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History of a diplomatic failure: how  
Italy lost Libya, from the signature of  
the Peace Treaty to the Bevin-Sforza  
Plan

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## Abstract

This thesis is going to investigate how Italian diplomacy tried to conserve Libya's possession in the years after WWII. Specifically, it will consider the years between the signature of the Peace treaty – 1947 – and the failure of the Bevin-Sforza Plan – 1949. Especially, it will do so by analysing the original documents of Italian diplomacy, published directly from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it will try to understand the decision-making process behind diplomatic actions. This work is divided in three chapters. The first one contains a brief analysis of the history of Libya, with a focus on the years of Italian domination, and then the defeat of Italy in WWII and the signature of the Peace treaty. The second chapter contain the first phase of the negotiation for the colonies, characterised by the discussion among the Four – the US, Great Britain, France and USSR – and by the concerns for Italy's future in the international field in view of the elections of 1948. The final chapter will investigate how the Fours were unable to find a solution, and the problem was referred to the UN, where Italy was able to construct a solid front to sustain its claims, but ultimately failed. Finally, the conclusion will analyse how the Western Powers behave in front on Italy, how this period influenced Libya's history and the problem of the “colonialist mentality” that many inside the Italian political elite possessed.

## INTRODUCTION

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 1970, the Libyan dictator Ghaddafi, who raised to power less than a year before, announced that the Italians in Libya shall be expelled, and their properties shall be confiscated. This did not come entirely as a surprise, as just few days before the Colonel denounced Italy's presence in the Libyan system, but still, such an extreme act was unexpected. Since 1956, when an Italo-Libyan treaty was signed to safeguard the Italian community, the two people were integrated with each other. However, in the eyes of Ghaddafi, the Italians were a reminder of the past when the country was subdued. Furthermore, they were also a memory of past made of violence and discrimination, and there were still many Libyans who remembered the *pacificazione* made by Italy, and especially by Graziani's troupes in the 30s. The very colonel lost an uncle during the colonial wars.

Italians tend to forget sometimes how harsh their colonialism was. The myth of *italiani brava gente*, while very spread in popular culture and mentality, is mostly false and inaccurate. In time, historians like Angelo Del Boca showed through documents and research the brutality of Italians. What may come as a surprise, however, is that this idea of the "good colonisation" was not only spread among the public opinion, but also among the political elites, as Ministers or diplomats. And this conviction was showed by the tenacity by which Italy tried, after its defeat in the Second World War, to conserve its colonies.

While being in reality a defeated country, Italians never saw themselves as responsible for the war, but as victims of fascism. Many years had to pass until the historian Renzo De Felice would have showed how untrue this vision was. Nevertheless, because they had helped the Allies in the *cobelligeranza* and with the Resistance, Italians expected not to be treated in the same way as the Germans or the Japanese. And to a certain extent this happened: Italy was still a State – unlike Germany, that basically was non-existent after the War – and it had still a certain degree of autonomy – unlike Japan, that was under the US protectorate. However, this did not stop Italian public opinion to feel humiliated after the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1947. This treaty was considered too harsh and unfair, and among the clause that created more resentment there was the renunciation of Italy to all its colonial possession, not only the ones conquered during fascism, but also the one

conquered before it. And among them, maybe no one was considered more important, from a strategic, economic, and political view, than Libya. This is why Italian diplomacy did not give up on them, and for more than two years it desperately tried to reclaim them, first by pleading its cause in front of the Four – Great Britain, the US, France, and USSR – and then in front of a new institution, the UN. In these two years, Italy would have shifted its position from more maximalist reclaims – the restitution of all the colonies – from more realistic one. While in the end Italy got trusteeship over Somalia, it lost Libya and, most importantly, Tripolitania, a territory that it desperately tried to obtain. And it almost did, and, as it will be possible to see, it will be only narrowly that its quest will fail in front of the UN Assembly.

This thesis is going to investigate the two years from the Peace Treaty to the failure of the Bevin-Sforza Plan, the last serious attempt that Italy made to retain its colonies. Specifically, it is going to explore the diplomatic struggle made to return in Libya. Among the reason for this choice was the importance of this territory for Italy: it was the myth of the Fourth Shore, a promised land where Italians could go to find jobs and opportunity. This propaganda, started with Giolitti, was very well alive even at the end of the Second World War, and for long-time diplomats even use it to promote claims over Libya. It was only when it was clear that using old colonialist terms was underproductive that diplomacy changed its tactics; still, these ideas were still very spread among the public opinion, both left and right.

Furthermore, the strategic importance of Libya was growing in the context of the dawning Cold War. A pivotal role in this story had the anxiety that Great Britain, but later also the US, had to ensure themselves basis in the Centre of Mediterranean. USSR was considered further and further a menace, and it was essential to avoid it to grow its influence on the Mediterranean. This was even more urgent when Great Britain was starting to lose its colonial power, especially in territories of the Middle East as Egypt or Palestine.

Finally, aside from Italy's aspirations and the Great Power conflicts, there is also a third element that has to be kept into consideration, and that is the rise of the Arab consciousness. This last element represents a novelty of the time: in fact, it was quite unusual until now to discuss on fates of countries by at the same time considering the wishes of the locals. In the case of the Arabs this was even more important because they

were forming an inter-state solidarity whose opinion had to be considered even by Great Powers such as the US or Great Britain. France particularly adverse Arab nationalism, and this is one of the key reasons why it supported Italy's claims. Moreover, Libya quickly became one of the common battles that the Arabs fought as a united front, by opposing in a way or another to Italy's returning, even if there will be some nuances. And the fact that the UN was just instituted made possible to the Arabs to make their voice heard and to obtain concrete results. Finally, one last thing regarding the Arabs: these are the years of the beginning of the Israel-Arab conflict. This alone created solidarity among the Arabs and also a sense of resentment towards the Westerns who allowed the construction of Israeli State; the fear of Libya as a "Palestine two" was constant both in the minds of the Arabs but of the Anglo-Americans as well.

This work is divided into three chapters. The first one represents an historical introduction, with a brief summary of Libya and its conquest by Italy. There are some important elements that already emerge here and are important to keep in mind for the future. First of all, Libya could hardly be defined as a country. It is in reality formed by three different entities: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. Cyrenaica is especially important, because it is there where most of the resistance against Italians was made, thanks to the religious organisation of the Sanusi, able to organise the population. It was during fascism that Libya was really conquered, through brutal means that the locals would have never forget. When the Second World War broke out, Libyans helped the British in the Northern Africa front: it is in this occasion that the British Foreign Minister Eden vowed that Cyrenaica would have not fall again into Italian hands. When the war ended, Italy fought to have a Peace Treaty that would have not been punitive in characters, but with little success.

The second chapter deals with the period from the Signature of the Peace Treaty to the national elections of 1948. This time is characterised by a lack of negotiation power by Italy: the fear that the Communist Party could have won the elections made the Western Allies very careful with their promises. Mirroring this, USSR showed a much more conciliant and favourable approach to the restitution of the colonies. Furthermore, this is the period when the issue was exclusively negotiated between the Four, even if there are

some “external elements”, such as the rising of Arab nationalism, that are kept in mind. While Great Britain was the main obstacle to the Italian’s request, the American lack of support – and lately openly contrast – it is also an important element to underline.

Finally, the last chapter analyse the period that went to the victory of the Christian Democrats in Italy to the failure of the Bevin-Sforza Plan. In this part the role of Italy is much more active, not only because the menace of the Italian Communists diminished, but also because the Great Four failed to find a solution and thus the question was referred to the UN. Italy was able in this context to construct a solid alliance with France and Latin American countries, that allowed it to become an important actor to be dealt with. At the same time, Italian request became much more realistic, reducing its claims to only Tripolitania. However, the Sforza–Bevin Plan eventually failed, mostly because it was an old diplomatic instrument ill-suited for the UN context. While discussion on Libya will go on for another UN Session, this is the end of Italian struggle to retain the colonies; even more, Italy is going to become one of the supporters of independence.

Finally, some conclusion will be drawn on how Italian diplomacy struggle to understand the new world that was rising, and how much complicated was its relationship with Libya, something that could be argued even to these days.

A last word must be said on the methodology used for this work. This is a thesis about Italian diplomatic history, thus its main sources are the diplomatic documents of the time – aside from the first chapter, where secondary sources are used. While the problem of the Italian colonies after the war was extensively covered by many historians – like Angelo del Boca, Saul Kelly and Gianluigi Rossi, the latter’s work being probably one of the most exhaustive – it was done essentially by looking at American and British diplomatic documents. This is why this thesis will have among its focuses the different opinion that Italian diplomacy had on the matter. It will help to show the process made behind the diplomatic actions of the country, but it also helps to display the differences inside that process. Quaroni and Tarchiani, just to make a simple example, showed very different interpretation of the American behaviour, and Sforza’s decision to choose among one of this point of view had repercussion on the whole activity of diplomacy. Even diplomats and Ministers are, after all, human beings.

# CHAPTER I

## **A brief account of Libya**

Libya was considered the poorest of all the provinces when it was part of the Ottoman Empire. In reality, it was not even a province. The Libyan state is the union of three macro-regions, each with its specific culture and history: Tripolitania in the North-West; Cyrenaica in the East; the Fezzan in the South-West. To understand the historical evolution of Libya, and why it will become an important country in the Great Power's game, it is important to first look at its geography.

The Fezzan is mostly a desert area, occupying all of the West's internal areas. Thus, it has no opening to the sea. At the beginning of the XX century, it was still inhabited by an ethnically heterogenous population, composed of Bedouins, Arabs, and Black Africans<sup>1</sup>. It was a zone difficult to govern – the Turks never really managed it, and the Italians will have great difficulty – and which, because of the geographical characteristic of the territories, offered very few economic opportunities. Fezzan had no real relationships with the other two zones, and the only form of connection between the desert and the coast was given by the commercial caravans that left from Sub-Saharan Africa (Sudan, Chad etc.) for the Mediterranean and vice-versa<sup>2</sup>.

Tripolitania and Cyrenaica are the two most important regions of the country. They are precisely at the centre of North Africa and the Mediterranean. It is on the Mediterranean coast that all main cities are localised. The two most important cities are Tripoli – Tripolitania – and Benghazi – Cyrenaica. It is only here that the climate allowed some populations to become sedentary people and to develop agriculture. The control of these territories ensures an important position in North Africa and, most importantly, in the Mediterranean. They extend all over the coast and are separated by a long desert strip which arrives at the sea. It is called Sirtica and it constitutes “one of the most remarkable natural and human frontiers of the world”<sup>3</sup>. It is extended for more than 800 kilometres

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<sup>1</sup> Calchi Novati Gian Paolo, *L'Africa d'Italia. Una storia coloniale e post-coloniale*, Carocci editore & Aulamagna, 2021, pg. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> Cresti Federico and Cricco Massimiliano, *Storia della Libia contemporanea. Dal dominio ottomano alla morte di Gheddafi*, Roma, Carocci, 2012, pg. 25.



on the coast of the Mediterranean, between the populous provinces of Tripoli in the West and Benghazi in the East<sup>4</sup>. The presence of the Sirtica desert can help explain why Libya's Western and Eastern regions had such different historical and cultural experiences. It was not until the construction of the *Via Balbia* that the two territories can communicate between themselves. Finally, the two regions had completely different histories: “The first one looks to the West and is linked with Tunisia [...] the second one looks at the East, to Egypt”<sup>5</sup>.

Lastly, an important event needs to be underlined. In the second half of the XIX century, Cyrenaica was interested in the birth and the spread of the Senusis, a Muslim organisation which constituted a sort of “counter-power” to the Ottoman rule, by administrating territories that the Empire had difficulty maintaining, and by playing the role of arbiter in the disputes between tribes or between local and Turkish official. This organisation will play a huge role in the history of Libya. Just to give some examples: the chief of Libyan resistance against Italy – Umar al-Mukhtàr – and the first Libyan king – Idris I – were both part of the brotherhood.

### **From the Ottoman rule to the Fascist era**

As stated before, Libya was not a State. During the Turkish rule, it was divided into the Tripolitania *vilayet* (province) and Cyrenaica *liwa* (district)<sup>6</sup>. Fezzan was not considered in the political administration, and it was part of Tripoli's *vilayet*. The Ottoman rule was mostly symbolic, and it was seen by the Arabs as an authority that asked for much – military conscription, taxes etc. – by giving very little. Tribes and clans were the main political actors inside the region. When a dispute between tribes, or between a tribe and the central power arose, it was usually the Senusis, considered as a *super partes* figure, that played the role of the arbiter, at least in Cyrenaica<sup>7</sup>. Senusis's power was exercised through the *zawiya*, places of praying and proselytism, as well as places of power and administration. Furthermore, Senusis' principles also encourage trade and agriculture,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Breccia Gastone e Marcuzzi Stefano, *Le guerre di Libia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2022, pg. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Calchi Novati, *op. cit.*, pg. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Senusis was not present only in Cyrenaica. Many *zawiya* were sometimes present in Chad, Egypt, and Sudan. Differently from the Turkish, however, the English and French were strong enough to push back the brotherhood to keep control of their colonial territories.

thus the presence of this brotherhood was also a fuel for economic development in a very depressed area.

The Ottomans exercised a harsh fiscal regime, especially after the bankruptcy of 1875. This translated into a policy that did not allow agriculture or trade development because of the high tariffs. At the same time, most of the Public Administration was in the hand of the Turkish, with a very low percentage of Arabs. Investments in instruction were also very low<sup>8</sup>. In conclusion, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were the two poorest zone of the Empire, with the slightest exception of the two main towns, Tripoli, and Benghazi. It was this country that Italy was eager to conquer.

There are many reasons why Italy decided to pursue a war with Turkey. First of all, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were the only territories left in Africa that were not conquered by a European Power. The last free territory, Morocco, was occupied by France in 1911, with an agreement with Germany that gave the latter some territories in Central Africa and, implicitly, also gave her permission to conquer unoccupied territories<sup>9</sup>. If Italy wanted to participate in the last acts of the “scramble for Africa” it needed to be quick. And there was also the need to re-establish the international prestige of the Italian army and power: the battle of Adua – 1896 - was still a vivid memory.

Then there are domestic reasons. Giolitti was pushed by many internal forces to conquer Libya. The most influential force was that of the nationalists, that could not stand Unified Italy, the heir of Imperial Rome, to be side-lined by the other European Powers. Nationalists are also responsible for the use of the term “Libya”: this was the name of the Roman province in North Africa. And it was by recalling Ancient Rome that nationalists spoke about the opportunities on the “forth shore”: for them, Libya was a territory full of opportunity, whose poverty and sterility did not derive from the difficult geographical conditions, but from the ineptitudes of the Arabs and the Turks to administrate it efficiently. The fact that the climate changed in 2000 years and that those territories had

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<sup>8</sup> In 1881, only 0.35% of the Turkish investment in Tripolitania was made for education. After the coup of the Young Turks, an ambitious reform was implemented to improve the situation, but the Italian invasion interrupted it, and it is not possible to state whether it was successful or not (even if some progress was made). Source: Cresti and Cricco, *op. cit.*, pg.46.

<sup>9</sup> This was the so-called *Second Moroccan Crisis* that almost started a war between Germany and France.

had a complex and long history in the meantime seems of no concern to them. Just some years before the breaking of the war, in 1909, a scientific expedition of the Jewish Territorial Organisation, led by the geologist John Walter Gregory, analytically studied the territory of Cyrenaica, and it revealed the scarcity of water in the region. The mission concluded that it was not advantageous to build an agricultural settlement in Cyrenaica<sup>10</sup>. However, cold science and history are powerless in front of a demagogic speech of a D'Annunzio or a Pascoli. The latter defined the Italian colonial quest as the “*risveglio della Grande Proletaria*”. Libya, as an entity, was born, first and foremost, in the speeches of Italian nationalists. Furthermore, Giolitti was in the process to approve some of his most ambitious reforms – universal male suffrage and nationalisation of the assurances on life – that distasted to the Right-wing parties. To not see any obstacle to their approval, a trade-off was necessary.

Catholic opinion also was in favour of intervention and looked to them as a modern crusade against the infidels. Interestingly enough, one of the few catholic figures that was against the war was the Pope. Finally, there was also a part of the left that favours the war. They saw Libya as an area that could help to resolve some of the chronic problems of Italy, like emigration or the need for new territories in order to sustain the growing Italian population. This was especially true for Southern Italy, in fact, many *Meridionalisti* sustained the war by thinking that Libya's conquest could help to resolve the problems in the Mezzogiorno. However, from the left came also the only few prominent figures against the war, namely Gaetano Salvemini – who famously called Libya “*lo scatolone di sabbia*” - and Filippo Turati, together with a part of the socialist party.

After years of “*pacific penetration*” – especially thanks to the financial operation of the Bank of Rome, *Banco di Rome* – the war was formally declared, despite the will of the Ottomans to resolve the disputes used by the Italians as pretexts in a diplomatic way. The war was quickly condemned by international opinion. Furthermore, the hopes of a military promenade, where the Arabs welcomed the Italians as liberators were disappointed. The battle of Sciara Sciat – 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1911 - showed that the Arabs

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<sup>10</sup> The mission was authorised by the Turkish government in order to study the possibility for a Jewish community to settle in Cyrenaica, that it was thought it would have favoured economic development. For more details see Cricco and Cresti, *op. cit.* and Breccia and Marcuzzi, *op. cit.*

and the Bedouins saw the Italians as invaders. The Turks, while still outsiders, were at least Muslims. Religion was the first element that united the different tribes against the Italians.

Turkish resistance was so harsh that the Italians decided to enlarge the conflict to the Dodecanese. Furthermore, the Balkans states wanted to exploit Ottoman crises by eroding, even more, his control of the region. The collapse of the “Great Sick of Europe” – something that all European Powers feared – has never been so close<sup>11</sup>. That is why a very hasty peace – Peace of Ouchy, 1912 – was reached. For a little time, the chapter of the war with Turkey was closed, although the complete resolution arrived only in 1918, with the collapse of the Empire in the aftermath of World War I. However, the war with the rebels of the region was far from over: it will continue until 1932.

During WWI Italy had to maintain the little it had conquered. In 1917, an agreement was on the other hand signed with the Senussi and his leader, Mohammed Idris: the Senussi brotherhood would have maintained an administrative control on the internal area of Cyrenaica. In return, it would not try to extend its influence all over Libya. In Tripolitania, the lack of a central strong authority like in Cyrenaica had both advantages and disadvantages. On one side, it was easy to exploit the tactic of the *divide et impera* to defeat the single tribes. On the other, it was impossible to dialogue with someone, because no one had authority over all the souls of the resistance.

After the War, Italy tried the route of dialogue, by enacting Statues that were among the most liberal advanced of their time – too advanced for the other colonial power – that ensured the people of Libya fundamental rights. The Statues did not enter into force, and the road of violence was again pursued by the new Governor of Tripolitania – from 1921 to 1925 -, Giuseppe Volpi, and confirmed by the new Fascist government of Mussolini. From then on, a very harsh war between the coloniser and colonised will go on. From the Italian side, the most important figure of the period was without a doubt, General Rodolfo Graziani. For his brutal means, he will be defined by the locals as *the butcher*<sup>12</sup>. Thanks

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<sup>11</sup> Many historians see the Italo-Turkish war as the preamble of the Great War. Italian invasion was the sparkle that awaken war in the Balkan Region against the Ottomans, that ultimately destabilized the Region. However, as noted by Sergio Romano (Romano Sergio, *La quarta sponda*, Milano, Longanesi, 2015), the other powers' actions in the previous years are no less responsible for the destabilization of the European equilibrium.

<sup>12</sup> Cresti and Cricco, *op. cit.*

to his military tactics, he was able to “pacify” all of Tripolitania and Fezzan between 1925 and 1928.

But the greatest challenge was Cyrenaica. The leader of the Senussi, Mohammed Idris, left the country in 1922 and take refuge in Cairo, under the protection of the British. For many years the flew of Idris caused a rupture between the leaders of Tripolitania’s rebellion and the chief of the Senussi, who was accused of having abandoned his people. But on the field, the Senussi were able of organising a resilient resistance, under the guidance of Umar al-Mukhtar, the true “black beast” of the Italians in Libya. To defeat him, Graziani used brutal, and barbarian means, by writing some of the worst pages of colonialism. The most infamous of these acts was the deportation inside concentration camps of the population of the Gebel Akhdar, the internal zone of Cyrenaica. The numbers of the deportation are reported by Del Boca: “In twenty years the population of Cyrenaica was diminished of 60 thousand units [from 198.300 of 1911 to 142.000 of 1931]; 20 thousand for the exodus in Egypt and 40 thousand for the war, the deportation and the prisoning inside the lager”<sup>13</sup>. This brutal experience, the inhabitants of Libya are not going to forget it – but the Italians are -, as it will be possible to see later. The war was pursued with illegal means, like asphyxiant gases. The rebellion ended after the capture and execution of al-Mukhtar at the end of 1931. Finally, in January 1932 the Governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, Pietro Badoglio, could declare the end of the rebellion in Cyrenaica.

On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1934, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were reunited under one province, Libya, and the command of it was given to Italo Balbo. The Balbo’s age will last until 1940 and was characterised by many important developments, like the building of infrastructures – *via Balbia* particularly, was the first route to unite Tripolitania and Cyrenaica by passing for the Sirtica -, agricultural grants and the implantation of many Italian families, especially in Tripolitania. Before the war, in 1939, they were present in Libya “6166 colonialist families, distributed as such: 3960 in Tripolitania, with 23.919 members, and 2206 in Cyrenaica, with 15.014 members”<sup>14</sup>. These numbers are quite large, and it will be possible to see that Italians, during the negotiation for Libya, will often use them as

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<sup>13</sup> Del Boca Angelo, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1988, pg. 183. Del Boca rightly define Italian repression in Cyrenaica as a genocide.

<sup>14</sup>Ivi, pg. 266.

proof to describe the “demographic” aspect of Italian colonisation. Balbo also tried to absorb the Libyan inside the Fascist society – he instituted the *Gioventù Araba del Littorio* – however, he never had in mind to destroy the differences between colonisers and colonised. The Libyans had to be fascist and be part of the society, but always be in a subordinated role compared to the Italians. Even when littoral Libya was transformed into a metropolitan province of Italy, the Libyans were still considered B-class citizens.

When the War broke out – Balbo died in an air crash some days after the declaration – Libya became very soon an important theatre of the war. Operation Torch – 1942 – had at its core the conquest of Northern Africa to have a base to use to invade Greece and Italy – the “soft underbelly” of Europe. The battle was particularly harsh in Cyrenaica, with Axis and Allied forces that fought each other, conquering and losing territories. As a result, Italians who resided in Cyrenaica – who already were few compared to those of Tripolitania – leave the Region and went to Tripolitania or returned to Italy. Despite Rommel's genius tactics, the lack of means, the terrible state of the Italian army and the logistic difficulties doomed the Fascists. The Axis forces were defeated at El-Alamein in November 1942. On 23 January 1943, the British forces entered Tripoli. The Italian domination of Libya was over, after only 32 years.

Before going forward, it is necessary to do a little digression to understand the strategic importance of Libya for the other Great Powers. Especially, it is necessary to understand it in the design of Great Britain to build a Mediterranean sphere of influence.

### **Libya in the Mediterranean Chessboard.**

Another actor that it is necessary to introduce is Great Britain. Until the end of the Second World War, it could be considered the hegemonic power in Europe, if not the entire world. Among the pillars of this great Empire, there was the necessity of keeping “a balance of power in Europe” and conserving control over the Mediterranean. This last element became particularly important after 1869, that is the construction of the Suez Canal. From then on, control of the Eastern Mediterranean became a necessary condition to allow Great Britain and France – the other great Colonial Empire – to communicate with their overseas territories. If it also considered the fact that the Ottoman Empire became incapable of defending its territories, it is easy to understand why, in the XIX century, the

Mediterranean was interested in a “scramble” between France and Great Britain: the formerly occupied Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881<sup>15</sup> and Morocco in 1911; the latter occupied Cyprus in 1878 and established a protectorate over Egypt in 1882<sup>16</sup>.

Cyrenaica and Tripolitania remained the only Ottoman territories the West of the Suez Canal. When Italy invaded them, international public opinion condemned the war<sup>17</sup>. However, from a political point of view, neither France nor Great Britain did anything to help the Turks. France was still negotiating with Germany over Morocco, and it did not want to displease Italy because it hoped to detach her from the Triple Alliance. Great Britain, on the other hand, saw Libya's occupation by Italy as a way to counterbalance France's power in North Africa. However, Great Britain was also very preoccupied with the repercussion that the event would have on the Muslim world. In an open letter published by the *Times* and quoted by Breccia and Marcuzzi, the Muslim English-subject jurist Sayyid Amir Ali expressed his preoccupation with the Italo-Turkish war by noticing how it was seen by the Italians as a religious crusade. This was causing violent reactions in the Muslim world, and this was a danger, especially for England where “more than anyone is interested in keeping peace in the East” because more than a quarter of her subjects were Muslim<sup>18</sup>. The preoccupation to engage in good relations with the Arab and the Muslims to stabilise the Middle East and the Mediterranean is something that it will be possible to observe also in the discussion about Libya after the Second World War.

After World War I and during the Fascist era the European powers substantially accepted Italian conquest. Only with France, there were sometimes some motives of tension, because of the difficulties to establish clear frontiers between Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Chad. After all, it is nearly impossible to establish a clear frontier in a completely desert zone, where no natural barriers exist. These conflicts will be resolved in 1935 with the Mussolini-Laval agreements.<sup>19</sup>

1935 is also, however, the year when the Ethiopian campaign is prepared. Thus, it is also the starting point of a descending curve in the relationships between Britain and Italy.

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<sup>15</sup> This conquest of Tunisia by France was a harsh hit for Italy, which saw Tunisia as a natural territory to conquer, because the geographical proximity and the presence of a large Italian community.

<sup>16</sup> Cresti and Cricco, *op. cit.*, pg. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Romano, *op. cit.*, pg 117-124.

<sup>18</sup> Breccia and Marcuzzi, *op. cit.*, pg. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Del Boca, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

Since Italian Unification, Great Britain considered Italy a useful actor to keep control over the Mediterranean, and this policy was followed both during the liberal phase of Italy and after the advent of fascism<sup>20</sup>. But with the invasion of Ethiopia and his aggressive policy, Mussolini revealed his design of wanting to construct an “enlarged Mediterranean Empire” at the expense of the British. While moments of great tension were reached – British troops were deployed at the borders between Egypt and Libya – in the end, appeasement was followed. This disappointed many members of the Libyan resistance who emigrated to Egypt – among them, the leader of the Senussi, Mohammed Idris - and hoped to be helped by Great Britain to fight the Italian invader. However, they did not need to wait very long.

In 1940 Italy stabbed France and Great Britain in the back by entering the War as Germany’s Ally. This made the English consider the Italians as full-fledged enemies and created resentment inside British public opinion – but also in the political class – that will characterise the relationship between the two countries for the years to come.

When it became clear that Italy was the weak ring in the Axis scheme, Churchill proposed to attack Europe from the South – Italy and Greece – and in his scheme, the conquest of Libya was an essential point. Furthermore, British authorities were from many years in strict contact with the chiefs of the Libyan resistance, especially the leader of Senussi Idris, who found refuge in Egypt in 1922. It is in Egypt that contact between the Senusi and the British was taken. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden pronounces a speech at the House of Commons in which he promises that Cyrenaica – and only Cyrenaica – will not fall again into the hands of the Italians. The Arabs of Cyrenaica participated in the war against Italy in a much more important way than those of Tripolitania. This was because they had a unified leadership and because the memory of the brutalities of Graziani was still very vivid. Furthermore, there were some discordances between the British and the Senussi. As reconstructed by Rossi, the British were very careful in promising independence to Libya. Eden only stated that Cyrenaica would not fall again under the Italian hands but did not specify if Cyrenaica would have been under the control of another State, or even if Cyrenaica and Tripolitania would have

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<sup>20</sup> Varsori Antonio, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2022., pg. 21-22.



been reunited under one flag. The British cared about having an allied regime in Cyrenaica, especially for military reasons: in some years, they had to retire their troops from Egypt, and they needed a territory near the Middle East and in the Eastern Mediterranean to exercise their influence over those territories. It was even proposed by some members of the *Colonial Office* to transform Cyrenaica into an autonomous province of Egypt.

As far as the Americans were concerned, they did not have a clear idea of the asset to give to the Italian colonies at the time of the war. It is in this period, however, that the Atlantic Charter – 1941 – and the concept of trusteeship came into being. According to this project, States that were not able to govern themselves would have been administered by an International Commission, which would have helped them in the construction of State structure to make them independent. When Eden, the British Foreign Minister, heard about the project at the Quebec conference, “he said to Hull that ‘I do not like it very much’ and that the word independence, particularly, was very scared for him”<sup>21</sup>

Taking control of Libya was thus very important for war operations. However, aside from military motives, there were also political reasons why Churchill wanted to bring the war to North Africa:

- The conquest of the Italian colonies was a way for Churchill to establish British influence on the Mediterranean, that is, an area whose control was necessary to keep the Empire – which was facing a deep crisis – together.
- Invading Europe from the South was also a way to keep Russian outside the Mediterranean and the Balkans. Stalin was already at the time showing signs of wanting to extend Russian influence as much as possible. Stalin wanted an opening on the German front – like France – and not on the Southern flank. This would however risk allowing the Red Army to extend its control all over Eastern Europe and the Balkans while the British and Americans were busy fighting in France. This was a risk that Churchill was not ready to take.

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<sup>21</sup> Rossi Gianluigi. *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza (1941-1949)*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, pg. 37.

## **From the British Military Administration (BMA) to the London Conference**

After the liberation of Tripoli, the British installed a Military Administration on Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. While the relationship between the Italian and the Arab communities remained incredibly stable, the British government spoils the Italians of all those privileged that they enjoyed in the past. The armistice of the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, the co-belligerency, the Resistance, the end of the War: nothing changed the punitive character of the British administration towards the Italians who resided in Libya.

Cyrenaica was also under British control, while the administration of Fezzan was entrusted to the French. The goal of the different administrations was “care and maintenance” until their settlement was decided after the end of the war. The armistice did not contain any precise provision on the future of the Italian colonies. However, inside the anti-fascist entourage, the narration that Italy deserved to retain their pre-fascist colonies because they had been efficiently administrated was starting to circulate in all the political parties, from the right to the left. Some examples of people who declared themselves in favour of the restitution of the prefascist colonies to Italy are Sforza, Salvemini, Don Luigi Sturzo, Benedetto Croce, and Bonomi<sup>22</sup>. When Eden stated in the House of Commons that the Italian Empire was lost forever, the reaction of the Italian public opinion was violent.

The British were the ones who had the strongest opinion against the return of Libya and the other colonies to Italy. The only possibility that was taken into consideration was Italy's participation in an international trusteeship for – and only – Tripolitania.

The Three Greats started to seriously discuss the situation of Libya at the Potsdam Conference. The British position was that in Cyrenaica a friendly State, ruled by Mohammed Idris – who returned to Cyrenaica in 1944 and whose enthusiastic welcoming by the Arabs convinced the British that the best solution for a stable Cyrenaica would have been to make him rule – was the best solution. Much more nuanced was the analysis for Tripolitania: here there was not a central power like the Senussi to whom concede independence. In the Arundell rapport – which spoke of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica as two different countries- it was underlined the necessity to install British influence over

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<sup>22</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 57-62.

Cyrenaica and to avoid Tripolitania could have fallen into a “hostile country” hand – the reference was probably to the USSR<sup>23</sup>. The possibility to give back the colony to Italy was considered, but only under certain strict conditions, and only *in extremis*. There was the risk that the return of Italians would have caused a violent rebellion<sup>24</sup>.

The Soviets, on the other hand, started to sustain the hypothesis that the Italian colonies should have been administrated by an international trusteeship. This was in line also with the American theses, and their wish to create an administration in line with the principles of the newly drafted Atlantic Charter. However, the Soviets sustained that the administration should have been exercised only by one country, and not by a Commission composed of members of different nations. This was not well seen by the British, who feared that, by using this position, the Soviets could ask for the administration of a Colony to use it as a military base. The Soviets, on the other hand, accused the British of imperialism. The Americans tried to mediate between the two positions, but in the end, nothing was decided, and the decision was postponed to the Conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which had the duty of drafting different Peace Treaties, including Italy.

The London Conference saw the participation of the Three Greats, plus France and China, and the voices of the interested Governments, like Italy, were listened to. However, also this Conference will not resolve the problem of Libya. France, first of all, made clear that she considered Fezzan as an important territory, and she was interested in keeping it. This was because it was an area that would have helped to reunite the France colonial possession of Tunisia and Algeria with those of Chad. In return, France was ready to accept the return of Italy to Tripolitania and even Cyrenaica. De Gaulle would have told to Pietro Nenni that “I prefer the Italians in the Mediterranean instead of the English, the Arabs, the Russians”<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> “Future of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Middle East” quoted by Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 82.

<sup>24</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 87.

<sup>25</sup> “Nenni Pietro, *I nodi della politica estera italiana*, Milano, Sugarco, 1974” quoted by Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 146.

The Americans still favoured the creation of an international trusteeship under the administration of the UN until they could become independent. Section III of the *memorandum* of September 14, spoke of an independent Libya after a period of 10 years and a multinational Commission. There are several reasons why the Americans decided to be against the return of the Italians<sup>26</sup>. First of all, they thought that the Italian nation proved inefficient in the administration of Libya; furthermore, the country was now in a deep political and economic crisis and would not have the means to administrate not even Tripolitania. But the main reason was the fear of the Soviet demands. Byrnes thought that, by proposing the trusteeship of a single country, that is Italy, the USSR would have asked more strongly to also have a single trusteeship for themselves – Tripolitania was the most obvious choice -, according to their thesis at the Potsdam conference. This would have risked strengthening the Soviet position in the Mediterranean and/or Africa.

The greatest cleavage was between the Soviets and the British. The new Labour Government was also initially divided on the future of the Italian colonies. Prime Minister Atlee questioned the capacity of Great Britain in keeping influence in even more territories, and also the opportunities of doing so. He thought that, in the new era of nuclear weapons and aviation, keeping bases in those territories would have been pointless. But most of all, it would have been too costly.<sup>27</sup> Of a different opinion was the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bevin, who considered Cyrenaica as a strategic territory to keep British influence in the Middle East and the control of the Mediterranean. In the end, the line of the Foreign Minister was followed by the British during the Conference: the precise request would have been a British trusteeship over Cyrenaica, while the idea of an Italian trusteeship over Tripolitania was considered feasible only after having looked at the opinion of the Arabs<sup>28</sup>.

The real earthquake of the London Conference was when Molotov requested a single trusteeship over Tripolitania. The official reason was that USSR suffered because of the Italian invasion, and it was only right that compensation was given. The specific reason why Tripolitania was asked was because the USSR needed a base in the Mediterranean

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<sup>26</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 110-111.

<sup>27</sup> “Future of the Italian Colonies, Memorandum of Atlee of January 1<sup>st</sup> 1945”, quoted by Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 127.

<sup>28</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 128 .

for her cargo ship, to help her to strengthen her trade. However, it was not difficult to see in this proposal also military and strategic reasons in order to have a foothold in the Mediterranean. This was unacceptable to the English, who saw this area as under their influence. Molotov, on his side, accused the British of hypocrisy and imperialism: he stated that Great Britain and the United States already have military bases all around the world. Why could the USSR not have them too? Bevin replied that the British never asked something about Eastern Europe, that they understood was under the Russian umbrella, so it was no sense for the Russians to ask something in the Mediterranean. The Americans sustained the British against the Soviets' demands. Bevin even started to align himself with the American project: compared to having the Soviets in the Mediterranean, even an international trusteeship was better. But in the end, a compromise was not reached – with great relief of Bevin. The problem was rescheduled for the next conference, that of Paris.

The Italian action in both conferences was basically inexistent. The only important event was the De Gasperi trip to London to speak with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in brief encounters, and only limited to the Trieste problem<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, during the London Conference, Egypt and the Arab League sustained the option for a Libyan referendum – so, all of Libya - in which the population could have decided to either be an autonomous province of Egypt or an independent Country. Idris, on his side, did not like the proposal very much, because he thought that this would have caused him to be dependent on Egypt. Furthermore, he stated to sustain the idea of an Emirate that would have not only comprises Cyrenaica but also Tripolitania and Fezzan. However, Italian, Egyptian, and Libyan opinions were on the background compared to those of the Greats.

In the session of the Deputy delegates no substantial result was reached. The only novelty was represented by the proposal of the British delegate to give the temporary administration of the colonies to the Four (*guardianship*) until Italy would have renounced them in the Peace Treaty. The proposal was however rejected by the other delegates<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Ivi, pp. 137-138.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, pg. 173.

## **From the Paris Conference to the Peace Treaty**

The question of Libya was thus discussed during the Paris Conference. The first to propose a new course of action was Molotov. He suggested reuniting the French project of Italy's return to Libya with the American idea of trusteeship, by conceiving a dual trusteeship. The Italian colonies would have been administrated by one of the big Four plus Italy. Tripolitania would have been under the Trusteeship of the USSR and Italy, while Cyrenaica would have been under an Italo-British/Americans administration<sup>31</sup>. Aside from the strategic motive of having a base in the Mediterranean, this proposal was probably done to show USSR friendship toward Italy, favouring the Italian Communist Party – PCI – in the process<sup>32</sup>. Bevin quickly responded to this project by proposing the independence of Libya<sup>33</sup>. For him, it was unacceptable that Russians could interfere in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Additionally, to allow Italians to return to Cyrenaica, even together with the Anglo-Americans, would have been to disregard the word given to the Senusi and to enrage the Arab world.

It was the latter who joyfully welcomed Bevin's proposal. However, the other Greats were dissatisfied. Bidault especially was against Libyan independence. He feared that this would have created a domino effect in North Africa – that is, the French colonies – by re-lightening the wish for independence in the population of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria<sup>34</sup>. On his side, Molotov saw this proposal as a clear move of British imperialism. Byrnes, on the other hand, underlined the difficulty of this proposal to again push forward his idea of international trusteeship<sup>35</sup>.

Molotov responded to Bevin's proposal by asking to treat as a unique problem the question of Trieste and that of the colonies<sup>36</sup>. This was rejected by the English Minister of Foreign Affairs, who thus stated that the best thing to do was probably to insert in the Italian Peace Treaty a clause of the surrender of the colonies. Byrnes agreed, by stating that if a solution was not found after a year, the solution of the settlement would have

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<sup>31</sup> Kelly Saul, *Cold War in the Desert. Britain, the United States and the Italian Colonies 1945-52*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, pg. 48.

<sup>32</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 192.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, pg. 192-193.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*, pg. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 197.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*, pg. 51.

been given to the UN trusteeship council<sup>37</sup>. Both Molotov and Bidault, however, were contrary to this<sup>38</sup>. In the session of May 10<sup>th</sup>, Molotov decided to sustain the French's proposal of an Italian trusteeship of the colonies over a period of ten years. Bevin counterattacked: by revealing more than ever British aims in the region, he stated that Britain could have been in favour of an Italian trusteeship over Tripolitania, but at the condition that British's interests over Cyrenaica were protected because it was "an essential link of *imperial* communication, [and it was] vital to the continued survival of the British Empire"<sup>39</sup> and that the "Benghazi-Tobruk area meant as much to the British as Stalingrad did to the Soviets"<sup>40</sup>.

To unlock the *impasse* Byrens presented a memorandum in which he proposed to ask Italy to surrender its right over the Colonies, discuss their settlement between the Four and, if an agreement was not found over one year, to refer the question to the UN. The memorandum did not have any concrete result, and it was not well-received by the other delegation. However, it showed a side of American Foreign Policy towards Italy: it was the US that - despite common lieu that considers the Americans as friends and the British as evil - was mostly against the return of Italy to her colonies. Aside from the idealistic reason – anti-colonialism sentiment and willingness to apply the principles of the Atlantic Charter –, there were probably also logistic and political reasons. The main argument of the Department of State against the return of Italy to Africa was that the country did not have the material means to govern those territories<sup>41</sup>. If Italy was to retain its colonies, it was necessary to help her more substantially. Help that could have been even of the type of military assistance if the Arabs would have reacted violently to the Italians returning. This would have concurred to destabilise the Region even more. John Utter, the State Department investigator of Italian colonies, after having visited Libya concluded that "in order to maintain good Arab-Americans relations, the US government must insist on a solution in line with their internationalist convictions"<sup>42</sup>. The return of Italy to Libya was a risk not worth taking.

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<sup>37</sup> Ivi, pg. 52.

<sup>38</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 201.

<sup>39</sup> "Third reunion Verbal of the Paris conference, p. 334-335" quoted by Kelly, *op. cit.*, pg 54; Rossi pg 206.

<sup>40</sup> "Third reunion Verbal of the Paris conference, p. 336" quoted by Kelly, *op. cit.*, pg 54.

<sup>41</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 166.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp 62-63.

From the 15 of May to the 15 of June, the Deputy delegates were in charge of finding a possible solution – that they could not reach. When the Ministers returned to Paris, In the Session of June 20<sup>th</sup>, Byrnes proposed again the hypothesis of a general trusteeship. This trusteeship would have lasted for 10 years: after that, the Trusteeship council would have decided if Libya was mature for independence or not<sup>43</sup>. While recalling his support for the French thesis, Molotov stated that referring the solution to Italian colonies in one year was probably the best solution. Thus, the final text of the declaration of the Conference stated that: Italy was going to surrender its right over the colonies; the Four Powers will decide on the future of the colonies; an ad hoc Commission will be created to study those territories and their people aspirations; if the Four were not able to find an agreement the question will be referred to the UN General Assembly<sup>44</sup>.

During the Paris Conference, Italian diplomatic action, while intense, was pointless, if not sometimes counterproductive. Italian memorandum presented before the Conference on its position regarding the colonies- that basically stated that Italy has a right all over its pre-fascist colonies – was ill-received by all the Great Powers<sup>45</sup>. It is almost surprising how Italy showed to not consider itself a defeated country and did not consider any of the Great Powers' interests and motives. The different discussions that the Ambassadors – especially Tarchiani with US authorities and Carandini with the UK ones – reveal a general distrust of the Americans and the British towards the Italians, who in the best cases were reassured only with vague commitments. Maybe the only important event was the De Gasperi trip to Paris, where he had the possibility to meet face-to-face all the Foreign Ministers of the Four. But even by De Gasperi, no substantial result about the colonies was reached.

Finally, the decision of the Four Powers was referred to the Conference of the Twenty-one, which has the objective to draft the final text of the Italian Peace Treaty. In reality, no substantial change was made, because the Four backed up each other to avoid a discord between them after having reached a difficult compromise. From this conference,

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<sup>43</sup> Ivi, pg 232.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, pp. 240-241.

<sup>45</sup> Ivi, pg. 157-168.



however, some orientation emerged that would have proved crucial in the following years to resolve the question of Libya.

Egypt, while not being officially part of the conference, had the opportunity to express his point of view. It declared in favour of Libyan independence and presented a memorandum to modify the Egyptian-Libyan borders. Specifically, Egypt reclaimed the Jirabub oasis. Iraq, as representative of the Arab League, was in the same position as far as Libyan independence was concerned.

While being in the same position as Britain, especially in Cyrenaica, the *dominions* of New Zealand and South Africa stated that they were not contrary to Italy's returning Tripolitania. Southern African General Theron also sustained the concept that “because Italy was the only European country that considered Africa by looking at it as an outlet for his emigration, it could have also had an important equilibrium function on the racial plan”<sup>46</sup>.

Important was also the position of Brazil, as representative of all the Latin American countries. Latin America had strong ties with Italy, both because they hosted a great Italian community and because they saw Italy as one of the birthplaces of Latin culture<sup>47</sup>. Furthermore, these countries were also visited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sforza in an important diplomatic mission, that had the objective to bring Latin American countries to Italian position. The mission could be considered a successful one because at the conference of the Twenty-one Brazil was the only country that considered the clauses in the Treaty as unjust towards Italy.

Finally, it was allowed to express its positions to Italians. On August 10<sup>th</sup> De Gasperi made a speech in front of the Assembly. He said that it was not against the extension of the BMA, at the condition that also a part of Italian functionaries was involved in it and that “no request for preventive surrender of rights was asked”<sup>48</sup>. In the following days, De Gasperi also met with different foreign Ministers, but the results were scarce<sup>49</sup>. Bonomi also made a speech on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. He was on the same tone as De Gasperi,

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<sup>46</sup> Ivi, pg. 258.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, pg. 251.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, pg. 252.

<sup>49</sup> Lorenzini Sara. *L'Italia e il trattato di pace del 1947*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007, pg 80-88; Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 253-256.

but a stronger accent was put on the demographic presence of the Italians in the colonies and the good administration that was exercised on Libya and the other territories by Italian authorities. Important was however the fact that Italy asked for a *trusteeship* and not for direct control. In the end, Italian diplomacy understood that it was no sense to sustain a maximalist position and that it was better to adopt a more elastic approach.

However, all the amendments proposed by the different delegations on the Italian colonies were not adopted. In the session of New York – from November 4<sup>th</sup> to December 11<sup>th</sup> – no substantial modification was made. The decision on the colonies became Article 23 of the Peace Treaty, with this formulation:

- “1. Italy renounces all right and title to the Italian territorial possessions in Africa, i.e. Libya, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland.
2. Pending their final disposal, the said possessions shall continue under their present administration.
3. The final disposal of these possessions shall be determined jointly by the Governments of the Soviet Union, of the United Kingdom, of the United States of America, and of France within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty, in the manner laid down in the joint declaration of February 10, 1947, issued by the said Governments, which is reproduced in Annex XI”<sup>50</sup>.

Annex XI stated the same decision that was taken by the Fours in Paris: a period of one year to resolve the question among them; referral to the UN General Assembly if such a decision was not found.

What characterised the entire negotiation of the Italian colonies in the years between 1945 and 1947 was the Anglo-Soviet rivalry and their wish to control the Mediterranean. As

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<sup>50</sup> United Nation Treaty Series, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2049/v49.pdf>

stated by Rossi, the minimal objective of the USSR and the UK was that “exclude any kind of influence, direct or indirect, of the other Power”<sup>51</sup>. United States were, on the other hand, pushed also by idealist reasons – wish to see implement the UN principles with the *trusteeship* and to see disappear the colonialist empires. Finally, France was interested in the maintenance of the status quo, and that is why it opposed strongly Libyan independence.

Italy saw its positions become more and more ductile: from maximalist demands of having back the pre-fascist colonies to requests of trusteeship. However, Italy’s demands were still too much optimistic if it considered Italy’s position of being a defeated country and the strategic importance of Libya for the Great Powers, especially in a context of growing tension which can be considered as a prelude to the Cold War.

A final note must be done on the question of Libya as a unitary State or as an artificial union of three different historical experiences – Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. What can be noticed from what it was described was how the solution of a unitary State or not was the result not of a deep reflection or a study but was simply the son of the different circumstances. The UK asked for control of Cyrenaica and considered Libya as an “artificial entity”<sup>52</sup>; then the USSR asked for a trusteeship on Tripolitania; so, the UK demanded Libya's independence, to avoid Soviet influence in the Mediterranean. Even Mohammed Idris, leader of Senusi, seemed not to have a clear design: while having the aspiration to rule all over Libya, he never stated clearly for fear of enraging the British and because he was aware of the deep difference between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and the diffidence of Tripolitania’s elites against Senusi. Again, the convenience of Libya being an entity or not changed according to the different political situation, especially as far as the relation between the Great Four was concerned. Libya's only “national element” was her opposition to Italian colonialism. But once Italy was gone, would it have been possible to find a unifying element? This was not seen as a problem by any of the negotiators: all that mattered was to find the best agreement between the Greats.

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<sup>51</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 268.

<sup>52</sup> Future of the Italian Colonies and the Mediterranean Island, Brief for the United Kingdom Delegation at TERMINAL (July 1945), FO 371 U 5497/51/G 700; Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 80.

## CHAPTER II

### **The Diplomatic Action of the Third De Gasperi Government (2<sup>nd</sup> February – 30<sup>th</sup> May 1947)**

Italy was trying to reconstruct itself and regain a place in the concert of the nations while the Four Powers decided on the destiny of the colonies. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946, the Italians – men and women – voted for the Constituent Assembly and they choose Republic. The New Democratic State tried to present itself as a reborn Italy, the daughter of the Resistance that fought against fascism. Symbol of this new Italy was Alcide De Gasperi<sup>53</sup> who – since he assumed the charge of Minister of Foreign Affairs in Parri’s Government – presented himself as a reliable politician, able to regain the trust of Americans, British, Russian, and French. He will be especially able to gain the trust of the Washington government, after his visit to the American capital at the end of 1947. After his experience as Minister of Foreign Affairs, he became Prime Minister several times. At the beginning of 1947, his Second Government fell because of a domestic crisis caused by a division inside the Socialist Party. On February 2<sup>nd</sup> the Third De Gasperi Government was formed and the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs was taken by Count Carlo Sforza, a man with a long diplomatic history and strongly antifascist. While being very pro-Western, Sforza’s nomination was at the time not understood as a political choice but as a “homage to an old political man of pre-fascism” who had the ungrateful task of signing the peace treaty<sup>54</sup>. Furthermore, this Government was still based on the Alliance between all the anti-fascist parties, including the PCI. However, in his five years in Palazzo Chigi, Sforza’s work will be essential in bringing Italy into the Western camp, by allowing it to become a founding member of both the Atlantic Alliance and the European Coal and Steel Community. This was also possible thanks to the extremely competent – and politically homogeneous – Diplomatic Corps of the time. Tarchiani, who had been very close to Sforza, remained in the US – he risked being removed by the previous foreign minister, Nenni. Pietro Quaroni, famous for his cynical realism, will pass from Moscow – where it will be substituted by Manlio Brosio – to Paris, where he will be essential in the reconstruction of the Franco-

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<sup>53</sup> For more information on De Gasperi see: Piero Cavreri, *De Gasperi*, Bologna, Il mulino, 2006. See also: Pietro Scoppola, *La proposta politica di De Gasperi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1977.

<sup>54</sup> Varsori, *op. cit.*, pg 75.

Italian relationship. Quaroni was probably one of the few diplomats who understood the uselessness of the colonial revendication. It will be possible to see that its communication with Sforza represents a unicum in the diplomatic documents concerning the question. Finally, in London, there was Carandini, who had the very difficult task of maintaining good relationships between Italy and Great Britain, which were very tense at the time. Subsequently, he will be substituted by Gallarati Scotti, another liberal figure who will also be the voice of Italy during the Conference of Deputies held in London. The task of the Ambassadors in London was particularly harsh: the British still did not forget the Italians' "stab in the back"; they, on the other hand, considered the British approach as too punitive regarding Italy, and felt frustrated by a perceived anti-Italian approach that the British Military Administration seemed to have adopted in the former colonies. All these Diplomatic figures presented some similarity: they were not "professionals" but anti-fascist political figures: Tarchiani was very closed to Sforza during his exile in the US, where they militated together with Salvemini inside the "Mazzini Society" and he will subsequently adhere to the *Partito d'Azione*; on their side, Carandini, Brosio and Gallarati Scotti were all members of the Liberal Party. The only notable exception to this "politicised diplomats" was Pietro Quaroni, the only one who won the *concorso* in 1920 and thus the only one to be a diplomatic professional. While he did not adhere to any anti-fascist movement, during the regime he was "exiled" at the Kabul Embassy, in Afghanistan. The reason for this was his "realistic" intelligence, which made him difficult to comply with the triumphalist and uniform narration that the Fascist regime required from his functionaries. Even during his carrier in the Republic, he will maintain independence in his judgment, and his reports are a gem not only for their insight analyses but also because they clearly express disagreement with the Italian government's action whenever it is deemed necessary.

As far as the minister of Foreign Affairs is concerned, Sforza's major merit is to have contributed – together with De Gasperi – to re-establish Italy as an international actor with a certain degree of credibility. Nevertheless, it is also to pursue this design that the Count engage in the quest to get the pre-fascist colonies back.

Even before becoming Minister Sforza had expressed his view that pre-fascist colonies should remain in Italy's hands. In a speech quoted by Rossi<sup>55</sup>, pronounced on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1944, he had declared that Italy should have retained all his pre-fascist colonies or that, in the alternative, the only other way was that all colonies – not just Italian ones, but also that of other countries – were put under an international trusteeship<sup>56</sup>. It was a clear way to say that, despite Fascism, Italy deserved its colonies just as France and Great Britain did.

The signature of the Peace Treaty, while humiliating in itself, it also put a formal end to the occupation regime of the Allied Forces in Italy. This would have finally allowed Italians to regain some space for manoeuvre in the diplomatic field. As far as the colonial question was concerned, the issue was strictly intertwined with the problem of the Peace Treaty, its ratification, and hopes to modify it in the context of the UN. The Treaty was considered extremely unfair by public opinion and political class. In the days before the date of the signature – February 10<sup>th</sup> – many in the public opinion and inside the political world were against it; it was only on February 7<sup>th</sup> that the Council of Ministers decided to sign<sup>57</sup>. On that day, Sforza released a telegram to different Italian Embassies to inform the respective receiving governments that Italy considered this Peace as unjust, and it was ready to sign it only in the hopes for a future “true constructive peace in the world”<sup>58</sup>. However, Italy still had to ratify the Treaty with a vote of the Constituent Assembly, thus making the signature void of any legal meaning. This delay in the ratification caused a lot of irritation on the Allies' side, especially the UK. Carandini explicitly stated this in a communication with Sforza: “Our government took a courageous step but renounce its

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<sup>55</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 57.

<sup>56</sup> The speech is taken from “Carlo Sforza, *L'Italia e i problemi della pace europea, discorso pronunciato il 20 agosto 1944 al teatro Eliseo in Roma*, Roma, ed. Viola”. The precise passage is “[Le colonie] acquistate dall'Italia prima del Fascismo [...] ci devono essere conservate. [...] In un solo caso io credo che noi avremmo tutto da guadagnare, anche materialmente, a perdere le nostre colonie; se le potenze coloniali comprendessero che il vero modo di conservarle più a lungo e al meglio svilupparle sarebbe di fondere tutte le colonie di tipo analogo [...] in un grande consorzio internazionale con amministrazione mista”.

<sup>57</sup> For a clear reconstruction of the days of the signature and its impact on Italian public opinion, see “Sara Lorenzini, *L'Italia e il trattato di Pace del 1947*”.

<sup>58</sup> Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (from here on DDI), Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 48 “*Il Governo italiano, firmando un trattato che non è stato chiamato a negoziare e che sarà sottoposto all'approvazione dell'Assemblea costituente ha voluto provare che affronta gli atti più dolorosi per affrettare l'avvento di una vera pace costruttiva nel mondo*”.

positive consequences by defining its signature void at the moment in which it poses it”<sup>59</sup>. This late in the ratification – Carandini underlined – risked hurting the admission of Italy inside the UN and therefore on the possibility of managing the colonial question inside the UN forum<sup>60</sup>.

As a more specific and short-term objective, Italy tried to ensure a place in the Inquiry Commission that would have visited the colonies to know their condition and the will of the population. In days before the signature of the treaty Italian diplomacy concentrated on the participation of Italian representatives inside the Commission of Inquiry of the Four Colonies. In one of his last telegrams as Minister of Foreign Affairs on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Nenni instructed the Embassies in London and Washington to insist on the participation of Italy in Commission<sup>61</sup>. Tarchiani responded from Washington that France should be favourable to an Italian collaboration – that did not necessarily mean that they would have cooperated as full-fledged members of the commission – while the Americans did not take a “firm decision”<sup>62</sup>. The British representative Sargent, on the other hand, gave only vague reassurance to Ambassador Carandini that the British representative at the Congress of the Deputies would be in favour of Italian requests<sup>63</sup>. However, the illusion of having a representative in the Inquiry Commission will be short-lived. Just a few days after, on February 7<sup>th</sup>, Tarchiani would have informed that both French and British expressed to the Americans their opposition to the presence of an Italian inside the commission, because contrary to Article 23 of the Peace Treaty – which stated the surrender of rights of Italy on all his colonies. The British also opposed because they thought this concession would have produced a domino effect that also other countries – Ethiopia, Egypt, Dominions etc. - would have asked to participate in the inquiry<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 86. “*Il nostro governo ha compiuto un atto coraggioso, ma ha rinunciato alle sue positive conseguenze definendo priva di effetto impegnativo la propria firma nel momento in cui la apponeva*”.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, “*Se non tardiamo a ratificare, potremmo essere membri delle Nazioni Unite verosimilmente a settembre, quando cioè avremo ancora davanti a noi molti mesi e molte possibilità di intervento prima che la questione coloniale sia decisa*”.

<sup>61</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 10. “*Converrebbe insistere, nel periodo che ci separa dal 10 febbraio, perché affidamenti relativi alla nostra partecipazione alla Commissione di inchiesta che si recherà nelle colonie vengano dati*”.

<sup>62</sup> Ivi

<sup>63</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 13

<sup>64</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 30 “*Ho appreso in via confidenziale che tanto inglesi quanto francesi avrebbero espresso al dipartimento di Stato loro punti di vista nettamente contrari all’inclusione di un rappresentante italiano nella Commissione incaricata del sopralluogo delle nostre colonie in quanto*

Eventually, it was clear that Italy had to sign the Peace Treaty without the possibility to have some assurances on the colonial question. In the following contact to have insurance on the participation of Italy to the Commission, the argument that was used was nearly the same: incompatibility with Article 23 and, especially in the case of the UK, the fear of other countries asking to participate in the enquiry<sup>65</sup>.

Nevertheless, there was the hope that, after the signature, it would have been possible to modify some of the harshest clauses, maybe in the forum of the United Nations. The British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bevin, explicitly stated this to Ambassador Carandini: “[The UN is] the only site where Italy will be able to defend its interests and to pursue its aspirations”<sup>66</sup>. In this sense, the Italian diplomatic action towards the Latin American countries must also be understood. Sforza instructed the Diplomats in those countries to ask for their assistance to modify what must be considered an “unjust peace”. The Latin American countries were the ones who explicitly expressed their solidarity with Italy and were ready to take a common action inside the UN General Assembly to defend Italian interests<sup>67</sup>. The most extreme example in this regard was Cuba, which decided to conclude with Italy a separate Peace because it considered the Paris Treaty too unfair<sup>68</sup>.

However, Italy did not renounce to plead his case also in front of other Governments. In this sense, it is very interesting the meeting between Ambassador Carandini and the Indian Ambassador in London, Krishna Menon<sup>69</sup>. The report is notable because it shows the Italian arguments in favour of the maintenance of its colonies in front of a country that had just freed itself from a colonial Empire and was of course in favour of the independence of the Italian colonies. Carandini explained that immediate independence would be against both the Italian and the local interests because it would interrupt the Italian initiatives on territories and interests “that developed under our *long and efficient*

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*inconciliabile con articolo 23 del trattato di pace. Inglese avrebbero anche insistito su loro previsioni di analoghe e immediate richieste da parte di alcuni Dominions, Egitto, Etiopia etc.”*

<sup>65</sup> For an example see DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 94.

<sup>66</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 75 “*Essendo sempre stato convinto [Bevin] che nostro realismo ci avrebbe persuaso a firmare, così ha piena fiducia che Costituente darà prova stesso senso responsabilità ratificando e permettendo sollecito accoglimento Italia Nazioni Unite, sola sede in cui essa sarà in grado di tutelare suoi interessi e promuovere sue aspirazioni”*.”

<sup>67</sup> For some examples see DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 68; DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 73; DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 105; DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 140.

<sup>68</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 213.

<sup>69</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 21. The meeting occurred on February 5<sup>th</sup>.



administration”<sup>70</sup>. He then proceeded by explaining that the main objective was to prepare the Libyan and Eastern African populations for independence, but, for this purpose, Italy needed to obtain a single trusteeship on those territories. Months after, Tarchiani met the Indian ambassador in the US, Asaf Ali, and he used approximately same argument – that is, the exceptional goodness of the Italian colonial experience and the wish to accompany the locals through independence under a UN mandate<sup>71</sup>.

The failure to recognise its own crimes committed during the colonial period, is an evident demonstration of a lack of historical consciousness by Italy<sup>72</sup>. During this period, Italy never recognised them and this was shown by the insistence in which it declared that locals missed the Italian population – many examples will be given afterwards. Also, Italy’s demand for a single trusteeship of all the territories is symptomatic of the fact that it ignored – or did not consider – all the discussions made among the Four. Furthermore, Libya's status as a pre-fascist colony was debatable; while formally having been conquered in 1911-12, it was possible to see in the First Chapter that the concrete subjugation occurred during the Fascist period. Especially, it was very difficult that Great Britain would have ever renounce to its aims over Cyrenaica.

Speaking of Cyrenaica, maybe the document that mostly shows the lack of understanding of the Italian position over the problem of its – former – colonies is a communication that Sforza sent to the Embassies in Washington, Paris and London. Herein illustrated the advantages of an Italian trusteeship over Cyrenaica – that was the territory over which the British were not inclined to give any kind of concession to anyone<sup>73</sup>. In it, the Italian Minister recognised that Cyrenaica was the colony that, most of any other ones, presented

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<sup>70</sup> Ivi, “*Gli ho spiegato le ragioni [speaking of colonies’ independence] che, non solo nell’interesse italiano ma in quello essenziale delle popolazioni indigene, darebbero un carattere pericolosamente negativo ad una separazione del lavoro, del capitale, dell’iniziativa italiana da territori e interessi che si sono sviluppati sotto una nostra lunga ed efficiente amministrazione*”.

<sup>71</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 327.

<sup>72</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this “lack of historical consciousness” see: Focardi Filippo, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano: La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale*, Laterza, 2016.

<sup>73</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 78.

development opportunities<sup>74</sup>. Then he proceeded by discrediting the Sanusi – considering it as a sect that destabilised the Region. It then asked for the return of the Italian workers who were displaced during the war, to avoid Cyrenaica could return to conditions of abandonment<sup>75</sup>. Moreover, Sforza underlined the strategic advantage of having a Cyrenaica under a European nation: to leave the territories in the hands of the Senusi would have given strength to the pan-Arab movement that would have destabilised the region and it would have been against Italian and British interests. For the security of Europe, it was necessary that Italy would have retained Cyrenaica to continue the colonisation work that it already started. This could have been done also under the control of the UN. Finally, Sforza exposed demographic reasons why it was convenient to have Italy there. Cyrenaica had a scarce local population – 130 thousand people<sup>76</sup>. Thus, if it was permitted to Italian colonisers to return, Cyrenaica could have become “the most European of the Northern Africa countries”<sup>77</sup>. This was necessary to avoid the Region would fall into the hands of the pan-Arabic movement.

There is no need to analyse the deep colonialist mentality that emerges from the reading of the Document<sup>78</sup>. Instead, it is interesting to see how Italy approaches the new phenomenon of Arab nationalism compared to Great Britain and the US. Italy recognised the great strength of the movement; however, it saw it as a menace to European hegemony and it adopted an antagonistic approach. The US and the United Kingdom, on the other hand, preferred to find a more cooperative way to cope with this new phenomenon: they recognised that to keep stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, it was necessary to work with Arab nationalists. In this sense, the British obsession to keep their word with the Senusi or the Bevin’s call for an Independent Libya can be understood. It

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<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, “*Fra le quattro colonie messe in valore dal lavoro italiano in Africa, la Cirenaica per la sua situazione climatica e geologica è quella che presenta maggiori possibilità di sviluppo economico*”.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, “*Non si vede infatti quale profitto possa trarre la Cirenaica da una situazione che a poco a poco, dopo lo stato di floridezza e di progresso cui era giunta, la riporta in condizioni di regresso e di abbandono*”.

<sup>76</sup> It must be underlined that one of the reasons why the local population of Cyrenaica was so scarce was because Italy, especially through Graziani’s troupes, operated a genocide there.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, “*La Cirenaica, per la sua scarsa popolazione indigena (130 mila anime), per le possibilità che offre di accogliere una assai più numerosa popolazione europea, si presenta in condizioni ideali per poter essere trasformata, in tempo anche breve, nel più europeo tra i Paesi dell’Africa settentrionale*”.

<sup>78</sup> See “Angelo del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 368.

was impossible to return to the old colonialist world, so it was more efficient to have an independent State with a friendly government to retain a degree of control. This was the reason why the Anglo-Americans were sceptical about Italy's return to Tripolitania because they feared an angry reaction from the Arabs. Probably this is why Sforza tried to discredit here the Pan-Arab movement and the Sanusi, by presenting them as unreliable and as enemies, not as possible partners. Furthermore, this was the period that saw the birth of the Israeli state and the start of the Jew-Palestinian conflict. The Anglo-Americans both sustained the return of the Jews to Israel, something that did not like the Arabs at all. To add another reason for resentment between the Anglo-Americans and the Arab nationalists allowing Italy to return to Libya would have compromised the relationship between the two parts too deeply. Furthermore, it would have been a problem in a period when the Middle East and North Africa were becoming more and more important, with the clouds of the Cold War approaching. Finally, aside from the Arabs, Italy showed little understanding of how the world was changing, especially regards the collapse of the colonial Empires. The United Kingdom, in this sense, showed a more mature view of the problem, by recognising India's independence and by renovating the system of the Commonwealth. Great Britain, as recognised by Rossi, bravely recognised the awakening of the national consciousness of the colonial countries, something that Italy did not<sup>79</sup>.

Instead, Italy in this period pursued two goals as far as the colonies were concerned: to obtain a single trusteeship and to be part of the Commission of the Inquiry. Both of them were not reached.

In a meeting between Tarchiani and the new American Secretary of State Marshall<sup>80</sup> – February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1947 – the latter revealed that it was still studying the possible different forms of trusteeship for the colonies, while he was not against the possibilities that Italy could expose to the Commission his points of views and to give some suggestions<sup>81</sup>. This

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<sup>79</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.* pg. 304.

<sup>80</sup> Marshall substituted Byrnes as Secretary of State on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1947.

<sup>81</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 124.

was a “diplomatic” way to say to Italy that it could not participate in the Commission of Inquiry, the most it can hope for was to be an observer and to expose its position.

The French and the British were also against the equal participation of Italy in the Commission for the reason stated above. However, rumours were reported by Tarchiani – and will be then confirmed by Quaroni<sup>82</sup> - that the Quai d’Orsay was in favour of Italian participation in the works of the Commission, not on an equal footing with the Four, but as observers and with the possibility to express their points of view<sup>83</sup>. According to the US Ambassador, the Americans were in favour of hearing Italian *desiderata* when the Commission, at the end of its work, would have decided about the different forms of *trusteeship* of those territories. Americans Officials were also divided: some wanted a single trusteeship while others pursued the project of a multi-managed trusteeship. The Russian ideas were still unknown<sup>84</sup>.

France’s opening can be understood as the wish of both countries to reconstruct a mutually positive relationship. France especially felt that Italy could have been an important international ally in a world where French *grandeur* was at an end. This was the period when the idea of a Franco-Italo agreement of friendship was starting to take form<sup>85</sup>, in the form of a “*do ut des*: we made a political pact and France is going to help Italy to retake the place it deserves in the global councils”<sup>86</sup>. Italy would be again a full-fledged international actor, and France would have an international ally in a world that was farther and farther dominated by the Americans and the Russians – the British were probably considered too pro-American. In the colonial question, as it was stated in the First Chapter, this translated into the French approach of being in favour of Italy’s return to its colonies. Italy understood this and it is probably why, every time it spoke about

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<sup>82</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 183.

<sup>83</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 126 “*Stesso alto funzionario americano [...], ha spontaneamente detto essergli giunte recenti informazioni Parigi che Quai d’Orsay stava esaminando, con disposizioni favorevoli, possibilità che nostri esperti abbiano una partecipazione ai lavori della Commissione*”.

<sup>84</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>85</sup> To understand the genesis of this *entente* see Quaroni’s rapport of his talk with Bidault: DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 152.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, “*facciamo un patto politico e la Francia si impegna ad aiutare l’Italia a prendere il posto che le spetta nei consigli mondiali*”.

Libyan's revendication, it only talked of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica; Fezzan, the territory under French temporary Administration, was never mentioned. Certainly, this could probably be related to the fact that Fezzan was considered such a poor territory that it was not worth fighting for it. Nevertheless, it was more probable that Italy decided to leave that territory to not antagonise the only real ally – that is, France – that it had at the moment. After all, France considered Fezzan as an important territory to reunite its possessions of Northern Africa and Chad. This thesis seemed to be sustained by the report of a conversation between Quaroni and Mr Jean Chauvel – on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1947. At the end of the report, Quaroni wrote: “About Fezzan, not a single word on it: my interlocutor did not speak of it, and I, as agreed, did not mention it”<sup>87</sup>. Another reason why France wanted Italy to return to Libya – at least Tripolitania, the British cared too much about Cyrenaica – was to have an ally against the Arab movement. Contrary to Great Britain, France would have adopted a more “antagonistic” approach against the decolonisation movements and Arab nationalism. After all, the story of French decolonisation is much more violent than that of the British one, the war in Algeria being the most extreme example. To have Italians in Tripolitania would have meant having a European ally in North Africa and a bastion against the Arabs; furthermore, to concede independence to Libya – or a part of it – would have risked provoking a chain effect that would have created demands for independence in the Northern Africa French Territories – especially Algeria, at the time still a colony, while Tunisia and Morocco were protectorates. As noted by Quaroni, the French feared Tripolitania controlled by the Arab League, especially after the episode of Abd el Krim<sup>88</sup>.

Regarding the British, Carandini some days after communicated that Bevin was never against the participation of Italy in the Commission, at least not in a direct form - to avoid participation requests from other countries - and that this was not in contrast with Article 23<sup>89</sup>. Quaroni – March 10<sup>th</sup> - then confirmed that France sustained Italian participation in the Commission, while the Americans and the British were ready to accept Italy as an

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<sup>87</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 544 “*Del Fezzan non è stato fatto parola: il mio interlocutore [Mr. Chauvel] non ne ha parlato ed io mi sono, come d'accordo, astenuto dal parlarne*”.

<sup>88</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 163.

<sup>89</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 161.

observatory – but the latter specified that this was only possible if an equal position was given to Ethiopia and Egypt<sup>90</sup>.

As far as Russia was concerned, in a meeting between the Ambassador in Moscow Brosio and Maurice Couve de Murville<sup>91</sup>, who was there to participate in the works of the Moscow Conference<sup>92</sup>, the latter renovated French support for Italy and reveal that Russia did not have a negative attitude to Italian aspirations<sup>93</sup>.

Meanwhile, voices of conversation between Americans and the British on the concession to the US of military bases in Libya started to circulate<sup>94</sup>. These voices will eventually take concrete form some months after, on January 1948, when the Anglo-Americans decided the re-opening of the Mellaha base, near Tripoli<sup>95</sup>. Furthermore, the adjunct delegate of America for the Colonial Commission expressed a negative opinion both on the participation of Italy in the Inquiry under any form and on a return of Italy to the colonies in general<sup>96</sup>. The voices, referred to by Quaroni, will be then contradicted by Tarchiani, who also noticed that British and American relations were so tight that there was no need to ask for any special concession<sup>97</sup>. Furthermore, Tarchiani confirmed Utter as an American member of the Commission but revealed that he was in favour of hearing Italian experts on the colonial question. Even more, he asked Italy to prepare a list of people to hear and places to visit<sup>98</sup>.

It is true, however, that the fear that Britain could leave its position in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, thus living a vacuum that could be filled by the Soviets, led the Americans to reconsider their position on the Italian colonies, by becoming against both the hypothesis of Italian trusteeship and the idea of an independent Libya<sup>99</sup>. Because the United Kingdom was retiring from Egypt and Palestine's positions were weak,

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<sup>90</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 183.

<sup>91</sup> Couve de Murville was at the time General Director of Foreign Affairs at the French Foreign Ministry

<sup>92</sup> Moscow Conference started on March 10<sup>th</sup> and ended on April 24<sup>th</sup>. The objective of the meeting was to reach an agreement on the Peace Treaty with Germany and Austria – thus Italian colonies were officially not on the agenda.

<sup>93</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 227.

<sup>94</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 233 and DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n.327.

<sup>95</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 319.

<sup>96</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 233.

<sup>97</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 264.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>99</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*, pg. 88.

Cyrenaica became an essential territory in Anglo-American strategy. On its side, Britain recognised that the presence of British bases in Cyrenaica would have made useless the need to stay in Egypt and Palestine, and would have allowed it to retain influence in the Middle East, which was essential not only for strategic reasons but also for economical ones, like the presence of oil<sup>100</sup>. This worsening in the relationship between West and East made the possibility to find an agreement on Libya – a strategic territory in the Mediterranean – much harder, as Tarchiani himself noticed<sup>101</sup>. While they may have been divided on some political matters, the British and the Americans were forming a stronger alliance because of the convergence of their strategic military interests. On March 12<sup>th</sup> Truman would have started what will be known as the “policy of containment” and the Mediterranean became one of the frontiers of East-West confrontation. It is in this sense that must be understood the progressive abandoning by the Americans of the hypothesis of a plural trusteeship of the Italian colonies because that would have meant a risk of Soviet influence in the Mediterranean<sup>102</sup>.

Between the end of March and the beginning of April, the Governor of the Colonies Cerulli had some meetings in London with members of the Foreign Office. The question of the Italian colonies must be resolved, according to the Governor, by looking both at the particular interest of the population and the general picture of the Mediterranean<sup>103</sup>. He affirmed that Tripolitania was probably the most important colony for Italian public opinion essentially for demographic reasons<sup>104</sup>. He also underlined the problem of a possible UN clause that would prohibit immigration from Italy to Tripolitania except for the refugees<sup>105</sup>. For the Governor, Tripolitania's destiny was deeply tied with the problem of Southern Italy, for it was a territory that would have helped to absorb the job demand

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<sup>100</sup> See “Bullock Adams, *Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary 1945-1951*, N. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1983” (pg. 359).

<sup>101</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 264 “*Va del resto osservato che stato rapporti tra Americani e URSS, che specialmente coinvolge il Mediterraneo orientale, difficilmente consentirebbe ora negoziati su un problema tanto complesso*”.

<sup>102</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 283.

<sup>103</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 322.

<sup>104</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 268 (meeting between Cerulli and the General Governor of Sudan MR. Robert Howe) “*Mi ha chiesto [Sir Robert Howe] [...] una graduazione di preferenza tra i vari territori e i vari motivi [...] l'opinione pubblica italiana era profondamente sensibile alla Tripolitania dove ancor oggi 45 mila italiani vivono e dove tante migliaia anelano a tornare*”.

<sup>105</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 242 (meeting between Cerulli and MR. Graham-Bower, chief of the Italian Office at the Research Department of the Foreign Office).

of that area<sup>106</sup>. However, Scott Fox affirmed that the Arab population of Tripolitania would have never accepted other Italian, and neither an Italian Administration of the territory, even under a UN trusteeship<sup>107</sup>. The British delegate of the Commission Lord Hubert Miles Gladwyn Jebb clearly stated that to re-open the door of Italian immigration in Tripolitania would have risked compromising the relationships between the Arabs and the British<sup>108</sup>: the example of Israel was under the eyes of everyone.

When speaking of Cyrenaica, Cerulli affirmed that, from a concrete and economical point of view, it was the most important colony<sup>109</sup>. However, the British position was adamant and underlined that any kind of agreement between the Arabs and Italians was impossible<sup>110</sup>. The Governor underlined that the reason for the referral of the question of Italian colonies of one year was that Great Britain did not accept Molotov's proposal of an Italian trusteeship of its former colonies at the Paris Conference. Italian public opinion did not forget it and the colonial question would have been a *test case* for Italian-British relationships<sup>111</sup>. This was an attempt by Cerulli to soften the British position by using the card of Communism. It will not be the last time that Italian diplomats will use the spectrum of a Communist victory in Italy to bring the Anglo-American position closer to Italy's one. And it was certainly true that Italian public opinion was filled with Anglophobia: Italians thought that the British Military Administration applied criteria that discriminated against Italians in the colonies. The situation was so tense that the British Representative in Rome, Charles, sent a note to Sforza. In it, he offered counterarguments to show that Italians were treated without discrimination in those territories – furthermore, the British paid Italians to stay there because they represented the most competent and educated part of the population and were essential for the economy. When speaking about Tripolitania, Charles stated that the only reason why it was forbidden for new Italian immigrants to go there was because of public order: “The return of Italians [...] provoked

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<sup>106</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 242 and DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 288 (meeting between Cerulli and MR. Scott Fox, chief of the Egyptian Department of the Foreign Office).

<sup>107</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 322.

<sup>108</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 397.

<sup>109</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 268.

<sup>110</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 242.

<sup>111</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 288.



violent protest from the Arabs and a general strike was organised as a protest against illegal immigration”<sup>112</sup>.

Despite British advice, Italy tried to establish direct contact with the Arabs. This is shown by a Report of the General Director of Political Affairs Zoppi (DGAP, *Direttore Generale degli Affari Politici*) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sforza<sup>113</sup>. He revealed that contact was established between an Italian representative – he does not specify the name – and some representatives of the Arab League and Tripolitania’s leaders. They revealed their aspiration for a unified Libya, their distrust of Sanusi and Great Britain and asked Italy to support their demands. In exchange, they would have allowed Italy to have special benefits in the “economic, cultural and migration fields” and Italian residents in Libya would have been treated as equal. Zoppi affirms that on some points – that is Libya's unity and Italian-Arab cooperation to ensure the equality of Italian in Libya - Italy could agree. Another discussion was needed on other topics: Italy would have been in favour of independence, but in the long period, because it considered the Italian trusteeship essential; it could not assume an anti-British attitude; more insurance on the possibilities to favour more Italian immigration was needed. This discussion with the Arab League would have in the end arrived at a dead end, and they were characterised by reciprocal misunderstanding. Azzam Pascià, the leader of the League, sustained that Italians were ready to abandon their request for a Libyan trusteeship as far as the rights of the Italian community in that territory were ensured; on their side, Italians sustained that it was possible to arrive at a compromise to allow an Italian trusteeship, otherwise, Italy was ready to sustain the independence of the Arabs against French and British interests. This conversation will be short living – just the starting months of 1947 – both for the fear to be accused of a double game by the French and British and because the misunderstandings in the end became clear<sup>114</sup>.

Meanwhile, Carandini had some contact with the Sir Orme Sargent to prepare the forthcoming visit of Sforza, which would have taken place *only after* the treaty ratification – the Constituent Assembly still did not do it, because, officially, it was waiting that the other Powers, especially the US, did it first. Naturally, the visit would have had among

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<sup>112</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 405.

<sup>113</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 353.

<sup>114</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 300.

the topic of discussion the future of the colonies. Carandini exposed the problem both as a question that regarded the Italo-British relations and as something that regarded, by looking at the bigger picture, the entire chessboard of the Mediterranean and Middle East. American interest in the Mediterranean to contrast with the Russians and the awakening of the Arab world complicated the situation even more. This is probably why Carandini – and he is the first one to do so – stated that Italy should have concentrated its effort on the revindication of Tripolitania and Somalia – the latter being the one with the most probability of success<sup>115</sup>. He also called for the necessity of a policy towards the Arab world<sup>116</sup>, to which Sforza agreed. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also recalled to the Ambassador that it was the common interest in the Mediterranean that push Italy outside the Triple Alliance in WWI: Britain and Italy were natural allies in that zone, and this unified interest would have helped the two countries to construct a solid alliance<sup>117</sup>. Carandini was thus one of the first to notice that Italy should not ask for the entire revindication of the colonies, and, at the same time, he recognised that the Arab opinion was something to be reckoned with.

Sforza's visit, however, will not take place, at least for now. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, the Third De Gasperi government fell because of the contrast between the Democratic Christians on one side, and the Communists and Socialists on the other. The storm of the Cold War arrived in Italy as well, and the union between the anti-fascist parties came to an end.

To conclude, while brief, the Third De Gasperi Government was very active in the diplomatic field. Sforza's approach to colonies was characterised by maximalist demands, and this is probably why he failed in his objective. To ask the British to concede Cyrenaica, by knowing how much they care about this territory for a variety of reasons, only contributed to cooling the relationship between Italy and Great Britain. If the late ratification of the Peace treaty and the Anglophobia of the Italian public opinion – but also the Italo-phobia on the other side – are considered, it can be understood how difficult the diplomatic relations between the two countries were. But maybe the greatest flaw of

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<sup>115</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 425.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>117</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume V, doc. n. 439.

Sforza's strategy was the inability to understand the direction that the world was taking: the West-East antagonism, the rise of the US as a Superpower, the awoken of the Arab world that was a phenomenon that could not be stopped but could only deal with. All of this help to explain why, in three months, basically no success was reached as far as Libya was concerned. Only in the end did some diplomats such as Carandini, and most importantly Quaroni, understand that Italy should start to pursue more realistic objectives.

### **The Fourth De Gasperi Government and the preparation for the Deputy Conference (31<sup>st</sup> May – 6<sup>th</sup> October 1947)**

The main objective of Italian diplomacy at this point was to involve Italy in the Deputy Foreign Ministers Conference that would have taken place in October and that should have decided the composition of the Commission of Inquiry and begun the procedure provided in Art. 23 and in Annex XI of the Peace Treaty. In the mind of the British, the Conference should have started in March, so that the Commission of Inquiry could have started its work as soon as the Treaty would have been approved by the Italian Assembly. This haste to start the Conference by the British had different reasons: Great Britain wanted to end the Military administration of the Colonies – that cost a fortune in terms of money and materials –; it wanted to ensure as soon as possible influence over Cyrenaica, in relation of the abandoning of the bases in Egypt; mostly, it wanted to give to the Conference of the Foreign Ministers as much time as possible to find a solution to the colonies and to avoid that the decision would have referred to the UN<sup>118</sup>. While Americans and French responded positively, the Russians affirmed that they could not participate in the work of the Conference before the entry into force of the Italian treaty. Thus, the Conference was delayed to October.

Italy would have wished to expose its position<sup>119</sup> and, at the same time, to cooperate on the political and technical work of the Conference<sup>120</sup>; over the longer period, it still hoped to retain a single trusteeship on all its former colonies<sup>121</sup>. Nevertheless, there was still the problem of the ratification of the Treaty, which the Italian Constituent Assembly had still

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<sup>118</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 278.

<sup>119</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 10.

<sup>120</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 20.

<sup>121</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 20.

not ratified, while the US had already done it. Furthermore, in this period the Marshall Plan was announced and the division in blocs between East and West was becoming more and more pronounced. This translated into a change of attitude of the Soviets towards Italy, as underlined by the Ambassador in Russia Brosio<sup>122</sup>. This was probably due to the fact that, after the expulsion of the Communists and Socialists from the Government, and the announcement of the Marshall Plan, it was becoming obvious that Italy was sliding towards the West. Thus, Molotov's proposal for a collective trusteeship or even a single one to Italy to avoid Anglo-American expansionism in the Mediterranean was not a convenient option anymore. The Russian Ambassador in London, and representative at the Deputy Conference, Zarubin, lamented with Carandini the worsening of Italo-soviet's relationships; although, at the same time, he also requested that the Italian Embassy could send to the Russian materials regarding the colonies that "were not of British origins". That material would have included economic and political observations, and, according to Carandini, these memoranda could have been given not only to the Russian Deputy Representative but also to the others, to better sustain the Italian point of view at Conference<sup>123</sup>. The question was considered particularly delicate. The deputy General Director of Political Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, Jannelli declared that such memoranda were already given to the Four Powers when the colonial question was discussed in the previous Conferences; all the subsequent telegrams regarded only specific problems with the British Military Administration (BMA) and thus were only sent to Great Britain. However, in the end, Sforza decided to give Zarubin the latest memorandum that was delivered to the British Ambassador in Rome Charles, even if in a more schematic form<sup>124</sup>. This episode shows two things: firstly, Italy recognised that the breach between East and West was becoming deeper and deeper, and the Fourth De Gasperi government was certainly more pro-Western oriented – to give an *ad hoc* document only to the Soviet Ambassador was considered a "delicate question". Secondly, Sforza still did not renounce to play on both fronts regarding the colonial question, and in the end, accepted to give the Russian representative the information he required. Russian behaviour was also the topic of a meeting between Ambassador Brosio and the

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<sup>122</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 47.

<sup>123</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 198 *and* DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 219.

<sup>124</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 406. For the memorandum in question see: DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 136.

US Ambassador in Moscow, Smith. The American expressed the opinion that it would have been wiser to search for a compromise between the Four rather than bring the question to the UN General Assembly. In order to do so, it was essential to make the Soviets understand that Italian trusteeship was the best solution. The Soviet decision would have depended, to Brosio, on the judgment that USSR had on the new Arab nationalism and its relationship with England. If they thought that the Arab League was to compromise with the British and were scared of the anti-communist nationalism inside the Arab world, they could have supported Italian trusteeship as the less evil. Brosio then stated the necessity to reassure the Russians and to adopt a foreign policy that would have shown Italy as a non-hostile country towards USSR<sup>125</sup>. Sforza replied to Brosio that he should insist, in front of the Soviet government, on the “popular character of our colonisation” and the fact that “popular masses have the nostalgia of the Italian colonisation”. He also expressed the opinion that the Soviet representative in the Commission of Inquiry could help the latter to perform its task in the “larger way possible” and avoid only people selected by the BMA would have been heard. Finally, Sforza remembered that a positive attitude from the Soviets could help them to rehabilitate them in the eyes of the Italian public opinion, after the position they assumed over the Trieste question<sup>126</sup>. So, while on the Anglo-American front, Italy used security and political argument to convince its interlocutor of the opportunity to give Libya to Italy, with the Soviets it used a “popular” argument, that it was that Italy was remembered with nostalgia by the masses. Both arguments were used on both fronts, but, according to the different interlocutors, one was put on the frontline compared to the others.

Relationships with the British were still tense. In 4 memoranda transmitted to Carandini, Sforza presented the Government’s position on some questions related to the colonies:

- A critique of some aspects of the BMA, especially censorship of Italian journals in the colonies and a discriminatory policy towards Italians and their economic activities.
- The re-opening of trade relationships between Italy and its former colonies.

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<sup>125</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 415.

<sup>126</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 484.

- The re-opening of Banks, especially in Libya to finance agriculture and reconstruction. Italian banks were closed after the British occupation. Now Italy asked that these institutions could start again their normal activity and unlock the bank deposits of the Italians still resident in Libya.
- The repatriation of Italian refugees of the colonies. Specifically, in Tripolitania, the BMA authorised only the repatriation of younger than 16 or over 65 Italians, and only on a one-on-one logic. That is: for each Italian that would have returned to Libya, another would have to return from Tripolitania to Italy. Italian government protested both against the return of “adult” Italians – between 16 and 65 years old – and the repatriation according to numeric exchange. That is, for one Italian returning to Tripolitania, another should have returned to Italy. On the other hand, the BMA of Cyrenaica did not allow the return of any Italian. The Government asked that the BMA could at least concede some temporary permissions to some Italians that had economic business there so that they could settle them<sup>127</sup>.

The last point about refugees was probably the most important for the Italian Government. Since 1945, there had been a migration movement of people from Italy to Tripolitania; these were especially men who fought or were taken prisoners, but children and women were present too<sup>128</sup>. As it was already possible to note, one of the key arguments that Italy used to convince the international arena of the necessity to get back its colonies was the demographic factor. Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia were considered essential to manage the augment of the population. Even more, Italians who already inhabited those territories were so great in number that it was unfair to consider them a minority<sup>129</sup>. Furthermore, the presence of a numerous group of Italians – that is, a white European population – was presented as a positive stabilisation factor in the Mediterranean and in line with Anglo-American interests. British prudence to repatriate Italians was due to problems of public order: the BMA feared that if Italians had return *en masse*, the local population would probably have revolted. In a conversation between Sir Orme Sargent and Sforza, in June 1946, when the latter said that Italy leaving North Africa would have meant an end of

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<sup>127</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 69.

<sup>128</sup> See Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 333.

<sup>129</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 136.

European influence over that territory, the former replied “But the Arabs hate you; we cannot make war against them to bring you back there”<sup>130</sup>. But every time that the Arab element was mentioned, Sforza usually replied that the relationship between Arabs and Italians was much better than the British thought, and, at the same time, he underlined the element of “European solidarity”. In a communication with Carandini, he stated “I recognised the delicate position of Great Britain in front of the Arab World: however, it seems to me that it is useful that this does not destroy the front of European solidarity and it must be remembered that Italy acquired much more Arab sympathy than it is usually believed”<sup>131</sup>. But Sforza overestimated the sense of “European solidarity” that the British felt towards Italians – the memory of the war was still vivid. Furthermore, the British made clear that the question of the colonies had to be resolved in a negotiation between the Four Greats, Italy's point of view being secondary. This is proved by the fact that, while preparing Sforza's visit to London, the British ambassador in Italy Charles specified Bevin could not give any kind of assurances on the matter: they could discuss the problem, but their meeting was not a negotiation<sup>132</sup>. Sforza also underestimated the sense of hostility that the locals felt towards their former coloniser, especially in Libya – Cyrenaica being the most extreme case. Sforza declared to the British Ambassador Charles that, according to his sources, there was no hostility of the Arab population in Libya towards Italians, indeed the Italians who returned to Tripolitania were warmly welcomed<sup>133</sup>. But there was at least one man inside the diplomatic corps, Ambassador Quaroni, that not only protested against this view that Italians and Arabs were friends but also, in general, against the overall Italian strategy in the colonial question. In a letter to the General Director of Political Affairs, Zoppi, Quaroni stated that the British Colonial Office – which had much more power over the question of the Italian colonies than Bevin – was against Italian returning to Tripolitania, because the British were already in difficult relation with the Arab World because of Palestine and did not wish to open another front in Libya. It was possible to have a common Italo-British policy towards the Arabs, but only if Italy completely renounced Tripolitania – something that, according to Quaroni,

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<sup>130</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 303.

<sup>131</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 70 “*Riconosco la delicata posizione dell’Inghilterra di fronte al mondo arabo: ma mi sembra anche utile per essa che non infranga il fronte di solidarietà europea e a tale scopo si associa l’Italia che dal canto suo si è già acquistata più simpatia araba che non si creda*”.

<sup>132</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 86.

<sup>133</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. 136.

presented many more advantages than staying there. He stated that the Arab League would fight against Italy's return to Tripolitania with all the means. At this point, the only country that could help Italy get its colonies back was France, which had an interest in containing Arab Nationalism to avoid any kind of destabilisation in its territories in Northern Africa. As far as the Americans were concerned, Quaroni declared that they were not interested in seeing Italy back in Northern Africa, especially for their "oil interests". In the end, Quaroni affirmed that the only way to stay in Tripolitania was "against the Arabs" – with the hope of a future conciliation. Alternatively, – and this was Quaroni's idea – the only way was to recognise the end of the colonial period and to position Italy in the anti-colonialist front<sup>134</sup>. Here Quaroni demolished the Sforza's strategy in the colonial question: the negotiation with Britain, and the friendship of Arabs and Americans. Even the opportunity to conserve the colonies was put into question.

Zoppi would have answered these observations. The view of the DGAP at the Foreign Ministry reflected the opinion of most of the Italian government. In a personal letter<sup>135</sup>, he confuted the opportunity to ally with the Arab front. According to Zoppi, this would have created difficulties with the European allies because it would have implied that Italy should also sustain the independence of the French and British colonies. To the DGAP, in good and evil, European action allowed the Mediterranean Sea to acquire a certain unity that ensured the pursuit of important economic and political results. To see this unity dismantled, with the Europeans on the Northern Shore and the Arabs on the Southern, would have meant a situation of confusion in the Mediterranean. The DGAP agreed that the colonial regimes were to an end, but it could be possible to stay there like the British were doing, to safeguard their "positions and interests".

The *charge d'affaires* in London, Migone, also received Quaroni's letter and Zoppi's response. Despite being in theory a personal letter, the DGAP sent it to the London Embassy to ask for an opinion about Quaroni's ideas. Migone answered Zoppi that he was satisfied with his reasoning and declared that it was untrue that the Colonial Office was as influential as Quaroni claimed to be. He and Carandini were also against the idea to focus more on France rather than Great Britain: French support was only meaningful

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<sup>134</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. 163.

<sup>135</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. 232.



when it was sustained by the British one. Furthermore, there were common interests in North Africa both for the French and the British, thus the idea to privileged one instead of the other would have been out of place. Finally, he considered unwise the idea to present alone in front of the Arabs, because they had “the tendency to treat with the strongest”. The only way to show that Italy was an influential country was to ally with Britain in the negotiation with the Arab world<sup>136</sup>. Carandini also received assurances on British intentions in different meetings with Sargent. The undersecretary ensured that the United Kingdom was in favour of an Italian trusteeship over Tripolitania, and it was only the American proposal of a collective trusteeship that brought British projects to fail. He also affirmed that in Northern Africa France and the UK had convergent interests, and both favoured Italy’s return there. He promised to speak to the FO about the discriminatory treatment that the Italian minority received from the BMA and to study the proposal of an Italian official in Tripolitania as a representative of the Italian population<sup>137</sup>.

The dominant idea inside the Foreign Ministry was that Britain was slowly changing its position in favour of Italy, and there was optimism that the British would have understood that Italians could offer a strong guarantee for a Mediterranean equilibrium. This was also the result of the fact that according to Carandini – an opinion also shared by Zoppi – there was at the time no clear British policy on the colonial question<sup>138</sup>. Italy’s design was clarified in a note from Zoppi to Sforza<sup>139</sup>. This document deserves careful analysis, both because it will be presented to the British as an official memorandum on Italian positions – with of course all the necessary formal adjustments<sup>140</sup> – and because it shows the “bubble” in which the Italian Foreign Ministry seems to live. For the DGAP, concrete proof of British lack of a coherent policy was its actions in the Middle East, where the support to the Arab League ultimately backfired. It was possible then to convince the British, also thanks to the support of Americans and French, to have a common policy towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Africa was essential for Europe, and it must be “Europeanised” in the same way as Southern America. To this purpose, the UN

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<sup>136</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 317.

<sup>137</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 296.

<sup>138</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 296.

<sup>139</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 465.

<sup>140</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 540.

should have conceived the trusteeship. To deny Italy its colonies would have meant, politically, to reduce European influence in Africa and, economically, to lose all the investments Italy did over time. Zoppi also speaks specifically of both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica:

- Regarding Tripolitania, Italy's return could have helped France retain its position in Northern Africa, which was also in the interest of the British. The fear of the Arab reaction was a false problem: initially, Arabs reacted violently against the Italians only because of the BMA propaganda. Now the Arabs think with nostalgia to the Italian rule and, if the British were ready to cooperate, Italian return could have been possible<sup>141</sup>.
- Zoppi recognised British military needs in Cyrenaica, and thus it was ready to divide it into two parts: a western one that could have been entrusted to the Italians; an Eastern one, that contained the strategic Tobruk port, entrusted to the British. The pledge that Great Britain gave to the Sanusi was something that could have been adjusted. According to Zoppi, the Sanusi themselves were searching for contact with Italians and expressing sympathy towards Italy: they could have been thus convinced to modify their wishes towards the British. Finally, to have a consistent "white population" in the area was the best way to guarantee European interests in that territory, and the Italians were the most suited<sup>142</sup>.

There were in the end convergent interests between Great Britain and Italy. Great Britain should have finally decided to adopt favourable solutions for the Italians, also because there were at least two other Great Powers – France and the US – ready to sustain the Italian position. Italy was able to find a solution to these common problems to finally annul any reason for diffidence between Great Britain and Italy.

In this memorandum, Zoppi designed a picture of reality far from true. First of all, the Libyan question could not have been limited only to an Italo-British one, but it should

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<sup>141</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 465 *"Il nostro ritorno si può quindi preparare facendo leva sulle simpatie di cui godiamo e che vanno rapidamente rinascendo, se all'attuale amministrazione britannica vengano preposte persone idonee con precise istruzioni in tal senso, e se contemporaneamente da parte italiana, d'accordo e con l'appoggio inglese, si prendano contatti con gli arabi"*.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem, *"Data la scarsità della popolazione indigena, la relativa fertilità del territorio, lo spirito di adattamento degli italiani, la Cirenaica potrebbe rapidamente divenire l'unico Paese del Nord Africa a popolazione bianca prevalente su quella indigena"*.

have been understood in the great picture of the new division of West and East. Here, the Russian incognita completely disappear and the American behaviour is considered favourable to Italy *a priori*. While it was undoubtedly true that France was ready to sustain Italy – something that was confirmed by Quaroni many times – it was maybe the greatest illusion of the Italian diplomacy of that time to think that the US would have sustained them in their battle to reacquire the colonies. The US, on their hand, never gave any kind of assurances to Italy on this front. Aside from ideological reasons – a generally negative view of any kind of colonial regime – the US was contrary to giving back Italy its colonies because Italians were considered incapable to administrate them, due to their lack of resources, especially military ones. Furthermore, it was still not clear what Italians would have chosen in the upcoming elections: Americans could not risk that a pro-Russian or a neutralist government would possess territories strategically important as Libya. The only reason for a certain kind of optimism was a meeting between the Italian Ambassador in Russia Brosio and the American General Ambassador in Russia Smith. The latter expressed a favourable opinion on an Italian trusteeship over Libya, that would give Italy a role of stabilisation over the Mediterranean. However, Smith himself admitted that these were only personal opinions, and he did not know the position of General Marshall on the matter<sup>143</sup>. Finally, it is surprising that Italy still had any desires at all as far as Cyrenaica was concerned. In all the contacts that Italy had with the United Kingdom, it was clear that the British were maybe ready to negotiate on Tripolitania, but they had no intentions on treat Cyrenaica. Carandini understood this in one of his meetings with Sargent “England in the secret of its intentions continues to set the problem, as far as Libya is concerned, according to its old design of division of spheres of influence: Tripolitania to Italy, Cyrenaica to England”<sup>144</sup>. In that same meeting, Sargent also stated that Britain initially was in favour of Italian influence over Cyrenaica and that it was the American proposal of a collective trusteeship that made the matter more complicated<sup>145</sup>. While Sargent probably softened British behaviour toward Italy for diplomatic manners, one thing should have been clear: there was room for Italy in Tripolitania, but nothing for

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<sup>143</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 415.

<sup>144</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 296 “*l’Inghilterra nel segreto delle sue intenzioni continua ad impostare il problema, per quanto riguarda la Libia, nel suo antico disegno di spartizione d’influenza: l’Italia in Tripolitania, l’Inghilterra in Cirenaica*”.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*.

Cyrenaica. British opinion was clarified by Ward in a meeting with Zoppi himself<sup>146</sup>. The former claimed that it would have been very difficult to negotiate in such a specific way bilaterally between Great Britain and Italy “It is a delicate question that regards the Four and that comprises a lot of interests”<sup>147</sup>.

The impression that the British behaviour towards the colonies was not so crystal was shared also by the French. In a meeting between Quaroni and Chauvel<sup>148</sup>, the latter confirmed that France was ready to sustain Italy. He was ignorant about the Russian position, but it was easy to assume that they “would have sustained the contrary of the American thesis”. The Soviets would have opposed a trusteeship of Britain over Cyrenaica. Americans had probably softened their anti-colonialist positions, to avoid any kind of Russian influence over Africa. Chauvel had however had some contacts with American officials and had the impression that, according to them, Italy’s return to Africa “would have met strong oppositions from the locals and would have required us [Italy] big expenses in the military field that Italian budget was not able to sustain”<sup>149</sup>. Finally, speaking about Great Britain, Chauvel still thought that Italians were too optimistic about the British attitude towards their colonies and that the Arabs were among their major concerns. Even as far as French colonies were concerned, Britain did not have a clear position.

Quaroni also shared with Sforza some personal doubts about the position of the Four Great on Italian colonies and on Italy’s way to conduct its diplomatic action<sup>150</sup>. First of all, Quaroni expressed the opinion that the British theses were very far away from any favourable settlement for Italy; not only that, but he also declared that now the decision was not anymore exclusively in British hands, as it was one year and a half before. Quaroni then dismantled the enthusiasm that some have for a possible positive behaviour of Russia – whose real intentions on the matter were still unknown. He remembered that the first proposals of Russia were not for a single trusteeship of Italy but for a collective trusteeship of the Four plus Italy. This idea, already difficult to accept at the time, was

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<sup>146</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 641.

<sup>147</sup> *Ivi*, “È una questione delicata che riguarda i Quattro e nella quale sono coinvolti molti interessi”.

<sup>148</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 544.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem*, “un nostro [Italiano] ritorno in Africa, sotto qualsiasi forma, avrebbe incontrato una ferma opposizione da parte degli indigeni ed avrebbe quindi coinvolto noi in grosse spese di carattere militare che il bilancio italiano non era in grado di sopportare”.

<sup>150</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 563.

impossible now. For France, Great Britain, and the US would have meant that Russia had a foothold in Africa; Russians, on their side, now saw Italy as part of the Western bloc, and they would not have been so favourable to restitution to Italy of its former colonies anymore.

Quaroni was also one of the few diplomats that expressed doubts about the Americans. According to him, the US's main objective was economic penetration inside the former colonies of Europeans, and they were ready to sustain the older colonisers only if they accord them this privilege. Italian colonies were, however, more interesting from a strategic point of view than an economic one, especially Libya, also because they did not seem to have any kind of resource (sic!)<sup>151</sup>. He even reported some rumours that would give credit to Americans' intentions to ask for a mandate over Tripolitania – or even all over Libya – in order to have a stronger base in the Mediterranean. At this point, the only way in which Italy could come back was by helping the US in the “valorisation” of the territory. France was in favour of the Italians' return to North Africa, but only because they feared that, if the colonies were not given back to it, Italy would have completely embraced the Arab thesis – that will be what Italy will do after the failure of the Bevin-Sforza compromise. Furthermore, the French were probably very sceptical about a possible mass migration of Italians towards Libya and would probably not be ready for a policy of cooperation with Italy in Northern Africa. And Quaroni also noted one little detail: everyone spoke always about a UN mandate to give Italy, but “how can you give a UN mandate to a State which is not part of it?”.

In the second part of its report, Quaroni criticised the Italian propaganda *vis-à-vis* international public opinion. He criticised the excessive focus on the demographic character of Italian colonisation. French feared a too strong concentration of Italians near their colonies, and they still had doubts about the new “democratic and moderate” Italy. Obviously, though, the greatest obstacle was constituted by the Arabs, who in that period also had under their eyes the catastrophic consequences of Jew migration towards Palestine. Then Quaroni criticised the fact that domestic propaganda was conducted with old-fashioned terms: it spoke too much of Italians and not enough of the locals; the UN

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<sup>151</sup> Ibidem, “Ora, anche facendo un largo margine di bestialità dei nostri geologi, si direbbe che nelle nostre colonie non ci siano grosse risorse che possono interessare gli americani: le nostre colonie potrebbero invece – specie la Libia – interessare l’America dal punto di vista strategico”.

trusteeship was not a Society of Nations mandate. Times were changed, so it was better to speak of valorisation of the territory, temporary mandate, walk towards independence etc. New times required new formulas, even if the objectives were the same. How Italy presented its project may have been good for Italian public opinion, but not for the international one.

In the end, Quaroni concluded that the only way in which Italy could have succeeded in his objective was by “putting aside Russia” by exploiting the US-Soviet rivalry. And “the key to success [...] is, exclusively, in the form of the presentation, in a form which is consonant with the spirit of the time. If we do not do it, we will lose everything that we could still obtain; and if we do not do it, we take in front of Italy an important responsibility, which we will be called to respond to it one day”<sup>152</sup>.

### **The Conference of the Deputies and the Italian Elections (6<sup>th</sup> October 1947 – 18<sup>th</sup> April 1948)**

When the Conference of the Deputies started, on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1947, one major issue was the problem of the inclusion of the other “interested countries” in the discussion. Italy was interested in being heard, but there was the risk that, by accepting it, many other countries – especially the Arab ones – would have asked to participate. Italy also wished that the Commission of Inquiry would have had the possibility to hear the refugees who had escaped from the former colonies. However, the French advised Italy not to insist on their participation in the Conference, because that would have meant opening the doors also to many other States who had declared to have an “interest” in the matter<sup>153</sup>. However, on October 8<sup>th</sup> the Conference decided – under Russian proposal – that all the countries that had signed the Treaty of Paris plus Egypt would have been asked to expose their position on the settlement of Italian territories<sup>154</sup>. Tarchiani stated that the Americans had the intention to try to ensure that Italy could express its point of view in a “larger

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<sup>152</sup> Ibidem, *“La chiave del successo di quanto stiamo facendo è, ed è esclusivamente, nella forma della presentazione, in una forma consona allo spirito dei tempi.”*

<sup>153</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 570.

<sup>154</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 571. The countries that would have exposed their views on the matter were:

Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa, and Egypt.

way” than that of the other states and that Italian representatives in the different territories could expose their opinion to the Commission of Inquiry<sup>155</sup>. These were, however, very vague and weak promises. Once it was decided that all the signing parties of the Peace Treaty were to be heard, Sforza sent a communication to the interested Embassies to start a work of moral persuasion towards the Governments. In all of these communications, Sforza included four attached documents:

- Illustrative albums that showed the work of “civilisation” that Italy did in those territories.
- A brochure that contained information about the locals and their ethnicities.
- A memorandum that was prepared for the Paris Conference – with the necessary adjustments.
- A memorandum of economic and financial character.

The memoranda did not contain any novelty compared to what was already said. In them, Italy recalled the economic success of its colonisation, the fact that those colonies were acquired before fascism with the consent of the other European powers and that Italy would have used its position in Africa to maintain the equilibrium in the Mediterranean. For Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, Italy put the accent, especially on the demographic character of its colonisation, the fact that Italian administration knew very well those territories and the different populations that inhabited them; finally, when speaking about the Sanusi, it was depicted as a religious sect, not very worth of any kind of trust<sup>156</sup>. There is a fact that must be underlined: Italy presented memoranda that were drafted in 1945 when the political international situation was very different. Italy presenting the same position in 1947 as in 1945 shows that Italian Foreign Policy makers did not completely grasp the direction in which the world was going. Quaroni’s advice to refresh Italian propaganda and political objectives was completely ignored.

These communications were transferred to all the Embassies with the instruction to show them to the receiving Government. Sforza gave very similar commands; however, according to the country in question, he suggested putting on the front-line one argument

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<sup>155</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 574.

<sup>156</sup> See DDI, Serie X, Volume III, doc. n. A2a and A2b.

instead of another. For example, with China – an anti-colonialist power – he remembered that Italy was convicted too that Colonialism was over, that it respected the new UN principles and that it only wished to continue to accompany Libya, Eritrea and Somalia in their path towards civilisation.<sup>157</sup> This attempt with China will not give however any fruit: Nanchino would have instructed its representative at the Deputy Conference to declare that Libya was ready to be an independent country and that only a limited *trusteeship* could have been accepted<sup>158</sup>. In the communication to London, Ottawa and Pretoria Sforza Sforza instead put the accent on the common European – and Commonwealth – interests, and that it was important to maintain the solidarity between the “people of white race” and Italy was the best for this role<sup>159</sup>. Relationships with South Africa and its leader, Smuts, were particularly fruitful, and many times he expressed the opinion in favour of the Italian thesis<sup>160</sup>. Italy contacted even Yugoslavia, with whom it was in a diplomatic dispute for Trieste and the Venezia Giulia. Sforza claimed that this was the opportunity for Yugoslavia to show friendship towards Italy in a subject where the two countries had no substantial opposite interest. Sforza also remembered that the locals now looked with nostalgia at the Italian administration and that he was in favour to grant to the Inquiry Commission as much discretion as possible “as proposed by the Soviet Deputy in London”<sup>161</sup>. The Arab League also reunited during that period and discussed in depth the Libyan question, under the initiative of the Secretary of the Arab League Azzam Pacha. According to the Minister in Beirut, Alessandrini, the League would have probably sent a memorandum to the Conference, and it would have asked Libya being under the trusteeship of an Arab country – probably Egypt<sup>162</sup>. This was confirmed in a meeting between Alessandrini himself and Ammoun – General Secretary of Lebanese Foreign Affairs – who revealed that the main goal of the Arab League was to obtain an Arab country trusteeship on Libya and to fight any Italian try to obtain a single trusteeship. He also claimed that, if Arab League’s demand to be listened to on Libya would have been refused by the Four Greats, then the League had been ready to

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<sup>157</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 596.

<sup>158</sup> DDL, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 7.

<sup>159</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 581.

<sup>160</sup> For an example, see DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 420.

<sup>161</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 612.

<sup>162</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 598.



bring the question in front of UN<sup>163</sup>. Sometime later, a representative of the Arab League would have declared that friendship relations between Italy and the Arab countries would have depended on Italian behaviour over the Tripolitania question: “If Italy would have returned in Tripolitania [...] that would mean that it intend to continue in regards of the Arab countries the policy of its past governments; a policy that he considered dangerous because of the growing Arab nationalism”<sup>164</sup>.

When the Egyptian government was allowed to expose its point of view in front of the Conference, it declared in favour of Libyan unity – so no division between Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan – and asked either for Libyan independence or for a trusteeship under an Araba country<sup>165</sup>.

In the meantime, the Conference was perfecting the composition of the Commission and it was decided that the itinerary would have been Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya (date). The Commission would have left in the first days of November. The first countries to be heard would have been those with territorial interests, that is Italy, Ethiopia, and Egypt<sup>166</sup>. Meanwhile, Italian most pressed requests were to convince its interlocutors of the opportunity to hear the refugees. Cerulli discussed the matter with the American Commissioner Utter and the *chargé d'affaires* Gallman and agreed that the most efficient way to hear the refugees was to visit one or two refugee camps and listen to the representatives of the most important refugee association<sup>167</sup>. This problem was also discussed in the Bevin-Sforza bilateral meeting, during the visit of the latter in London. But, at least by looking at the verbal of the meeting, it can be concluded that the results on this occasion were scarce. The Secretary of State only said that an aspect that interest His Majesty Government was illegal Jewish immigration in Palestine<sup>168</sup>. The matter of the “Italian children” would have been discussed more in detail in a Foreign Office Reunion with Zoppi’s participation<sup>169</sup>. Zoppi stated that the total number of refugees was 45.000 units and lamented the way in which the BMA allowed people to return – that is,

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<sup>163</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 607.

<sup>164</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 757 “*Se l’Italia dovesse ritornare in Tripolitania [...] ciò significherebbe che essa intende continuare nei riguardi dei popoli arabi la politica dei suoi passati governi; politica che egli considera pericolosa in vista del crescente nazionalismo arabo*”.

<sup>165</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 753.

<sup>166</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 613.

<sup>167</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 644.

<sup>168</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 660.

<sup>169</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 667.

for any Italian returning to one of the colonies another should have returned to Italy. Grey responded that the local sentiment of the population had to be considered. Another case of importance was that of the “breadwinners” and their families, where usually the former resided in Italy and the latter in Africa – especially in the case of Tripolitania – and the familiar reunification was usually impeded by BMA rigid rules. Harvey claimed that it was possible to find a solution to this issue, but the repatriated should have been ensured a job in Tripolitania. Mallet considered with interest the request made by Zoppi of an Anglo-Italo committee that would have analysed all of these “special cases”: the presence of Italians would have annulled any kind of suspicion by Italian public opinion that the British would have acted in an egoistic way and the share of responsibility would have been divided between Italian and British. It was also necessary that the first group of people repatriated to Tripolitania were chosen with accuracy in order to avoid that they could “start trouble”. Zoppi also put on the table the problem of the Banks – only one, the Bank of Tripoli, was allowed to re-open and it was too little to have the possibility to do any kind of job – and that of the absence of any trade agreements between Italy and the BMA. Bell claimed that agreements, as proposed by Italy, were not possible for territories of which the fate was unknown, but the question could have been further analysed by the British Embassy in Rome. This was as far as Tripolitania was concerned. When Cyrenaica was however discussed in the meeting the British position quickly became rigid: it was not even allowed Italians to return to that territory to see the state of their properties and gave a negative answer to the proposal that former Italian administrators of the region could have been heard by the Inquiry Commission, the reason being that the Commission objective was to collect the wishes of the population, not of this or that government.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, Italy exposed its views to the Conference through the voice of the Ambassador in London, Gallarati Scotti<sup>170</sup>. His speech was divided into 5 parts. In the first part, Gallarati Scotti claimed that Italian colonies were acquired in a legal way with the consent of the other European Powers, but the Treaty of Paris spoiled Italy of these territories. Nevertheless, Italy was ready to discuss with the Winning Powers the matter, but it asked to remember the work of civilisation Italy made, and thanks to which Italy considered it fair to ask for a single trusteeship of Eritrea, Libya, and Somalia – naturally

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<sup>170</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 745.

– according to the principles of the UN Charter. In the second part, the Ambassador presented the situation of the Three Territories as very different from each other, thus Italy was the most suited for the job because it knew the cases in detail. In the third part, the merit of the Italian population in the development of those territories was recalled, as the fact that they were now “Italians of Africa”. To allow them to remain, under an Italian administration, would have facilitated the development of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia. The subsequent part is probably the most interesting of the speech. In it, Gallarati Scotti confuted the idea that granting Italy the colonies would have been bad because of its dire economic situation. This thesis was especially popular among Americans. Previously, the Ambassador in Washington Tarchiani enumerated three arguments that American public opinion – but also a part of the public service – used to oppose Italian trusteeship<sup>171</sup>:

- Violent use of colonisation methods both under fascism and before it.
- The incapability of Italy to administrate the colonies for financial reasons – it did not possess enough economic means to reconstruct those territories.
- Italy was incapable of administrating the colonies for military reasons – it did not possess enough troops to guarantee public order in those territories, especially Libya.

Gallarati Scotti reversed the second argument, by proclaiming that maintaining those territories was essential for Italy to economically recover. Furthermore, the production and trade of Eritrea, Somalia and Libya were based on Italian assistance, and to deprive those territories of it would have ultimately compromised their hope for development. In the final part, the Italian Ambassador asked that the Commission of Inquiry would have also heard the Italian refugees. After the speech, the American Ambassador asked for clarification on economic matters, while the Russian Ambassador requested more information about the refugees.

Probably Gallarati Scotti’s speech did not have a great impact. This is confirmed by a Quaroni communication that revealed some back scenes of the Conference. He said that Chauvel, the French delegate, was pessimistic about the colonies’ future. He suggested that Italy started to approach Americans in order to enter the Anglo-American system.

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<sup>171</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 613.

Quaroni replied that Italian public opinion was contrary to enter in any military system, to which Chauvel replied that it was only a matter of time before Italy became part of the American system, so it was better to enter now and try to acquire some concrete result<sup>172</sup>. This pessimism on the Conference was also communicated by Gallarati Scotti after a meeting with Sir Noel Charles. Furthermore, the British official heavily criticised Italian requests, by stating that Italy did not realise the full strength of the Arab movement – a “lack of objectivity”<sup>173</sup> – and that the aggressive behaviour of the Italian public opinion and of some officials did not give any kind of guarantee that Italy was able to exercise colonies’ trusteeship according to the goals of the UN<sup>174</sup>. Charles revealed that in the discussion inside the FO, the problem of Italian policy was analysed by considering its national interest, but Italian supporters had problems because of Italy’s insistence on “asking too much” and by not giving any kind of indication on what it was ready to renounce to keep the negotiation going on<sup>175</sup>. The British official also underlined the importance of the US designs in the Mediterranean and the fact that American behaviour could have been the determinant element to decide about the future of the colonies<sup>176</sup>. This piece of information was transmitted by Sforza to Ambassador in America Tarchiani, with the former ordering the latter to promote a confidential – that is, non-official – exchange of views with American to find a compromise solution between both parties<sup>177</sup>. It is possible to see, slowly, the growing importance of America compared to that of Great Britain. News on the changing attitude of the Foreign Office was also sent to Quaroni, who underlined how for the first-time space for action was found. According to the Ambassador in Paris, the reason why nothing was possible until now was that the FO saw the colonial problem not as concerning Italy-Britain relations, but the Four Greats from one side and Italy, other Countries (Egypt, Ethiopia etc.) and International Institutions (the Arab League, the UN) on the other. However, since the Conference of

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<sup>172</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VI, doc. n. 784.

<sup>173</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 30 “*Mancanza di oggettività*”.

<sup>174</sup> *Ivi*, “*Opinione pubblica, atteggiamento italiani nelle colonie e in genere di alcuni funzionari risultavano tali da non dare sufficienti garanzie che la Nazione si potesse impegnare con leale persuasione ad amministrare delle colonie secondo vera finalità del trusteeship di fronte Nazioni Unite*”.

<sup>175</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 88, “*Assicurò [Charles] che il problema delle colonie italiane era esaminato dal Foreign Office con ogni cura “da tutti i punti di vista” e con reale simpatia, ma mi accennò all’imbarazzo in cui si trovavano anche i nostri più sinceri amici di fronte nostra insistenza nel chiedere “troppo” e ad opportunità che quanto prima vi fossero indicazioni che dessero qui possibilità comprendere fin dove irrigidimento italiano fosse tale da non ammettere possibilità intese e formule compromesso*”.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>177</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 101.

London, the possibility of an agreement between the Four had become more and more remote, and Great Britain was starting to realise that it was not possible to trust too much of the Arab countries. Furthermore, Quaroni underlined that Italy could also have taken another route, that is to openly declare for the independence of all colonies<sup>178</sup> – something that Quaroni always implicitly suggested but that was becoming also very popular among other members of the Italian Government, as it was confirmed by Sforza<sup>179</sup>.

Meanwhile, an unforeseen event would have provoked a worsening of the relationship between Britain and Italy. On January the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1948, at Mogadiscio<sup>180</sup>, 51 Italians died following an anti-Italian pogrom that was caused by an attack of a Philo-Italian group on the headquarter of the Somali Youth League. The BMA was accused of having done nothing to prevent the incident or even to have favoured it. It is not here the place to discuss in detail what followed, but it must be underlined that this exacerbated the anti-British feeling inside the Italian public opinion. Italian functionaries were also worried about the impact that this incident could have had in Tripolitania, another territory where the contrast between the Italians and the locals – especially Arabs – was tense<sup>181</sup>. Gallarati Scotti also referred to Sargent that there was news that the different BMA favoured anti-Italian organisations and movements<sup>182</sup>.

While the Foreign Office affirmed that the event did not change Great Britain's attitude toward Italy, Charles lamented to Gallarati Scotti this kind of behaviour of the Italian press<sup>183</sup> and the indirect pressure that Italy was doing on other Governments to ask for support in the colonial question; according to Charles, these contacts were anti-British in character<sup>184</sup>. However, the Ambassador in London noticed that many positives came out from the meetings with the British Official: Foreign Office understood Italy's importance, especially after the failure of the London Conference and it was ready to favour its stay in Africa at least by giving to Italians some administrative function. Furthermore, Italy could have been a useful ally in creating an Anti-Soviet front to protect the

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<sup>178</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 111.

<sup>179</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 112.

<sup>180</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Mogadiscio incident see: Urbano Annalisa and Varsori Antonio, *Mogadiscio 1948. Un eccidio di italiani fra decolonizzazione e guerra fredda*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2019.

<sup>181</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 216.

<sup>182</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>183</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 148.

<sup>184</sup> Ibidem.

Mediterranean<sup>185</sup>. Generally speaking, Gallarati Scotti showed optimism on the question but urged the Italian government to give him instruction on the minimum that the Italians were ready to accept<sup>186</sup>. Sforza communicated this minimum in the following manner “We take as starting point the insurances that in the last two years of unofficial contacts were given to us: the non-British opposition to the Italian trusteeship over Tripolitania and Somalia. As far as Eritrea and Cyrenaica are concerned it is not exact what Charles says about our non ‘helpful’ behaviour, because we advanced subsequent suggestions and many possibilities of agreed solutions”<sup>187</sup>. Sforza then proceed by stating that Italy was ready for any kind of *entente*, “even the military one” to create a condition of solidarity and cooperation among all the European Nations, both on the Continent and in Africa<sup>188</sup>. This reference to an alliance probably had to do with the discussion on the Western Union, which would ultimately translate into a military alliance between France, Great Britain, and the Benelux countries. Italy would not have become part of this military alliance. One of the reasons for this was that the De Gasperi Government knew that public opinion was hostile to any kind of military pact: to enter into a military alliance just before the national election would have risked compromising the victory of the Governmental parties. Nevertheless, it is important to note that during the negotiations that engaged between Italy and Great Britain, the former used these discussions as a way to push forward the colonial question. Even more, Great Britain's rejection to give back the colonies to Italy was used as an argument to justify the fact that Italy could not join the alliance. In a meeting between Gallarati Scotti and the British Foreign Minister Bevin, the former insisted that it was uncoherent to state that Italy needed to be strong – as the British Minister asserted – and, at the same time, to impose the harsh condition of the peace treaty, including the lack of territories in Africa: “no Government in our country would have been able to make understand to the Italian people the acceptance to enter inside the Western Union in a state of inferiority, were the very problems of his existence and

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<sup>185</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, “*La mia non dovrebbe essere una semplice esplorazione preliminare per la quale però mi sarebbe opportuno conoscere quel minimo che il Governo italiano potrebbe far accettare al Paese e ciò come base per cercare di ottenere molto di più a nostro favore*”.

<sup>187</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 162 “*Noi prendiamo come punto di partenza le assicurazioni che nei contatti ufficiosi degli ultimi due anni ci sono state ripetutamente date: la non opposizione britannica ad una amministrazione fiduciaria italiana in Somalia e Tripolitania. Per quanto si riferisce all’Eritrea e alla Cirenaica non è esatto quanto dice Charles circa un nostro atteggiamento poco “helpful”, in quanto abbiamo avanzato successivi suggerimenti di varie possibilità di soluzioni concordate*”.

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem.

equalisation were not resolved”<sup>189</sup>. Western Union and the subsequent Brussel’s Pact could have been a great chance for Italy – that, it must be remembered, was a defeated country that was still reconstructing its image – to enter once again into the international system. However, from this meeting, there is almost the impression that participation for Italy was more of a weight than an advantage, and thus that the counterpart – in this case, Great Britain – should have even conceded something. It was nevertheless true that there were at least two elements that made Italy’s participation very difficult, that is the incognita of the future elections and the unwillingness of public opinion to be part of any military alliance. Nonetheless, the question of the colonies was an element that was put on the table by the Italians. In commenting on Bevin’s speech on the Western Union, Sforza stated to Tarchiani that if Italy had to enter the alliance, then the advantages had to be evident and the only problem remained open from the Peace Treaty – the colonies – had to be resolved; an American official declaration would have re-assured the Italian people on the matter, he then concluded<sup>190</sup>. Maybe Sforza thought that Americans would have considered Italy so essential to the European defence that they would have put pressure on the British. Not only that, but the Italian Foreign Minister would have probably hoped that the upcoming elections would have convinced the Western Power to become more “elastic” on Italian demands. Needless to say, this calculation was proved wrong. At that time, the British Foreign Office was ready to give Italy some concession to restore its dignity, also with the purpose of having it as a partner inside the Western Union. On February 5<sup>th</sup>, Bevin proposed a plan that would have given Italy trusteeship over Somalia and a great part of Eritrea, plus safeguarding Italian interest in Tripolitania<sup>191</sup>. On this latter territory, however, Britain refused to be in favour of an Italian trusteeship, the main reason being the fear that this would have entailed a strong Arab response that would have endangered the British chances of getting a trusteeship over Cyrenaica<sup>192</sup>. France, while reluctantly – it would have preferred to see Italians in Tripolitania – was ready to sustain the British proposal. However, the Americans refused

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<sup>189</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 168 “*Nessun governo nel nostro paese, concludevo infine, sarebbe mai riuscito a far comprendere al popolo italiano l’accettazione di entrare a fare parte dell’Unione Occidentale, in uno stato di inferiorità, ove i problemi fondamentali della sua stessa esistenza e parificazione non fossero risolti*”.

<sup>190</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 170.

<sup>191</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*, pg 94.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibidem*.

to take any decision on the colonies until the 18<sup>th</sup> April elections<sup>193</sup>. Furthermore, as was already stated, Americans did not trust Italy to be able to retain its colonies, they thought it did not have enough economic and military means. The US and Britain were also getting closer and closer in terms of strategic military objectives, and in their designs, Libya was an essential territory where it was necessary to have a military presence for the Anglo-Americans. French delegate to the Conference Massigli would have revealed this to the Italian Ambassador Gallarati Scotti, by saying that the British had no hostile opinion as far as Eritrea and Somalia were concerned and that the real problem was Libya. The main difficulty for the Foreign Office was to decide on the separation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica: inevitably the Libyan problem would have required some time to be resolved and the solution had to also consider the Anglo-Saxon interests. As far as France was concerned, it preferred to see Italians in Tripolitania to help French in their struggle against the Arab world<sup>194</sup>.

Bevin clarified to Gallarati Scotti that it was now a mistake to think that the problem could have been resolved in a bilateral way between Italy and the United Kingdom and that a similar action of persuasion had to be made also *vis-à-vis* France and the US<sup>195</sup>. Similar suggestions were also given by Sargent, who stated that Italian problems with the colonies could have been resolved only inside the Western system that was envisaged by Bevin, and that would have allowed Italy to cooperate with all the Western nations and the colonial African world<sup>196</sup>. However, Sargent also showed irritation for some Italian behaviours, namely its idea of wanting to return to the pre-war position. As far as Tripolitania was concerned, he added, it was impossible to analyse the problem without considering the strategic needs of the Anglo-Americans and the force of the Arab movement<sup>197</sup>. By commenting on the discussions with Charles and Bevin, Quaroni affirmed that the British were right by stating that Italy underestimated the Arab movement, that it was still anchored to an old concept of the colonial world and that the only way to get out of this *impasse* was to enter inside the Anglo-American military

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<sup>193</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>194</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 307.

<sup>195</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 186.

<sup>196</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 216.

<sup>197</sup> Ibidem.



system. If Italy was not ready to do so, then it was better to completely sustain the Arab thesis<sup>198</sup>.

While the discussions were substantially blocked, the USSR took the initiative. By using the momentum created by the Mogadiscio incident, with the purpose to influence the Italian elections favouring the PCI, on February 14<sup>th</sup> it delivered a *nota verbale* in which it was proclaimed that the Soviets still sustained their 1946 thesis, that was: an Italian trusteeship all over its colonies<sup>199</sup>. Probably not only the elections but also military strategic reasons influenced the Soviets, as it was claimed by the Ambassador in Moscow Brosio after a meeting with Zorin<sup>200</sup>. Italian solution would have been the best way to avoid a too strong British influence over the Italian colonies, especially Libya, where the Anglo-Americans were re-opening the Mellaha military base – near Tripoli, used during the war – without any protest from the Italians. Brosio did not exclude that this last episode could have been one of the reasons why the Soviets finally decided to take the stance they did<sup>201</sup>.

The Soviet decision put the Italian government in great embarrassment, so much so that in the communiqué that the Government realised on February 16<sup>th</sup>, the final words were that an American declaration was expected<sup>202</sup>; that would have been the only way to avert the effects that this declaration would have caused on the elections. Aside from embarrassment, Sforza also saw an opportunity: maybe, now that the Soviets had made their move, Western Powers would also do so, but favouring a positive solution for the colonies and/or other matters as Trieste. However, the Americans ultimately decided not to engage themselves in a declaration on the colonies, the justification being that they could not do any kind of unilateral declaration until the end of the work of the Commission of Inquiry<sup>203</sup>. Under this formal reason, there was another more substantial one, as Quaroni noted: Commission report would have been ready after the Italian elections. As the Italian Ambassador to Paris wrote: “The fate of our colonies is connected with the defence – and offence – of Anglo-American system, neither one nor the other

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<sup>198</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 217.

<sup>199</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 267.

<sup>200</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 275.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>202</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 272.

<sup>203</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 285.

will take any kind of engagement until they know what Italian Government will come and [...] which direction it will take in Domestic and Foreign Policy”<sup>204</sup>.

Furthermore, the French, American and British delegates to the Conference decided that interested countries could express their opinion only after the reports from the Commission had been made; this was to avoid the work of the Conference could become a stage for Soviet satellite States to make political propaganda<sup>205</sup>. Another effect of the declaration was to stiffen British position, as it was noticed by Gallarati Scotti in his meetings with Bevin and Sargent, both of them much colder *vis-à-vis* the Italian ambassador. Now any kind of British proposal, even the most reasonable, would have sounded too little to the ears of the Italian public opinion<sup>206</sup>. This latter did not help, and the Foreign Office was irritated by the anti-British feelings of Italians<sup>207</sup>, so much so that Gallarati Scotti ventilated the possibility that the British could get tired and decide to delegate the problem to the UN Assembly, something that would hardly mean a solution in favour of Italy<sup>208</sup> – at that time, it was not even part of the Organisation. The Ambassador in London suggest that the only advisable thing to do was an “intelligent, sagacious, temperate persuasive action toward Washington, Paris and London” to obtain the minimum to calm the public opinion. As far as Paris was concerned, the French Foreign Minister Bidault was maybe the only one who understood Italian Government's difficulty at the time, probably also for the similar situation – a strong Communist Party – that the two-country shared. For him, however, British and American positions would not move until the results of the election were revealed, and even in that case, if a too-strong left coalition would have emerged, little hope stayed for Italy<sup>209</sup>.

Contrary to Gallarati Scotti, Quaroni offered a different view. For him, it was necessary for Italy to abandon its rigid position and to start a conversation on the basis of the British proposal, even if vague, and it should be clear that the maximum that was obtainable was far below what Italy pretended –namely, the restitution *tout court* of the colonies. If Italians would have remained in their rigid position, the only result was that France, the

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<sup>204</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 337.

<sup>205</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 320.

<sup>206</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 301.

<sup>207</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 322.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>209</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 323.

US and Great Britain would have found an arrangement without them – Russia in this matter “counted nothing”<sup>210</sup>. Again, Quaroni seemed as the only one who was genuinely capable of realistically analysing the situation, without any kind of wish for *Italian grandeur*.

Quaroni's opinion was not listened to, as it is possible to see by looking at the memorandum that Italy presented on Libya to the Conference of Deputies<sup>211</sup>. The memorandum was divided into 8 paragraphs, and it can summarise as such:

- 1) Italy considered Libya as one territory, and its unity was in the local population's interest.
- 2) Italy was ready to cooperate with the Arabs, and in this sense, Libya must not be seen as a reason for conflict, but as a possibility for cooperation.
- 3) Italy was in favour of Libyan independence. For this purpose, it was ready to assume the UN trusteeship of the State and consult with the locals to decide the most suitable form of government.
- 4) Between Italy and the Senusi, it existed a friendly relation, and the former was ready to recognise the political role of the latter if the population of Cyrenaica would have agreed to it.
- 5) After the political structure of Cyrenaica was built, Italy was ready to negotiate with Egypt for a border review.
- 6) Italy was ready to help Tripolitania, which represented a clear example of successful cooperation between Italians and Arabs, to reach independence too.
- 7) Fezzan should be considered together with Tripolitania, with which it shares a common history.
- 8) In the end, Italy asked for a UN trusteeship all over Libya.

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<sup>210</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 337.

<sup>211</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 405.

There were surely some little elements of novelty in this memorandum. First of all, the old colonial language was abandoned in favour of a more “modern” one, that focuses on the needs of the locals – and not of the Italian community – the goal of independence and the UN mandate. The Arab element was also taken more seriously. A novelty was also in the way in which Italy referred to Senusi: if in the memorandum of 1947, the group was depicted as a “religious sect”, now the accent was put on the “friendship relations” that always existed between them and the Italians. This new way to present Italy’s position can also be found in the radio message that the Undersecretary to Foreign Affairs Brusasca addressed to the Libyan population some days before – March 7<sup>th</sup> – the Commission of Inquiry would have visited the country<sup>212</sup>. In it, the Undersecretary expressed the wish of his country to accompany Libya to independence, and he promised the country a National Parliament where all groups – Italians, Arabs, Jews, and Berbers – would have their representatives and would have allowed everyone to enjoy equal rights. Brusasca’s speech created discontent among the French, Quaroni revealed<sup>213</sup>, especially the part where he promised a National Parliament. France’s discontent could be explained by two reasons: the first was that France wished to see Italy back in Libya because it needed an ally to fight Arab nationalism, while Brusasca proposed a compromise between the Italian request of trusteeship and the Arab League’s thesis; secondly, the Undersecretary declaration was a personal initiative of which no-one was informed – not even Quaroni<sup>214</sup>. This alimeted the idea that Italians were “masters of double game” and not very trustworthy. This incident had also some repercussions, in fact, the Quai d’Orsay suspended the instruction that had to be delivered to the French representative in the Commission of Inquiry; as Quaroni noticed, this was clearly a warning. Only a month later – on 8<sup>th</sup> April –, Bidault would have stated that Brusasca’s incident was closed, but he nevertheless asked that Italians should prevent the French every time they decided to make a public declaration on colonies – the French would have done the same<sup>215</sup>. One last thing must be however underlined in Brusasca’s message: in one passage, he expressed Italy’s will to repair, whenever possible, the “wrong inflicted to some of you in the past”<sup>216</sup>. It was the first time that an Italian representative, even if

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<sup>212</sup> Oriente Moderno, Anno 28, Nr. 4/6 (Aprile-Giugno 1948), pp. 77-79.

<sup>213</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 427.

<sup>214</sup> Ibidem, “*Tempestivamente informato, avrei potuto impedire o limitare queste reazioni sfavorevoli*”.

<sup>215</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 541.

<sup>216</sup> Oriente Moderno, *op cit.*

just *en passant* and minimising, admitted that his Nation inflicted some injustices on Libyans in the past. It is something worth underlying.

Back to the memorandum, despite all the novelties the request expressed in it was as “maximalist” as possible, with a request for a single trusteeship. Without a doubt, the near election was one of the reasons why Italian representatives choose this path; however, as it was possible to see from the various documents, it is plausible that most of the Italian Government and its diplomatic corps – including Sforza – really believe in the possibility to have a sort of influence over their former colonies, or at least they thought that they had to present demands as ambitious as possible, to obtain as much as possible. Request over Cyrenaica is probably the clearest example of this behaviour, despite the fact that the British made clear many times that it was not possible to negotiate on this territory.

Nevertheless, this strategy proved useless, and Italy was not able to receive any kind of declaration as far as the colonies were concerned. The Western Allies preferred a declaration that referred to Trieste: on March 20<sup>th</sup>, the three Western Powers made a declaration in which they asked for the return of all the Free Territory of Trieste (both Zone A and Zone B) to Italy. As for the USSR was not a problem to declare in favour of the Colonies because after all they were under British administration. For the Western Powers it was easy to ask for the restitution of the FTT because it concerned mainly Yugoslavia, a Soviet ally. Even after this declaration, however, Italy did not renounce to try to make pressure on the Western Allies – mainly America – to get some kind of reassurance on the restitution of the colonies<sup>217</sup>. But again, the Westerns refused any declaration until the Commission of Inquiry ended its investigation. Some days before the elections, Chauvel answered that it was impossible to ask for a declaration now, but that it was possible to work on the long period. The necessary conditions for Italy to get some kind of colonial satisfaction were for it to be domestically secure – so, to reduce communist influence as far as possible – and to accept to be part of the Anglo-American

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<sup>217</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 474 and DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 496 and DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 497.

military system. The final decision would have been in the hands of the Americans, even if the British attitude was not of secondary importance<sup>218</sup>.

In the end, the day of the election arrived, and the results clearly favoured the DC and the Western Forces: the DC alone obtained 48% of the vote, while the Popular Front arrived just at a 30%. Italians clearly chose the Western camp<sup>219</sup>.

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<sup>218</sup> DDI, Serie X, Volume VII, doc. n. 54.1

<sup>219</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the national election and its importance for Italy see: Formigoni Guido, *Storia di Italia nella guerra fredda (1943-1978)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2016.

## CHAPTER III

### **From the aftermath of Italian elections to the referral of the colonial question to the UN (8<sup>th</sup> May- 21<sup>st</sup> September 1948)**

After the victory of the Christian Democrats and the formation of the Fifth De Gasperi Government – where Sforza was confirmed again Minister of Foreign Affairs – it was the opinion of the Italians that the Western Allies would have softened their position concerning the colonies. Now that it was clear that Italy had chosen the West, maybe all the doubts on a Soviet penetration in case of an Italian trusteeship would have disappeared. During this period Italy tried to overcome another obstacle to a possible return in Africa, by establishing a contact with some Tripolitania leaders<sup>220</sup>. Zoppi proposed that Tripolitania could have enjoyed a status similar to that of Sicily, and when it was time to reach independence, it could also have decided to stay with Italy. Furthermore, the Arab League was now considered – always by the Italians – more prone to compromise. The *chargé d'affaires* Archi stated that there was a discontent as far as Egypt was concerned following the military defeats in Palestine and that the Arab Countries were starting to consider Italy as an interlocutor to avoid a partition of Libya<sup>221</sup>. Moreover, there were tensions between the Sanusi and the Committee of Liberation of Libya, where the latter considered Idris as an obstacle to the maintenance of the unity of the country, and the former saw the Committee as the main obstacle to its aspiration<sup>222</sup>. A softer approach by the Arab League was also confirmed by Mahmud Muntasser, leader of Tripolitania's independence, who had a meeting with Zoppi<sup>223</sup>. The Arab chief revealed aspiration for independence but affirmed that there were no anti-Italian feelings in Tripolitania. Zoppi proposed to Muntasser to construct an Italy-Tripolitania association, until independence. Muntasser, while stating that he preferred the route of immediate independence and gave Italy the status of “most favoured nation” did not exclude this solution. This relationship between Arabs and Italians was seen with suspicion by the French, who, according to Quaroni<sup>224</sup>, reacted to the news of the negotiations quite coldly. The French wanted “Italy

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<sup>220</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 2.

<sup>221</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 15.

<sup>222</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>223</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 152.

<sup>224</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 228.

to return in Libya without any kind of bargaining with the locals, with its full rights restored, to re-establish its sovereign authority and to make of those territories a real Fourth Italian Shore, with maybe a prevalence of Italian population, so to interrupt the Arab continuity between Asia Minor and French Northern Africa. It is unclear how the French do not realise the impossibility to create such a policy, that they themselves have not the courage to openly patronise”<sup>225</sup>.

Aside from the Arab element, it was becoming clear to some members of the Italian political class the Four would have hardly reached an agreement on the fixed deadline – 15 September 1948. Italy started to ask to its various Embassies to hear the opinion of UN’s States to understand what would have been the possible result if the decision on the colonies was referred to the UN General Assembly<sup>226</sup>. The General Secretary of the Deputy Conference revealed to Gallarati Scotti that the most probable scenario was that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs would have approved the decisions over which the Deputies would have found an agreement while they would have referred to the UN any other question<sup>227</sup>. This problem was connected to the way in which the Annex XI was interpreted by the Great Powers: it was now considered official that the Annex should have been interpreted not as regarding the entirety of the colonial question, but only the territories considered in a separate way. Thus, it was possible to reach a compromise on certain question but not on others that would have been discussed by the UN. In view of this eventuality, Italy at least tried to obtain by the Three Western Powers – France, Great Britain and the United States – a declaration in which they affirmed to favour a UN’s solution that took into account Italian interests<sup>228</sup>. However, again the Allies did not see the opportunity to make such a declaration. It is true that, even if the Democratic forces won in Italy, the country was still considered not very trustworthy. Gallarati Scotti noted that there was a “Britannic diffidence towards the Italian affirmation of ‘being in favour

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<sup>225</sup> Ibidem, “essi [i Francesi] vorrebbero che l'Italia ritornasse in Libia senza alcun patteggiamento con gli indigeni, con pienezza di diritti, per ristabilirvi la sua autorità sovrana e fare di quei territori realmente la quarta sponda d'Italia, con prevalenza magari di popolazione italiana, sì da interrompere la continuità araba dall'Asia minore all'Africa del Nord francese. Non si capisce come i francesi non si rendano conto dell'impossibilità attuale di una simile politica, che essi stessi non hanno del resto il coraggio di patrocinare apertamente.”

<sup>226</sup> See as an example: DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 232; DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 233; DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 234.

<sup>227</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 40.

<sup>228</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 136.



to the West', that were however counterbalanced by a clear Italian tendency towards neutrality". It must not be forgotten that inside the Democratic forces in Italy there were some groups sceptical about a clear deployment of Italy inside the Western camp and preferred that it would have remained neutral – an example, the group of the *Cronache Sociali* inside the DC led by Dossetti. But probably the main reason for diffidence was given by the fact that Italy faltered on its participation to the Western Union. It was underlined in the previous chapter that Sforza believed that Italy could have used the participation to the alliance to ask for compensation regarding the colonies. According to the Italian view, it would have been very difficult to explain to the public opinion how it was possible to conclude a military agreement with countries that wanted them out of Africa<sup>229</sup>. This was especially the case of Great Britain, that after the elections did not soft its position at all. Consul Manzini, sent in Somalia after the Mogadiscio incident, affirmed that some organs of the British military apparatus – especially the Middle East Command – were adverse to Italy mainly for two reasons: because they thought that Communist could still seize the power and because they looked with scepticism to a cooperation with the locals and considered Italian policy on the matter too much "reactionary"<sup>230</sup>. In a meeting between De Gasperi and the British Ambassador in Rome Mallet the former would have responded to these accusations by stating that the new Italian functionaries had a mentality suited for an "African policy of large view"<sup>231</sup>.

Following the rigid British positions, Italy started to concentrate its effort on the US, seen as the determinant actor in the decisions concerning the colonies: "It is the US behaviour the one which will have a determinant weight on the formulation of the solution of our former colonies" revealed Gallarati Scotti after a meeting with the French representative Massigli<sup>232</sup>. The problem was that Great Britain, and the US were exchanging their views on the matter of the colonies<sup>233</sup>. The Foreign Office was now convinced that a return of Italy in Tripolitania would have created a new Palestine and thought that for that territory the best solution was American trusteeship<sup>234</sup>. Discussion was particularly vivid as far as Tripolitania was concerned: this because both great powers wanted the other to obtain the

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<sup>229</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 177.

<sup>230</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 44.

<sup>231</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 247.

<sup>232</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 147.

<sup>233</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 185.

<sup>234</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 361.

trusteeship of the territory. Neither of the two wished this military, financial and economic burden, especially Americans, who were ideologically contrary to everything that remembered colonialism. Furthermore, Americans feared that a trusteeship over Tripolitania would have worsen relationship with the Arabs, already tense after Palestine<sup>235</sup>. The only point that admitted no discussion, for the British, was that of Cyrenaica, unquestionably a territory subjected to British influence<sup>236</sup>. Italo-British relations were furthermore stiffened by two events: the first one was the ordinance for municipal election in Tripolitania by the BMA, the second one was a declaration of independence of Cyrenaica made by Idris on the Egyptian press. Sforza considered these two decisions in contrast with the Peace treaty that gave to the Conference of Deputy the goal to decide on the colonies<sup>237</sup>. Not only Italy, but the USSR too was irritated by these two events. Gallarati Scotti met a Soviet functionary, Saksin, who affirmed that to proclaim an election was too much for an administrative authority that suppositively had only a temporary character<sup>238</sup>. Furthermore, he confirmed that the Soviets would have sustained the thesis that Annex XI did not refer to the overall territories, but to them separately. However, they would have considered Libya in their entirety, and not as three separated territories. To Gallarati Scotti, this was a way to avoid that Great Britain or America could obtain trusteeship over Cyrenaica, but, indirectly, this also meant to obstacle Italian aspiration over Tripolitania: “By insisting on Libya individuality Soviets can easily botch any possibility of agreement and to make everything to refer to the UN”<sup>239</sup>.

Pression over the US did not give the expected result, as it was communicated from Zoppi to Quaroni and Gallarati Scotti<sup>240</sup>. Americans preferred the question to be resolved by the UN, according to the DGAP, and at the same time they nominated an anti-colonialist personality, Joseph Palmer, to establish contact with France and Great Britain<sup>241</sup>. Moreover, it seemed that British persuaded Americans that – aside from Somalia – a “a

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<sup>235</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 363.

<sup>236</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>237</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 149.

<sup>238</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 189.

<sup>239</sup> Ibidem, “*Insistendo sull'indivisibilità della Libia i sovietici possono facilmente mandare a monte qualsiasi possibilità di accordo e far rinviare tutto alle Nazioni Unite.*”

<sup>240</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 239.

<sup>241</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 239.

return of Italy in the African regions would mean revolts, massacres and instability”<sup>242</sup>. In reality, it was already possible to see in the previous chapters that Americans never truly favoured Italians returning to Africa, so probably British never needed to persuade them on this point. One of the few personalities that favoured Italian cause to the US administration was the American ambassador in Rome Dunn, who underlined the merits of the Italian administration in Africa and the disastrous consequences that a negative decision would have had on the Italian public opinion. The American Ambassador suggested that De Gasperi should speak to Secretary Marshall in a “highly confidential way” to discuss the matter<sup>243</sup>. The Italian prime Minister wrote to the American Secretary on the necessity to find a solution that does not dissatisfy public opinion<sup>244</sup>: “As you are well aware, Mr. Secretary of State, the colonial question is the only one that the Peace Treaty left open instead of deciding against us [...]. It is a question deeply felt by the Italian people without party or class distinction [...]. Should I not stress the consequences that an unfavourable solution of the question would have from this angle, I would fail in my duty of being perfectly frank towards the American Government”<sup>245</sup>.

Meanwhile, between the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1948, the Commission released the reports for the different territories. As far as Libya was concerned, the situation of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan was analysed separately, but final conclusion for the overall territory was inserted too<sup>246</sup>. By summarising briefly this report it is possible to affirm that:

- for Tripolitania, all the Commissioners recognised the contribution of the Italian colonisers to the development of the local economy. It was also possible to recognise population aspiration to the independence, even if the Soviet commissioner underlined how vague this concept understood. The Anglo-American commissioners also reported a sentiment of opposition to the option of Italian trusteeship, while the French commissioner affirmed that the individual

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<sup>242</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 243 “*Da parte britannica - a parte la Somalia - si è riusciti a persuadere moltissimi ambienti americani che il ritorno dell'Italia nelle regioni africane significherebbe rivolte, massacri e instabilità.*”

<sup>243</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 243.

<sup>244</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 273.

<sup>245</sup> Ibidem, original in English.

<sup>246</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 370.

- relationship between Arabs and Italians were good. Finally, all four the Commissioner recognised the immaturity of the territory for independence;
- for Fezzan, it was reported the extremely political immaturity of population, who showed a sense of satisfaction for the present administration and of indifference to any possible change of regime, even if it was recorded the request to consider the Islamic religion of the population. No anti-Italian sentiment was found;
  - for Cyrenaica, the population expressed their net preference for independence under the authority of Mohammed Idris – Sanusi leader – and their opposition for Italians’ return. The idea of a united Libya did not receive much consent, while the Soviet Commissioner underlined the ties between the Sanusi leader and Great Britain;
  - finally, the global conclusion reveals a clear cleavage between the “Western” Commissioners and the Soviet one. While the former reiterated the differences between the three territories, the latter considered Libya as singular entity, where the difference between the Fezzan, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were artificially created during the war. This reflected the Soviet approach to insist on Libya unity, as it was underlined previously<sup>247</sup>.

It can be noticed that, aside for the general observation of population immaturity for independence, the Commissioners expressed different point of view that would have allowed to their respective governments to sustain their own thesis. On July 30<sup>th</sup> Gallarati Scotti held a speech to the Conference in which it expressed Italians’ view on the matter after the reports were released<sup>248</sup>. Originally it was Cerulli who had to speak, but Sforza thought that he was too much of a ‘colonialist’ personality and preferred Gallarati Scotti instead<sup>249</sup>. The Italian Ambassador underlined that the Commission recognised that those territories were not mature enough for independence. Furthermore, the Inquiry also shed a light on Italy’s merits on the development of those territories, especially on infrastructure. If once it was difficult and dangerous to travel along those areas today it was much easier and comfortable thanks to the “wonderful and modern streets that were

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<sup>247</sup> For a summary of the different reports, see: Rossi, *op. cit.*, pp 370-372.

<sup>248</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 267.

<sup>249</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 230.

built by the Italians”<sup>250</sup>. Moreover, it had to be considered that, despite Italy was basically absent from those territories from more than seven years, however “with its [Italy] interrupted work it was able to obtain constant sympathies from the population, whose, despite everything, vivid expressions were present even after seven years”<sup>251</sup>. It had to be considered that Italians former functionaries of the colonies were not heard and that it was difficult for pro-Italian forces to organise under the BMA. Finally, by taking into account Italians’ merits, Gallarati Scotti concluded that the best solution was his country trusteeship all over the former colonies, under the principles of the Charter of San Francisco, and by taking into account the population wishes. As noted by Rossi, despite presenting in the end the request for trusteeship, the speech presented some novelty. First of all, the bases of the declaration were in the Commission’s reports, that did not hide the positives of Italy’s administration in the past. Then, any reference to the “demographic” argument and emigration of Italian workers was avoided, while the commitment to the population wishes and the principles of the UN Charter were underlined<sup>252</sup>.

The final discussion at the Deputy Conference revealed a division between the countries that participated. For Libya, the following opinion were expressed:

- Following the USSR lead, the five Eastern European countries participants to the conference (Belarus, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia) favoured Italian trusteeship over the three territories.
- Australia, Canada, and New Zealand were in favour of a British trusteeship. By considering that these were Commonwealth countries, it is easy to understand why they sided with Great Britain.
- the other Commonwealth country, South Africa, sustained instead a British trusteeship over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and a French trusteeship over Fezzan.
- Brazil and Holland favoured an Italian trusteeship.
- China wanted immediate independence.

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<sup>250</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 267, “*Chi percorre oggi quelle stesse distanze, ed altre di gran lunga maggiori, lo fa lungo delle belle e moderne strade costruite dagli italiani.*”

<sup>251</sup> Ibidem, “[*l’Italia*] con la sua opera più tardi interrotta abbia saputo ottenere simpatie costanti da parte delle popolazioni, di cui, nonostante tutto, non sono mancate le vivaci espressioni pur dopo sette anni.”

<sup>252</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 374.

- India asked for a UN trusteeship, similar to Pakistan that proposed unity under the Sanusi regime with some form of international control.
- Belgium and Greece made no specific proposal<sup>253</sup>.

It was now clear that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs would not have reached a conclusion on all the territories. Both Gallarati Scotti and Quaroni started to suggest that it was better, for the moment, to pursue a “minimalist” objective, namely the obtainment of a trusteeship over Somalia, while the other questions would have been referred to the UN. Quaroni was told by Schumann – the new French Foreign Minister – that there were concrete possibilities that Italy could retain Somalia, if the Russians agreed with the interpretation of Annex XI as speaking of the single territories<sup>254</sup>. Gallarati Scotti agreed with this strategy of “partial solution”, that was to be seen as a starting point which would have encouraged good relationships between Italy and the Western Powers. Tripolitania would have probably been discussed by the UN, and here French would have approved Italy’s return if the latter would not have compromised too much with the Arabs; instead, Cyrenaica was “an argument that I do not think could have been discussed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs with any hope of resolution”<sup>255</sup>. This strategy of partial revindication was however only a temporary one, the main objective staying a global revindication of the colonies, as it was affirmed by De Gasperi in a letter to Sforza<sup>256</sup>. Italian behaviour would have been “global revindication, accepting a gradual solution if the other territories are not prejudiced”<sup>257</sup>. But some things had to be recognised since the beginning, like the strategic importance of Cyrenaica and a special administration for Tripolitania that would have also include the Arabs<sup>258</sup>. Sforza also sent a telegram to all the Diplomatic Representations of UN countries, to obtain as much support as possible in the forthcoming UN Assembly<sup>259</sup>. Towards the anti-colonialist countries, Italy should have tried to obtain at least an abstention; towards the countries of the Arab League, instead, Italian representatives should have put the accent on the colonies of Eastern Africa. As far as Libya was concerned, with the Arabs Italy had to affirm his will to install a pacific

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<sup>253</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pp 377-379.

<sup>254</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 302.

<sup>255</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 290.

<sup>256</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 342.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>259</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 337.

trusteeship based on cooperation with the locals, and it had to be underlined that the Commission itself did not consider Libya mature enough for independence<sup>260</sup>. During this period negotiations with the Arab League had gone on, especially after the Commission reports were released: Italy used the conclusion of the Inquiry to try to convince Arab countries that it was the best country suited for Libyan trusteeship<sup>261</sup>. The leader of the Arab League, Azzam Pascià, subsequently stated that the best solution for Libya, according to him, was independence; secondly, it was trusteeship by an Arab League country; finally, an Italian trusteeship<sup>262</sup>. Frangié, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, who professed himself as a friend of Italy, said that he was pessimistic as far as Libya was concerned, and that he would try to separate this problem from that of the Eastern Africa colonies, on which some results were possible<sup>263</sup>. In the subsequent Arab League reunion, countries decided that they would have sustained the unity and independence of Libya, and each member would have pursued the strategy that it considered the most efficient at the moment<sup>264</sup>. Libya was thus by far the most important – and at the same time the most complex – colony that was discussed. There were strategic reasons, that were considered especially by the Anglo-Americans, and, consequently, also by the Russians; there was the Arab element, that imposed to all actors to move cautiously to not compromise their influence in the Middle East region; finally, there was the objective difference that existed between the three territories – Fezzan, Tripolitania, and Cyrenaica. At the eve of the decision of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Zoppi had a meeting with Fouques Duparc, French Ambassador in Rome, in which he approved Massigli project of a future partition of Libya: Tripolitania to Italy, Fezzan to France, Cyrenaica to Great Britain<sup>265</sup>. This project would have been however being applied only after the decision of the Conference of the Foreign Ministers, that, in the original plans, should have approved Italian trusteeship over Somalia and to refer the remanent problems to the UN. However, things did not go as planned. An exhaustive report of the Conference of Paris was written by Quaroni for Sforza<sup>266</sup>. The problem started when the Soviet Foreign Minister,

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<sup>260</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>261</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 270 and DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 276.

<sup>262</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 293.

<sup>263</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 355.

<sup>264</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 407.

<sup>265</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 408.

<sup>266</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 431. See also Rossi, *op cit.*, pp 390-395.

Vishinski, raised a procedural question: at the Conference, Bevin and Marshall were in fact absent, substituted by the two ambassadors in Parsi Douglas and McNeil. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, the Soviet representative would have stated: “You cannot do a Council of Foreign Ministers without Foreign Ministers as you cannot do a mutton ragout without a mutton”. After a short debate, this procedural problem was overcome, but new difficulties emerged the day after, when, speaking about Somalia – that in theory should have been the territory that everyone agreed to give Italy – the Soviet representative communicated that the position of his government was that *all* former Italian colonies were given back to Italy through the trusteeship. The fact that the Western adopted only a partial solution for Somalia meant that the Russian proposal was not accepted and thus, there was no agreement between the Four. Hence, the Soviet put on the table another project, that was a collective administration by the UN on all the three territories – and as Vishinski noticed, this was basically the same proposal that Byrnes made in 1945. That was unacceptable for the Western representative that, it was noticed in the previous chapters, wanted to avoid any kind of Soviet interference in the colonies, something that a collective administration would have risked bringing to. The reason why the Soviet decided this quick volte-face had probably to do with their wish to detach from Italy, especially after the election of April 18<sup>th</sup>, when it was clear that the country chose the Western bloc and it was thus counterproductive to sustain its interests. Then, the new Soviet approach had probably also the purpose, as noted by Rossi<sup>267</sup>, to pave the way for a possible collective mandate proposition to present to the UN. Whatever the case, it was undoubtedly Soviet’s goal to make the Conference fail, and they succeeded. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the deadline for the Four to decide, no decision was taken. Thus, Council approved a letter in which it communicated to the UN General Secretary, Trygve Lie, that no agreement was reached. And so, in conformity with the Peace treaty, the colonial question would have been discussed by the UN, whose next session would have started in few days, on September 21<sup>st</sup>.

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<sup>267</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 394.



## **The first part of the Third General Assembly (21<sup>st</sup> September – 12<sup>th</sup> December 1948)**

The General Assembly (GA) that should have decided on Libya and the other colonies started on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1948. It was the third one of its kind, and was divided in two parts, the first one from September to December 12<sup>th</sup>. This period was characterised by an intense diplomatic activity, tough, surprisingly, very little progress, not only from parts of the Italians, but of the British as well. In order to approve the decision on the colonies it was necessary a two third majority. Now, the Assembly was divided in different ‘factions’ on the matter – Italian allies, Anglo-Americans, Arabs and anti-colonialist, Soviets. Each one of these groups did not possess enough vote in order to make their proposal pass, but they did have enough votes to block others proposal. Thus, this session of the Assembly can be summarised as a stalemate, where each faction tried to take some votes from other groups, with scarce results as it will be possible to see. Finally, it is useful to remember that the Session took place in Paris, and it explain why Quaroni played here an important role, being the main source of information on how the Assembly proceeded.

Italy’s wish was that the GA would have decided to concede trusteeship of Somalia to Italy and to refer the other questions to a different time, possibly not to the GA but again to the Four<sup>268</sup>. Sforza considered this solution as “the most probable to collect the majority, by leaving unaltered the *status quo* and by avoiding discussions that would accentuate the disagreements by enlarging their scope and consequences”<sup>269</sup>. That it also why, for example, Zoppi did not consider wise to raise the question of Libyan unity despite the demand of the Lebanese Minister. The latter proposed to the Italian General Director of Political Affairs that if Italy could declare itself in favour of the unity – that was the main concern of the Arab League countries together with Libyan independence – the Arabs would have soften their position on Italy.<sup>270</sup> While the Arabs were thus opposing Italy in the UN, the latter allies in the Assembly – it may be useful to underline that Italy was not at this time member of the UN because of USSR veto – were France

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<sup>268</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 432.

<sup>269</sup> Ibidem, “*Appare infatti questa soluzione più suscettibile raccogliere maggioranza adesioni lasciando impregiudicato status qua ed evitando discussioni che accentuerebbero dissensi allargandone portata e conseguenze*”.

<sup>270</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 456.

and the Latin American countries. However, some doubts about them were frequently expressed, especially by Quaroni, that would have declared at the end of the Assembly that it was not possible to trust completely of them “despite the Latin-Americans worked well in Paris, it would be better not to count on them to much when the time comes”<sup>271</sup>. Opposed to Italy were of course the Anglo-Americans, the Arabs, and many anti-colonialist countries, such as India<sup>272</sup>. Soviet countries too opposed Italy. Brosio, Ambassador in Moscow, reported some article of the Soviet press that describe Italy as now a simple pawn in the hands of Great Britain and the US. For the Ambassador, Italy’s behaviour was the main responsible for the Soviet’s change of mind; the only possibility that Italy had to be supported again by the USSR and its allies was to depict an Italian trusteeship as the “lesser evil”, compared for example to a British trusteeship or the construction of a puppet State in the Anglo-American hands<sup>273</sup>. This possibility however was far from feasible. This was the period were Italy – or it should be better to say, Sforza and De Gasperi – was trying to gain the *confidence* of the Western Bloc, and it was the time where the Atlantic Pact was being negotiated too. While the colonies were important, it would have been difficult to imagine Italy to concede something to the Soviet Union. The time has passed when there was a possibility for the two blocs to dialogue or for Italy to remain ‘independent’ from the struggle – even if many in Italian public opinion, and even the Government, would have liked to. This is also probably why, among the diplomatic documents that regards Libya and the other territories, very few attempts were made towards the USSR, compared to before.

Finally, there was the Anglo-American bloc, composed of the UK, the US, the Commonwealth countries and all the country ‘close’ to them, such as Belgium. Great Britain was willing to get the trusteeship over Cyrenaica at the end of this Session of the GA. Thus, it proposed that, together with Italian trusteeship over Somalia, the UK would have had at the same time trusteeship over Cyrenaica. The problem was not, per se, the official renounce of Italy over Cyrenaica: after all, both Quaroni and Gallarati Scotti, understood from quite a long time that it was impossible to take back that territory. Problem was that Italian public opinion would have never accepted this ‘exchange’,

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<sup>271</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 740.

<sup>272</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 489.

<sup>273</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 483.

feeling that they would have just something to make them content, while the British would have taken the lion share. In a meeting with the British Ambassador Mallet the Italian Foreign Minister defined the contemporary assignation of Somalia to Italy and Cyrenaica to the UK as a “psychological error”, while recognising the British interests: “We [Italians] do not object British supreme objectives over Cyrenaica but it was clear that the contemporaneity of the two decisions would have deprive the concession in our favour of any moral value”<sup>274</sup>. One of the reasons why the United Kingdom oppose Somalia’s concession to Italy was because it feared that the latter would have applied what Gallarati Scotti defined as the “artichoke strategy”: “the colonial artichoke we wanted to eat it leaf by leaf; starting with Somalia then leave us one-time year to work against you [British] to take the entire Libya as well”<sup>275</sup>. This idea was favoured by the ambivalent Italian behaviour, Gallarati Scotti noticed: while Sforza spoke of a renounce over Cyrenaica, some Latin American Ambassadors revealed to British official that their pledge towards Italy regarded the restitution of all the colonies, including Cyrenaica<sup>276</sup>. Gallarati Scotti thought that this ‘maximalist’ approach would have backfired, and that there was the need to pursue a more realistic route, that is to work only on Somalia and Tripolitania, by constructing the pillars for a cooperation in Africa with French and British<sup>277</sup>. A government capable of doing this would have been able to face the public opinion.

That is why the Italian then proposed to take the “Massigli proposal” as a starting point for future negotiation. The Italian, together with the French, proposed that Libya should have been divided in three parts: Cyrenaica to the United Kingdom, Tripolitania to Italy and Fezzan to France. French too, while initially wanting Italy back both in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, favoured now British trusteeship over Cyrenaica, as far as their suzerainty over Fezzan was recognised<sup>278</sup>. However, the main problem was Tripolitania. The British, in fact, refused to give any kind of practical reassurance that Italy could have obtain that territory. They refused to have a contemporary solution for Tripolitania and Fezzan, by

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<sup>274</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 565, “*Non certo noi obiettavamo supreme ragioni britanniche per Cirenaica ma era chiaro che la contemporaneità delle due decisioni avrebbe tolto ogni valore morale alla concessione in nostro favore.*”

<sup>275</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 587, “*il carciofo colonie ce lo vogliamo mangiare foglia per foglia; cominciando dalla Somalia poi lasciateci un anno di tempo per lavorare contro di voi e prenderei anche l'intera Libia*’».

<sup>276</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>277</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>278</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 381.

proposing that Italy would have only have Somalia and that in the future Assembly's Session Great Britain would have sustain Italy's claim over Tripolitania, but no concrete assurance was donate on this point. French and Latin Americans, while in favour of a British trusteeship over Cyrenaica, were not willing to approve this solution as long as Great Britain did not recognise Italy's trusteeship over Tripolitania. This raised again the tension of the British-Italy relationship, something that can be grasp by looking at the minutes of a meeting between Quaroni and the British representative at the GA in Paris, McNeil<sup>279</sup>. The meeting was apparently so tense that Quaroni had to specify at the end of the minutes that, despite the apparent tone, the discussion was friendly<sup>280</sup>. The analysis of the document is a useful summary of the Italo-British relation during this period. The Italian ambassador claimed that it was not possible to simply trust that the British would have work in the future for an Italian Tripolitania: "The British Government does not even give us a precise commitment for Tripolitania [...] and because the possible and the impossible depend mostly from the British authorities in Tripolitania, of whose work we do not have to be content until now: this possible and this impossible depend from the will of the British government on which you do not want to ensure us since now"<sup>281</sup>. The British representative insisted that a sudden return of Italians would have caused riots among the Arabs: "Tripolitania does not concern us: we would gladly leave it to Italy but today such a solution would create serious reactions from the Arab States, reactions that we want to avoid: we hope that during this year we would be able to make the Arab see the matter from another point of view"<sup>282</sup>. Quaroni replied that if this was the case, it was also possible that the Arabs could not have been convinced, and that Tripolitania could have been lost – also, Arab-British relationship were not good at the time. Furthermore, it seems like Britain take into consideration the public opinion of everyone except the Italians. He stated that Great Britain in the end won the war, and it could take all the colonies without that Italy, a defeated country, would be able to do nothing – "you could

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<sup>279</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 510.

<sup>280</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>281</sup> Ibidem, *"Il Governo britannico non ci da nemmeno un commitment preciso per la Tripolitania [...] e siccome il possibile e il non possibile dipenderebbe in gran parte dalle autorità britanniche in Tripolitania, della cui attività non abbiamo avuto certo da lodarci fino adesso: questo possibile e questo non possibile dipende dalla volontà del Governo britannico che lei non vuole impegnare fin da ora."*

<sup>282</sup> Ibidem, *"La Tripolitania: non ci interessa: saremmo disposti a lasciarla all'Italia ma oggi una soluzione del genere solleverebbe delle gravi reazioni da parte degli Stati arabi, reazioni che ci preme di evitare: speriamo nel corso di un anno di potere indurre gli Stati arabi a guardare la cosa sotto un altro punto di vista."*

also take Sicily from us without we were able to do a thing”<sup>283</sup> – but this *diktat* would have had disastrous consequences in the relationship among the two countries. Then, McNeil tried to convince Quaroni of the futility of Italian proposal because their allies did not have the necessary majority; Quaroni replied by noticing that this was true also regarding the British side. This *friendly* meeting ended with both of them menacing each other – “McNeil: *You may regret it*; Quaroni: *you may regret it too*”<sup>284</sup>. As Quaroni noted in his report, the British seemed to want to end the colonial question as fast as possible, and it could have been possible to take this to Italy’s advantage. The reason why Great Britain wanted to close the colonial question during this period was not only because of the strategic importance of Cyrenaica, but also because the financial burden of the Administration of the Italian colonies – which, it has to be remembered, was still in the BMA hands – was becoming an unsustainable weight<sup>285</sup>. When it became clear that Great Britain would have concede Somalia only if Cyrenaica was given to them, Italian diplomacy decided that the best course of action to pursue its thesis was a complete referral of the question to the subsequent Session of the GA: “Great Britain is so eager to resolve the question now: it thinks that our support to its project would facilitate its approval at the UN. In these circumstances, if there is one chance to make better its proposal in our favour – and it is only possible to make them better – the only hope to make some step forward [...] is to make it understand that we are, finally, ready to postpone everything”<sup>286</sup>.

However Great Britain was not the only obstacle to Italian proposal. The United States were too. Despite the illusion that Italy always had on the US being more ‘friendly’ than the UK, it became clearer that in this matter Americans favoured the British. During the first period of this Session, the Americans had a low profile due to the upcoming Federal Elections. It has to be remembered that Italo-Americans were an important part of the electorate. This can help to explain why the Republican Candidate Dewey publicly

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<sup>283</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>284</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>285</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg. 412.

<sup>286</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 510, “*L’Inghilterra ha una così grande fretta di risolvere la questione adesso: ritiene che la nostra adesione ad un suo eventuale progetto ne faciliterebbe il passaggio all’O.N.U. In queste circostanze, se c’è una possibilità di migliorare le sue proposte in nostro favore - è solo di migliorarle che si può parlare - l’unica speranza di farle fare qualche passo avanti [...] sta appunto nel farle comprendere che noi siamo disposti, in ultima analisi, a far rimandare il tutto*”.

proclaimed that he was in favour of the Italian thesis<sup>287</sup>. The Democrats led by Truman, on the other hand, did not make any public statement, even if Truman administration had by now agreed with the British thesis. Marshall, the US General Secretary, especially was against an Italian return to the colonies. After the Democrats won the elections – November 1948 – they started more openly to sustain the British thesis. More specifically, Northern American started to exercise pressure over the Southern and Central ones to obtain that they would have voted for the British proposal – that was: Cyrenaica to Britain, Somalia to Italy and postponement for everything else<sup>288</sup>. This is what emerged during a private reunion of the representative of the US Foster Dulles and the Southern American representatives in Paris<sup>289</sup>. The day after this news, Sforza released a statement to all the Latin American embassies in which he remembered their role in ensuring the Southern Americans support: this alone shows the seriousness of the threat that Northern American lobbying posed to Italian thesis<sup>290</sup>. Cerulli informed Sforza that the British too were lobbying the Latin Americans, by affirming that a vote for Cyrenaica – and only Cyrenaica – was the premise of a future Italo-British accord<sup>291</sup>. While the Latin American front remained mostly compact, there were some alarm bells. The clearest example was Cuba, that, at the American meeting mentioned before, expressed its willingness to support the cession of Eritrea to Ethiopia<sup>292</sup>. Furthermore, to the Cuban representative in Paris it was given the instruction to support Italian thesis “in the limits imposed by the general politics from which we [Cubans] cannot exempt. As it is known, the only limitation to the Cuba action can only be imposed by its strict ties with the US”<sup>293</sup>.

The reason why the Northern Americans were against the Italians returning to the colonies were well-known, but apparently most of the Italian diplomacy did not understand how serious the objections by the US were. The most important ones regarded the military capacity of Italy. Marshall clearly stated this to Couve de Mouville, the French representative, who then reported it to Quaroni, who had himself a conversation with

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<sup>287</sup> Rossi, *op. cit.*, pg 401

<sup>288</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 638.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>290</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 639.

<sup>291</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 673.

<sup>292</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 650.

<sup>293</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 691.

Marshall<sup>294</sup>: “Tripolitania interests us from the point of view of our aviation fields: the British have in Tripolitania enough troupes [...], very efficient, and they know how to use them: until they are there, we [Americans] are relaxed: can the Italians ensure us the same tranquillity? We doubt it”<sup>295</sup>. Tarchiani underlined that the US not only were in favour of British thesis, but became the main promotor of them, and refused to give insurances even on Italians returning to Tripolitania<sup>296</sup>. Tarchiani blamed the African Division of the State Department and Marshall presence in Paris for this anti-Italian behaviour<sup>297</sup>. However, what characterised Tarchiani view of the matter is the fact that he considered Great Britain as the main culpable: “Americans are unable to resist to the British will, when they, by considering a problem capital for the security of their Empire, are not ready to accept different solutions from what they proposed”<sup>298</sup>. This was in contrast with Quaroni interpretation, that considered American objections right in themselves. He noticed how Italians were unable to give any practical reassurance to them and considered, to a certain extent, American opposition more serious than the British one “British opposition seems mostly inspired by political reason [...] American opposition is instead based on various concrete considerations, to which, honestly, it is impossible to deny a fundament, and it will not be easy to surmount”<sup>299</sup>. Tarchiani’s idea that it was only one part of the American administration adverse to the Italian thesis seems also confirmed by a meeting with the newly elected Truman<sup>300</sup>. After having said that the American president showed sympathy for the Italian thesis, the Italian ambassador communicated his impression “It is my impression that President Truman does not share the ‘strategic’ concerns and economic-political consideration of Marshall”<sup>301</sup>. Again, there

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<sup>294</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 640 and DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 648.

<sup>295</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 648, “*La Tripolitania ci interessa dal punto di vista dei nostri campi di aviazione: gli inglesi hanno in Tripolitania delle truppe sufficienti [...], bene in mano, e le sanno adoperare: fino a che ci sono loro, siamo perfettamente tranquilli: sono gli italiani in grado di assicurarci la stessa tranquillità? Ne dubitiamo*”.

<sup>296</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 684.

<sup>297</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>298</sup> Ibidem, “*Gli americani non sono in grado di resistere alla volontà degli inglesi, quando questi, attribuendo a un dato problema un'importanza capitale per la sicurezza del loro Impero, si mostrano risoluti a non accettare soluzioni diverse da quelle che essi propongono*”.

<sup>299</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 740, “*L'opposizione inglese mi sembra ispirata prevalentemente a ragioni politiche [...]. L'opposizione americana è invece basata su di una serie di considerazioni di fatto, alle quali, onestamente, non si può nemmeno negare una certa base, e che non sarà facile smontare*”.

<sup>300</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 690.

<sup>301</sup> Ibidem.

is a more pro-American interpretation offered by Tarchiani, and a more realistic one given by Quaroni.

Before speaking of the Assembly decision, a little parenthesis must be open on the Arabs, especially one country, Lebanon. The Arab Governments made clear that, as far as Libya was concerned, they would have sustained its independence and unity<sup>302</sup>, but an Arab cooperation with Italy was not impossible. The President of Lebanon, Riad El Solh, proposed to Cerulli a cooperation based on arms trade: Italy would have offered weapons to the Arab countries and the Arab countries could have reconsidered their position on Libya in one of the following manners:

- A) “Lebanese vote (and parallel action inside the Arab group) for the simple postponement according to the Italian thesis;
- B) Lebanese vote (and parallel action inside the Arab group) with the purpose that, by discussing Libya, Italy could have Tripolitania in the same manner of Great Britain having Cyrenaica. This implies either a ‘Transjordanian number three’ or an Italian trusteeship for a period of time to define”<sup>303</sup>.

The reason why the Lebanese minister proposed this trade-off – favouring Italian thesis in exchange for Italian arms – was explained by Quaroni by referring to the latest news coming from Palestine<sup>304</sup>. This was in fact the period of the first Israeli-Palestinian war, when the Israeli were successfully pushing back the Arab forces. Italian diplomacy certainty saw an opportunity in this: just few days after the news of this meeting arrive in Rome – November 10<sup>th</sup> – the DGAP Zoppi gave the *nulla osta* for the negotiations<sup>305</sup>. On December 15<sup>th</sup> – so after the postponement of the colonial question – Riad arrived in Rome to directly negotiate the army furniture<sup>306</sup>. When he returned to Lebanon, the Minister in Beirut Alessandrini, communicated to the Lebanese chief that “the Italian government was satisfied with the good will showed by him [Riad] during the discussion

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<sup>302</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 494.

<sup>303</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 609, “a) voto libanese (ed azione parallela nel gruppo arabo) per il rinvio puro e semplice di un anno, secondo la tesi italiana; b) voto libanese (ed azione parallela nel gruppo arabo) perché, discutendosi la Libia, l'Italia abbia in Tripolitania la stessa situazione che l'Inghilterra avrà in Cirenaica. Questo implica anche «una Transgiordania numero tre», oppure un trust italiano per un numero di anni da stabilire.”

<sup>304</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 610.

<sup>305</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 610.

<sup>306</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 780.



of the Italian colonies at the UN<sup>307</sup>. This episode can be at the origin of a certain pro-Arab behaviour that Italy will show many times in its foreign policy compared to many of its Western allies.

After a look to this intricate mosaic, it is easy to understand why the General Assembly failed to find a solution to the colonial question and it was forced to postpone the question to the second part of the Session, that would have taken place in April 1949. Especially the US tried until the last to convince the Italians that an immediate trusteeship over Somalia and the postponement for Tripolitania were the best possible decision. Undersecretary to the State Department Lovett personally wrote to De Gasperi a letter to convince him “[the US has taken into consideration] also the practical question of Italy’s economic position and the possibility that the burden of administration of some of the areas might seriously retard recovery at home<sup>308</sup>. Again, here there is the economic motif that Italy was still not economically stable enough to sustain the administration of its former colonies – and it was hard to say otherwise. Nevertheless, for reasons that are exquisitely of domestic politics, De Gasperi and Sforza still did not cede. When they realised that the Anglo-American proposal did not have enough vote at the Assembly, Washington decided to sustain the postponement of the question to April.

Italian public opinion – and this was also the fault of government propaganda – was still not prepared to accept to loss of the colonies. There was by now two views of the colonial question:

- a more realistic one, composed of diplomats as Quaroni and Gallarati Scotti, that thought that it was impossible to regain all the territories, and that it was the case to concentrate only on those that it was possible to obtain, that is Somalia and Tripolitania;
- another view was given by De Gasperi and Sforza, who, for their political role, were much closer to public opinion and were determined to regain all the colonies.

In his final report Quaroni summarised what had emerged from the discussions in the previous three months<sup>309</sup>. He noticed how serious the US obstacle was and how it was

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<sup>307</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>308</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 712.

<sup>309</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 740.

necessary to find a way to concrete answer their objections. Latin Americans were useful allies, but it was necessary to be constant in lobbying them to avoid North America influence. It was also necessary to continue relations with the Arab countries that were “one of the most interesting *features* of this Assembly”<sup>310</sup>, in a concrete way, by showing that good relationship was in the interest of both parts. Quaroni also signalled the work of Riad El Solh “who was very useful: he has a following and influence, and his relationship with our representative are very good”<sup>311</sup>. Negative point was the relationship with the anti-colonialist front, where Italy was unable to present itself under a different light than a country following old colonialist methods. Finally, speaking of Libya “Cyrenaica must be considered as completely lost [...]. Instead, Tripolitania is possible to save, but with different formulas than the ones used until now: they were useful to get from Washington the consent for the postponement, but they are useless to change their position”<sup>312</sup>.

### **The Second Part of the UN General Assembly (12<sup>th</sup> December 1948 – 17<sup>th</sup> May 1949)**

Once the first part of the Assembly was over, Italy concentrated to present a project that could have obtained the consent of the Anglo-American. It was in fact clear that, in order to obtain a two-third majority, the British bloc and the Italian bloc had to find a common solution. It was abundantly clear that Cyrenaica was lost, British were too obsessed by it; thus, efforts had to be concentrated on Tripolitania. For a certain time, Sforza thought that the best solution for this territory was the construction of a “contractual State”, that is an Italo-Arab State that it would have been tied to Italy by a contract. A model for this type of relationship was the tie between Tunisia and France, and maybe it is for this reason that the first person with whom Sforza discussed this – outside members of Italian diplomacy, of course – was the Foreign French Minister Schumann<sup>313</sup>. After having

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<sup>310</sup> Ibidem, “bisogna considerare la Cirenaica come definitivamente perduta [...]. Salvabile invece la Tripolitania, ma salvabile con argomenti e con formule sostanzialmente differenti da quelli adoperati finora: esse ci hanno servito adesso a Washington per ottenere l'assenso al rinvio, ma non ci serviranno per un cambiamento di posizione.”

<sup>311</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>312</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>313</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 768.

ensured the French Minister that Italy was perfectly capable of maintain order in the region – “Sforza: If we come back to Tripolitania, we have one or more divisions capable of maintain public order”<sup>314</sup> –The DGAP Zoppi proposed that the promise of future independence for Tripolitania could have been used to favour the construction of a contractual State – “Count Zoppi: Could we push forward our promises for independence until the construction in Tripolitania of a State united to Italy by a *contract*, by creating the same situation that you [French] have in Tunisia?”<sup>315</sup>. Schumann approved the idea, even if he warned the Italians to be careful to the use of the word *independence*<sup>316</sup>. From then on, an intense diplomatic work starts with the objective of convince the British, the Americans and even the Arabs on the merits of this solution. Particularly, despite Quaroni’s advise that the main obstacle of the solution was in Washington rather than in London, Sforza continued to concentrate its forces on the UK rather than the US. It is also in this sense that Manzini’s mission in London can be explained. Manzini was a competent diplomat, who had the possibility to shine during its mission in Mogadiscio, where he was able to reconstruct trust between Somali, Italian and British after the bloody incident of January 1948. Manzini mandate was to discuss the difficult points that emerged from the Assembly, Tripolitania asset being one of them. The base for the discussion would have been the construction of an independent State linked to Italy by a treaty of cooperation; in order to do so it was necessary that loyal cooperation existed between Italians, Arabs and British<sup>317</sup>. Italians would have asked for the British permission to start *in loco* negotiations with the Arabs chiefs in Tripolitania to find a formula for this Italo-Arab State. A difficulty was evident since the start: how could have been possible to reconcile the Arab aspiration for unity and independence of Libya and, at the same time, convince them to support the construction of different statal entities under different zone of influence – Tripolitania to Italy, Cyrenaica to Great Britain? Count Zoppi proposed, as a solution, the construction of entities ties between them by a federative bond with separated “treaties of assistance”<sup>318</sup>. The General Secretary, that it

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<sup>314</sup> Ibidem, “*Ministro Sforza: Se ritornassimo in Tripolitania noi abbiamo quella divisione o quel paio di divisioni che sarebbero necessarie per mantenere l'ordine.*”

<sup>315</sup> Ibidem, “*Conte Zoppi: Potremmo noi spingere le nostre promesse fino alla costituzione in Tripolitania di uno Stato unito all'Italia da un atto contrattuale, creandovi una situazione eguale a quella che voi avete in Tunisia?*”

<sup>316</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>317</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 16

<sup>318</sup> Ibidem.

was possible to notice was a partisan of Italy's return to the colonies, tried to convince the representative of Egypt in Rome that Libyan unity was impossible to make because of the too important British interest in Cyrenaica<sup>319</sup>. The most reasonable think to do for the Arab country would have been, according to Zoppi, to support the construction of an Italo-Arab State in Tripolitania, that could have been tied to Cyrenaica by a federative bound<sup>320</sup>. The Minster in Cairo, Fracassi, reiterated this to the Foreign Undersecretary Hassouna Pacha<sup>321</sup>. Subsequently, the DGAP sent instruction to the Embassies in the Arab countries with the argument to use in order to favour the cause of an Italo-Arab State in Tripolitania<sup>322</sup>. Aside from what has been already told, another argument to be used was that Libyan unity would have been possible only under the rule of the Sanusi, but that would have been "absurd" and in contrast with Tripolitania population wishes: "To think to reconstruct Libya as a united country by subduing it under a *pastoral and theocratic* Government, as whose Sanusi is, would be an historical and political absurdity, in contrast with the wishes of the population of Tripolitania and their degree of *social evolution*"<sup>323</sup>. The construction of this State would have been decided by Italians and Tripolitania population as well, and during the negotiations there would have been a transitional regime<sup>324</sup> – that would have probably meant a passage of power from the BMA to the entity of this new State. An episode encourages Italians to push even more the hypothesis of an Italo-Arab State: on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1949, municipal elections were held in Tripoli and other cities of the area, and pro-Italian candidates won in many of them. For people like Zoppi this was a clear signal that Arabs of Tripolitania favoured Italy's return. However, as Del Boca noticed, this hardly meant that the relationship between locals and Italians there were good: "Truth to be told, aside those few categories that already were favoured by Italy and other ones who expected to be favoured too, the rest of the population reject any form of tutelage from Italy, and any form of cooperation

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<sup>319</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 69

<sup>320</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>321</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 142

<sup>322</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 100

<sup>323</sup> Ibidem, "*il pensare di voler ricostituire l'unità della Libia incardinandola su un Governo pastorale e teocratico, quale quello dei senussi, sarebbe un assurdo storico e politico, in assoluto contrasto con le aspirazioni delle popolazioni della Tripolitania e con il loro grado di evoluzione sociale*".

<sup>324</sup> Ibidem.

as well”<sup>325</sup>. To sustain this argument, the Italian historian referred the episode of the death of Admiral Frenzi, president of the CRI (*Comitato Rappresentativo degli Italiani*), a political organisation that represented most of the Tripolitania Italians<sup>326</sup>. The British too did not consider the elections as a sufficient proof to show that Italy’s returning there would have been pacific. However, the reason why the project of an Italo-Arab state never fully realised were essentially two: the lack of a clear project on how to do it, and the opposition of the Americans. Since the beginning of the negotiation, the British especially claimed that in order to continue more details were needed<sup>327</sup>, not only on how the new state would have looked like, but also on what and how many resources were required. Military assurances were especially dear to the Americans, as Trachiani noticed<sup>328</sup>. Quaroni too admitted that it was unclear whether Italy had the necessary tools to do what it claimed wanted to “I have the impression that from our side there is too much optimism [...]. I fear that we think we can say to the British and the Americans: yes, we have the soldiers and the money, but who is going to check if we really have them?”<sup>329</sup>. British too felt very unease with the Italian promises, that Clutton, official of the African Department of the Foreign Office, considered too vague<sup>330</sup>. Sforza tried to response to these critiques, by sending more detailed projects on how this future State would have looked like and how many forces would have been needed<sup>331</sup>. For a brief period, it seemed that this project could actually be a base for the discussion, as McNeil, Minister without portfolio of the British government, confirmed to Gallarati Scotti<sup>332</sup>. So, at this point, the British seemed a little bit reassured, the French sustained the project, and there were contacts with the Arabs. However, the consent of a major actor was lacking, that of the United States. The US, after having be presented the idea, remained “silent” on the matter. The US did not communicate their opinion neither to the Italians, or the British or the French, as far as

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<sup>325</sup> Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 379, “*Per la verità, salvo poche categorie di libici che già hanno avuto favori dall’Italia e che altri se ne aspettano, il resto della popolazione respinge ogni forma di tutela dell’Italia e anche ogni forma di collaborazione*”.

<sup>326</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>327</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 164.

<sup>328</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 16.

<sup>329</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 177, “*Ho però l’impressione - V.E. vorrà scusarmi se mi sbaglio - che da parte nostra ci sia ancora qualche eccessivo ottimismo [...]. Temo cioè, per dire le cose come sono, che si pensi di poter dire a inglesi ed americani: sì, abbiamo i soldati ed i danari, e chi va poi a vedere se ce li abbiamo realmente?*”.

<sup>330</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 164.

<sup>331</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 211.

<sup>332</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 265.

Italians knew<sup>333</sup>. This was a major problem for Italy because, according to McNeil, either a solution was found among all the Four actors – Italy, France, Great Britain and the US – or the matter would have been discussed again at the GA with the risk to be postponed again. The fact that the Americans were not saying anything convinced some, like Zoppi, that maybe it would have been better to start to negotiate only between France, Italy, and Great Britain. US silence rapidly transformed into open doubts. It became clear that the Americans looked suspiciously at the construction of a new State, and they preferred to stay loyal to the trusteeship formula<sup>334</sup>. Maybe it should come by no surprise that, after Americans made clear that they did not support the project, France and Great Britain also stopped to support it. The British Ambassador justified this change of course by stating that a project like this, that provides the construction of a new State that, even before its birth, was already tied to another one by a contract, would have never been approved by the General Assembly<sup>335</sup>. Zoppi tried to justify Italy's proposal by saying that it was construct concurrently to what Great Britain was doing in Cyrenaica, but it then added that there was no objection by Italy if, instead of this project, Italian trusteeship was approved: the important thing was that Tripolitania could come back to Italy, in a way or another. Similarly, French also abandoned the project because they thought that Italy would first ask for trusteeship and only then it would have worked to construct a contractual State<sup>336</sup>; also, to this objection Zoppi replied by stating that this was actual the true, and that the memorandum<sup>337</sup> was misinterpreted<sup>338</sup>. More than misunderstanding, it is more probable that French found an excuse to justify that they did not support the project anymore when it became clear that there was not necessary support to continue it. In the end, even Zoppi understood that to sustain trusteeship had better chance for Italy than the construction of an Italo-Arab State. Aside from Italians, the Arabs were also discontent because they thought that Italy had the support of the other Western Powers and that it was possible to negotiate on Tripolitania's project<sup>339</sup>. This was shown by the fact that, when the Minister in Cairo discussed the matter of the colonies

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<sup>333</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 277.

<sup>334</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 286 and DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 324.

<sup>335</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 326.

<sup>336</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 336.

<sup>337</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 211.

<sup>338</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 352.

<sup>339</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 336.

with different Egypt personalities, it emerged that, while Egypt and the Arab League were against Italian trusteeship, “if they had the certainty to obtain the instauration of an Italo-Arab State in Tripoli with the agreement of the other powers, they would have been ready to discuss this. And this is even more obvious if, with the attribution of Cyrenaica to Great Britain, they saw the end of all hope to safeguard Libyan unity”<sup>340</sup>. Furthermore, Fracassi noticed that it had the impression that the Western Power did not see with favour an *approchement* between Italians and Arabs<sup>341</sup>. Finally, Zoppi was forced to communicate to the Minister that this idea was not on the table anymore, and that the UN could only decide on the attribution of trusteeship<sup>342</sup>.

After this episode, it was the American’s turn to propose a solution. This American project was communicated to Sforza by Tarchiani and planned a “multiple trusteeship on all the Libyan territory with a Central Council formed by France, Italy, Great Britain, the United States and Egypt. The council would have competence of supervision and ‘recommendations’ on the exercise of the tutelage functions, that would have been in reality be enforced by France in Fezzan, by Italy in Tripolitania and by England in Cyrenaica, with great power in the civil and judicial administration”<sup>343</sup>. As Tarchiani noticed, it was a sort of “Solomonic” decision “The new Libyan project appears as a compromise between the different aspirations and it is more an answer to the preoccupation of “pushing through” the British ones, and consequently the American ones, on the North Africa without opposition from the Arabs, that hopefully will be tampered by the participation of Egypt and by the theoretical Libyan unity”<sup>344</sup>. This project was judged by Zoppi as useful – maybe – and he even proposed that Egypt would have been substituted by an Arab State that would have rotated each year<sup>345</sup>. However, not everyone was happy with the United States proposal. Tarchiani described the first reaction

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<sup>340</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 647, “*se avessero la certezza [Egitto e Lega Araba] di potere ottenere l’istituzione di uno Stato italo-arabo a Tripoli con l’accordo delle potenze, sarebbero pronti a discuterne. E ciò evidentemente, tanto più se, con la definitiva attribuzione della Cirenaica all’Inghilterra, vedessero tramontata per sempre la possibilità di salvaguardare l’unità della Libia.*”

<sup>341</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>342</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 657.

<sup>343</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 389.

<sup>344</sup> Ibidem, “*il nuovo progetto per la Libia appare in sé stesso come un compromesso tra le diverse aspirazioni e risponde più che altro alla preoccupazione di far «passare» le aspirazioni inglesi, e di conseguenza americane, sulla costa settentrionale dell’Africa senza difficoltà da parte degli arabi ammansiti, almeno così si spera, dalla partecipazione dell’Egitto e dal teorico mantenimento del l’unità della Libia.*”

<sup>345</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 470.

of the French representatives in Washington as not favouring the project, especially as far as Egypt participation was concern in the Supervisory committee<sup>346</sup>. This French aversion can be easily explained by the fact that, as it was stated many times, their main objective was to keep the Arabs as far as possible from governing Northern Africa, fearing the spread of the idea of independence – even if, in reality, that idea was already spread. This behaviour was also observed during the Cannes meeting, when Schumann asked Sforza not to use the concept of independence when speaking about the Italo-Arab State in Tripolitania<sup>347</sup>. But the British too did not agree with the American project. The reasons were exposed by McNeil to Gallarati Scotti. The former considered the proposal dangerous because “of the difficulty to avoid that the Assembly make to participate also representatives from the Eastern bloc and other groups and that would have meant intolerable interference on the administrative powers”<sup>348</sup>. Gallarati Scotti tried to convince his interlocutor that the situation should have been decided by a shared solution between Italy, France, the US and the UK<sup>349</sup>. However, McNeil concluded that Great Britain was more and more in favour of a postponement of a decision for Tripolitania, considering how much complex the situation became<sup>350</sup>. This is the start of a new phase of the negotiation, where basically the US and the UK discussed the matter of Tripolitania bilaterally, unable to find any kind of compromise. France and Italy tried to convince Great Britain to start a three-way negotiation, but in vain<sup>351</sup>. Massigli told to Gallarati Scotti that “three-way conversation was basically impossible till the end of the bilateral conversation between the British and the Americans”<sup>352</sup>. At the same time, however, French and Italians also had some negotiation on Fezzan, a territory that it was hardly discussed in the past. It was already noticed how Fezzan was a very poor territory, and that could have been one of the reasons why Italy never attached too much of importance to it; nevertheless, it was also very likeable that Italy did not make any kind of revendication to avoid discontenting its most important ally on the colonial question, that is, France. This second option is the most plausible, because Italy seemed to know that

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<sup>346</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 542.

<sup>347</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume I, doc. n. 768.

<sup>348</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 554.

<sup>349</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>350</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>351</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 568.

<sup>352</sup> Ibidem.



this territory could have oil. This is confirmed by a Quaroni meeting with Couve de Murville<sup>353</sup>. Quaroni underlined that, while it could have been possible to make Italian public opinion understand the loss of Fezzan, “if one day it would have come out that important oil resources were in Fezzan this could have had severe repercussions on Italo-French relationship”<sup>354</sup>. Along with this, there were the problem of the frontiers: while Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica were considered different territories, their specific boundaries were not very clear – also because a territory like Fezzan and zone like Siritica that divides Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were mostly desert, so very difficult to precisely define. Precise borders among these areas could have been determined who would exploit possible oil resources in the future. Both Quaroni and Murville agreed that in the future Italy and France would have negotiated over Tripolitania-Fezzan borders and that it could have been possible to find an agreement for cooperation over oil<sup>355</sup>. This will to cooperate over oil was also confirmed by both Minister of Foreign Affairs in a bilateral meeting that they had<sup>356</sup>.

Meanwhile, contacts with both the Americans and the British continued. Minister Sforza had meetings both with McNeil, from the UK, and with Dulles, from the US. The American representative declared that the main obstacle to approve Italian trusteeship was the fear of the Arab reactions, while the British one said that it was in the very same interest of Italy to help Great Britain to get Cyrenaica<sup>357</sup>. The point was always the same: to find a formula that would have guaranteed Tripolitania to Italy and Cyrenaica to Great Britain. And both the countries – for their alliances in the Assembly – were necessary to obtain a two-third majority for any kind of solution. Some days before the UN GA took place, Gallarati Scotti had a meeting with Lord Jowitt, a man very close to Bevin<sup>358</sup>. The Ambassador lamented the position of Great Britain and its representative at the UN, McNeil, by saying that he did not understand why the British refused to concede Tripolitania to Italy, despite Bevin and Foreign Office’s promises. The Lord replied that the main problem was the passage of powers between Italy and the BMA, that could not happen right now, while Great Britain needed immediately to obtain Cyrenaica. The

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<sup>353</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 547.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>356</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 679.

<sup>357</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 757.

<sup>358</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 835.

Italian representative then concluded that, at this point, the only thing left to do was to fight “with all our forces to not let the British thesis pass”, and this despite the *rapprochement* between the two Nations that happened thanks to the construction of the European Council and the Atlantic pact.

Since the start of the Assembly – this time held in Lake Success, near New York –, it was clear that, in few months, the situations did not change: the different blocs still did not have enough strength to let their thesis pass, but they did possess the numbers to avoid that the other bloc could pass their thesis. At this point, Sforza thought that the best way to exit from this *impasse* was to find an agreement between Great Britain and Italy. However, the Italian Foreign Minister decided to do so not through his UN representative, but directly, bypassing the channels of the UN and negotiating bilaterally with the British Foreign Minister. Sforza justified this change of approach in this way “The environment inside the UN prevent to reach a formula that could have been accepted by everyone. Despite the efforts I made with most of the delegates with many conversations I had in New York, especially with Acheson and Bevin, I persuaded myself that the only way-out possible was a direct agreement with Great Britain”<sup>359</sup>. The first meeting between the two happened in London, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, where Sforza found himself to negotiate on the European Union<sup>360</sup>. The way in which Sforza report the discussion to De Gasperi is emblematic of the tense situation between the two countries, at least on this matter: “Yesterday evening I had a first exchange of idea with Bevin on the colonies. He asked me to help him for Cyrenaica. I answered that our support had just one name: Tripolitania. I will see him again”<sup>361</sup>. The second, and longer, encounter<sup>362</sup> took place to days after, on May 6<sup>th</sup>. It was here that the Bevin-Sforza plan came into being, after three hours of talking:

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<sup>359</sup> Sforza Carlo, *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi. La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1952*, Roma, Atlante, 1952, p. 157 “L’atmosfera all’O.N.U. non si rivelò propizia ad accogliere formule accettabili da tutti. Malgrado gli sforzi che io feci attraverso una fitta rete di colloqui che ebbi a New York con la maggior parte dei delegati, e soprattutto con Acheson e Bevin, finii per persuadermi che solo una via d’uscita era possibile: un accordo diretto con l’Inghilterra”.

<sup>360</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 863.

<sup>361</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>362</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 875.

“The UN Assembly recommends: *Libya*: a) Cyrenaica will be placed under international trusteeship and Great Britain will be the administrative power; b) Fezzan will be placed under international trusteeship and France will be the administrative power; c) Tripolitania will be placed under international trusteeship at the end of 1951 and Italy will be the administrative power. In the interim period the British administration will continue but it will be assisted by an Advisory Council composed by the United States Great Britain France Italy Egypt (or another Arab State) and by a representative of the local population. Competence and duties of the Advisory Council as its sit and the procedure to pass the administration to Italy will be defined by the members of the Council in consultation with the administrative authority”<sup>363</sup>.

Sforza considered this compromise as the best one possible, the only way to keep Tripolitania and the two important Eritrea cities of Asmara and Massaua. This had to be specified to the Italian public opinion, which, nourished as it was of months of propaganda on the fact that Italy deserved to retain all of its colonial possessions<sup>364</sup>.

This plan was mainly the results of Sforza personal work: neither De Gasperi or Ambassadors as Tarchiani or even the Italian Allies inside the GA (France and Latin American countries) know of this. The way in which this plan came to be was through a *modus operandi* typical of XIX century secret bilateral diplomacy, and maybe it was for this reason why the reaction to it by other countries was very negative. When the plan was known by the Arab population in Libya, protests erupted among the population. Del Boca describes this very well “Where indignation reached its peak was of course in Tripolitania, where demonstrations against Italy went on with no interruption from May 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup>. Under the invitation of the nationalist Tripolitania chiefs, on May 11<sup>th</sup> Tripoli is blocked by a general strike. On the same day some thousands of demonstrators

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<sup>363</sup> Ibidem, “*Assemblea Nazioni Unite raccomanda: Libia: a) Cirenaica sarà posta sotto trusteeship internazionale e Gran Bretagna ne sarà potenza amministratrice; b) Fezzan sarà posto sotto trusteeship interna zionale e Francia ne sarà potenza amministratrice; c) Tripolitania sarà posta sotto trusteeship internazionale alla fine del 1951 ed Italia ne sarà potenza amministratrice. Nel periodo interinale continuerà amministrazione britannica ma questa sarà assistita da Consiglio consultivo composto da Stati Uniti Gran Bretagna Francia Italia Egitto (o altro Stato arabo) e da un rappresentante popolazione locale. Competenza e doveri del Consiglio consultivo come pure sua sede nonché procedura per trapasso amministrazione all'Italia saranno definiti dai membri del Consiglio stesso in consultazione con autorità amministratrice.*”

<sup>364</sup> Ibidem.

marched to the BMA seat to present a document of protest within it is menaced a campaign of civil disobedience if the Bevin-Sforza plan should pass at the UN”<sup>365</sup>. Latin American countries were surprised by it, and very discontent by the fact that Italy did not share the information regarding these negotiations with them, after all the support they had shown. Sforza had to send a communication to the different Latin American representations in which he justified this compromise by explaining that it was the only one possible, and at the same time he thanked them because, according to him, this plan was possible only because of them<sup>366</sup>. And then he asked to Tarchiani to specify that, with this formula, the US would not have been so in favour of the postponement<sup>367</sup>. However, the Latin American countries reacted coldly to this new proposal, as Tarchiani noticed “We felt a cold atmosphere among our friends, both because they were not warned – after having been so much prompted and pushed to act in our favour – and because a bilateral agreement, that had nothing to do with the UN or with any solicitation procedure, would have found many obstacles and it would have been most probably doomed to fail”<sup>368</sup>.

France and the US were satisfied by it, but not enthusiastic. Schumann communicated on May 7<sup>th</sup> to the UN representative Chauvel to vote in favour of the Bevin-Sforza Plan “without reservations and without enthusiasm”<sup>369</sup>. The US were also in favour but refused to present the project in front of the Assembly, despite both Italians and British requests “Dulles was ready to accept the project negotiated in London and he was ready to support it *if proposed by others*”<sup>370</sup>. There was also debate on how to vote the resolution: if in its entirety or if point by point. Great Britain would like the latter, Italy the former. The reason was evident: Great Britain was interested only in had support over Cyrenaica, which was mathematically sure, while there were doubts if the other proposal, especially the one regarding Tripolitania and Eritrea, would have been approved<sup>371</sup>. While each point would have been voted separately, the recommendation to the Assembly should have been

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<sup>365</sup> Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 382.

<sup>366</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 897.

<sup>367</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 898.

<sup>368</sup> Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 384, “*Sentimmo che tra i nostri amici serpeggiava un po’ di freddo, sia perché non erano stati avvertiti di nulla (dopo essere stati tante volte sollecitati e spinti ad agire in nostro favore), sia perché immaginavano che un accordo a due, estraneo alle Nazioni Unite e ad ogni procedura societaria, avrebbe trovato seri ostacoli e sarebbe stato molto probabilmente votato al fallimento*”.

<sup>369</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 899.

<sup>370</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 894, “*Dulles disposto accettare progetto concordato Londra e lo appoggerà se proposto da altri in Assemblea*”.

<sup>371</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 893.

considered in its entirety making “impossible any separate decision based on the different articles”<sup>372</sup>. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, the plan was voted by the Under committee, and all the points received the necessary majority except from the one regarding Tripolitania: as it was foreseen by some, two votes were missing<sup>373</sup>. In the subsequent days, Italy tried to pressure some countries not to vote against the project, or, at least, to abstain and this was true especially in the case of Turkey<sup>374</sup> and Lebanon<sup>375</sup>, even if both refused in the name of Muslim and Arab solidarity – even if, in the end, Turkey abstained<sup>376</sup>. The project was finally voted on May 17<sup>th</sup> and the result was as follow: “Cyrenaica approved with 36 votes in favour, 17 against, 6 abstained; Fezzan approved with 36 votes in favour, 15 against and 7 abstained; Tripolitania rejected with 33 in favour, 17 against and 8 abstained [...] The resolution has been rejected in its entirety by 37 votes against, 14 in favour and 7 abstentions”<sup>377</sup>. For Tarchiani the main responsible of the failure was an excessive Anglo-American optimism and, more concretely, the negative vote of Ethiopia and Haiti<sup>378</sup>. Especially the last country was severely accused by Sforza, who wrote in his memory that the representative of the country would have presented drunk at the voting<sup>379</sup>. This was untrue; nevertheless, it seems that the personality of the Haitian representative, whose name was Émile Saint-Lot, was directly responsible on how the vote was casted. The Minister in the Havana, Fecia di Cossato, presented a detailed biography of the man after the episode at the UN<sup>380</sup>. He confirmed that the representative did not follow the instruction dictated by the Haitian government, favouring Italian thesis. Saint-Lot was described as a paladin of the “*black race*” and thus ready to use any possible occasion to work in favour of the “black population all around the world”. Haiti was in fact a country in first line against the colonialism and in favour of the emancipation of the black people, this because of its history, even if the Minister ensured that most of the leadership of the country looked at Italy with sympathy. Still, this did not prevent to Saint-Lot to declare, the day after the vote “considering its affinity with the African people it was impossible

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<sup>372</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 898.

<sup>373</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 952.

<sup>374</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 939.

<sup>375</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 941.

<sup>376</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 944.

<sup>377</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 947.

<sup>378</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>379</sup> Sforza, *op. cit.* pg 161.

<sup>380</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 990.

for Haiti to sustain the resolution project of the First Committee, that could have had ominous consequences on those people”<sup>381</sup>. Finally, Fecia di Cossato said that Saint-Lot was, according to may, of a “versatile intelligence, but without any kind of professional and moral righteousness”<sup>382</sup>. In reality, Saint-Lot was a man who had an important role in the drafting of the “Declaration of the Human Rights” and will, in the following years, had an important role as paladin of decolonisation process inside the UN. In 1957, he will even hold a speech for Libyan independence, and his vote was very important for the approval of independence of many countries<sup>383</sup>. While it can be possible to understand Sforza and other Italians rage to see the Bevin-Sforza plan failing for basically only this vote, to call Saint-Lot a drunkard or someone with no “moral rightness” is not very elegant and certainly not true.

There is also probably another reason why the Bevin-Sforza plan failed, and it was that it was an old diplomatic tactic, not suited anymore for post-World War II diplomacy. The fact that even the allies of this plan felt unease with its presentation at the UN, and the strong opposition that the local population showed against this plan are indicators that diplomatic tools were changed. It was impossible now for States to use “secret diplomacy” in order to decide the fate of many populations. Furthermore, both Sforza and Bevin probably underestimated the context of the UN: despite the support of countries such as the US and France, the UN now offered to many new “anticolonialism” countries to have not only a forum, but also a concrete tool, to fight the system of colonialism.

After the failing of the Bevin-Sforza plan, Italy lost its last hope of retaining Libya. A resolution by Poland was approved that would have referred the problem of the Italian colonies to the Fourth GA. Sforza tried to keep the idea of the compromise for next negotiation with Great Britain, but the latter decided that it would have sustained Cyrenaica’s independence. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, Mohammed Idris unilaterally declared Cyrenaica independence<sup>384</sup>. In *waltz turn* Italy completely changed its tactics, by declaring itself in favour of Tripolitania’s independence. While it is true that during this period Italy tempted some last attempt of diplomatic manoeuvre to keep Tripolitania, after the Bevin-

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<sup>381</sup> Rossi, *op cit*, pg 469.

<sup>382</sup> DDI, Serie XI, Volume II, doc. n. 990.

<sup>383</sup> See: <https://leflambeau-foundation.org/foundation-overview/our-foundation/senateur-emile-saint-lot/>

<sup>384</sup> Cresti and Cricco, *op. cit.*, pg 143.

Sforza plan failing it was clear to many that any hope to fight for it would have been in vain. Thus, in a strange turn of fate, Sforza found himself to play the part that Quaroni suggest him a long time ago: to be a paladin for the independence of the African people. During the Fourth General Assembly, that in the end would have decided the destiny of Libya, Sforza made a speech in which he said that Italy would have sustained Tripolitania independence. Finally, the UN decided on Libya with the resolution 289 (IV) of November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1949: it would have been one political unity, and its independence should be declared no later than January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1952. This would not have been the end of Libyan path towards independence, however. To help Libya to reach independence, the UN created an “Advisory Council of the UN for Libya” chaired by the hollandaise Adrian Pelt – that Italian press judged “anti-Italian”<sup>385</sup> – and composed of representatives from Egypt, Pakistan, Italy, France, Great Britain, the US, the three provinces of Libya and the minorities inside the country<sup>386</sup>. Many negotiations with the Western Powers – especially with Great Britain – continued, and in the end, it was decided to unify Libya under the authority of the Sanusi leader Mohammed Idris, the greatest ally of the British in the country. This decision would have created a lot of discontent, especially among some of the Tripolitania people who did not like to be subdued to the authority of the Sanusi. More than the need of its people, Mohammed Idris would have preferred to look to the interest of the Foreign Powers, especially the British. The choice made for Federal State, uniting the three areas of Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania, was made after an intense debate among the Arab States that preferred a centralised State and Western Government who thought that the Federal State would have allowed them to better maintain sphere of influence in the different Areas. Later, the National Libyan Assembly – under indication of the now King Idris I – designated the first Provisional Federal Government. However, the latter did little to ensure a certain independence to the country “[The federal Government] was not the result of popular preferences, but the result of a choice that was exercised by some external powers with the consent of the Sanusi”<sup>387</sup>. Italy also found some consolation in it: in fact, it was able to reach some agreement with Great

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<sup>385</sup> Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 398.

<sup>386</sup> Cresti and Cricco, *op cit.*, pg 144.

<sup>387</sup> Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pg 421 “[Il governo federale] però non è l’espressione della volontà popolare, ma il risultato di una scelta esercitata con prepotenza da alcune potenze straniere con il beneplacito del corrivo Senusso”.

Britain to see its economic interest safeguarded in Tripolitania<sup>388</sup>. Solidarity among colonialist country still existed after all. In the end, the newly Libyan state suffered from being greatly influenced by external Powers and to be very weak on the inside. A simple example, Libya did not have one capital, but two: Tripoli, the most important city of Tripolitania, and Benghazi, the most important one of Cyrenaica. As for Italy, because of the numerous Italian communities in the country and its geographical proximity, it will have a privileged relationship with its former colony. But this is another story.

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<sup>388</sup> Ivi, pg 412



## CONCLUSIONS

One of the things that may surprise today is how much the colonial issue was felt both by the popular opinion and by the political elite. While these years are nowadays mostly famous – and studied – for events like the signature of the Atlantic Pact or the institution of the Council of Europe, one can remain surprised on the importance that was given to the colonies. In this period a new world was borning, but at the same time the old one was still not completely dead. Colonial's possessions were still considered by many an essential tool for a Nation's prestige and power. While the new superpowers – US and USSR – had in common an aversion to colonialism, European powers were not willing to renounce to it completely. Maybe, an exception was Great Britain, who tried to 'transform' its colonial Empire into the Commonwealth system. Political men as Bevin and Attlee, while they were not eager to renounce the colonial system, understood that the British Empire was overstretched. The United Kingdom did not possess anymore enough resource to administrate such a large territory, and this can help to explain why it adopted new political forms and why it rejected an old way of thinking. In fact, it was Great Britain first who lamented the usage by Italy of old terms and arguments to justify trusteeship. While the British were not eager to renounce the colonial system so easily, they had enough maturity to understand that a more 'subtle' approach was needed. In contrast, Italy initially had not understood it, and it was very late that it started to use a more 'modern' approach, especially when the problem was referred to the UN. However, it should be noticed that the Italian 'Empire' and the British one were hardly comparable. Great Britain had an Empire that started in the Renaissance, and in century of administration it learned how to deal with colonies, and it was very 'mature' in the XX century. Italy, on the contrary, did not manage to keep colonies for even a century, and the extension of its Empire was pitiful compared to the British one. This lack of 'colonialist maturity' can help to explain why Italian diplomacy struggled to understand the direction the world was taking regarding colonialism. This can also be observed in other occasions, such as the wavering behaviour between choosing the West and remain Neutral. It is only after the victory of the Christian Democrats that Italy would have assumed a clearer behaviour on the matter. And again, this was mostly thanks to De Gasperi and Sforza, because most of the Italians were against siding with a military alliance again. And one of the main arguments used by Sforza's and De Gasperi's

opponents against their pro-West policy was the aversion that the Anglo-Americans showed to any kind Italy returning to its colonial possession. By looking at the internal pressure, it is easy to see why the Foreign Minister attached so much importance to a problem that, by looking at how Italy was in ruin after World War II, can be considered of secondary importance today. Together with Trieste, the colonies were maybe the last episode in which Italians showed a stubborn nationalism. And maybe, for many, to conserve Libya, Eritrea and Somalia was also related to the proudness of be part of a 'Great Nation'. After all, since the Risorgimento it was the dream of the political elite to show that their country was as much important as France and Great Britain. To renounce to the colonies automatically meant to agree that Italy was not a Great Nation anymore – if it ever was. Diplomats too were probably concerned by this danger, and this can explain why, at least in the first part, many of them shared Sforza's enthusiasm for the matter. But there was at least one exception. Since the start, it was clear that Quaroni did not agree at all with the political view of his chief. Various time, he tried to show the futility of the battle, and he even anticipated what Sforza then did, when he suggested that it was better to side-line with the anticolonialism front. As time passed, other diplomatic figures understood that it was maybe better for Italy to desist its revendication; among them, there was the Ambassador in London Gallarati Scotti and the Consul Raimondo Manzini, the latter also took part in the investigations of the Mogadiscio incident. Nevertheless, the people ultimately responsible for Italian Foreign Policy – Sforza and also the General Director of Political Affairs Zoppi – continued to sustain Italy return in Africa. Probably, these men were much more sensible to domestic opinion than their ambassadors were.

Speaking more strictly about diplomacy, maybe one of the fatal mistakes in Sforza's approach was to think that the Americans were willing to help Italians, while the British were the main obstacle. In reality, the US was, to a certain extent, even more contrary to Italian's revendication than the United Kingdom was. And this because the objection that the Americans made to their allies' plan was essentially pragmatical and, substantially, impossible to prove wrong. US did not want that Italy – whose economy was still fragile, and whose army was in ruin – decided to dedicate its scarce resources to something that was anachronistic and whose success was not ensured. Furthermore, the Americans were the one who helped Italy the most, with their financial and economic aids. To see US resources used to fight Arabs in Tripolitania was probably not what they had in mind.

And the Communist Italian Party, while defeated at the elections, was still very powerful. What would have happened if Italian Governments would have decided to use resources for their colonies instead to use them to adjust Italian society problems? Maybe the Communists could have exploited this malaise and could have used it to take power. The risk was too high, and the reward too little. After all, the British were already there, and they already had agreed with the Sanusi, so, in a way or another, Americans would have been able to use Libya in a strategic way. British were, after all, a much more solid Ally than Italians.

Sforza's insistence to consider the problem of the colonies as 'bilateral', regarding thus only Great Britain and Italy, was also ultimately a mistake. Many times, Italian diplomacy asked to its allies to make pressure on London, because it considered it the main obstacle. It is true that the UK had a main role in the story – after all, most of the colonies were under the BMA – but for Great Britain the settlement of Libya, Eritrea and Somalia was something far more important in scale than relationship with Italy. Cyrenaica especially became an essential piece in the chessboard of the Cold War, when from the rest of Middle East and the Arab World the British were in retreat. To have military bases and a friendly Arab State in the Region could make the difference between victory and defeat in case of war with Russia. British diplomacy was considered more 'hostile' by Italians because of the punitive behaviour that Great Britain adopted towards them during the Second World War and after, and also because they directly controlled the former colonies with the BMA. Nevertheless, as it was possible to see, the United Kingdom was not interested in a 'direct' control of those territories, and it desperately tried to resolve the problem as fast as possible because the resources to its disposal were diminishing. The British, differently from Italians, understood that some changes had to be made to remain relevant in the new world.

However, there were also so positive to underline in the Italian diplomatic action. One of it is how Italy was able to find allies to sustain its cause. France had been the first country to actively sustain it during the colony's discussion. In this case however it was more France that choose Italy as an ally than the other way around. The former was worried of the crescent influence of the Anglo-Americans, and it fear that this front could reduce its status as a great power. This is why the French were so eager to help Italy, because they needed an ally to counter-balance the Anglo-Saxon's influence. In fact, it was not

only on the colonies, but also in other important event such as the entrance of Italy in the Atlantic Pact that France always pledged Italy's cause. Hence, the counterbalancing of the Anglo-Americans, and the containment of the Arab nationalism are the main causes of France's behaviour during the negotiation on the colonies. And Italy repaid this courtesy by never bringing on the negotiation table the settlement of Fezzan. For French, that was an essential territory to reunite their Algerian possession with the ones in Eastern Africa; Italy, on the other hand, probably did not have so much interest in the territory and valued the French support much more. The only reason for dispute could have been the discovery of oil in the region: that is why, sometimes, the question of the borders among Tripolitania and Fezzan and a possible agreement of co-exploiment was discuss among the two parts. But again, this had to be discussed bilaterally, as if Fezzan was already considered as France's possession.

Other important allies on the Italian side were the Latin American. Among these countries existed a sort of cultural affinity that can help to explain why Southern Americans were ready to sustain Italy. Furthermore, some of these countries had inside them a big Italian community, that was much sensible to what the disposition towards their motherland was.

Finally, the relationship between the Arabs and the Italians is very interesting, even if full of nuances. On the surface, their position was completely antagonistic: the Arab League pursued for an independent and united Libya, Italy for a trusteeship over it. Nevertheless, both parts were able to find space for dialogue. The most interesting case, as underlined in Chapter 3, was the talks between the Italians and the Lebanese. The latter agreed to have a more conciliant tone as far as the colonies were concerned, while the former offered weapons in return – presumably to fight against Israeli. This could be one of the first episode that underline a peculiar Italian policy towards the Arabs, much more sympathetic than that of the other Western countries. It was maybe one of the first step of what in future will be the neo-Atlantic policy, or, more generally, a policy very careful to the Arabs. However, it is undeniable that, in the period analysed, Italy seriously underestimated Arab nationalism, and, more specifically, the resentment that the people of Libya had against Italy. And that is connect to another point, that is the incapacity of Italy to recognise its brutal behaviour during the colonisation.

Not once, in the documents that were analysed, Italy criticised its past as coloniser. It always presented itself as, for example, “street builder” or anyway someone who brought civilisation among savages. It completely ignored what was done to conquer those land and, in the specific case of Libya, it deeply underestimated the resentment that was caused by the Italian troops, especially in Cyrenaica, where, according to some historians like Del Boca, a genocide took place.

This was not however the story of Italy only, but also the Libya’s one. And by looking at it, it was possible to see the origin of a country that represent one of those ‘artificial’ nations that was created many times by Europeans in Africa. Libya was born from Italian desire to recall itself to its Roman heritage – Libya was the ancient name of those territories in Ancient Rome. By doing so, it completely ignored the historical evolution and the socio-economic differences that existed among Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. It is true that antecedently the Ottoman contributed to form some kind of ‘formal’ unity among these territories, especially thanks to the common Muslim faith, but there were still many differences and Turkish rule was weak. And it must be remembered that, in all of these territories, there were even more division that derived from disparate tribes and families. By the end, Italy managed to offer to the different population a common goal and objective, which was the struggle against the invader. One of the reasons why the Sanusi manage to extend its influence on just Cyrenaica to all-over Libya was, in fact, thanks to their role in the fight against the Italians. In spite of this, some differences between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were still present. This is showed by the fact that Italy tried to reach out some Tripolitania chiefs to convince them to support it, by exploiting their animosity against the Sanusi. But in the end the desire of independence and unity was much stronger than any kind of rivalry.

This did not mean that the reign of Idris was what many independentist expected. Among his first acts as sovereign there was a strong repression of dissidents. During the first free elections, in 1952, grave incidents took place in Tripoli, and many people from parties different from the one of the kings, or that pledged for a unified Libya free from foreign influence, were either imprisoned or exiled. The years of Idris I were characterised by the discovery of oil and by agreement with the Western countries – like ensuring to the Anglo-Americans military bases on Libyan territory. As far as the old coloniser were concern, relationship with it were manage by the Italo-Libyan treaty of 1956, that

protected private properties of Italian citizens in Libya – Tripolitania especially had the biggest community of Italians. However, relationship among the two countries were still very tense, especially the Libyan part looked at Italians still suspiciously. Idris's Libya was also characterised by a certain ambiguity regarding Arab nationalism: from one side, there was public opinion that called for alignment with Nasser's designs, on the other Idris and his court who knew that the stability of their power was based on Western support. It was this contrast inside the Libyan society that allowed Ghaddafi and his men to take power. And Ghaddafi certainly had an ambivalent relation with Italy. On one hand, he used the hate against Italians as a political tool, to unify public opinion. This went so far to exile the Italian community in 1970. But relations were not exclusively antagonistic. Oil export towards the former coloniser were among the main economic activities of Libya. Italy would have played a role of mediator between it and the Western Powers, especially the US, and even more. This was especially true during the Craxi government and the Foreign Ministry of Andreotti, when they both tried to avoid military actions against the Libyan dictatorship – like in the case of the 'El dorado Canyon' operation in 1986. It is not the objective of this thesis to speak about to this period, but it can be said that there are still many 'obscure' points in those years that the historians of the future will have to enlighten.

Ghaddafi managed to stay to power for almost 40 years. But he too succumbed to the revolution that shocked the Arab world in 2011. Western Powers swiftly took the opportunity to finally depose the dictator. However, Libya's story is not one with a happy ending. While these conclusions are being written, the country is desperately trying to recover from the civil war. In this complex environment, Italy plays an important role of dialogue among the different governments in Libya, in Tripoli and Benghazi, to help in the overcoming of the division inside the country. It is the hope of the international community that it will be possible in the future to reach an agreement to create a unified and legitimised government for a stable Libyan state. Only a strong and unified entity will be able to help in the management of many difficult questions, such as the handling of immigration flux. Furthermore, a strong State is necessary to stop the proliferation of armed militias that to these days infest the Libyan territory. And to avoid further suffering of the Libyan people. The recent tragedy in Derna is another case of catastrophe that is

strictly linked to the political instability of Libya: fragmentation of powers and civil war are responsible for it as much as – if not more than – the environment.

Libya may be one of the most important countries for Italian Foreign policy, both for geographical, and historical reasons. It is by no means an easy State to understand, and some may also argue that it is not even a unified entity. That is why it is important to study the history of this country and understand how its relationship with Italy had evolved in time. The attempt to conserve Libya as a colony surely is one of the pivotal events of this relationship, when Libyans struggled to find their identity and Italians were trying to re-take a place in the new international field. Colonialism was over – or at least it was approaching to an end – and new challenges – the Cold War, and, to a lesser extent, Arab Nationalism – were on the horizon. Today challenges are different but can only be faced if historical perspective is considered. Only by looking at the past will be possible to construct solid relationship for the future.

In the end, it may be wise to make some considerations on the colonialist mentality that was expressed many times by the Italian political elites. It is easy, today, to be shocked on how racist were, according to our standards, men like Sforza, De Gasperi or Zoppi. And it is even more easy, today, to play the role of the judge and condemn them. And probably, who is writing now has succumbed to the temptation sometimes. However, to express value judgments on men who lived in different times is a mistake that an historian should not do. Carlo Sforza was a man born in 1872. When he was 12 years old, Western Powers reunited in Berlin to decide the partition of Africa<sup>389</sup>. Both he and De Gasperi – born in 1881 – were young people who remembered the defeat of Adua – 1896. De Gasperi was born under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and passed the first years of his live to fight for the unification of Trentino to Italy. They lived in a world where to speak of “white men burden” was a normal thing. And while they were certainly persons who managed to reconstruct and push forward the world in which they lived, they were still men of their time. It may be good to remember that the US, who used their ‘anti-colonialist’ mentality as one of the justifications to not concede trusteeship to Italy, was a country in which was established the strict separation among ‘blacks and whites’.

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<sup>389</sup> The reference is to the Berlin Congress of 1884-1885, that it is considered by many historians as the beginning of the ‘scramble for Africa’.

An historian should have the authority to value on concrete and verifiable things, like the pursuit of an objective. In our case, Italy did not manage to obtain Libya back – or even part of it. But should be very careful if it tries to judge the moralities and the values who pushed men in their design. They had to be analysed because, like it or not, human being is pushed by values. But to judge them could be tricky. By creating a line between good and evil there is also the risk that the historian abandons its primary objective, that is to explain the human being and his actions. Even when we talk about colonialism, Nazism, or fascism this criterium must be in our mind. March Bloch, in his “Apology of history” spoke of the historian’s dilemma to wanting to become a judge. He claimed that, by doing so, an historian risk to betray his primary mission, that is to explain humanity both in its individuality and in the society. To judge is the easy; to analyse and to explain, much harder. I wish to conclude my work precisely with Bloch’s words, that represents a beacon for everyone who writes and studies history. “A motto, in synthesis, dominates and enlightens our studies: ‘to understand’. We do not affirm that the good historian is extraneous to passions [...]. A motto, it is true, charged of difficulties, but also hopes [...] and friendship. [...] Who is different from us – stranger, political adversary – is, almost certainly, a bad guy for us. Even when we conduct struggles that cannot be avoided, a little more intelligence in the souls would be necessary; even more, when we are still in time to avoid it. History must help us to heal from this flaw, provided that it renounces to its false airs as an archangel. It is a vast experience of human varieties, a long meeting among men. Life, as science, has everything to gain from this encounter being fraternal”<sup>390</sup>.

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<sup>390</sup> March Bloch, *Apologia della Storia*, pp. 107-108 “*Un motto, in sintesi, domina e illumina i nostri studi: ‘conoscere’. Non diciamo che il bravo storico è estraneo alle passioni [...]. Motto, non nascondiamocelo, carico di difficoltà, ma anche di speranza [...] di amicizia. [...] Chi è diverso da noi – straniero, avversario politico – passa, quasi necessariamente, per un cattivo. Anche per condurre le lotte che non si possono evitare, un po’ più di intelligenza delle anime sarebbe necessaria; a maggior ragione, per evitarle, quando si è ancora in tempo. La storia, purché rinunci alle sue false arie da arcangelo, deve aiutarci a guarire da questo difetto. Essa è una vasta esperienza delle varietà umane, un lungo incontro fra gli uomini. La vita, come la scienza, ha tutto da guadagnare dal fatto che questo incontro sia fraterno*”.



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