacking: Lessons in the Politics and Prejudice of Terrorism*, Potomac Books Inc, 2005.

⁸⁰Cf: H. Delios, *In Mideast, A Twist on Peace* «Chicago Tribune», 09/10/ 2000.

disagreements with the PLO, especially during the 1976 Lebanese Civil War. As a result, there was no direct membership in the PLO. Notwithstanding Viola Meskin, one of the passengers present during the hijacking, will say that the Palestinians continued to praise the PLO leader, saying phrases such as "Reagan no good, Arafat good".⁸¹

What happens then, once the terrorists have fully taken control of the ship? About two hours after the attack, around 3 pm, the radio operator on the *Achille Lauro* was able to send the Mayday, the help request signal. The latter was received in Gothenburg in Sweden. The news spread quickly and also reached Italy. The first to be informed of what was happening were the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as a leading exponent of the Christian Democrats, Giulio Andreotti and the Minister of Defense and secretary of the Italian Republican Party, Giovanni Spadolini, who was in Milan and returned for the emergency in Rome. In the evening, the Prime Minister and leader of the Italian Socialist Party, Bettino Craxi, will reach Palazzo Chigi. The Government immediately seemed split on what to do. The predominant one is the Craxian and Andreottian line. Both have a certain sympathy for the Arab countries, and in those years, they had begun to create a project for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.⁸²

To have a better understanding, I will need to put this into context. It all began in 1983, following the trip made by the Italian Prime Minister to Washington. That year Craxi met with Reagan for the planned fifteen-minute conversation, the standard time dedicated for official visits by foreign Heads of State. However, their conversation lasted about 40 minutes longer than usual. This is because the socialist leader aroused the interest of the Head of the White House, with his project on the security of the Mediterranean and a political strategy that had a bilateral objective. The project objective was twofold: to Israel to recognize Palestinians' rights. Reagan showed great interest and seemed to express a certain appreciation in the fact that a country like Italy was working towards such an "ambitious" policy.⁸³ It also named King Hussein of Jordan for his involvement in the project. Craxi nodded and left the conversation quite satisfied. However, from the beginning of his career as Premier, his idea of a program for the area surrounded by the sea surrounding Europe was clear, as can be seen from this statement: "We are vitally interested in peace in the Mediterranean. No one will be able to consider us foreign interlocutors, or judge us animated by intrusive intentions, if we have to always make our word count on all the relevant issues open in the Mare Nostrum".⁸⁴

Despite the consensus that the two will find in many key figures in the Mediterranean region, such as the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, the already mentioned and sponsored by the

⁸¹ *15 Passengers, On return to US, Tell of the Terror on the Cruise liner*, «New York Times», 10/13/1985.

⁸² M. De Pizzo, *Il leone, la volpe e l'aquila. Craxi, Andreotti e la crisi di Sigonella*, LUISS University Press, in <<https://luissuniversitypress.it/l-america-per-noi-crisi-sigonella-de-pizzo-estratto/>>, last accessed: 15 February 2023

⁸³ G. Acquaviva, A. Badini, *La pagina saltata della Storia*, Marsilio Editori, Fondazione Craxi, 2010, p.75

⁸⁴ M. De Pizzo, *op. cit.*

White House, the King of Jordan, Hussein and above all the Leader of the PLO, Arafat, the plan did not materialize. The geopolitical design signed by Craxi-Andreotti will in fact encounter two major obstacles. One of them will be the entire Palestinian area which was against the negotiation with Israel and one of its leading exponent Abu Abbas himself. But what will mark the sinking of the Italian proposal will be the abrupt closure by the Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres. However, Craxi's idea, didn't even please many of Reagan's men, such as John Poindexter, the national security adviser and in particular Michael Ledeen, adviser to the President and another key figure in the crisis that took place in Sigonella.⁸⁵

Going back to the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, there are two distinct and separate lines within the government: the one carried out by Craxi and Andreotti, and the one supported by the Minister of Defense, Giovanni Spadolini. The latter, who predominantly supported the American position, after returning to the capital in the morning, organized a meeting with the highest echelons of the army. The outcome of the summit was to implement the so-called "Margherita" operation, which involved the use of some Navy and Air Force units with the task of monitoring the area adjacent to where the ship was docked, with the possibility of a direct intervention on board. This last possibility caused a state of confusion, especially ~~in~~ for Andreotti, who continued to invoke the diplomatic route instead. A few hours after the end of the meeting organized by the PRI Secretary with the military forces, there will be a conversation between Craxi and Arafat. The PLO leader will not only affirm the total exclusion of the Organization in this matter but will also make himself available to mediate, so that this unfortunate situation could end as soon as possible. To confirm this, he will inform the Prime Minister that two of his emissaries were leaving for Cairo, to try to convince the terrorists to stop the hijacking. Arafat's two men were Hani El Hassan, one of his most trusted men, and Muhammed Zayn, known by the nickname of Abu Abbas, head of the Palestine Liberation Front, who, as already mentioned in the previous pages, will become the real protagonist of the whole story. As stated by Giulio Andreotti himself, the suggestion to reach the President of the PLO by telephone came precisely from the US government, which advised to "test the water" to verify what his position was.⁸⁶

On the morning of October 8, the terrorists on the *Achille Lauro* managed to get in touch with the Syrian authorities. It had already been detected by the Italian services that the ship was headed to Syria. The extremists reiterate their request and the release of 50 Palestinians detained in Israel, specifically the member of the FLP and Hezbollah, Samir Kuntar. If their request is not accepted, they will blow up the ship.⁸⁷ Furthermore, they communicated the decision to

⁸⁵ Cf: M. K. Bohn, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>, minute 15:00, last accessed: 01/15/2023.

⁸⁷ Cf: M. K. Bohn, *op. cit.*

speak only with the International Red Cross and with the ambassadors of Italy, United States, England and West Germany. Still Andreotti himself, will say in an interview that the intention of the hijackers was to dock in the port of Taurus, in Syria. To ascertain the Syrian availability, the Italian Foreign Minister contacted the President of Syria, Hafez al-Assad, who was temporarily based in Czechoslovakia. He declared his preference to opt out, however, still showing his availability, should ~~in case~~ his involvement be considered necessary and useful.⁸⁸ Damascus, therefore, gave its consent to dock the ship in the port of Taurus. But this would only happen if there was an intention on the part of the two executives, the Italian and the American, to negotiate with the terrorists. The United States denied any possibility of negotiation, consequently, Craxi informed Assad that the ship will not be able to get to the port. As noted by the statements made by members of the crew, such as the purser on board Aldo Accardi, and the Captain Gerardo De Rosa, after the impediment received to be able to dock in Tartus, the terrorists caused a violent escalation. After checking the passports of the passengers, they came across that of Leon Klinghoffer. Sixty-nine-year-old Jewish American citizen in a wheelchair. After two strokes, he was on a cruise to celebrate the 58th birthday of his wife Marilyn, who had colon cancer in remission, as well as their 36th wedding anniversary. Youssef Majed Molqi, recruited by Abbas in a refugee camp in Jordan, will be identified as the leader of the terrorist group on board, will later release a statement explaining why Klinghoffer was chosen as the first victim: "I and Bassam [al-Ashker, another member of the commando] agreed that the first hostage to be killed had to be an American [...] I chose Klinghoffer, an invalid, so that they would know that we had no pity for Anyone, just as the Americans, arming Israel, do not take into consideration that Israel kills women and children of our people."⁸⁹

The 69-year-old was killed with two shots, one to the head and one to the chest, by Molqi himself. The killing occurred at 3:05 pm. Molqi told De Rosa that the next passenger to be eliminated would have been Mildred Hodes, a woman who was part of the group of the Klinghoffers. She was supposed to get off the ship with her husband in Egypt, but decided to stay because she felt unwell. The assassination will be the incipit of the diplomatic crisis between Italy and the US that will characterize the following days. Meanwhile, Abu Abbas was working to get in touch with the members of the FLP who are holding the cruise ship hostage. He managed to make radio contact with the *Achille Lauro* from Port Said and to speak with Molqi himself who, after checking on him, ordered him to apologize to the crew and say that the initial objective was not to hijack the ship. Zayn spoke with De Rosa, to whom he apologized for what had happened, explaining that this was due to the circumstances. The commander

⁸⁸ *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>, minute 17:48, last accessed: 01/15/2023.

⁸⁹ *Terrorist Reverses Confession, Denies Killing Klinghoffer*, «Houston Chronicle», 07/20/1986.

answered that he was aware of the general context and that he understood the reasons of the Palestinians. In the middle of the night between the 8 and 9 October, the American ambassador Maxwell Rabb went to Palazzo Chigi, to communicate the denial regarding any negotiations with the hijackers and to send a message to Bettino Craxi. The US intends to carry out a blitz on the ship to free the hostages, as to avoid more of them being executed. Before moving on to the continuation of the story and the response of the Italian Prime Minister, it is necessary to shed light on what was happening in the White House and what the reactions had been since the beginning of the hijacking. In Washington, in fact, the first obstacle was to understand the location of the ship. The matter was immediately dealt with by Robert C. "Bud" McFarlane, who was the national security adviser, and the aforementioned John M. Poindexter, advisor's deputy. Thus, a meeting was organized, very similar to the Italian one, with representatives of the Defense Department, the State Department, Intelligence and the staff of the National Security Council of the White House.⁹⁰ Immediately, the plan was to involve the special forces to carry out a military operation directly on board. The task was entrusted to Major General Carl Stiner who was put in charge of the military commando that brought together units of the Navy, SEAL Team Six, and Delta Force. However, not knowing the precise position of the *Achille Lauro*, it was necessary to prepare the ground for the launch of the operation once the whereabouts of the ship was known. Firstly, Margaret Thatcher gave permission to use the Akrotiri base in Cyprus, as a starting point for the units. Secondly, the Secretary of State George Schultz got in touch with most of the Mediterranean countries, exerting pressure so that none of them granted the possibility of docking in any of their ports. The US Ambassador of Egypt was also asked to speak with the authorities of his country so that the ship would remain in international waters in order to facilitate any intervention. After the failed arrival at the port of Taurus and after listening to Molqi's conversations with the Syrian authorities and Abbas, the White House was almost certain that there was at least one victim among the hostages and that the mediator sent by the PLO was the true architect of the whole plan. It was therefore necessary to intervene quickly, also to avoid the repetition of another case such as that of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847, which occurred only a few months earlier.⁹¹ To avoid further casualties,

⁹¹ The case of TWA Flight 847 concerns the hijacking of an airliner, which was bound for Rome from Athens, which took place on June 14, 1985, by two Lebanese Shiite terrorists belonging to Hezbollah. The latter demanded the release of 700 Shia Muslims detained in Israeli prisons and forced the pilot to divert the route to Beirut where they landed and took off several times, also freeing hostages in exchange for fuel. The ordeal lasted for 17 days and saw the killing of the young US Navy diver, Robert Stethem. Furthermore, once the plane stopped in Beirut, other armed extremists joined the hijackers. Many hostages were freed over the two weeks and only 39 of them were held captive in Beirut until June 30 when they were released. The operation was a de facto success for the terrorists who had no consequences and actually obtained the release of the prisoners in Israel, although the Israeli authorities will say that the release of those prisoners was not related to the hijacking. (W. E. Smith. *Terror Aboard Flight 847*, «Time Magazine», 2001 in <https://web.archive.org/web/20080206210255/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,142099,00.html>), last accessed: 01/16/2023.

General Stiner was ordered to prepare a military action on the ship. As confirmed by the President of the Italian Republic Francesco Cossiga, the intention of the Americans was to operate even alone without the support of the Italian forces. This aroused the latter's pride, who replied that if there was a force operation, Italian defense units would also participate. The hypothesis, Cossiga added, was rejected because it would certainly have caused bloodshed among the crew members as well.⁹² Indeed, Craxi replied to Ambassador Rabb that not only would it be up to Italy to take the initiative in case it was required, but he also said that there was no confirmation on the murder of passengers on board (this was also what the Egyptian leaders had reported to the Prime Minister). Meanwhile, inside the *Achille Lauro* the Palestinians have changed their position after speaking with Abbas and decided to head back to Port Said and spare the hostages. Furthermore, the PLF released a lengthy statement regarding the hijacking in which it stated:

The aim of the operation was not to hijack the ship or its passengers, or any civilian of any nationality. The operation was likewise not aimed against states that are friendly to our people and their cause." Furthermore, the initial objective was to make a "travel on an ordinary sea journey to Ashdod harbor in occupied Palestine, from where our comrades were to proceed to a specified Israeli military target, as a reply to the war of extermination and terrorism against them and to avenge the martyrs of the Israeli raid on Tunis. Our comrades were compelled to take control of the ship before reaching the specified target. We wish to mention that the course toward Arab ports was the result of the situation and the confusion into which the squad fell."⁹³

On the morning of October 9th, the ship arrived in Port Said. A conference took place between the Egyptian representatives and the two emissaries of Arafat, Hassan and Abbas. The outcome was favorable although, the Egyptians did not know of what was involved in the hijacking. The terrorists would leave the ship and free the hostages only if they had the guarantee of a "safe conduct" to be able to get off the vessel without future repercussions. Despite the clear refusal of the American and English Ambassadors in Egypt, the hesitant yes of the German Ambassador and the absolute assent of the Italian Ambassador in Cairo, Vincenzo Migliuolo were sufficient for the Egyptian authorities to proceed with the landing of the four Palestinians and accept their offer.⁹⁴ This happened, however, only after Captain De Rosa confirmed the

⁹² *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>>, minute 22:52, last accessed 01/15/2023.

⁹³ T. L. Friedman, *Port in Israel Described as Target of Terrorists Who Seized Vessel*, «The New York Times», 10/11/1985.

⁹⁴ Cf: M. K. Bohn, *op. cit.*

perfect state of health of all the passengers on board. The Italian Government had in fact given as a condition that no crime was committed on board the *Achille Lauro* that would go against the Italian law. But, as we know, the Klinghoffer murder was committed, but De Rosa lied because Molqi forced him to, holding a gun to his head, as the Commander himself stated several times.⁹⁵ Thus, the hijackers were picked up by an Egyptian-flagged cargo and once they arrived in Cairo they would be put on a plane to Tunis, where the PLO headquarters were. The hostages would be freed. At this point, Andreotti reported the news about the success of the negotiation to Craxi, who decided to organize a press conference to inform journalists. The conference took place but the announcement of the leader of the PSI was different. After having received the information from his Foreign Affairs Minister, the Prime Minister thought appropriate to call De Rosa again, to confirm that nothing had really happened on board. The Commander, now free from any threat, revealed that an American citizen, Leon Klinghoffer was murdered. On Thursday October 10, the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, held a press conference in which he said that the terrorists have left Egypt for Tunis affirming that Cairo was unaware of the death of any passenger when he took charge of the hijackers. Actually, the Americans, who obtained reliable information through Israel's and their own intelligence, knew that Mubarak was lying and that the command of men along with the two emissaries, Abbas and Hassan, were still on Egyptian territory.⁹⁶ Thus, international tension grew over the question to which country the Palestinians should be extradited. Even the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, believed that it was up to Israel to try the terrorists as Klinghoffer was killed because he was from Israel. Meanwhile, the PLO continued to maintain its total extraneousness to the events and would have liked the trial against the four hijackers to be managed by the PLO. In this regard, it is worth noting a statement that President Reagan let slip to the press, in which he hinted at the possibility that it might be the Arafat-led Organization that could try the four Palestinians and this would be "all right."⁹⁷ This was an important statement as it implicitly provided US recognition to the PLO and for this very reason it was immediately corrected by McFarlane. In any case, the time has come for the White House to intervene. On the evening of October 10, the four extremists together with the two PLO mediators and ten Egyptian representatives boarded an EgyptAir Boeing 737 which took off from the Al Maza military base, a few kilometers from Cairo, towards Tunis. However, the Tunisian government, after being in contact with Washington, did not authorize the landing and so did the Greek one after an attempt by the Boeing pilot to arrive in Athens. Meanwhile, a direct message from Ronald Reagan arrived from the White House: "These young Americans

⁹⁵ *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>, minute 25:18, last accessed: 01/15/2023.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, minute 29:27

⁹⁷ L. Cannon, *Reagan Briefly Implies PLO Could Try Pirates*, «Washington Post», 10/11/1985.

sent a message to terrorists everywhere. The message is: ‘You can run but you can't hide’ ”.⁹⁸ The President gave the order to intercept the Egyptian plane. Two American fighter jets took off from the US Saratoga, flanking the Boeing and forcing it to land at the Italian military base of Sigonella.

2. The facts happened in Sigonella

As previously seen, after the Tunisian refusal to land, the EgyptAir airliner was directed towards Tunis and then tried to fall back towards Athens. Even failing to reach the Greek destination, it continued to fly in the skies, until it was diverted to Sigonella. But how was he forced to make his way to the Italian military base in Sicily? Thanks to the help of my university colleague Ashley Reynolds, who managed to get in touch with one of the American fighter pilots that followed the Boeing, we can answer this question.⁹⁹ We are talking about the Lieutenant Commander, Steve Weatherspoon, who was commissioned, together with colleagues Ralph Zia and Skid Massey, to carry out the mission of intercepting the plane in which the terrorists were located.¹⁰⁰ Weatherspoon was 35 at the time and already had ten years of piloting experience and had already been to Sigonella once but never on a mission. The most important thing that emerges from his testimony is that he had no information regarding the purpose of his mission, apart from the fact that it was an emergency. The Sigonella Affair didn't exist for them, only the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*. While the second point will be analyzed later, in the following lines the attention will be focused on the mission accomplished by the three American pilots aboard the USS Saratoga, based in the Mediterranean, from which the jets departed.

The aircraft carrier USS Saratoga was based and operated primarily in the Mediterranean. Sometimes it crossed the Suez Canal, the Indian Ocean, all the way to Singapore. As reported by Weatherspoon, the aircraft carrier had been at sea for about ten days, and performed many operations that consisted of their training, with which they occupied most of the time, considering that it was a relatively quiet and peaceful period (the US was not at war with anyone). On the night of October 10, the operations officers were called back: they wanted to configure the airplanes to be on alert and ready to launch. The Lieutenant Commander states that in reality they did not know what was happening. They were aware that the *Achille Lauro* had been hijacked, but only that it had sailed around the Mediterranean in search of a port, no one would take it, and it came back to Alexandria. He was only told what they were supposed

⁹⁸ *You Can Run but Not Hide, Reagan Warns Terrorists: Calls Case for Action 'Clear Cut'*, L.A. TIMES ARCHIVES, 10/11/1985.

⁹⁹ *L'Aeronautica Militare al servizio della sicurezza nazionale ed internazionale. L'importante ruolo della Sicilia* in <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZAXeasiArI>>, minute 2:45:50, last accessed: 01/20/2023.

¹⁰⁰ M. K. Bohn, *op. cit.*

to intercept an airliner allegedly carrying the hijackers. It was an atypical operation, Weatherspoon will say that it was not what they were trained for. Their job was to fight other fighters or attack in enemy areas, not to intercept airliners especially not at night. At this point, the alert level from alert is increased from 15 to 5. Suddenly, he noticed that the ordinance men were frantically reconfiguring the planes from medium and long range missiles to short range missiles and projectiles with tracers. He tells how he was just a normal driver and didn't imagine what would happen shortly thereafter. But after they first launched an alert colleague of his, who did not have a radar and they had to bring him back, he was chosen to be the next kid to be launched. Given the emergency and the limited time available, he was not formally informed, but was told that they would try to tell him what was happening on the way. At that point Weatherspoon confesses that he was rather confused, because: "the objective was to find one of the hundreds of airliners in the Mediterranean in the middle of the night, without knowing where it was going, when it had been launched, what the right airliner and somehow intercept it and then make it do what we want it to do... and anyway, who's in charge of the airline? There are terrorists on that plane: are they in charge or are they handcuffed behind? We didn't know anything".¹⁰¹

Once the mission was launched, the pilot recalls that an early warning aircraft, a Grumman E-2 Hawkeye with a large dome radar used for tracking, was also flown with him with a group of officers in the rear to operate the radars and keep track of everything that happened in flight. Weatherspoon recalls that at the time several operations had been carried out in the Gulf of Sidra against Gaddafi who had claimed the Gulf as Libyan domestic airspace. The Libyan President had effectively declared that anything below this line of latitude (that separates the Gulf from the rest of Mediterrean Sea, geographic coordinates: 32° 30' N) in the Gulf of Sidra (although it should be international airspace), consisted of his airspace, calling it the "death line", threatening to shoot down all the aircraft that would have overcome it. Weatherspoon will say: "I'll always remember this, I thought I don't know who is playing around here but when the people of Washington wake up, when the adults wake up and hear about this, we'll all go back to the ship in Dubrovnik and everything will be fine. Of course, I didn't realize that DC is where the plan was coming from".¹⁰²

The pilots then formed a grid over the central Mediterranean and reflected that the aircraft was from Alexandria; therefore, they became convinced that his destination would be Tunisia. An interception operation began, under the direction of the E-2 which controlled the situation, involving many aircraft before arriving at the right one. In fact, the pilot points out several times that these were not the usual activities they carried out in training (they were trained for night

¹⁰¹ Interview with Steve Weatherspoon made by Ashley Reynolds.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*

interceptions but not to get too close to the planes and understand which airline they belonged to). Meanwhile the American fighters burned a lot of fuel intercepting all these planes. The duration of a full tank of kerosene was only about two hours. But thanks to the tankers sent from the ship there was the possibility of refueling two or three times during that night and turning a two-hour mission into four. Among the many intercepted planes, Weatherspoon recounts that there was also the C-141 on which General Stiner and his special forces were, in turn, looking for the Egyptian Boeing 737. Which none of the pilots knew in the slightest. After hours of searching for the aircraft, the American airman receives a radio message that they have found the right aircraft. Here I report a piece of the interview made by my colleague Reynolds with Weatherspoon:

We had been running intercepts for a while when we heard the sudden change in tone of the voice of the controllers: “this is it, this is the one”. And I guess (I didn't know) that they had intel about when it had launched and where it was headed, and they had a feeling that there was a good chance that one of the three or four players coming out was going to be the right one. So, we happened to run intercept on the right one. Again, we came around behind him, lights out, and at the same time another guy from the sister squadron was coming around. They put two of us on this one because they wanted it to work. So, we both simultaneously rendezvous on him and my concern was what is going on in the cockpit [of the 737]? Who's telling that captain inside what to do? Does he have a gun to his head? Will they start shooting out windows at whatever they see out there. We just don't know. So, what I did is I let the other guy go in for the ID and I just dropped in trail because, if I were that 737 pilot and I wanted to get away, the first thing I would do is kill all my lights and I would just dive for the deck and do basic maneuvers. So, what I was doing was holding him at a radar lock, in about a half a mile radar trail. This the other pilot then got the positive ID by shining a flashlight on the vertical tail. We pretty much knew it was a 737, but they needed the exact site number to be absolutely certain they had the right guys.

How close to you have to get for something like that?

Well, it's about half a wingspan, so when you're flying in formation back there, you're just outside his wingtip, but behind him so even if he looks out the window, with your lights out he's not going to see you. Another thing is, the hard part was the communication. We have ultra-high frequency radios (UHF radios), and the airliner has VHF radios so we couldn't talk directly to the airliner. But the E2 had both kinds of radios. He eventually got the airliner upon his VHF radio was able to talk to the

captain and they would negotiate something, and then they would tell us in UHF radio what was going on or what to do or what the next step was going to be. So, it was like a game of telephone; you interpret what you want to hear. In the meantime, this airliner is going all different kinds of places, not flying in a direct line. He's not doing any hard maneuvering; he's just turning and going here and going there. He turned toward Crete for a while, then turned toward Greece for a while. At this point, we're really not sure what he's doing. I was OK on gas because I just refueled. Then apparently (I don't know because I wasn't on that frequency), the captain of the airliners said something like what do you mean we have fighters on us, there are no fighters out here, that's just an empty threat so I'm not going to do what you tell me to do Mr. E-2, I'm gonna go where I wanna go. So, they weren't following directions at all. That's when they told us to go ahead and come up on either side of him, with our lights out, outside of his cockpit in his field of regard. And then they told us to turn on all of our lights on. I don't know if you've seen pictures of an F-14 but when it turns all of its lights on in the pitch black, it's like a cop car: it just lights everything up. Again, I didn't know what was happening in the airplane or if the hijackers saw what was going on outside. Certainly, the pilot did, who I learned afterwards was a former Egyptian Air Force pilot who was then an airline pilot for EgyptAir and had volunteered to do this job. Now he knew for certain that there really were fighters on him, and he was talking to the E-2 which was telling him to land. In the meantime, I'm sure that the E-2 was telling the C-141 with the Delta Force what was as going on too, and they were vectoring around in case they surrendered, and they were gonna surround their plane and arrest them. I was a little concerned because we never fly over land: we fly in international airspace; we do not violate sovereign airspace. The United States recognizes a three-mile limit, so all the land and three miles out, we stayed out all the time. In the meantime, now we're flying over Crete, I'm seeing city lights (I never got to see that), so apparently, we flew over some countries because that airline didn't care, he was just trying to go wherever would take him. I learned later, Commander Ralph Zia was talking to everybody later and he said it was funny the marked change in the tone of the voice of the guy [737 pilot]. After that point [lights on], he did everything exactly that we told him to do. I don't know what would have happened if we would've had to go further... In my mind, I was preparing to do warning shots with the tracers or launch flares on the back, which wouldn't hurt anybody but would really blind you and would really get your attention. The last resort would've probably been launching a short-range missile in front of him.

Would they have ever given orders to fire on the aircraft, in your opinion?

After seeing F-14s out your window, there's no one that would ever test/press that. If they would have gone back towards Egypt or something, I don't think that it would've happened, but you never know.

So, he turns in and we vector him towards Sigonella. By now, they've launched F-14s off the flight deck – they didn't want to put too many in the air because you have to keep them all refueled. But know that they knew who their main was, they were launching F-14s and I looked out there and there was a string of about eight F-14s around this airplane when they finally called me off. They called me off because I was really running low on gas. So, all these fresh F-14s came up and to continue to escort them to Sigonella. They turned me back and they take me back to ship, as they headed to Sigonella, which is a Naval Air station (maybe there's a status of forces agreement type of thing or some treaty that allows the US to use it), but to us it's still sovereign Italian space.¹⁰³

After completing the mission, Weatherspoon flew back to *Saratoga* and was not be able to talk about what actually happened in Sigonella (he only described his thoughts on the dangers of landing on an aircraft carrier, especially at night). The landing went well. The news of Sigonella's events reached him only two weeks later (which was in any case the normal time frame for news to arrive) by mail and through reading newspapers and magazines.

After identifying the plane, in the situation room of the White House there was the problem of being able to contact Palazzo Chigi to discuss the situation that had arisen. The idea was to talk to Craxi at the end of the operation.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, it must be remembered, as Weatherspoon also says, that Sigonella was a NATO base with a constant American presence, but it is still an area of Italian sovereignty. At this moment, a very important figure came into play within the story, which I have already mentioned. This is Michael Ledeen, a White House consultant, who was contacted by Marine Lieutenant Oliver North, directly at home, as he already knew Craxi and spoke Italian fluently. The Italian Prime Minister had already had the opportunity to meet with Ledeen on other occasions, and it was well known among his advisers that he did not think highly of him.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the Washington consultant called the Raphael Hotel in Rome, where Craxi was staying, and got in touch with the diplomatic adviser Cornelio Brandini, who informed him that it was not possible to reach the Italian Prime Minister. At that point, based

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁴ M. K. Bohn, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>, minute 39:47, last accessed: 01/15/2023..

on his side of the story, Ledeen "threatened" Brandini saying that it was a matter of life and death. If someone had died because he did not have the chance to talk with Craxi, (Brandini's face)-would be on the front pages of all newspapers worldwide.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, there was a "nice" conversation between Ledeen and Craxi, and to the question of why Sigonella had been chosen and not another military base, Ledeen answered: "Because no other place on earth can offer the unique combination of beautiful weather, cultural tradition, and magnificent cuisine that Sicily can provide these people." "Craxi laughed and said he would take care of it at once."¹⁰⁷

Craxi gave consent for the landing. The Boeing arrived at Sigonella escorted by General Stiner and Delta Force. Colonel Ercolano Annichiarico, Commander of the Italian Air Force's 41st Wing and therefore also base commander, declared on several occasions that the plane landed on the "Italian" side and only for this reason he was able to subsequently intervene.¹⁰⁸

The aim of the White House was undoubtedly to pick up the terrorists together with Abu Abbas and bring them from the United States. General Stiner dedicated a chapter of his book *Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces* to the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* and the consequent incident that took place in Sigonella. It is necessary to specify that, although about 17 years had passed (the book was published in 2002), the description given by the author would not seem to be very precise and balanced.¹⁰⁹ In any case, the General checked the plane and ascertained the presence of the four terrorists, of Abu Abbas, of the Egyptian representatives (members of the counter-terrorism unit) and moreover, surprisingly, he found himself in front of Ozzudin Badrakkan, head of military operations of the PLF, who had probably joined the group in Port Said.¹¹⁰ The plane had been completely surrounded by Italian airmen and Carabinieri. Suddenly, around the Italian soldiers, it was created another circle formed of SEALs and US Special Troops. Abbas and the others did not and could not leave Italy. In turn, another cordon of 300 Italian soldiers and officers of the Carabinieri surrounded the one formed by the Americans. Thus, three concentric circles are formed facing each other with the soldiers looking at each other eye to eye. After the interview with Ambassador Raab, who seemed very perplexed about the work of the American troops, Stiner then called the Pentagon to explain the situation. He said he had verified that there were terrorists and two people he had not yet identified (Abbas and Badrakkan) with the Egyptians, he showed no concern for the Italian "threat" because they had the strength to prevail, instead he expressed doubts about the

¹⁰⁶ M. A. Ledeen, *Perilous Statecraft*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p. 178

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁸ *Ossi di Seppia, Sigonella, la notte più lunga* in <<https://www.raiplay.it/video/2022/08/Ossi-di-Seppia---Quello-che-ricordiamo---Sigonella-la-notte-piu-lunga-6d11b051-c17a-4e67-8652-1f444f87f011.html>>, minute 12:08, last accessed: 01/18/2023.

¹⁰⁹The book contains several errors and omissions concerning some names of people but also of places. Some expressions are also used such as "Put down the Italians" which seem to be rather exaggerated, although there were certainly moments of high tension.

¹¹⁰ M. K. Bohn, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

uncertainty of the situation since he declared "A backfire from a motorbike or a construction cart could precipitate a shooting incident that could lead to a lot of Italian casualties. And I don't believe that our beef is with our ally, the Italians, but rather with the terrorists."¹¹¹ In the meantime, there was another contact between Rome and Washington, with the American request for the extradition of Abbas and the rest of the group. First, there was an attempt by the Secretary of State, George Shultz and the Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, with their Italian counterparts, Andreotti and Spadolini, but without any effect. Subsequently, around 3 a.m. of October 11, Reagan called Palazzo Chigi again. Craxi's response was very firm and diplomatic. He said that if it had been up to him, he would have gladly handed over the passengers of the plane but the events had occurred on Italian soil and therefore the problem was precisely from a legal point of view since the terrorists had to be tried in Italy.¹¹² Ledeen also confessed another backstory, namely that Reagan asked to have all four Palestinian terrorists arrested. Craxi replied that perhaps it would have been better to arrest two of them and put the other two under surveillance. While Reagan agreed with this hypothesis, Ledeen, who was interpreting the call, mistranslated Reagan's response and told Craxi that all four should be arrested. At that point Craxi nodded and the entire commando was arrested.¹¹³ However, an important problem remained unsolved: what would happen to Abu Abbas?

Antonio Badini who was Craxi's diplomatic advisor, Admiral Fulvio Martini, the head of SISMI (Servizio per le informazioni e la sicurezza militare), and the PLO affairs officer in Rome, Al Aflak Hussein, went to Sigonella. The purpose was to deal with Abu Abbas. The Americans refused to leave the man who was considered the mastermind behind the hijacking, in the hands of the Italians. There was then a meeting of the three with Abbas, in which the Palestinian continued to deny any involvement in the operation carried out by the four terrorists. The order was from Rome to send the Boeing towards Ciampino. For General Stiner this is a move not to be trusted. According to him, the plane could go anywhere, possibly even Egypt, to release Abbas. For this reason, together with the Egyptian plane, American T-39 left to escort it. In response to this, the Italian jets took off in turn. As reported by the President of the Republic himself, Francesco Cossiga, who listened to the conversations, there was an exchange of insults and "bad words" between the Italian and American pilots.¹¹⁴ A few hours after the arrival of the Boeing and consequently of the American and Italian planes, the Attorney General, Edwin Meese, arranged to deliver to the Minister of Justice, Mino Martinazzoli, the

¹¹¹ T. Clancy, C. Stiner, T. Koltz, *Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces*, Putnam's Sons, 2002, p. 285.

¹¹² *The Achille Lauro Hijacking (B), Case Program*, C16-88-864.0, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard College, 1988.

¹¹³ *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>>, minute 39:07, last accessed: 01/15/2023.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, minute 47:16

signed request for the arrest and the consequent extradition of Abu Abbas. The Italian response was again negative. The pressure on Palazzo Chigi at that time was not indifferent. In fact, both Mubarak and Arafat warned Craxi that there would be consequences if the PLO exponents were handed over to the United States. Not only in relations between countries but precisely as a "popular" reaction. Especially in Egypt, public opinion did not like the American meddling regarding a ship that was in Egyptian waters. So much so that the Egyptian authorities had no intention of letting the *Achille Lauro* leave Port Said if Abbas was handed over to the USA. Meanwhile, for Washington the priority had become, not so much extradition, which was becoming increasingly difficult, but the certainty that Abbas would not be released, a fear that was growing more and more. And the fact that a "son of a bitch" (definition given by the American ambassador in Cairo Nick Veliotos regarding terrorists)¹¹⁵ like Abbas was set free would not have been acceptable. However, Craxi had another plan and for him now the problem was the opposite. A way had to be found to deliver Abbas to the PLO without the Americans being able to notice and intercept him again. Saturday 12 October, after the Egyptian plane secretly arrived at Fiumicino, from Ciampino, Abbas (together with Badrakkan) was taken by the Italian secret services. Thanks also to the help of Zeid Imad Hamed, the Egyptian diplomat who had arrived from Egypt together with the Palestinians, a flight was thus arranged by JAT, the national airline of Yugoslavia, with departure time set for 7:10 pm, towards Belgrade.¹¹⁶ After two days he went to Yemen and then to Baghdad where he was arrested by US forces on April 15, 2003.¹¹⁷ In 1986 the convictions arrived for those guilty of the *Achille Lauro* Hijacking. As admitted by himself in his book, General Stiner had to change his mind about the numerous perplexities he had regarding the Italian justice system. Apart from the still minor terrorist, the other three, Magied al-Molqi, Ibrahim Abdel Atif and Ahmed al-Hassan, will be sentenced respectively to 30, 24 and 15 years. Abbas will instead receive a life sentence in absentia.¹¹⁸

3. Why did this situation lead to a diplomatic conflict?

The facts narrated so far caused the most serious diplomatic crisis between Italy and the United States since the end of the Second World War. The crisis is based on two precise and distinct situations: the refusal of the Italian government to the American request to have the terrorists delivered on the flight to Egypt, the tug of war that took place in Sigonella between

¹¹⁵ M. K. Bohn, *op- cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ *Wanted! Terrorist Abu Abbas Escapes with the Connivance of Italy and Yugoslavia, Setting Off Recriminations in the United States*, «Newsweek Magazine», 10/28/1985.

¹¹⁷ J. McWethy, K. Textor, *Achille Lauro Mastermind Caught in Iraq*, «ABCnews», 2003 in <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=79522&page=1>>, last accessed: 01/25/2023.

¹¹⁸ T. Clancy, C. Stiner, T. Koltz, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

the Italian and US soldiers. Craxi's no to Reagan, arose from the agreements made with the Palestinian mediators, who had managed to resolve the seizure of the ship, without the bloodbath threatened by the terrorists, in the event that their conditions were not accepted. Also, the blitz, proposed by defense minister Giovanni Spadolini or a possible armed intervention by American or Israeli special forces, could have seriously compromised the safety of the passengers. Unfortunately, there had been a victim and this, as Craxi himself said in Parliament, did not allow the operation to be defined as "a real success". "However – as specified by the Prime Minister during a parliamentary session of the Chamber of Deputies - the non-bloody conclusion of the story, without the other bloodshed that could have been held, was a great result, due to the initiatives and impulses put in place by the Italian government and to the collaborations that it has been able to obtain".¹¹⁹

In any case, since the murder of the American citizen Leon Klinghoffer had been committed on board an Italian ship, it would have been up to the Italian judiciary to judge those responsible. Therefore, at stake were the laws of international law and the credibility of a State, which could not fail to comply with the agreements made. Not only to protect its prestige, but also to prevent possible future reprisals against its citizens.

However, the role that Italy had played in the Mediterranean is not to be underestimated and the driving force that its government had given to the peace process in the Middle East, through important trips made by Craxi since the beginning of his inauguration at Palazzo Chigi. Accompanied by Giulio Andreotti, he went to Egypt from 17 to 19 November, to Saudi Arabia from 19 to 20 November, to Algeria from 28 to 29 November and to Tunisia from 6 to 7 December 1984. The Italian Prime Minister did not intend to give up this function, aware of the favorable circumstances in which he found himself, as Italy was a country that had always recognized the Palestinians' right to have a homeland and Israel's right to exist. In a letter to Reagan, Craxi communicated his commitment to convince Arafat to accept Resolution n. 242 of the UN and for mutual recognition of the "parties directly involved in the crisis on the basis of the principles of security for all states (requirement set by Israel) and the rights of all peoples (request of the Palestinians)".¹²⁰

Obviously, Italy, as Matteo Gerlini wrote,¹²¹ could not be a decisive interlocutor, but its presence in the sphere of relations with the Arab world gave it a prominent place in the difficult geographical area under discussion. To this end, the Craxi government had intensified economic and political relations with the Horn of Africa, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, which still paid the

¹¹⁹ Communications from the President of the Council of Ministers. Chamber of Deputies. 10/17/1985.

¹²⁰ Di Nolfo (edited by) *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹²¹ *Ivi*, p. 100.

price for the isolation to which it had been relegated following the signing of the Camp David agreements.

The availability obtained, during the kidnapping, by the main Arab heads of state, not only the moderate ones, such as Mubarak, but also by Assad, demonstrates the considerable consideration in which the Italian authorities were held and perhaps the sense of gratitude fed on them. Arafat, in particular, had received important support from Italy, which had helped the party he led, Fatah, to assume leadership of the PLO. The Palestinian leader had also been visited in Tunis by the Italian Prime Minister and his Foreign Affairs Minister and had thus managed to orient the organization towards more moderate positions and to get closer to King Hussein of Jordan after the tragic events of Black September.¹²² In 1984, in fact, the seventeenth Palestinian National Council had been able to hold in Amman, where the Hashemite ruler had declared that the PLO had to abandon the "all or nothing" policy and join Jordan in a negotiation with Israel, based on the principle of "land for peace".¹²³ Hussein was interested in not losing the independence of the Kingdom and recovering the West Bank, with the consent of the United Nations and moderate Arabs, avoiding a rupture like the one that happened to Egypt, which could have made it subordinate to the West and therefore to Israel.

Albeit from opposite points of view, Assad also feared being isolated from a Jordanian-Palestinian agreement and for this reason, after the agreements signed on February 11, 1985, by Arafat and Hussein, he began a relentless action on Jordan, making use of figures such as Abu Nidal, expelled from the PLO, in order to overthrow its monarch. The choice of the Syrian leader earned him the brand of main sponsor of international terrorism, with serious political and economic consequences. At the same time, however, it allowed him to win the diplomatic match with Jordan, which did not obtain the military aid promised by the United States,¹²⁴ which it urgently needed and, with the defeat of Peres in the political elections in Israel, overtaken by the right-wing Likud, it was denied the possibility of sitting at a table with Israeli and Palestinian representatives.

On the other hand, the diplomatic offensive, which for months Craxi and Andreotti had launched in the competent offices, despite the support of Algerian President Bendjedid and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia,¹²⁵ had suffered a setback with so-called Operation Wooden Leg, the Israeli air raid on the PLO headquarters in Tunis on October 1, 1985. The operation was decided after three Israelis, probably Mossad agents, were killed aboard a yacht, anchored in the Cypriot port of Larnaca on September 25, 1985. The attack was claimed, to the France media, by Arafat's elite personal bodyguard unit, Force 17. The latter was unharmed in the

¹²²On September 1970, Hussein ordered a crackdown on Palestinian refugees in his kingdom.

¹²³Di Nolfo (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹²⁴In 1985, the US Congress rejected the supply of Stinger missiles to Amman.

¹²⁵Di Nolfo (edited by), *op. cit.*, p.102.

bombardment, which however caused sixty-eight victims and hundreds of wounded men. For this reason, it received condemnation from the international community, including that of the Craxi government, which defined the incident as "unworthy of a civilized country"¹²⁶ and canceled the Israeli tourism minister's visit to Rome.

Even the series of attacks, which had taken place in Italy in 1985, had intended to sabotage the efforts made by the government, to give dignity to the PLO and its president. In fact, they were under the signature of Arafat's main antagonist: the aforementioned Abu Nidal. On September 16, about forty tourists were injured in Rome by a bomb explosion claimed by the Revolutionary Organization of Muslim Socialists (ORMS). It was a "ghost acronym", which Abu Nidal had already used on other occasions. About ten days later, a woman was killed and ten people seriously injured by a bomb thrown by Hassan Aatab at the British Airways offices in Rome.

The Italian initiative could regain altitude and get the expected and desired results only if Italy showed itself to be authoritative and autonomous, as happened in Sigonella on the night of 12 October 1985. In this regard, it should also be emphasized that the aircraft on which the kidnapers of the *Achille Lauro* were travelling, "because of its characteristics as an aircraft in charge of a special mission of the Egyptian Government, it enjoyed the status of extraterritoriality: the presence on board of ten Egyptian agents in charge of the protection of the aircraft and its passengers and passengers holding diplomatic passports".¹²⁷

Interviewed by the Americans, the Italian judiciary had not deemed it necessary to detain or arrest, the passengers and, consequently, "the Italian Government could not carry out acts in violation of international legality and of Italian law itself".¹²⁸

The hijacking of the plane over Sigonella was an American attempt to impose force over law, which necessarily had to receive a reaction commensurate with its severity. But it could also become an opportunity to downsize Italian foreign policy, compromising, for example, its relations with Egypt. "The whole *Achille Lauro* affair - writes Matteo Gerlini - is an indicative test of the different foreign policy options between Italy and the United States, of the reactions resulting from these differences, and of the effects of the superpower's pressure on the ally".¹²⁹ The path of negotiation, taken by the executive, instead demonstrated the wide variety of Middle Eastern interlocutors on which Italy could count and the coherence with its own line of foreign policy, which remained anchored to the negotiations, even in the event that hostage was an Italian subject, such as the cruise ship.

¹²⁶*Ivi*, p. 105.

¹²⁷*Ivi*, p. 100.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹*Ivi*, p. 106.

The order from Rome to face the American Delta Force, with the help of the men of the Air Force Vigilance (VAM) and the carabinieri, was therefore not only a way in which Italy affirmed its territorial sovereignty, but above all, it was a question of the extreme defense of his diplomatic choices and of the role that his executive could have continued to have in the difficult and hindered peace process in progress. The government crisis that followed, the first in republican history due to foreign policy, greatly strengthened the choices and position of Bettino Craxi, who also obtained the consent of some opposition forces in parliament, such as the Italian Communist Party. This induced the American administration to retrace its steps, abandoning a test of strength and dismissing the hypothesis of a feared rapprochement between the PSI and the PCI.¹³⁰

Unfortunately, these events did not stop the spiral of violence which, on December 27, 1985, once again struck Italy. At the airports of Rome and Vienna, a few minutes away, bullets were fired at the lines of passengers at the counters of the Israeli airline El Al. At Fiumicino there were thirteen dead and seventy-six wounded, in Austria the victims were three and forty-four the people injured. In his autobiography, the former head of SISMI Fulvio Martini identified Abu Nidal as responsible for the two massacres, who, "attacked at Fiumicino following the failed hijacking of another terrorist group, the one headed by Abu Abbas and the hijackers of the *Achille Lauro*".¹³¹

For its part, the United States had made the war on terrorism a priority under the administration of Ronald Reagan. The president had created a team of counter-terrorism experts, in charge of acting on a large scale, in agreement with the intelligence of the allied countries and in particular with the Israeli services, considered among the most prepared in the matter. The team also included Robert McFarlane, John Poindexter, Oliver North and Michael Ledeen.¹³² They, who were invested with a sort of full mandate, had a great influence for years, finding themselves personally managing serious and delicate situations such as the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* and the Sigonella crisis. Their image - and in part also that of Reagan - was tarnished by the Irangate scandal, which will be discussed later, from which it resulted that the first shipment of weapons, directed to Tehran, left in August 1985, a few weeks before the *Sigonella affair*.

¹³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 114.

¹³¹ Cf. F. Martini, *Codename: Ulisse*, Rizzoli, Segrate 1999.

¹³² Di Nolfo (edited by), *op. cit.*, p.109, n. 10.

“DEAR BETTINO”: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS

1. The impact of the “Sigonella Case” on the Italian and American public opinion

The effects that the Sigonella story had on the two states involved, Italy and the United States, are very different. It is evident that, since Bettino Craxi was the apparent moral winner of the crisis, Italian public opinion gave to the whole question a greater weight than what it had across the Atlantic. The Prime Minister came out much strengthened and, on that occasion, assumed the stature of a statesman, which he would maintain until the outbreak of Tangentopoli, when the accusations directed against him and many of his party colleagues prevailed. In addition to the ability, shared with Minister Andreotti, with which he had been able to solve the seizure of the *Achille Lauro*, the firmness, with which he managed the diplomatic confrontation with his powerful ally, also met people’s approval. After all, Craxi had given himself the image of a decision-making politician, since the summer of 1983, when he became the first socialist head of government, appointed by the President of the Republic Sandro Pertini, a socialist as well. The well-known cartoonist Giorgio Forattini, to whom the director Eugenio Scalfari had assigned the front page of *la Repubblica*, used to reproduce him with a black shirt, knickerbockers and high boots, in the role of an unlikely leader of the eighties, just to underline his determined attitude. On the night of Sigonella, in fact, national sovereignty had been safeguarded, perfectly in line with the reputation of the character. Obviously Craxi's merits also depended on the power of his interlocutor. He had not been strong with a weakling, but with someone stronger than him, whom he had faced, such that imposing himself in order not to fail in the commitments undertaken with the Arab mediators.

The power of the Americans is, therefore, another element that has had a profound effect on the growth of Bettino Craxi's popularity. The Italians had perceived the USA as indispensable allies and, with gratitude, recognized them for having defeated Nazi-fascism during the Second World War. Nevertheless, they did not like the arrogance with which they interfered and, in some cases, imposed their decisions over Italian governments. The installation of cruise missiles in Comiso, for example, had aroused strong reactions in the political world and among public opinion. The old Comiso airport had been chosen by the Spadolini government in 1981, as the perfect place for the deployment of the Euromissiles, and had become operational in 1983, just under the Craxi government. It is estimated that the Pentagon spent as much as two hundred million dollars to demolish the Fascist-era air terminal and build the new base on a par with a city, able to worthily house the committed soldiers and their families. For this purpose, in addition to houses, a school and a church were built. On April 4, 1982, a massive demonstration in favor of peace took place, during which several thousand people marched to demand the suspension of construction work on the NATO base. Among them, one of the

leaders of the Italian Communist Party, Pio La Torre, killed by the mafia twenty-six days later, who on that occasion released the following statement:

Today in Comiso tens of thousands of Sicilians and with them delegations from all over Italy and Europe are meeting for a great demonstration for peace and disarmament [...] Our "NO" to the installation of the atomic base in Comiso tends to prevent a truly dark future for the Sicilian people. I can say this because I am convinced that today this is a fair and realistic goal. Negotiations between the USSR and the USA will begin in Geneva on November 30th and the first point on the agenda is the issue of Euromissiles. The successful conclusion of the negotiation - for which everyone must work - should be about creating a balance at the lowest possible level of opposing missiles: the Soviet SS-20 and the new American missiles in Western Europe. This level of equilibrium could be the zero solution, i.e., the non-installation of the Cruises, balanced by measures of equal significance for the SS-20. This is why the objective of preventing the construction of the base in Comiso can be achieved [...] We communists want to be only one component of this great unitary movement and we will operate, with increasing awareness, so that other democratic forces, overcoming misunderstandings and exploitation, will take the field to give their original contribution to this decisive struggle for the future of the Sicilian people and for the salvation of peace in the world.¹³³

On August 8, 1984, another massive protest caused clashes with the police, which caused numerous injuries among the demonstrators. It should be mentioned, however, that according to information from Tab 122 of the so-called "Mitrokhin dossier"¹³⁴, between 1970 and 1977 the PCI received money from the Kremlin, which was used to support the fight in support of communism inside Italy. The Roman cell of the KGB allegedly delivered to the Italian Communist Party \$1,600,000 in 1971, \$5.2 million in 1972, \$3 million in February 1974 and, by May of that year, another \$6 million; \$5.5 million in 1976 plus another million delivered later and, finally, \$1 million in 1977.¹³⁵

¹³³ *Pio La Torre: fermare la mafia, fermare la guerra*, in <https://www.collettiva.it/copertine/italia/2022/04/30/news/pio_la_torre-2068384/>, last accessed: 21/01/2023.

¹³⁴ It is a ponderous archive of some two hundred thousand documents, reconstructing the history of Soviet intelligence from the October Revolution to Gorbachev, which came to Italy between 1995 and 1999, thanks to British intelligence.

¹³⁵ A. Carli, *Presunti fondi russi alla Lega: il precedente del dossier Mitrokhin con il Pci*, in «Il Sole 24 ore»: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/presunti-fondi-russi-lega-precedente-dossier-mitrokhin-il-pci-ACex8OY>, last access: 02/20/2023.

Craxi's refusal to Reagan to hand over the commando responsible for the seizure of the cruise ship was interpreted, by the public opinion, as a re-establishment of the relationship between the two countries on an equal position. A 1984 US State Department report on relations between the US, Italy and Libya had defined Italian dignitaries as "a bunch of chickens".¹³⁶ Instead, the prime minister allegedly said to Admiral Fulvio Martini, head of SISMI: "we are allies of the USA but not their servants".¹³⁷

Nonetheless, the story also had a dramatic turn, when the defense minister Giovanni Spadolini, secretary of the Italian Republican Party, in disagreement with the line of Craxi and Andreotti, withdrew the republican delegation from the government and opened a crisis.

On 17 October, the prime minister assumed responsibility for the decisions taken in the Chamber, retracing the "known facts in their general lines, which have brought us gratitude from all the states that had their citizens on board the *Achille Lauro* for the prudence and I think also for the wisdom with which we have moved, in order to safeguard so many human lives".¹³⁸ Craxi continued by stigmatizing the "polemical tone of the first reactions of the American Government [...] for the disavowal by a friendly government of all that the Italian Government had done to successfully overcome a particularly critical and difficult situation, and of the results that had been achieved".¹³⁹ The Prime Minister also claimed the successes of Italy over terrorism "without destroying the principles and rules of the rule of law".¹⁴⁰ He reiterated the government's commitment "to pave the way for a prospect of peace in the troubled Middle East region".¹⁴¹ And finally he expressed his regret for the "decision of the Republican leadership, which has led to a crisis in the relations of the coalition and therefore entails the resignation of the Government".¹⁴²

On the morning of October 19, 1985, Craxi received a letter from Reagan, delivered to him by Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead and published the next day in *Corriere della Sera* and also in *The New York Times*. The head of the White House writes:

Dear Bettino, I'm anxious to see you next week in New York for the session of consultations which we will have with our major allies. I deeply value the suggestions you gave me in the past and appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts and

¹³⁶M. De Pizzo, *Il leone, la volpe e l'aquila. Craxi, Andreotti e la crisi di Sigonella*, LUISS University Press, <<https://luissuniversitypress.it/1-america-per-noi-criisi-sigonella-de-pizzo-estratto/>>, last accessed: 01/15/2023.

¹³⁷R. Storace, *Salvo Andò rievoca la notte di Sigonella e le conseguenze storiche*, 11/06/2020 in <https://avantilive.it/salvo-ando-rievoca-la-notte-di-sigonella-e-le-conseguenze-storiche_-1453/>, last accessed 01/21/2023.

¹³⁸ *Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio di Ministri*. Camera dei Deputati. October 17, 1985.

¹³⁹*Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁰*Ibidem*

¹⁴¹*Ibidem*

¹⁴²*Ibidem*.

your impressions while we approach my important meeting in Geneva with General Secretary Gorbachev”.

During the last week, we have had differences on the best way in which to respond to the hijacking of the Achille Lauro. Despite these differences, which we have dealt with, in a frank and friendly way, we share fundamental commitments on the necessity to respond with firmness to the threat of international terrorism.

I want you to know that I never had any doubt that your Government would proceed rapidly in the prosecution of the hijackers of the Achille Lauro.

Italian-American relations have been and will remain wide, deep and solid and I am sure that our personal relations will continue to be firmly tied to this tradition.

Sincerely, *RON*¹⁴³

This decision was reached after a subtle diplomatic work, which was described in detail by the Italian ambassador in Washington Rinaldo Petrignani.¹⁴⁴¹⁴⁵ Reagan did not want Craxi to miss the New York summit. On his perspective, the Italian prime minister had hinted that, in the absence of an official act from the White House to remedy for the Sigonella night, he would not go to the United States. This intention reached Washington following a conversation between Petrignani and Giuliano Amato, at the time undersecretary to the Presidency of the Council.¹⁴⁶ At the beginning, the idea was of a speech in which the US president expressed a sort of personal regret for what had happened. But with the government crisis that had unfolded in Italy, there was the fear that this was not enough. The suggestion for the letter came from Rozanne Ridgeway, who was the Assistant Secretary for European affairs at the Department of State. After discussing it with the Italian ambassador, the diplomat submitted her proposal to representatives of the American administration, who gave her the green light. When Ridgeway communicated it to Petrignani, the latter reported it to Andreotti, who also read the text of the letter. Obviously, the foreign minister spoke to Craxi about it and, being sure about the initiative's effectiveness, he gave the ambassador the go-ahead. Reaffirming how much Reagan cared about his ally's presence at the summit was the choice of the deputy Secretary of State, to deliver the message. A further telephone call from Andreotti confirmed to Petrignani that the talks between Whitehead and Craxi had been successful.¹⁴⁷ Shortly afterwards, during a

¹⁴³ *Reagan's letter to Craxi*, in «The New York Times»: <<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/20/world/reagan-s-letter-to-craxi.html>>, last accessed: 01/24/2023. A version of this article appears in print on 10/20/1985, Section 1, Page 18.

¹⁴⁴ *La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale*, in <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>>, minute 55:17, last accessed: 01/15/2023.

¹⁴⁵ R.Petrignani, in E. Di Nolfo (edited by), *La politica estera italiana negli anni Ottanta*, Marsilio, Venezia 2007, p. 140

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 141

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 143-144.

reception, Reagan addressed the Italian diplomat in Washington with words that foreshadowed being one step away from reconciliation: «Mr. Ambassador, I want to assure that the friendship between our two countries is unshakeable». ¹⁴⁸

The letter was immediately read in Italy as a new attestation of Craxi's success, before which the American giant became bowed, taking the first step towards to mend the tear between them. Dispelling the rumors of Arnaldo Forlani's candidacy for Palazzo Chigi, the President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga rejected Craxi's resignation, referring the government to the Chambers. Then, he got the parliamentary confidence. In Parliament, the Prime Minister also spoke out on the Palestinian question: “You see, I contest the PLO's use of armed struggle not because I believe it has no right to do so, but because I am convinced that armed struggle will lead to no solution. An examination of the context shows that armed struggle and terrorism will only make innocent victims but will not solve the Palestinian problem”. ¹⁴⁹

Craxi's popularity in Italy continued in the following years and reached its peak in the 1987 general elections, when the PSI achieved a historic result, obtaining 14.27% of the votes for the Chamber. However, in the socialist area it has been seriously suspected that the “Mani Pulite” judicial investigation, which overwhelmed the Italian political class in the 1990s and decreed the end of Craxi's hegemony, was attributable to the behavior of the government in 1985. Not in the sense that it was prepared by the Americans, but that it was exploited by them, to avenge the affront suffered in the Sicilian NATO base. In particular, former minister Gianni De Michelis claimed “that the Sigonella affair had left irreparable aftermaths, it was a bad precedent for good Atlantic relations themselves”. ¹⁵⁰ He claimed to have heard Craxi himself yell, in the most dramatic days of Tangentopoli: “if they think of blackmailing me or destabilizing me I will break their bones, because Italy must be autonomous”. ¹⁵¹ The suspicions are allegedly based on the frequent contacts that Antonio Di Pietro, the main magistrate of the investigation, allegedly had with the American consul in Milan, Peter Semler. After the notice of investigation sent to Craxi, the deputy prosecutor could have traveled to the United States to meet interlocutors, some of whom linked to the American Israelian community, interested in the political demise of the Italian socialist leader. ¹⁵²

On the other hand, the USA, unlike Italy, were used to managing international crises, often resolved through the use of power (soft or hard). The outcome of Sigonella could, on the opposite, overshadow the reputation of the United States as a power feared and supported by the allies. If, therefore, it was convenient not to highlight the conclusion of the events in front

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 145.

¹⁴⁹ *Discussione sulle comunicazioni del governo*. Chamber of Deputies, 11/06/1985.

¹⁵⁰ Cf: R. Storace, *op. cit.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵² *Ibidem*.

of the press, it was also necessary to study a strategy to recover the compromised prestige. However, about this last reconstruction, the idea that Washington preferred the ouster of an entire political class which, all in all, had guaranteed a long and faithful collaboration, to open new scenarios full of unknowns, leaves us perplexed and unconvinced.

Craxi's political adviser, Gennaro Acquaviva, is, instead, convinced that the whole story of the hijacking was a trap, set for the Italian government, by who was interested in sabotaging the peace plan in the Middle East, which Craxi was working on with a good chance of success. The conspiracy would have seen the coincidence of several interests, even opposing ones. Starting with the Israeli and American services, up to including the fringes of Palestinian extremism. Italy was committed to forming a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, the prerequisite for a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.

It was also due to the concrete risk that this action would find an effective way of realisation – writes Acquaviva – that the Sigonella operation was built. In fact, it was a carefully prepared crisis, because it involved the use of two opposing poles that determined it, tried to manage it and acted strongly to her realization: namely the conservative and substantially reactionary right of Israeli-American matrix, and the set – disparate and desperate – of what was then the consistent Palestinian party of the “hardcores”, represented by the “Rejection Front”, but also by Habash and Hawatmeh.¹⁵³

The hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* would therefore not have been the fallback for a planned attack in Israel, but the beginning of a hostile action against a government engaged in a difficult peace process.

2. The diplomatic relation between US and Italy after October 12, 1985

In any case, Reagan's letter to Craxi was a soothing gesture, followed by the meeting that the two had in New York on October 24, 1985. The meeting had been convened by the US president, to prepare the summit with Gorbachev, scheduled for 19 and 20 November in Geneva. In a private conversation, Craxi submitted to Reagan the proposal to enlarge the G5, made up of the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and France, to include Canada and Italy. The latter, explained the Italian prime minister, had had to adapt to the decision of the G5 meeting at the Hotel Plaza on September 25, undertaking initiatives in support of the dollar, heavier than those undertaken by the central banks of the G5 countries.

¹⁵³G. Acquaviva, *La trappola di Sigonella*, in <https://www.fondazione-socialismo.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Sigonella_Acquaviva.pdf, > last accessed: 01/10/2023.

Therefore, the time had come for them as well, to fully assume their responsibilities, intervening in decision-making bodies. Having obtained the hoped-for consideration from Reagan, Craxi informed his Canadian colleague Brian Mulroney, who committed to make a similar request to the other members of the G5.¹⁵⁴

The Italian proposal materialized in the Tokyo summit, which was held from 4 to 6 May 1986, at the end of a patient and delicate negotiation, which saw the opposition of France and the United Kingdom and the neutrality of Germany. Although the economic and financial ministers, including the Italian one, Giovanni Goria, had found an initial agreement on the declaration to be signed, which however did not formalize the expansion of the group. In conclusion, Craxi convinced Reagan, who told to his treasury secretary, James Baker, to include his request. In this way the socialist leader won his battle and his country was included among the “Big” of the Earth.

Another significant moment in the history of relations between Reagan and Craxi after Sigonella is the role played by the latter in the military escalation between the United States and Libya, which led to Operation Eldorado Canyon on April 15, 1986. We have already mentioned a warning reached Gaddafi from Craxi, which would have allowed the colonel to save himself from the air raid. Admission made, in 2006, by the Libyan foreign minister Abdulrahman Shalgam, who was ambassador in Rome at the time of the bombing.¹⁵⁵ Was Craxi's saving gesture from a friend or a precise political move? Considering what has been written so far, while we cannot rule out the first explanation, the political interpretation of that warning, which is set in the context of the Mediterranean and the complex web of relations between Italy and Libya, is also plausible. The physical elimination of Gaddafi, which took place in 2011, led to an extremely cumbersome situation in North Africa, due to a division of Libya, following the civil war, which exploded between the various tribes. There are currently two governments: one based in Tripoli, recognized by the international community and the other in Benghazi, supported by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and surreptitiously also by France. The lack of a single and credible interlocutor has produced negative effects in relations with Europe and, in general, with the Western Countries, at an economic level and in the difficult management of migratory flows. Obviously, it is impossible to know what would have happened if the Libyan leader had been killed in 1986, but it is probable that an expert politician like Craxi had foreseen dramatic and uncertain scenarios, which he wanted to avert, above all due to the inevitable repercussions that there would have been on the Italian economy.

Concerning the failed attempt to kill Gaddafi, Reagan, to whom Craxi had denied the authorization to let the planes involved in the mission in Libya take off from Italy to cross

¹⁵⁴ G. Acquaviva, A. Badini, *La pagina saltata della storia*, Marsilio, Venezia 2010, p. 120.

¹⁵⁵ V. Nigro, *1986, quando Craxi pensò di attaccare la Libia*, *op. cit.*

Italian airspace, did not react badly with the Italian government. He was probably unaware about the tip-off and perhaps he was also deceived by the launch of Libyan missiles against Lampedusa, a hostile action against Italy, which took place after the American bombing, which did not suggest any prior understanding between Gaddafi and Craxi. The support that the White House gave to the Italian delegation in Tokyo, two weeks later, demonstrates that there were no hard feelings between the two governments. On the opposite, it would confirm Reagan's esteem for the Italian leader, also in the perspective of the other very important diplomatic front, the one with the Kremlin. Here, the new secretary of the CPSU, Michail Gorbachev, had begun a reform process, called "perestroika", which the West kept under observation, with interest and distrust. Those were the years in which Reagan had thought of the SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative), to preserve the Atlantic countries from a possible Soviet nuclear attack. Announced on March 23, 1983, with a televised speech, the plan envisaged the use of highly advanced technologies, capable of identifying and destroying many missiles in various phases of their trajectory: at the moment of launch, while they were in flight and when they approached their targets.¹⁵⁶ The system was born for defensive purposes, but, managing to frustrate a hypothetical first Soviet strike, it would have created the conditions for a victory over the enemy, if the latter were left without the same protection. Reagan's ambitious program met many economic, military, and political objections. It was argued that investing in such an expensive project would take money away from social sectors, which deserved to be strengthened. It was also feared that the Soviet Union would feel encouraged to open a nuclear world conflict, before the United States equipped itself with the announced defense. Finally, SDI was accused of violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which had committed the US and USSR not to develop missile defense systems, to prevent a new and expensive arms race. For his part, Gorbachev gave such importance to this matter that he made the U.S. renunciation of SDI, a *condicio sine qua non* for the signing of the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty) and START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) agreements, signed in 1987, 1991 and 1993, respectively.

On May 29, 1985, Craxi had made a trip to Moscow, in which he had established a good understanding with the Head of the Kremlin. He had expressed sympathy for the concerns regarding the SDI, prompting Gorbachev to make the bitter joke that if the Americans had stubbornly continued to carry on with the SDI, they should have "solicited the Pope to organize the funeral at the Geneva negotiation".¹⁵⁷ The CPSU secretary hinted that the Soviet Union would be able to make missiles invisible to the American space shield. The prime minister also

¹⁵⁶US Department of State Archive, information released online from 01/20/2011 to 01/20/2009, at <<https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/104210.htm>>, last accessed: 01/07/2023.

¹⁵⁷G. Acquaviva-A. Badini, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

spoke of Eureka, the European organization for technological research, which was thought in order to deal with the field of security, promotion of space technologies, without military implications. Gorbachev appreciated the initiative, revealing that the Soviet Union “would be willing to participate in any initiatives in open research to East and West”.¹⁵⁸ After that meeting the two leaders continued to keep in touch through the mediation of their respective ambassadors and above all the exchange of personal letters.

The other aspect in which Italy showed interest was the fate of the Warsaw Pact, in the light of the reforms implemented by the Kremlin. In Europe there were different points of view among political leaders. Margaret Thatcher thought that with “perestroika”, market rules would spread into the Soviet economy. Helmut Kohl started to foresee a possible reunification of his nation. Francois Mitterand, on the other hand, was focused on the advantages that the “force de frappe” would derive from the political transformations that were taking place behind the curtain.¹⁵⁹ The prediction of the Italian government was based on a gradual detachment from Moscow of the satellite states of the Soviet Union. Craxi, who was still the secretary of a socialist party, although he had abundantly emancipated himself from communism,¹⁶⁰ intended to pursue this objective, thanks to the cordial relations he maintained with Erik Honecker, head of East Germany; Willy Brandt, former social democratic chancellor of West Germany; Janos Kadar, Communist leader of Hungary.

At the Moscow summit, the Italian Prime Minister had also asked Gorbachev to review the condition of the Sakharov couple, begging him to allow Mrs. Elena Bonner to travel to Italy to have her eyes treated and recover from the consequences of a heart attack. The initiative stemmed from a letter he had received in 1984 from the Soviet physicist, asking him to intercede with the then General Secretary of the CPSU Yuri Andropov. Craxi's request had the desired effect and both Sakharovs were later allowed to leave the USSR.

From the context described so far, clearly, Italy and its Prime Minister were points of reference that Washington did not want and perhaps could not give up. Hence President Reagan's willingness to quickly “forget” Sigonella's misunderstanding and to re-establish political relations with an ally who, even to his eyes, had shown to have undoubted mediation skills of which the United States could have still avail. The USA recognized Craxi having played an important role in the installation of the Euromissiles, not only for the policies implemented as Head of Government, but also for the support that, as secretary of the Italian

¹⁵⁸*Ibidem.*

¹⁵⁹*Ivi*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁶⁰“If we want to proceed towards socialist pluralism, we must move in the opposite direction to that indicated by Leninism: we must spread economic, political and cultural power as much as possible. Socialism does not coincide with statism. Socialism, as Norberto Bobbio recalled, is fully developed democracy, therefore it is the historical overcoming of liberal pluralism and not its annihilation. It is the way to increase and not to reduce the levels of freedom and well-being and equality.” B. Craxi, *Il Vangelo socialista*, in «L'Espresso», 08/27/1978.

Socialist Party, he had given to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a social democrat, when the latter, before taking a decision, had consulted the other European socialist leaders.¹⁶¹ They also could not ignore the clear-cut choices made by Craxi in favor of Israel, such as when, on February 18, 1985, the first official visit to Italy of an Israeli Prime Minister took place.¹⁶² Craxi and Shimon Peres, both belonging to the Socialist International, welcomed the signs of dialogue coming from the Arab world and favored the resumption of negotiations with King Hussein of Jordan «without preclusions and conditions».¹⁶³

After the crisis of October 1985, a “red line” was also installed between the White House and Palazzo Chigi, like the one already existing with the Elysée and Downing Street. In this way, Reagan was able to communicate directly with the man that he himself had even defined as “one of the greatest exponents of world politics”.¹⁶⁴

3. Reagan and Craxi: a comparison among two strong foreign policies

The two leaders, who had a clash in the Sigonella case, were both very strong, humanly and politically, with profoundly different personal histories. Reagan was an American from Illinois, of European origins, with an Anglo-Scottish mother, Nellie Clyde Wilson and an Irish father, Jack, a semi-alcoholic and responsible for many vicissitudes, often economic, experienced by the family. On the paternal side there is a distant relationship with the Kennedys, on the maternal side with Margaret Thatcher. Born in 1911 in Tampico, he began working at the age of fifteen as a lifeguard, an activity he repeated for seven consecutive summers (he saved about eighty people).¹⁶⁵ After a brief radio experience, he received a proposal from Warner Brothers, who signed him as an actor. He began a not very brilliant artistic career, which did not last long, and allowed him to improve his innate ability to perform and speak in public. In 1954 he moved to television, becoming the host of the General Electric Theater, the first major production of MCA's new television unit, Revue Productions. In this environment, Reagan gradually changed his democratic ideas, with which he had approached politics as a young man, to take a conservative course. In 1964 he gave a famous speech, entitled “A Time for Choosing”, in favor of the Republican presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater, which officially marked his debut in politics. The same year, he was elected governor of California, defeating incumbent Democrat Pat Brown. Nevertheless, he did not get the Grand Old Party (GLO) nomination, being repeatedly defeated, first by Richard Nixon and then by Gerald Ford. In 1979, instead, he

¹⁶¹ E. Di Nolfo (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, 32.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 33.

¹⁶⁴ *Ivi*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. G. Sangiuliano, *Reagan. Il presidente che cambiò la politica americana*, Mondadori, Milano 2021.

won over George Bush and, in 1980, he became the 40th President of the United States of America, reporting a clear victory over outgoing president Jimmy Carter.

Benedetto (Bettino) Craxi was born in Milan in 1934 to a mother from Lodi, Maria Ferrari and a Sicilian father, Vittorio, an anti-fascist, who after the war became deputy prefect of Milan and, eventually, prefect of Como. As a boy, Bettino contemplated entering the seminary, but at seventeen he joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), where he made a formidable climb to the top. After adhering to the so-called "autonomist" line, inclined to make the PSI free from the PCI, at the age of twenty-six he was elected city councilor of the Lombard capital and councilor for the finances. In 1968, for the first time he entered Montecitorio, the seat of Italian Chamber of Deputies, and in 1970 he became vice national secretary of the PSI. During these years he traveled a lot and met the major European socialist leaders: Willy Brandt, Felipe Gonzales, François Mitterrand, Mario Soares, François Rocard and Andreas Papandreou. With them Craxi worked in favor of the socialist parties in that states subjected to dictatorship, such as Spain, Greece, Portugal and Chile. After Augusto Pinochet's coup against the socialist president Salvador Allende, the South American country will remain a staple of his commitment to rights and freedoms. In 1976 he conquered the national secretariat, starting a profound process of renewal of the party, which replaced the old symbol with the carnation, gradually removing the book, "the sun of the future" and then "the hammer and sickle". During the Moro kidnapping, he was in favor of the negotiation for the release of the president of the Christian Democrats. A few weeks after the discovery of his body, he managed to get the socialist Sandro Pertini elected to the Presidency of the Republic. In the 1983 elections, the PSI increased its consensus by almost 2% and, on August 4, 1983, formed its first government, remaining in Palazzo Chigi, seat of the Italian Government, until 1987.

In foreign policy, Ronald Reagan was a staunch opponent of Soviet Communism, which he called "Evil Empire" on March 8, 1983, in front of the National Evangelical Association, in Florida. From this premise comes the so-called "Reagan Doctrine," that is, his willingness to counter Moscow's interests around the world "from Iran to Nicaragua, from the mujahiddin in Afghanistan to the rebels in El Salvador".¹⁶⁶ We have already mentioned his space defense plan against a nuclear missile attack by the USSR and his request to install atomic warheads aimed at the Warsaw Pact states in Europe. Gorbachev's arrival in the Kremlin allowed a collaborative process to begin, followed by many bilateral meetings, which were necessary to sign commitments to drastically reduce the arms race. On June 12, 1987, in front of the Berlin Wall, symbol of forty years of Cold War, he gave a memorable speech, which can be summed up in

¹⁶⁶ A. Gasperini, *Ronald Reagan, dalle stalle alle stelle, l'uomo che incarnò l'American Dream*, «La Voce di New York» in <https://lavocedinewyork.com/arts/libri/2021/12/27/ronald-reagan-dalle-stalle-alle-stelle-luomo-che-incarno-lamerican-dream/>, last accessed: 01/20/2023.

the unequivocal appeal to the Secretary General of the CPSU: “There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would dramatically advance the cause of freedom and peace. General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”.¹⁶⁷

Two other areas of US intervention during the Reagan presidency were the Middle East and Latin America. In 1981, the president was wounded in an assassination attempt by John Hinckley Jr., an insane man who wanted to attract the attention of actress Jodie Foster. The following year, a contingent of eight hundred marines was sent to Lebanon which, together with the United Kingdom, France and Italy, formed a multinational force that guaranteed the exit of Palestinian guerrillas from West Beirut, which was besieged by the Israelis. A year later, two hundred and forty-one American soldiers died in a suicide bombing and 100 were injured. A few days later, Reagan ordered an invasion of Grenada, a Caribbean Island where through a coup d'état Prime Minister Maurice Bishop had been removed, potentially paving the way for a pro-Soviet regime. Reagan's opponents accused the President of having concocted this military occupation to divert public opinion from Lebanese events. Other forms of interference took place in El Salvador and Nicaragua, in the latter case the Americans financed an army of guerrillas, called “contras”, with twenty million dollars to oppose the Sandinista government, an ally of Cuba, and restore a regime like the one of the late dictator Somoza. Two years after Reagan's re-election, on November 25, 1985, Attorney General Edwin Meese declared that the Reagan administration had smuggled weapons to Iran for the release of Americans held hostage in Lebanon and that a portion of the proceeds had been destined for the contras.¹⁶⁸ Reagan admitted negotiations with Tehran, but saying he was unaware of the destination of the funds in Nicaragua.

We have already mentioned the further developments of his policy in the Mediterranean, in particular the conflictual relationship with Libya, which led him to impose sanctions on the North African state in January 1986 and, in the following spring, he decided for the military option, following the attack in West Berlin, in which two people were killed, one of whom was an American soldier.

One last point inherent Bettino Craxi's foreign policy deserves to be focused and it is the aforementioned condemnation of the Pinochet regime. As deputy secretary of the PSI, he had gone to Chile in October 1973 to pay homage to the tomb of Salvador Allende, killed days earlier by General Pinochet's coup. As Head of the Italian government, he spoke to Reagan

¹⁶⁷ M. Thompson, *La fine del dibattito pubblico. Come la retorica sta distruggendo la lingua della democrazia*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2017, p. 92.

¹⁶⁸ MS Hamm, *Da Wedtech e Iran-Contra alle rivolte di Oakdale e Atlanta: sull'etica e le prestazioni pubbliche di Edwin Meese III*, *Giornale di crimine e giustizia* Volume: 14 Problema: 2 Data: (1991) pp.: 123-147.

about the issue during one of his trips to the United States. Antonio Ghirelli tells us that when asked by the Prime Minister: “But what are you going to do with Pinochet?” Reagan replied, “Why? Do you think elections could be held?” Craxi replied “No political elections, but there is a man, who is the Cardinal’s man, his name is Frei, to whom General Pinochet cannot say no”. At this point the US president asked Craxi: “So what?” and the Italian prime minister said: “So if presidential elections are held, Frei wins and it is a first step towards the end of Pinochet”.¹⁶⁹ Reagan did not reply to that prediction, but in 1994 Frei indeed became President of Chile.

On March 6, 1985, Craxi had the privilege of speaking to the United States Congress, the fourth Italian after the Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and the Presidents of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi and Antonio Segni. And even on that occasion, he expressed his intention to criticize the Chilean dictatorship, creating a possible embarrassment among American parliamentarians, since Pinochet's regime was appreciated by Washington. Ambassador Pettrignani tried unsuccessfully to dissuade Craxi, resorting to the mediation of advisers Antonio Badini and Gennaro Acquaviva. This is how Craxi expressed himself in the US Capitol.

Regarding Latin America, I think that all democratic countries must coordinate their efforts and their possibilities to contest any authoritarian involution, any unjustified recourse to violence, with no tolerance for dictators who sometimes speak in name of the West and that they have and cannot have anything in common with the West and with democracy. Above all others is the request for freedom of the Chilean people, a civilized people with democratic traditions, which has the right to free elections, and this request needs the unconditional support of all of us.¹⁷⁰

Badini commented on this intervention, underlining how

the members of Congress were sensitive to Craxi's reference to the «Founding Fathers» of the young American nation and received with a prolonged ovation the exhortation not to turn a deaf ear to the yearning for freedom that emanated from the Chilean people [...] His political courage, supported by a well balanced judgement, had won the sympathy and sincere admiration of Reagan himself, as well as the moved gratitude of Isabelle Allende and of those, like Alfonsín and Sanguinetti, who had just crossed the threshold of democracy.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹Cf: Documentario, *La mia vita è stata una corsa*, Regia di Paolo Pizzolante, Minerva Pictures Group, Fondazione Bettino Craxi, 2008.

¹⁷⁰A.M. Capriolo, “Santiago, Italia”, *Craxi, i socialisti e il Cile*, «Avanti», 22 gennaio 2019.

¹⁷¹E. Di Nolfo (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

The personal chemistry between Craxi and Reagan probably really existed.

CONCLUSIONS

The Sigonella crisis is one of the last acts of a political season, which began after World War II and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and most of the world's communist regimes. Shortly thereafter, in fact, would begin a series of events that would give a momentous turn to international politics: the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the first Gulf War, the August putsch, the disintegration of the USSR, the attack on the Twin Towers, the clash with the Taliban, the second Gulf conflict, the Arab Spring, ISIS, the pandemic, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A world in radical transformation, seeking a new and final order that, however, is still slow to take hold. The Middle East, in particular, has been destabilized by the invasion of Iraq and the ouster of Saddam Hussein, followed by the overthrow of other dictators, such as Qaddafi and Mubarak, or a serious downsizing of their power, as happened to Bashar al-Assad.

The United States has also felt and manifested the signs of change, seeking not to lose the propulsive role it exercised vis-à-vis liberal democracies and to continue to hold a kind of world leadership, which after 1989 it had deluded itself that it could assume unchallenged. In this sense, they have engaged in a fight against terrorism, fought on a large scale against specific organizations, such as Al Qaeda, but also against the so-called “rogue states”, i.e., those authoritarian regimes whose contiguity with Islamic extremism has been established.

In fact, the overcoming of ideological oppositions put an end to the world bipolarity that had characterized the Cold War years and resulted in a multipolarity that has seen the appearance on the scene of new emerging powers such as India, Brazil, South Africa and especially China, a true neocolonialist giant of the international economy.

As for the Sigonella protagonists, Ronald Reagan, in the face of the latest opaque acts of his administration and an economic policy conducted under the banner of extreme liberalism, retained much of his popularity. The news of his illness, Alzheimer's disease, which he himself spread in 1994 and which led to his death ten years later, aroused great emotion in public opinion.

In Italy, in the 1990s, we witnessed the end of a political class that had ruled the country for four decades and that a judicial investigation, called “Mani pulite”, drastically helped bring down. Two of the leading figures of a generation had acted at Sigonella, put on trial by judges and voters. Craxi and Andreotti themselves will undergo trials from which they will emerge with different outcomes. The former will be convicted of corruption and illicit financing of his party; he will escape arrest only because he will move to Hammamet, welcomed and protected by his grateful friend Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, president of Tunisia. There he spent the last years of his life and died on January 19, 2000. By his will he was not buried in Italy and his remains rest on North African soil. Giulio Andreotti, on the other hand, will be acquitted of

charges for some serious crimes, while for others the statute of limitations will run. Despite being appointed senator for life in 1991, his reputation was severely damaged until his death in Rome on May 6, 2013. In the common imagination he became a symbol of ambiguous politics, the keeper of secrets and disturbing mysteries.

Over the past four decades in the Middle East, 1994 saw the birth of the Palestinian National Authority, the result of the Oslo Accords, signed the year before by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat (recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize), mediated by U.S. President Bill Clinton, by which the Palestinians were given administration of the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. But the path to peace continued to be strewn with obstacles and bloodshed. In 1995 Rabin was murdered by a fanatical far-right Israeli citizen, in 2004 both Arafat and Abu Abbas disappeared, but attacks on Israel and subsequent reprisals, unfortunately, are still quite frequent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Colonel Gaddafi 'uses oil revenues to finance terrorism*, «The Times», January 4, 1974;
Evidence of Gaddafi financing of terrorism, «The Times», January 17, 1974;
Terrorists' air tickets 'issued in Libya, «The Times», January 21, 1974.
Terrorist Reverses Confession, Denies Killing Klinghoffer, «Houston Chronicle», June 20, 1986
15 Passengers, On return to US, Tell of the Terror on the Cruise liner, «The New York Times», October 13, 1985.
You Can Run but Not Hide, Reagan Warns Terrorists: Calls Case for Action 'Clear Cut', L.A. «Times» Archives, October 11, 1985.
Acquaviva G., Badini A., *La pagina saltata della storia*, Marsilio, Venezia 2010
Acquaviva G., *La trappola di Sigonella*, in https://www.fondazione-socialismo.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Sigonella_Acquaviva.pdf
Appunto autografo di Andreotti, 31 luglio 1984; il dattiloscritto su carta non intestata ha come titolo *Andreotti-Gheddafi, 31 luglio (Parte Riservata)*. Both in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Serie Libia, b. 1314.
Appunto manoscritto di Andreotti, «Pettrignani 3/IX/84 – Atti miei – Post visita Reagan 12/8/84», in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Serie Libia, b. 1314.
Archivio storico del Senato, Fondo Aldo Moro, Serie 1: Scritti e Discorsi; Sottoserie 18: Anno 1974; UA 619; busta 28, Aldo Moro, intervento al Senato sull'andamento della politica estera, 23 gennaio 1974.
Audizione di Eleonora Moro in <archivio900.it>
Baquis A., *Yom Kippur: Israele valutò il ricorso all'atomica*, in <<https://www.analisedifesa.it/2013/09/yom-kippur-israele-valuto-il-ricorso-allatomica/>>
Bellacci M., Uboldi R., Zullino P., *Fiumicino. Perché è accaduto*, «Epoca» n. 1212/1213, 12/30/1973, pp. 28-38; Zullino P., *Fiumicino. Un ufficiale accusa il governo*, «Epoca» n. 1215, 01/13/1974, pp. 18-19; Zullino P., *Abbiamo portato al giudice il documento su Fiumicino. Perché il capitano Corrado Narciso ha deciso di parlare*, «Epoca» n. 1216, 01/20/1974, p. 16.
Bellu G. M., D'Avanzo G., *Dietro Gladio c'era la Loggia P2*, «La Repubblica», 05/17/1991.
Bohn M. K., *The Achille Lauro Hijacking: Lessons in the Politics and Prejudice of Terrorism*, Potomac Books Inc, 2005.
Bucarelli M., Micheletta L. (Edd.), *Andreotti, Gheddafi e le relazioni italo-libiche*, Studium, Roma 2018, p. 46, no. 78.
Cannon L., *Reagan Briefly Implies PLO Could Try Pirates*, «Washington Post», 10/11/1985.
Capriolo A.M., «Santiago, Italia», *Craxi, i socialisti e il Cile*, «Avanti!», 01/22/2019.
Carli A., *Presunti fondi russi alla Lega: il precedente del dossier Mitrokhin con il Pci*, in «Il Sole 24 ore»: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/presunti-fondi-russi-lega-precedente-dossier-mitrokhin-il-pci-ACex8OY>
Centro Militare di Studi Strategici Ricerca CeMiSS 2009 – R12, *La politica europea relativa al conflitto mediorientale: scenari politico-strategici per il 2009 e potenziale ruolo dell'Italia*, Direttore della ricerca: Dott. Diego Baliani.
Clancy T., Stiner C., Koltz T., *Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces*, Putnam's Sons, 2002.

Coglitore M. (ed.), *La Notte dei Gladiatori. Omissioni e silenzi della Repubblica*, Calusca Edizioni, Padova 1992.

Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta concernente il "dossier Mitrokhin" e l'attività d'intelligence italiana, *Relazione sul gruppo Separat e il contesto dell'attentato del 2 agosto 1980* di Lorenzo Matassa e Gian Paolo Pelizzaro.

Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul rapimento e l'omicidio di Aldo Moro, seduta del 26 giugno 2017, resoconto stenografico, audizione di Bassam Abu Sharif.

Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi. Comunicata alle Presidenze il 22 aprile 1992

Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia...

Communications from the President of the Council of Ministers. Chamber of Deputies. October 17, 1985.

Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio di Ministri. Camera dei Deputati. October 17, 1985.

Costa A., *I rapporti tra Italia e Libia*, Sistema informativo a schede – 8/2010.

Craxi B., *Il Vangelo socialista*, in «L'Espresso», 08/27/1978.

De Pizzo M., *Il leone, la volpe e l'aquila. Craxi, Andreotti e la crisi di Sigonella*, LUISS University Press, <https://luissuniversitypress.it/l-america-per-noi-crisi-sigonella-de-pizzo-estratto/>

Del Boca A., *Gheddafi Una sfida dal deserto*, Laterza, Bari 2011, pp. 144-145.

Delios H., *In Mideast, A Twist on Peace*, «Chicago Tribune», 09/10/2000.

Di Nolfo E., *La politica estera italiana negli anni Ottanta*, Marsilio, Venezia 2007

Di Nolfo E., *Storia delle relazioni internazionali. Dal 1918 ai giorni nostri*, Laterza, Bari 2008

Discussione sulle comunicazioni del governo. Chamber of Deputies, 11/06/1985.

Documentario, *La mia vita è stata una corsa*, Regia di Paolo Pizzolante, Minerva Pictures Group, Fondazione Bettino Craxi, 2008

Fawcett L., *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Gosport, 2013

Friedman T. L., *Port in Israel Described as Target of Terrorists Who Seized Vessel*, «The New York Times», 10/11/1985.

Fruttero C., Lucentini F., *Pare che...*, «La Stampa», 12/07/1973.

Fukuyama F., *The End of History*, The National Interest-Summer 1989.

Gasperini A., *Ronald Reagan, dalle stalle alle stelle, l'uomo che incarnò l'American Dream*, «La Voce di New York» in <https://lavocedinewyork.com/arts/libri/2021/12/27/ronald-reagan-dalle-stalle-alle-stelle-luomo-che-incarno-lamerican-dream/>

Gelb L. H., *US Diplomat Reportedly Held Talks In Libya*, in «The New York Times», 03/23/1986. See also RB St John, *Libya and United States, Two centuries of strife*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002

Givens R. P., *Turning the Vertical Flank: Airpower as a Maneuver Force in the Theater Campaign*, in < https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13973.9#metadata_info_tab_contents > ,

Gresh A., *Storia dell'OLP: verso lo Stato palestinese*, Edizioni Associate, Roma, 1988

Hamm M.S., *Da Wedtech e Iran-Contra alle rivolte di Oakdale e Atlanta: sull'etica e le prestazioni pubbliche di Edwin Meese III*, *Giornale di crimine e giustizia* Volume: 14 Problema: 2 Data: (1991)

Hoyos C., *Le nuove Sette Sorelle: i giganti del petrolio e del gas fanno impallidire i rivali occidentali*, in «Financial Times», 03/12/2007, <https://www.ft.com/content/471ae1b8-d001-11db-94cb-000b5df10621#axzz3KSBXAvfZ>
<https://openaid.aics.gov.it/recipient-country/PS>

Interrogazione a risposta scritta 4/04005 presentata da Mura Silvana in data 14 Settembre 2009, seduta n. 213 in https://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic4_04005_16

Interview with Steve Weatherspoon made by Ashley Reynolds.

La Storia siamo noi - Il caso Achille Lauro - Un intrigo internazionale, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmj3RGdpM98>

Ledeem M. A., *Perilous Statecraft*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988)

Letter From President Nixon to Israeli Prime Minister Meir, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXV Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, document 388.

Liebman C., *The myth of defeat: the memory of the Yom Kippur War in Israeli society*, 1993, Middle Eastern Studies (Vol. 29, Issue 3), Frank Cass & Company Ltd.

Limiti S., *Arafat. La sovranità senza Stato*, Castelvecchi, Roma 2019.

Lo storico Sechi: "La strage di Bologna, il lodo Moro e il contesto mediorientale". *La riflessione dello studioso per la rivista Nova Historica*, in < <https://www.barbadillo.it/92203-lo-storico-sechi-la-strage-di-bologna-il-lodo-moro-e-il-contesto-mediorientale/>>

Lodi S., Giuseppetti A., *Fiumicino 17 Dicembre 1973. Il massacro di Settembre nero*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2013.

Lomellini V., *Terrorismo e ragion di stato*, Laterza 2022.

Maritain J., *Umanesimo integrale*, Borla, Roma 1980, p. 173-174, quote from Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I- II, 21, 4, ad. 3.

Martini F., *Nome in codice: Ulisse*, Rizzoli, Segrate 1999.

McWethy J. and Textor K., *Achille Lauro Mastermind Caught in Iraq*, ABCnews, 2003 in <https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=79522&page=1>

Monteleone D., *Basi NATO in Sicilia: la storia di Comiso, «la più potente d'Europa»*, in <https://ecointernazionale.com/2022/03/basi-nato-sicilia-storia-aeroporto-comiso-potente-europa/>

Moro A., *Lettere dalla prigionia*, edited by M. Gotor, Einaudi editore, Torino 2008, p. 106, no. 10.

Nigro V., *1986, quando Craxi pensò di attaccare la Libia*, «La Repubblica», 10/31/2008.

Ossi di Seppia, Sigonella, la notte più lunga in <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2022/08/Ossi-di-Seppia---Quello-che-ricordiamo---Sigonella-la-notte-piu-lunga-6d11b051-c17a-4e67-8652-1f444f87f011.html>

Outgoing message. Middle East Africa Brief 004-74, 01/08/1974.

Palma L., *La caduta di Gheddafi e la frantumazione della Libia*, 28 June 2021, <<https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/la-ccata-di-gheddafi-e-la-frantumazione-della-libia-30903>>

Petrignani a Esteri, 16 agosto 1984, tel. n. 77612/1571 «Colloquio dell'on. Ministro a Los Angeles del 13 corrente con il presidente Reagan e successivo colloquio con il segretario di stato Shultz», in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Serie Libia, b. 1314.

Priore R., Cutonilli V., *I segreti di Bologna. La verità sull'atto terroristico più grave della storia italiana*, Chiarelettere, Milano 2016.

Raisi E., *Bomba o non bomba*, Edizioni Minerva, Bologna 2012.

Relazione della Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di Via Fani sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia, Doc. XXIII, N. 5, Vol. primo, Roma 1983, p. 19.

Romeo I., *Pio La Torre: fermare la mafia, fermare la guerra*, in https://www.collettiva.it/copertine/italia/2022/04/30/news/pio_la_torre-2068384/

Salvemini G., *Il ministro della malavita*, Bollati Boringhieri Editore, Torino 2021.

Sangiuliano G., *Reagan. Il presidente che cambiò la politica americana*, Mondadori, Milano 2021.

Shwadran B., *Middle East Oil: Issues and Problems*, Schenkman Publishing Company, Cambridge, 1977

Smith William E., *Terror Aboard Flight 847*, TIME Magazine, 2001 in <https://web.archive.org/web/20080206210255/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,142099,00.html>

Stasi Archives - BStU, Sekretariat Neiber, no. 937, f. 22.

Storace R., *Salvo Andò rievoca la notte di Sigonella e le conseguenze storiche*, 11/06/2020 in < https://avantilive.it/salvo-ando-rievoca-la-notte-di-sigonella-e-le-conseguenze-storiche_-1453/ >

The Achille Lauro Hijacking (B), Case Program, C16-88-864.0, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard College, 1988.

Reagan's letter to Craxi, «The New York Times» <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/20/world/reagan-s-letter-to-craxi.html>. A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 20, 1985, Section 1, P. 18.

«The Observer» of 11/18/1990.

Thompson M., *La fine del dibattito pubblico. Come la retorica sta distruggendo la lingua della democrazia*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2017.

Tribunale di Roma, Ufficio Istruzione 2^a sezione, Procedimento 2677/77A G.I., Processo verbale di esame di testimonio senza giuramento, giudice istruttore Rosario Priore, segretario Paolo Musio, Stefano Giovannone, 19 luglio 1983.

Tribunale di Roma, Ufficio Istruzione 2^a sezione, Procedimento 2677/77A G.I., Processo verbale di esame di testimonio senza giuramento, giudice istruttore Rosario Priore, segretario Paolo Musio, Stefano Giovannone, 26 luglio 1983.

US Department of State Archive, information released online from January 20 2011 to 01/20/2009, at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/104210.htm>

Wanted! Terrorist Abu Abbas Escapes with the Connivance of Italy and Yugoslavia, Setting Off Recriminations in the United States, Newsweek Magazine, 10/28/1985.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis deals with the most serious diplomatic crisis, which occurred between the United States and Italy, following the events occurred in Sigonella on the night of October 10-11, 1985. It consists of four chapters, respectively devoted to the political scenario offered by the Mediterranean Sea in the 1970s; to the different visions held by the United States and Italy with respect to the Arab world; to the events surrounding the crisis itself; and to the reconciliation that took place between the two leaders involved in the affair: Ronald Reagan and Bettino Craxi. The idea of an initial Chapter 0 arose from the opportunity to focus, in a preliminary way, on the situation in the Middle East during the Kippur War, fought by Israel against Egypt and Syria in 1973. Taking these events as a starting point, it was then possible to refer to the multiple conflicts, which flared up in that region, from the birth of the State of Israel until the Camp David Accords, signed in 1976 between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar al Sadat, thanks to the mediation of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The central role played by the U.S., denotes the strategic importance, which the Mediterranean continued to have throughout the past century and how it remained the focus of attention of the world's major powers. As a result, what was happening in the Middle East, under some circumstances, further exacerbated the opposition between the West and the Soviet Union. In this context, there was also an analysis of the foreign and economic policy of Italy, a country naturally leaning toward the Mediterranean and, therefore, always linked to events there. We dwelt on the choice of equidistance, made by Italian governments, between the reasons of the Palestinian people and those of the State of Israel, in order to provide, on the one hand, a sufficient energy supply and, at the same time, to preserve the territory from possible terrorist attacks of Islamic origin. Initially the architects of this line were politicians of Christian Democrat extraction, such as Aldo Moro, Amintore Fanfani, Giulio Andreotti or state managers such as Enrico Mattei and later confirmed by Bettino Craxi, the first Socialist prime minister, who remained in office from 1983 to 1987.

Their attitude, however, did not always find approval from Washington, since Americans were clearly sided with Israel, which soon became the most important and valuable U.S. ally in the Middle East. Moreover, the Americans countered terrorism not only by prosecuting its organizations but also by fighting the regimes that were proponents of it. All that has also generated a series of contrasts between American and Italian diplomacy, in which the Sigonella crisis must also be included, which, however, have never called into question Italy's Atlanticist identity and its alliance with the United States.

This was the background for the first chapter, which was thus able to highlight the different approaches the U.S. and Italy had with the Arab world. The first section analyzed the relations

between the two countries and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The latter was analyzed, hinting at its internal divisions and splits, out of one of which came the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which will play a very prominent role in the hijacking of the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* and the Sigonella developments.

Inevitable and timely were mentions of the climate experienced in Europe during the Cold War and the influence exerted by the United States within its allies. There was mention of organizations such as Gladio, intertwined with the intelligence services, to keep up their guard and intervene promptly in case of attack or invasion by the Warsaw Pact. Without claiming to clarify it, given its complexity, the question of the possible involvement of this paramilitary structure in the most heinous massacres committed in Italy was addressed, with special reference to the two Fiumicino bombings, in 1973 and 1985 respectively, the Ustica air disaster and the one at Bologna station, both in 1980.

Then there was the “Lodo Moro”, an agreement agreed upon by Italian Foreign Minister Aldo Moro and the Palestinians, whereby terrorists were allowed to cross into Italy, even armed with weapons, intended for the liberation struggle, obtaining in exchange to leave Italian territory outside their targets. Since it could not be officially signed and therefore lacked a paper text materially initialed by the contracting parties, the real existence of the lodo had to be traced inductively, paying attention to certain events, which could attest to its actual use. In spite of the skepticism of some magistrates, such as the judges of Bologna, some cases were reported in which Palestinian terrorists, although arrested by the forces of law and order, then would concretely enjoy a certain immunity, even in the courts.

The Aldo Moro affair was then taken up, also in its personal aspects, thanks to the numerous letters, which the Christian Democrat statesman wrote and sent from prison, where he was held for fifty-five days by his captors. In some of them he alludes to the aforementioned agreement, hoping in his heart, that this would have induced the institutions to prefer the path of negotiation, a circumstance legitimized by the concrete possibility of saving lives.

At this point a glance was turned to other European states, such as France and Germany, to see how they managed to reach similar agreements. There was also reflection on the moral implications of a pact, which was certainly functional in saving people, despite facilitating a terrorist activity, which would sow death in other parts of the world. A separate section dealt with Libya, whose most recent history was reconstructed, beginning with Italian colonization and the effects produced by that experience, which would manifest themselves after World War II, when Colonel Gaddafi's coup d'état decreed the expulsion of all Italians from Libyan territory and the confiscation of their property. Nevertheless, there will be many situations between the dictator and Italy in which the interests of the two shores of the Mediterranean will be intertwined. There will be talk of business, involving the Libyan leader in Italian economic

affairs and how sometimes he has even taken possession of some large companies or bought shares of some of them. In relations between Libya and the United States, it was noted how the colonel had initially tried to talk with the White House, using the mediation of Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, the bearer of a written communication, sent by Gaddafi to U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Unfortunately, these attempts would be thwarted by the political and military crisis, which erupted in 1986 after the bombing of the "La Bella" nightclub in Berlin, in which the North African regime was implicated and which caused hundreds of injuries and the death of two U.S. citizens. The White House, at that point, deliberated to strike Libya, on April 15 of that year, even trying to physically eliminate its leader. The tension between Washington and Tripoli would pass through Rome in particular when Prime Minister Bettino Craxi warned Gaddafi of an impending U.S. air strike, most likely saving his life. This version was revealed by a Libyan diplomat at a conference held at the Farnesina many years later. When Libya responded to the aggression it suffered by firing missiles at Lampedusa, which lapped the Italian island and risked including Italy in the conflict. That eventuality was, however, averted by Craxi's fear of causing several Libyan civilian casualties. The narrative continues with the colonel's gradual rapprochement with Italian governments, following the escalation of 1986, under which new political and trade treaties would be made and further sharing of economic interests would be achieved. Until the Libyan regime is overwhelmed by the "Arab Spring" and the colonel is ousted and, during a desperate desert escape after being blocked by a French missile, intercepted by rebels and lynched. The second chapter is the central one, in which the main issue of the whole study is addressed: the Sigonella crisis. It starts, of course, with the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* by four Palestinian terrorists, en route to Israel, where they plan to carry out an attack in the city of Ashdod. They are discovered with weapons in their hands, which would lead them to a radical change of plans, moving on to hijack the vessel and demand the release of fifty of their comrades, held in Israeli prisons. Since the ship is of Italian nationality, government authorities enter the field and work toward a diplomatic solution to the matter. This route also includes appealing to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, chairman of the PLO, but also to despotic regimes, such as that of Syria's Hafiz al-Assad, with whom the United States refuses, however, to deal. It will probably be this denial, which will instigate the ship's hijackers to kill Leon Klinghoffer, an American citizen of Jewish descent, who is disabled and, because of this, forced to travel in a wheelchair. It focuses, now, on the rift between the Italian government ministers, due to the American veto toward a certain type of negotiation and the lack of awareness of the crime committed on board. Craxi and Andreotti prefer, in fact, to concentrate all efforts for a peaceful conclusion of the affair. On the other hand the Defence Minister Giovanni Spadolini has contiguous positions to American ones and he does not rule out a military option to free the boat. The risk that civilians might be killed makes the line of

dialogue prevail which passes through Arafat and Abu Abbas, a member figure of the FPLP, to whom, it will become clear later, responsibility for everything is likely to be owed. An understanding is soon reached, involving the release of the passengers and the ship, in exchange for immunity of the hijackers.

Satisfaction at what is thought to be an excellent outcome is overshadowed by news of the killing of a U.S. passenger. At this point we enter the heart of the discussion, which sees the United States and Italy come into conflict, as the former demands that the murderers of one of their citizens be handed over to them, the latter rejects the request, since the crime was committed aboard an Italian ship and therefore it is up to the Italian judiciary to ascertain the facts and try the perpetrators. Dissatisfied with this response, American fighter jets intercept the Egyptian plane in flight, which is carrying the hijackers to Tunisia, and order it to land at Sigonella, Sicily. There the actual crisis unfolds, with a feverish succession of phone calls from one end of the Atlantic to the other, resulting in precise orders given to the forces on the ground. The scene is described with the valuable contribution of one of the witnesses, whose interview, given to a colleague of mine, is quoted. The landed plane was first surrounded by Italian soldiers, who intended to prevent the Americans from picking up the passengers. The antagonists did not hesitate to encircle, in turn, the Italians, threatening to intervene, until other Italian military personnel, rushing to the occasion, surrounded the Americans. Only then, the decision is made to let common sense prevail, and the Americans let the plane resume its flight, bound for Rome.

The chapter ends making explicit the diplomatic implications of the crisis which committed, on the one hand, the Italian executive to enforce its territorial sovereignty and preserve a credibility at an international level, necessary to resume the initiative in favor of a peace plan in the Middle East, of which the articulated dynamics are described.

On the other hand there is a superpower that it is forced to back down from its intentions but does not intend to lose a decisive ally such as Italy. Precisely for this reason, the Reagan administration will decide to send a letter of clarification to Craxi, signed by Reagan himself and delivered by Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead, to prevent the Italian Prime Minister from carrying out his threat to defect from the upcoming summit in New York.

The third chapter begins with this letter and a description of the relationship between Craxi and Reagan and their different ways of doing politics. The first section discusses the consequences that the Sigonella Affair had within Italian and American public opinion. In Italy, the crisis had a greater resonance and the favorable outcome of the tug-of-war with the United States with the defense of Italy's national sovereignty gave great popularity to the Italian Prime Minister. In fact, it was the moment of his consecration as a government leader. Nevertheless, after a few years he would be swept away by the Tangentopoli scandal, which would spell the end of the

so-called "First Republic" and also of his political career. In addition, it was noted how, after the crisis, the tensions between Italy and the U.S. were also reflected in other very important and sensitive issues, such as the deployment of U.S. missiles in Italy, in Comiso, which aroused many contrary reactions in public opinion. One of these was that of trade unionist Pio La Torre, a leading member of the Italian Communist Party, who organized a massive pro-peace demonstration in Sicily and only twenty-six days later was killed by Mafia. In addition to ideological motivations, the relationship of Western European Marxist parties (the Italian one was the largest one) with the Kremlin was also mentioned. The KGB, in fact, financed "Botteghe Oscure" for years so that the party would support the struggle in support of communism in Italy.

The chapter describes in depth the diplomatic efforts of Italy and the United States that led to the restoration of relations between Craxi and Reagan, starting with the remarkable letter from the American president addressed to the Italian prime minister, which began with the incipit, "Dear Bettino". Building on the reconciliation between the two leaders, the second paragraph highlights two significant events that marked the relationship between Italy and the United States in the following years. The first event concerns the proposal made by Craxi to the White House to include Italy and Canada in the G5, the group of the world's five most industrialized nations. Despite initial opposition from several countries, including the United Kingdom and France, Ronald Reagan provided support for a request that was eventually granted. On the other hand, the chapter also analyzes how the warning that Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi gave to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi about an impending U.S. air raid in 1986 was perceived by the public as a political maneuver rather than a gesture of friendship. The Cold War context is also explored with a focus on Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative and the reform process undertaken by Gorbachev, which would lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Soviet Union.

The chapter concludes with a personal description of the two leaders and a comparison between them. Reagan, an American from Illinois with European roots, who began working as a lifeguard and then became an actor. Then he switched to television and hosted the General Electric Theater, which marked his debut in politics when he gave a famous speech in favor of Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. In 1966 he was elected governor of California and, in 1980, became the 40th president of the United States. In addition, he was a staunch opponent of Soviet communism, and his foreign policy was characterized by the so-called "Reagan Doctrine," which aimed to counter Moscow's interests in the world.

During Reagan's presidency, there were instances that fell into gray areas, such as the decision to invade Grenada in the Caribbean to prevent the establishment of a pro-Soviet government and his administration's allocation of twenty million dollars to Nicaraguan "contras" to restore

a regime similar to that of the late dictator Somoza. In addition, it was later revealed that his administration sold arms to Iran outside official channels for the release of American hostages in Lebanon, and that part of the funds from the sale were donated to the "contras". Reagan admitted negotiating with Tehran but stated that he had no knowledge of the destination of the funds in Nicaragua.

These events, however, did not hurt his popularity, which continued to be high even after the end of his term. Great emotion was aroused by his statements about Alzheimer's disease, from which he became ill and which led to his death in 2004.

Bettino Craxi was born in Milan in 1934 to a Sicilian father and a Lodi mother and, after contemplating entering the seminary, joined the Italian Socialist Party at the age of 17 and made a formidable climb to the top, eventually becoming deputy national secretary. He supported socialist parties in states under dictatorship, such as Spain, Greece, Portugal and Chile. He won the party's national secretariat in 1976 and replaced the old symbol with the carnation, abandoning the "hammer and sickle". In foreign policy, his opposition to Augusto Pinochet's coup in Chile against Socialist President Hugo Allende is well known. During the "Moro case", he was one of the few leaders to stand in favor of negotiating the release of the Christian Democrat politician.

In 1984 he became the first Socialist Prime Minister of an Italian government, garnering a popular support that significantly increased his party's seats in parliament in the 1987 elections. The "Mani pulite" judicial investigation, which began in Milan in 1992, reached him. After being investigated as part of the "Mani pulite" judicial inquiry that began in Milan in 1992, Craxi managed to evade arrest by moving with his family to Hammamet. He stayed there for several years, under the protection of President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Despite his exile, Craxi remained actively involved in Italian politics and maintained good relations with Italian and foreign political figures.