

Bettino Craxi, an analysis of his figure in the sense of foreign policy and his use of communication

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1. Introduction

Bettino Craxi's figure appeared at the top of Italian politics at a time in history when Italy was facing a period of transformation. He left an indelible mark with his politics, albeit associated with controversy. This thesis aims to analyze his role in the sense of the foreign policy of his governments and the innovative use of communication in it. The available sources aim to understand how these two spheres characterized Craxian leadership and how they influenced each other, changing Italy's international role and Craxi's image.

The historical context in which the Craxian leadership finds itself operating is that of an Italy that has struggled to overcome the years of crisis of the previous decade, that still bears the marks of political instability and terrorism, and that is trying to achieve a new position and assertiveness. In particular, the country is trying to balance loyalty to NATO and greater autonomy in foreign policy. At the same time, the 1980s also symbolized the evolution of the media system, which consequently influenced the technique of political communication and its twisting. At this juncture, Craxi manages to be among the first to grasp this innovation.

To arrive at an in-depth investigation of Bettino Craxi, it is necessary to consider the foreign policy of the time, his management, and especially how he constructed the narrative of his political action. In this case, communication is thus no longer a mere accessory; on the contrary, it is transformed into an essential tool for creating consensus and a narrative capable of influencing public opinion concerning the measures in place.

This paper is divided into three chapters, which together will ensure a comprehensive view of the Craxian figure concerning the topic of interest of this thesis. The first chapter, "Who was Bettino Craxi?," represents the historical-biographical part necessary to understand his figure and governing actions. Beginning with his life, it then moves to his political career and years in the PSI, and finally to an analysis of his years as Prime Minister. Once this part is completed, one will gain an insight into the man from a personal and political point of view to understand his later thinking and actions.

In contrast, the second chapter, "Craxi and Foreign Policy," will analyze government foreign policy. Through a wide range of literature, from both primary and contemporary sources and secondary literature, the foundational elements of his international action will be established, particularly through his relations with the European Economic Community, NATO, also addressing the Euromissile crisis, the United States, with a parenthesis on the Sigonella crisis, the Soviet Union and his engagement in the Mediterranean and Middle East areas.

The goal is to understand the actions and transformations related to them in the international landscape and assess their historical impact.

Finally, the third chapter, “Communicating Foreign Policy: Bettino Craxi’s Political Message on the International Scene,” will turn its gaze toward Craxian political communication, particularly going on to analyze its use in foreign policy. It will analyze how Craxi exploited the media and his particular communicative style, ahead of its time, to present and legitimize his governmental choices, both to Italian and foreign audiences. It will then take up as case studies the Euromissile crisis, the Sigonella crisis, and the Mediterranean and Middle East policy, going on to study them again, but from the perspective of the communicative strategy used in them and how it became an integral part of political action. Finally, an understanding of the contemporary perception obtained from this strategy and its legacy will be undertaken.

Through a historical reconstruction, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of Bettino Craxi as an actor who influenced and interpreted a historical era of transition and left an imprint on Italian politics.

2. Chapter 1 - Who was Bettino Craxi?

The first chapter of this thesis is developed in the sense of an exposition of the events related to the figure of Benedetto Craxi that is as bibliographically reliable as possible. In this sense, it was decided to proceed according to an exact schematic configuration, first with life and then on to politics. In an attempt to best analyze his political career, the youth period, the activity in the party, the secretariat, the new model of socialism, and finally, the governments have been divided. It is also necessary to point out that the government's foreign policy will be the subject of specific discussion in the second chapter and has been left out of this one.

2.1. Life

Bettino Craxi's life was characterized by a multidimensional influence linked to family and external experiences, including World War II. He developed from an early age a rejection of all forms of extremism, forming an early political consciousness. Thanks to his innate passion for politics, he devoted himself from his student days to the life of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), eventually abandoning his studies to begin holding national office and eventually climbing the ranks of the PSI. His private life remains private in any case, but what emerges is a man of incredible charisma who, in his way, ushered in a new era of Italian politics.

2.1.1. Childhood and Family Context

Benedetto Craxi (1934 - 2000), also known as Bettino, was born in Milan on February 24, 1934. Growing up in a middle-class family with a Sicilian father and a Lombard mother, he came to terms with a dual reality combining south and north. This peculiarity went on to influence him profoundly. It was precisely this duality that contributed in an important way to his complex identity. His parents both represented an important point of reference. His father, Vittorio, a lawyer and army officer, was essential in imparting to him a strong sense of justice and duty. At the same time, his mother, Maria, an even more fundamental presence, helped him develop a critical mind and a temperament that ensured his thinking and character were not easily influenced.¹

¹ "Bettino Craxi - Patrimonio Dell'Archivio Storico Senato Della Repubblica." n.d. [Patrimonio.archivio.senato.it.](https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/fondazione-craxi/bettino-craxi)
<https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/fondazione-craxi/bettino-craxi>.

2.1.2. Impact of the Second World War

The Second World War deeply marked not only Craxi's childhood but also the future politician he would become, leading him to reject any authoritarianism, not only fascist but also communist, and creating in him a dream of social reconstruction.

The family also spent the war suffering the privations and hardships of the conflict. However, the events following the September 8, 1943, armistice influenced him even more. Vittorio Craxi, an officer in the Italian army at the time, was called to collaborate with the newly formed Italian Social Republic (RSI)², but he firmly refused this possibility. There were various reasons for this, related to an allegiance to the Italian state, not recognizing the RSI as a legitimate state, and a rejection of fascism, its dictatorship, and the German occupation of Italy. This had significant consequences not only in the immediate term, putting the man and his entire family in mortal danger from almost certain repercussions, but also on the future development of young Craxi's political thought, leading him to the aforementioned rejection of authoritarian regimes.³

Cementing this idea even more strongly were the stories of the Resistance with which he came into contact during the period of occupation. During the same period, the Craxi family home in Casasco also became a place where Jewish families and military personnel could learn before their escape attempt to Switzerland. Following the conflict, Vittorio Craxi began his political career, becoming first Milan's vice-prefect and then Como's prefect in 1945.⁴

2.1.3. Studies and Education

When he was sent to study at the "De Amicis" archiepiscopal college in Cantù in 1940, Craxi officially began his academic journey. He found a rigorous environment with a strong discipline based on Christian principles, which deeply marked his personality. Indeed, he learned the value of hierarchies and authority. At the same time, it allowed him to lay the foundations for forming his determined and resolute character. On the other hand, the most vivid period of the war marked his return to his family, which, after the beginning of his

² "La Nascita Della Repubblica Sociale Italiana (R.S.I.)." 2020. Fatti per La Storia. September 22, 2020.

<https://www.fattiperlastoria.it/repubblica-sociale-italiana-salo/>.

³ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, Rome. As described on Lazio900, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi," Lazio900, last modified 2017, accessed May 8, 2025.

<https://www.lazio900.it/istituto/fondazione-bettino-craxi/>.

⁴ Ibidem.

father's political career, saw him immersed in a family environment linked to a strong political commitment. In any case, his presence at home was relatively short-lived, as in 1946, he returned to boarding school, first attending "Gallia" in Como and later being transferred back to "De Amicis."⁵

The years at boarding school marked him very deeply from a religious point of view, bringing him so close to the Christian faith that he considered entering the seminary. In 1948, his father ran for the Popular Front in the Como-Varese-Sondrio constituency. The election campaign saw Craxi actively engaged and accompanying his father. Following his father's appointment, Craxi enrolled, fascinated and excited by politics, in the Lambrate section of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) at age 17.⁶

Following the family's move to Milan, his school career continued at the Liceo Carducci, an institution known at the time to guarantee a high-level education and accommodate the children of middle-class and intellectual families. Bettino Craxi distinguished himself in high school by his determined character and curiosity. He continued his studies by enrolling at the Law School of the State University of Milan, probably to follow his father's previous career as a lawyer. As with his ecclesiastical vocation, however, politics again took over, and he decided to change universities to enroll in the faculty of Political Science at the University of Urbino. Unfortunately, due to his strong political commitment, this course of study was also interrupted, leading him never to earn a university degree.⁷

2.1.4. Character, interests, and private life

Having dealt with Benedetto Craxi's childhood and adolescence, to better understand his actions and experience, it is necessary to describe and address his character, passions, and private life in a small excursion. They, in fact, profoundly influenced the public figure who played a key role in the politics of the First Republic.

He was generally described as a resolute, pragmatic, and authoritarian person who, however, was able to distinguish his politics with a very lucid and rational vision but, at the same time, was particularly innovative. A significant role was played in his ability to handle power; in fact, this enabled him to become the prominent figure we all know today, putting

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

him forward as one of the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), both among the most influential and among the most decisive for the party itself. This ability was matched by an ideal of strong discipline and loyalty, which he demonstrated strongly in handling relations inside and outside the party. Those loyal to him were rewarded, in contrast to those who opposed him, who showed strong distrust. Finally, two of his most famous characteristics were even more effective: his incredible oratorical skills and magnetic charisma. These characteristics proved essential in bringing to life the man who could transform Italian political communication.

Beyond the politician, Craxi proved to be a history buff and a great art collector. His love for history was exceptionally dedicated to the Italian Risorgimento phase and the figure of Giuseppe Garibaldi. For these very reasons, we refer to his socialism as “modern Garibaldinism.”⁸ As a collector, on the other hand, he devoted himself to both works of art and historical memorabilia, particularly those related to his political faith and those concerning Italian culture. He then took up the arts, so much so that he signed several articles and essays under the pseudonym “Ghino di Tacco,” a tribute to the medieval Tuscan brigand who was said to steal from the rich to help those in need. Later, in Tunis, he discovered painting and decorated several amphorae.

Another important pillar of his life is his family. As mentioned in the part related to his childhood, Craxi was influenced by his parental figures during his growth. His mother helped give birth to his developed critical sense and thinking skills, enabling him not to be easily influenced by external elements. On the other hand, his father gave him both a strong sense of justice and duty and allowed him to understand the need for resistance to any form of extremism and authoritarianism. Through his career, it also allowed him to get in touch with what would become his greatest passion, politics. Once an adult, he formed a tightly cohesive family unit himself, although forced to come to terms with the figure and political relevance his father represented several times. In 1959, he married Anna Maria Moncini (1932 -), and from the union, two children were born: Stefania Craxi (1960 -) and Bobo Craxi (1964 -). Both continued their father's political career, following in his footsteps, albeit on two different sides. The daughter, currently a member of Forza Italia, has served as chairman of the 3rd Commission on Foreign Affairs and Defense of the Senate of the Republic since 2022 and has worked more than anyone else to defend and preserve the memory of Bettino

⁸ Craxi, Bettino. 2007. *Passione Garibaldina*. Marsilio.

Craxi, also founding the Craxi Foundation⁹. Bobo Craxi, on the other hand, is aligned in politics with the new Italian Socialist Party and was formerly Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the second government of Romano Prodi.¹⁰

From the elements presented, it is therefore possible to infer how the figure of Bettino Craxi is anything but simple, formed by different nuances and characteristics, in a conjugation of distinct personality elements. Understanding such aspects makes it possible to have a better reading and understanding of man's actions and political life. Having thus concluded the in-depth study of his character, the analysis will now deal with the last years of his life, leaving the central years of his existence to the political narrative in the section devoted to it.

2.1.5. Final years of life in Hammamet and death

The Mani Pulite scandal¹¹ created not only a great stir in the public scene of the 1990s but also the downfall of many of the era's most eminent figures and led to the end of the so-called First Republic. Among the politicians involved, one name caused a stir because of its importance: Bettino Craxi, who received no less than 28 notices of indictment between 1992 and 1994. On May 12, 1994, his passport was withdrawn for the alleged danger of flight¹². However, at the time of the events, the Italian authorities were not aware that he was already in Tunisia, in the villa in Hammamet, under the protection of his friend Ben Ali (1939 - 2019)¹³. At this juncture, Craxi defined himself as a "political exile," considering his stay on the African continent as a voluntary exile rather than a fugitive¹⁴, the way the Italian justice system

⁹ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, Rome. As described on Lazio900, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi," Lazio900, last modified 2017, accessed May 8, 2025.
<https://www.lazio900.it/istituto/fondazione-bettino-craxi/>.

¹⁰ "Governo Prodi II." 2015. Wwww.governo.it. November 11, 2015.
<https://www.governo.it/it/i-governi-dal-1943-ad-oggi/xv-legislatura-28-aprile-2006-6-febbraio-2008/governo-prodi-ii/335>.

¹¹ The term "Mani Pulite Scandal" refers to the judicial investigation that began in 1992 in Italy, which revealed an immense system of bribery and corruption that immersed politics, public administration and the business world.
Pirola, Mattia. "Tangentopoli, Cos'è E Riassunto Di Una Vicenda Che Cambiò per Sempre L'Italia."
<https://www.ilgiornaleditalia.it/news/cronaca/338072/tangentopoli-cos-e-riassunto.html>.

¹² Buccini, Goffredo. 1994. "Può Fuggire, via Il Passaporto a Craxi." Corriere della Sera. May 13, 1994.
<https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/slider.html#>.

¹³ Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali è stato il secondo presidente della Tunisia dal 1987 al 2011.
"Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali Obituary." 2019. The Guardian. September 19, 2019.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/19/zine-al-abidine-ben-ali-obituary>.

¹⁴ Italian justice declared his absconding on July 21, 1995, and resulted in the seizure of his assets.

defines it.¹⁵ Several extradition requests were also submitted between 1994 and 1999 by the Italian state, which were unsuccessful; however, Craxi himself asked to be allowed to return to Italy starting in 1999 to receive medical treatment; this request split the executive in terms of decision-making in any case and never led to any permission.

During his stay abroad, Bettino Craxi continued to pay great attention to Italian political life. He wrote articles, letters, and speeches in several newspapers, including *Il Giornale*¹⁶. The Hammamet villa soon became a gathering place for former socialists, center-right figures, intellectuals, and journalists. However, his figure remained controversial in Italy for a long time, divided between those who believed he was innocent and those who condemned him.

In the same years, another unimportant condition took over in the former prime minister's life, namely the deterioration of his physical health. Due to his stay outside Italy, he could not treat his type 2 diabetes well, and this proved his aggravation. In the late 1990s, he developed several complications because of this: renal, vascular, and cardiac. He was, in addition, operated on for kidney cancer in 1999, but his health was already compromised. Eventually, on January 19, 2000, he died of cardiac arrest at the age of 65 at his villa in Hammamet.¹⁷

His funeral was held in the Tunis Cathedral and was well attended by both the native population and former militants of the Italian Socialist Party and other Italians. Not yet forgotten, however, were the events of Mani Pulite, the delegation of the D'Alema II government¹⁸, composed of Lamberto Dini (1931 -) and Marco Minniti (1956 -), received several insults and were hit by the same coin toss that had targeted Craxi years earlier in front of the Hotel Raphael by a crowd of socialists. Today, in the Catholic cemetery, Benedetto Craxi rests in Hammamet, buried in a tomb that reads, "La mia libertà equivale alla mia vita."

¹⁵ "Adesso è ufficiale Craxi "latitante". *Corriere della Sera*, July 22, 1995.

¹⁶ Founded by Indro Montanelli (1909 - 2001), it began as a newspaper independent of political parties with a liberal and conservative orientation. From the beginning of Berlusconi's political career to the present, it is considered one of Italy's leading center-right newspapers.

¹⁷ "La Notizia Della Morte Di Craxi Dagli Archivi Dell'ANSA - Notizie - Ansa.it." 2020. Agenzia ANSA. January 11, 2020.

https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2020/01/11/la-notizia-della-morte-di-craxi-dagli-archivi-dellansa_8162a8f5-6b23-4463-aaf8-9fd18a67eea2.html.

¹⁸ "Governo D'Alema II." 2015. www.governo.it. November 11, 2015.

<https://www.governo.it/it/i-governi-dal-1943-ad-oggi/xiii-legislatura-9-maggio-1996-9-marzo-2001/governo-dalema-ii/341>.

2.2. Political career in the Italian Socialist Party

Having observed the private life of Benedetto Craxi, we cannot now but inevitably focus on his political career. Not only as a leading figure in the politics of his time, but also as a forerunner of what would be a model by which later politicians could be inspired.

2.2.1. Start of career

It was as a result of his father's involvement in politics that, as mentioned, Craxi's political interest would develop. After following the aforementioned political campaigns, his first steps occurred when he was only 17, in 1951, with his enrollment in the Italian Socialist Party at the Lambrate section. Even then, it was not a passive membership but the beginning of intense political activity in the student and youth fields. This early period was critical in his formation, allowing him to develop skills essential for future party leadership.

During his university days, his interest in politics only grew, leading him to found the Socialist University Group at that time. He promoted different kinds of activities aimed at initiating debates and meetings. He also adhered to the New University group, affiliated with the Italian Democratic University Center (CUDI). He delivered his first public speeches on these occasions, already demonstrating innate oratorical skills and a strong personality.¹⁹

By this time, his political career already seemed under way, and within a few years, he found himself involved in leadership roles. In 1956, he received the position, following an election, of national vice-president of the National Union of Italian University Representatives (UNURI), an essential structure of student representation. In a short time, he also held several positions in the Socialist Youth Federation, of which he was a leader, and had outstanding foreign experiences. As a CUDI delegate, he could link up first in Beijing and later in Prague, coming into contact with various youth movements in the Soviet zone and the international left. On the very occasion of his second trip, he had the opportunity to meet a central figure on the European student scene. Jiri Pelikan, the International Union of Students (IUI) president. This contact would manifest a double role in Craxi's life; on the one hand, it would generate in him a more international and less Italy-centered political vision, while on the other, it would refine even more his critique of the dominant pro-Soviet position in international leftist politics at the time. This view was also evident in his fierce critique of

¹⁹ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi."

the Soviet Union's censorship of the Polish newspaper *Po Prostu*, for which Craxi presented a motion for solidarity to the PSI Provincial Executive and, following the Soviet invasion of Hungary, also with his definitive repudiation of authoritarian communism. This led him not only to move closer to the position sought by Pietro Nenni but also to move away from the Frontist experience and create the basis for the future autonomy of the PSI vis-à-vis the Communist Party.²⁰

Following this, Craxi did his best to guide the Milanese youth movement toward a new process of ideological emancipation. In this sense, the first nucleus of the “autonomists” was born, aimed at opposing Communist hegemony in the international youth scene. This foundation was based on other figures such as Natali, Turri, Durante, and Cocucci. It is necessary to emphasize how the group they created was initially a minority but later became increasingly popular in the movement, winning a majority in the Milan Federation in the same year.²¹

Another student organization that played an essential role in its life in the same years was the Unione Goliardica Italiana (UGI). Future essential figures in Italian politics, including Pannella, Stanzani, Jannuzzi, Roccella, Chiarugi, Ungari, and others, attended the latter. On the occasion of the Perugia congress, Benedetto Craxi joined the so-called “seven principles of goliardia,” a title that allowed him a seat on the National Council. When his career seemed well on its way, his moderate and autonomist positions barred his way, leading him to marginalization in both the UGI and UNURI. What in some ways can be seen as a defeat, from another perspective, would instead allow him to concentrate more on PSI activities without powerful conditioning from international logic. Under these circumstances, his activities in Sesto San Giovanni, known to be an area of strong communist position²² desired by Secretary Guido Mazzali, allowed him to grapple with the working-class electorate and, at the same time, to be able to expand his tactical skills.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² It is also possible to refer in historical-political terms to an area of broadly communist ideology as the “red zone.”
Shin, Michael. 2001. “Whatever Happened to Italy’s ‘Red Peasant’?” *Geographic Reflections upon L.* Belgeo, no. 1-2 (June): 93–104.

2.2.1.1. Entry into local institutions

In Craxi's political life, work in local institutions was significant not only because it shaped him into the political figure he would become over time but also because it allowed him to give birth to a network of contacts within politics and beyond and to a stable base of consensus, which was necessary for him to appear in national politics.

Returning to 1956, outside of his student experience and work in 1958 in the Sesto San Giovanni district, his first institutional position came in that year. Running for office on the Italian Socialist Party list, he became a town councilor in Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, which is his mother's hometown. This experience was significant for Bettino Craxi for several reasons, despite being carried out within a small community. It gave him the sense of his ability to gather support among the electorate, thus showing him capable of transitioning from pure student activism to real politics, consequently giving him a fundamental first official role in institutions.

It would take a few years before he could move from a narrow political sphere, such as a small municipality, to a large city. However, in November 1960, he was eventually elected as a city councilor for Milan. This transition is very significant. It saw him involved in one of the most complex political areas of the Italian peninsula, which will consequently represent an exceptional political training ground for him. It was shortly followed by the alderman position for the Bursar's Office²³, which allowed him to manage public resources and better understand the administration's functioning. It brought him into contact with the fundamental dynamics of city management, such as budgets, labor relations, and procurement. This context was critical in allowing him to adjust to the necessary ability to juggle union drives, the needs of the working class, and divergences within the left in Milan.²⁴

His work as an alderman allowed his public figure to acquire an increasingly stable form. It cemented his authority, and thanks to these premises, in 1963, he was asked to assume the position of head of the provincial secretariat of the Italian Socialist Party in Milan. It is not only honors, however, that come with this position; it is also connected with significant

²³ This term refers to the office providing equipment and consumables for the operation of a particular entity; in this case, reference is made to the municipality of the metropolitan city of Milan.

²⁴ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, Rome. As described on Lazio900, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi," Lazio900, last modified 2017, accessed May 8, 2025.
<https://www.lazio900.it/istituto/fondazione-bettino-craxi/>.

responsibilities. Milan represented one of the most essential Italian federations for the Socialist Party, and it was divided and diversified into groups linked to different ideologies. There was, of course, the one most closely related to the classical tradition of socialism. However, there was increasing space for both the pro-communist Frontist experience and the new group of autonomists, of which Craxi is a member.

A year later, in November 1964, after being reappointed as city councilor, he began to serve as alderman for Charity and Assistance²⁵. In Milan in those years, this was an essential role, as it was forced to cope with increasing urbanization and heavy internal migration. Craxi's attitude toward these policies was decidedly practical and reformist compared to his predecessors, dealing in particular with the modernization of services and the protection of the weakest.

The Milanese experience thus proved essential to Craxi's concretization as a politician, representing a decisive test case. He was brought to hone several skills, from negotiation to coping with union relations and internal party dynamics, and how to create a stable and lasting consensus. In the 1960s, he was not only trained in the administrative field with his positions but also gave birth to leadership in formations that, in the following years, played a prominent role in the politics of the time.

In short, this career period can be defined as a key intermediate moment between his youthful student activities and his future leadership role. Indeed, he developed his decisive, at times blunt, and direct political style, which, over the following decades, came to characterize him.

2.2.1.2. Entry into national politics

Following his period in Lombardy, which was linked to local and municipal administration and was important for consolidating his role within the Milan Federation of the PSI, Benedetto Craxi decided to make an important leap, devoting himself to national politics.

²⁵ This type of alderman within public policy deals with social policies and services toward people in economic and social difficult situations. Generally, he is also responsible for managing funds, assisting programs, and supervising social welfare associations.

"§ 1.6.52 - L.R. 2 Gennaio 1979, N. 1. Attribuzione Ai Comuni Di Funzioni Amministrative Regionali." 2025.

https://www.edizionieuropee.it/law/html/138/si1_06_052.html#_ART0001.

This change also allowed him to establish himself as a major player in the party at the central level.

In 1965, the first fundamental step occurred: his decision to join the PSI National Executive.²⁶ This gave him an essential qualitative leap from being a leading figure in the local sphere to one capable of outlining PSI policy at the national level.

The year 1966 represented a year of turning point and change for the Italian Socialist Party. The PSI joined with the Italian Democratic Socialist Party (PSDI)²⁷, forming the Unified Socialist Party (PSU), and Craxi received his role as provincial secretary of the PSU in Milan, which led to his collaboration with exponents of the previous PSDI, such as Renzo Peruzzotti²⁸. This experiment of union between two political cultures was short-lived, and this unity project lasted until 1969. It proved, in any case, to be a further building block for Craxi's figure, allowing him to work on perfecting his strategic and organizational skills once again in a context that was anything but peaceful.

That same year, Craxi received the position of president of the Institute of Sciences for Public Administration (ISAP), a position he would hold until 1972. Since this institution dealt specifically with research and training in the administrative field, it proved to be extremely well-suited to Craxi's skills. He could practice what he had learned in his earlier years of training and strengthen his image even more, which was increasingly linked to the modern and competent executive.

²⁶ The National Directorate of the Italian Socialist Party represents one of the central governing bodies of the party. It is responsible for establishing and guiding the political line of the PSI. Its main functions include implementing the decisions made by the National Congress, developing a political strategy for the party, which is to be applied between congresses, coordinating the parliamentary groups in the sense of their activities, and managing internal political crises within the party.

²⁷ The Italian Democratic Socialist Party is an Italian party of social democratic and reformist inspiration. It was founded in 1947, following a split with the PSI, led by Giuseppe Saragat. It distinguished itself by being a center-left party, but mainly anti-communist, and often allied with the Christian Democrats.

Partito socialista democratico italiano (PSDI). Direzione nazionale (1951–1967). Sistema Informativo Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche (SIUSA).

<https://siusa-archivi.cultura.gov.it/cgi-bin/siusa/pagina.pl?TipoPag=prodente&Chiave=277457>.

²⁸ Renzo Peruzzotti was an Italian politician of the 1960s-1980s who played a significant role in the Lombardy area, in particular his political activity for the reform of psychiatric legislation is well known.

Lombardia Quotidiano. 2023. "Dalla I Alla IV Legislatura: I Presidenti Del Consiglio Regionale Dal 1970 al 1990 - Lombardia Quotidiano." Lombardia Quotidiano. April 24, 2023.

<https://www.lombardiaquotidiano.com/post/dalla-i-alla-iv-legislatura-i-presidenti-del-consiglio-regionale-dal-1970-al-1990>.

However, confirmation of his role at the national level came with the general elections of May 19, 1968, in which Bettino Craxi was elected deputy from the Milan-Pavia constituency. His victory resulted from 23,788 preferences, which testified that his figure had found a certain solidity in the Lombardy area. This election made his figure even more relevant in the PSI. This was the first time Craxi gained access to the Chamber of Deputies, but his tenure continued until 1994.

The same period also saw the beginning of a new phase of changes in the Italian political scene and the reorganization of the Italian Socialist Party, which had recently seen its union with the PSDI fail. In 1970, a new turning point occurred for Craxi. He was appointed along with Luciano Codignola and Giovanni Mosca as deputy secretary of the PSI at the behest of the new national secretary, Giacomo Mancini²⁹. This enabled him to consolidate his national position in the PSI even more.

When the 1972 Genoa Congress saw the redefinition of the power structures among the currents of the PSI due to the alliance between the Demartinian and the autonomist currents, Francesco De Martino was given the national secretariat, Pietro Nenni the presidency, and Craxi was reappointed as deputy secretary. A new power, however, entered his sphere of influence, namely, a specific delegation to international relations. It enabled him to build a dense network of relations at the global level, with figures of the caliber of Willy Brandt, Felipe González, François Mitterrand, Mario Soares, Andreas Papandreu, and other protagonists of the European democratic left.³⁰

In the international arena, Craxi's figure was immediately distinguished by an approach of active political solidarity with socialist or progressive parties subject to dictatorships. The best examples were his commitment to Spanish socialists forced under Francoism, Greeks in exile, and Chileans following the Pinochet coup³¹. This commitment was essential in

²⁹ Giacomo Mancini was an important Italian politician who played both local and national roles as a minister. Central to his politics remains his commitment to southernism, the modernization of institutions, and reformist policies.

"Giacomo Mancini, Il Sindaco E Politico Simbolo Di Cosenza." 2024. CalabriaNews24. July 12, 2024.

<https://www.calabrianews24.com/news/534685060614/giacomo-mancini-il-sindaco-e-politico-simbolo-di-cosenza>.

³⁰ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, Rome. As described on Lazio900, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi," Lazio900, last modified 2017, accessed May 8, 2025.

<https://www.lazio900.it/istituto/fondazione-bettino-craxi/>.

³¹ Ibidem.

affirming his figure in the sense of the European left and in the accreditation of the PSI outside Italy.

These events consequently consecrated Craxi at the level of national politics, transforming and establishing him as a party leader. He was determined, therefore, to move himself to lead the party toward a new political autonomy and modernization.

2.2.2. The party secretariat

Craxi's secretarial years (July 15, 1976 - February 14, 1993) profoundly marked the Italian Socialist Party, consecrating it to a new phase. The move away from communist ideology allowed for a newfound freedom of the PSI vis-à-vis the Italian Communist Party. The party's image found new life, and its international profile grew. Through moves such as the "strategy of the alternative"³² and the "Great Reform,"³³ its leadership also laid the foundation for a "New Socialism."

2.2.2.1. The rise to the PSI secretariat

The Italian Socialist Party faced one of the most challenging moments in its history in the First Republic when new early general elections were held in June 1976. The party stopped at 9.6%, its lowest ever, and distanced itself sharply from the two main parties, the Christian Democrats (38.9%) and the Italian Communist Party (34.4%). This result could only be reflected within the PSI, where tensions between the various groups deepened.³⁴

At the Midas Hotel in Rome, July 12-16, 1976, the Central Committee³⁵ was held. On this occasion, the then secretary Francesco De Martino was challenged, forcing him to resign.

³² Political line of the late 1970s promoted by Bettino Craxi. It was going to develop as an evolution of the strategy of alternation and historical compromise between the DC and PCI. It had as its basic idea the creation of a new governing majority, which would no longer have the Christian Democrats as the dominant party, but rather secular, socialist, and reformist forces.
Craxi, Bettino. 1978. *L'Alternativa Dei Socialisti. Il Progetto Di Programma Del PSI Presentato Da Bettino Craxi*. Edizione Avanti!

³³ It represented one of the central political themes of Craxi's 1980s political vision, and despite its failure, it remains an ambitious constitutional reform project and has in part influenced proposals still under discussion today. Its goals were to strengthen executive power, reorganize the powers of the state, and make Italy more governable.

Acquaviva, Gennaro, and Luigi Covatta. 2010. *La "Grande Riforma" Di Craxi*. 1st ed. Marsilio.

³⁴ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, Rome. As described on Lazio900, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi," Lazio900, last modified 2017, accessed May 8, 2025.
<https://www.lazio900.it/istituto/fondazione-bettino-craxi/>.

³⁵ The PSI Central Committee was one of the main governing bodies of the party. It developed in a manner similar to an internal parliament and was convened in the periods between congresses.

Therefore, it became necessary to find a new leading figure in the party, one capable of leading it out of this negative wake in which it was immersed. At this juncture, Bettino Craxi's figure was the only real possible choice. Indeed, he got himself elected through a cross-party consensus among four different groups: the autonomists, the ex-Demartinians, those who followed Giacomo Mancini, and finally, the Lombard left.

From his appointment as party secretary, Craxi began a process in which he intended to transform the PSI significantly through its rejuvenation. From a generational point of view, this took place in several ways, and especially by replacing older figures with younger ones through ideological, organizational, and communicative change. Finally, he decided to work alongside a pluralist deputy secretariat capable of uniformly representing the different souls of the PSI, not neglecting any of the existing currents.

2.2.2.2. The Turin turning point and the 'strategy of the alternative'

At the 41st PSI Congress³⁶, two years after his election to the secretariat, Craxi consolidated his power. Under these circumstances, the previously formed alliance between autonomists and the Lombard left received 63 percent of congressional support. This result allowed Craxi to reaffirm his role as secretary of the Italian Socialist Party. Compared to the previous term, however, he transformed the previous pluralist deputy secretary into a single figure, represented by Claudio Signorile³⁷.

Also, at Congress, Craxi paved the way for the "strategy of the alternative." This political proposal aimed to create a genuine alternative to the dominance of the Christian Democrats

Filippo Bovo. 2018. "Luglio 1976: La Svolta Del Midas Che Diede Vita al PSI Di Bettino Craxi – l'Opinione Pubblica." L'Opinione Pubblica. July 17, 2018.

<https://www.opinione-pubblica.com/luglio-1976-la-svolta-del-midas-che-diede-vita-al-psi-di-bettino-craxi/>.

³⁶ The 41st PSI Congress was held in Turin from March 29 to April 2, 1978.

"41° Congresso Nazionale Del Psi, Torino 29 Marzo-2 Aprile 1978 - Patrimonio Dell'Archivio Storico Senato Della Repubblica." 2018. Senato.it. 2018.

<https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/bettino-craxi/IT-AFS-020-000016/41-congresso-nazionale-del-psi-torino-29-marzo-2-aprile-1978>.

³⁷ He is an Italian politician known for his leadership of the left wing within the Italian Socialist Party, which often stood in opposition to Bettino Craxi's vision. He also served as Minister of Transport in the Craxi governments.

"Scheda Di Attività Di Claudio SIGNORILE - IX Legislatura | Senato Della Repubblica." 2025. Senato.it. 2025.

<https://www.senato.it/legislature/9/composizione/senatori/elenco-alfabetico/scheda-attivita?did=00002267>.

in the political sphere. This alternative would not come through an alliance with the PCI, as with the “historic compromise,”³⁸ but through strengthening the socialist identity. It would have presented itself far from the communist identity, thus moving away from the Italian Communist Party and closer to the European social democratic perspective.

This proposal came at a time of crisis for the country; in fact, the Congress was held on the same days as the kidnapping of Aldo Moro.³⁹ Craxi advocated a humanitarian, law-abiding negotiation aimed at saving the man’s life, opposing instead the line of “firmness”⁴⁰ put into practice by the Italian government. Although his position did not find support from the other forces, it once again manifested his autonomous profile.

2.2.2.3. The symbolic and ideological renewal of the PSI

In any case, Craxi’s renewal involved revising the party’s alliances and symbology. Two gestures, in particular, are the most significant in this regard: the replacement of the historic symbol and the article “The Socialist Gospel.”

The previously present symbol, recalling the socialist tradition linked to communism, represented the hammer and sickle on the book and a rising sun⁴¹. The two symbols of communism referred to the peasant class and the working class, respectively. The book stood for the ideas of education and critical consciousness, and the rising sun for renewal and hope. In contrast, the new symbol broke away from communist ideology, abandoning

³⁸ A political strategy proposed by Enrico Berlinguer in the 1970s, it aimed at an alliance between the PCI and DC, which was supposed to ensure democratic stability for Italy at a time of crisis. “Berlinguer, Teoria E Tecnica Del Compromesso Storico.” 2014. Rainews. October 6, 2014. <https://www.rainews.it/archivio-rainews/articoli/Berlinguer-compromesso-storico-ab36a912-ea49-478f-b145-c6de689db907.html>.

³⁹ The kidnapping of Aldo Moro, president of the Christian Democrats, took place on March 16, 1978, by the Red Brigades. His captivity lasted a full 55 days, after which his body was found May 9, 1978 in Via Caetani, Rome. Redazione Sky TG24. 2023. “Aldo Moro, 45 Anni Dall’uccisione. Dal Rapimento Brigatista Alla Morte: Cosa Accadde.” Tg24.Sky.it. Sky TG24. September 21, 2023. <https://tg24.sky.it/cronaca/approfondimenti/aldo-moro-rapimento#03>.

⁴⁰ The line of “firmness” was the Italian government’s chosen position toward the Moro kidnapping, which saw no way to negotiate with the Red Brigades. “‘Se Li Liberare Mi Do Fuoco’: Il Caso Moro, La Linea Della Fermezza E La Falsa Telefonata Di ‘Una Vedova Di Via Fani’ - Storiario.it.” 2021. Storiario.it. May 14, 2021. <https://www.storiario.it/fatti-della-storia/se-li-liberate-mi-do-fuoco-il-caso-moro-la-linea-della-fermezza-e-la-falsa-telefonata-di-una-vedova-di-via-fani/>?

⁴¹ According to some interpretations, the rising sun may actually refer to an ear of corn, which was meant to depict the peasant and agricultural world.

its traditional symbolism. It featured a red carnation⁴², recalling the pre-1917 Italian socialist tradition.

The article “The Socialist Gospel”⁴³ was published in 1978 in L’Espresso magazine. In it, Craxi disavowed Marx and Lenin, accusing them of giving rise to bureaucratic and authoritarian models. A re-evaluation of the figure of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a libertarian socialist who was considered the father of mutualism⁴⁴ and democratic socialism, then took place. This article thus affirmed the definitive break from communism and paved the way for the new vision of socialism.

Both changes once again renewed Craxi’s intention to distance the Italian Socialist Party from the Italian Communist Party, to create an identity free and independent of any constraints.

2.2.2.4. A new international positioning

Craxi, who, even before his party secretariat, had shown a strong interest in the international question and forming himself as a promoter of the PSI’s global position, during his tenure strengthened this position even more and led the party to become increasingly integrated into the affairs of European social democracy. To highlight the detachment from the communist dynamic within the international landscape of the Cold War, Craxi led the PSI to side firmly with the West, the Atlantic Alliance, and NATO.

Craxi’s pro-European vision was also expressed in his election as a member of the European Parliament in 1979, a mandate that would be repeated twice in 1984 and 1989. It is possible to highlight how his political vision saw Europe as the natural space for modern, reformist socialism.

⁴² The symbol is later reintroduced in 2019, when the PSI decides to use it to recall the party's iconographic tradition.

⁴³ Craxi, Bettino. “Il vangelo socialista”. L'Espresso. August 27, 1978.

⁴⁴ Economic-social theory that proposes a model in which society is based on voluntary association, self-management and fair exchange among producers.
Alex Prichard. 2022. “Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s Mutualist Social Science.” Chapter. In *The Cambridge History of Socialism*, edited by Marcel van der Linden, 286–307. The Cambridge History of Socialism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2.2.2.5. Political battles and state reform

During his political career, Craxi carried out several battles, but of particular importance are the Great Reform of the State, mentioned earlier, and the decision to support the installation of NATO missiles in Italy.

Craxi proposed the Great Reform in the historic newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party, *l'Avanti!*, in September 1979. This reform was proposed because Craxi believed the Italian state should reform itself to adapt to society's transformations and improve its ability to govern. The article had great resonance in that it was the first time that a leader of the Italian left so explicitly posed himself in the sense of constitutional reform. In even more interesting terms, it is a call for reform, which would have anticipated issues still being discussed in Italian politics.

Finally, the decision to favor the installation of the Euromissiles in Italy was aimed at reaffirming Italy's position in the Western bloc, as they were going to demonstrate Italian loyalty to NATO. This position remained in line with the PSI's new position in terms of ideology. However, it resulted in the definitive sharp break with the PCI, which, on this occasion, referred to Craxi as a "servant of the Americans."⁴⁵ In any case, we will go into more detail on this topic in the next chapter.

2.2.3. A new socialism

However much a project may eventually fail, not bringing the results first hoped for, this does not mean that it has not had a historical significance that is far from indifferent, both for good and evil. This is the case with the "new socialism" envisioned by Bettino Craxi. More than a mere government project, as we will analyze in this subchapter, it was a vision capable of extending into the cultural, identity, and reformist sphere both for the Italian Socialist Party and for Italy itself. It led to a definitive break with dogmatic socialism⁴⁶, turning

⁴⁵ Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo 1 Bettino Craxi, Rome. As described on Lazio900, "Fondazione Bettino Craxi," Lazio900, last modified 2017, accessed May 8, 2025.
<https://www.lazio900.it/istituto/fondazione-bettino-craxi/>.

⁴⁶ The term dogmatic socialism refers to that form of socialism that is characterized by rigid adherence to ideological principles, which are regarded as absolute and immutable. Concrete historical, economic, or social conditions are not always taken into consideration in this case. The term is often used as a critique.
Renato Caputo. "Lenin Contro Il Dogmatismo - La Città Futura." *Lacittafutura.it*, La Città Futura, 16 July 2021.
<https://www.lacittafutura.it/cultura/lenin-contro-il-dogmatismo>. Accessed 3 May 2025.

the Italian socialist left toward a more modern, European, pragmatic, and responsible course.

2.2.3.1. A cultural break: Craxi against communist hegemony

As introduced and analyzed earlier in the course of this thesis, one of the first actions implemented by Craxi following his election as secretary of the PSI in 1976 was to distance the party from the Italian Communist Party in order to give the PSI full autonomy. This profound cultural transformation broke with years of political tradition, which saw the PSI primarily and almost exclusively supporting the PCI. Through this detachment, therefore, the intellectual hegemony of the PCI was challenged, moving away from the principles of communism itself.

Several factors fostered this process of detachment even within the Socialist Party itself; preponderant, at any rate, was the form of impatience with the ideological rigidity present in Italian Marxism⁴⁷ within the party in those years. This impatience allowed Craxi to initiate this transformation, laying the groundwork for revising the socialist theoretical heritage. In a return to the possibilities created by the various socialist traditions born in Europe, a reassessment of the reformist tradition of socialism took place. As a result, several figures from this current were rediscovered, such as Carlo Rosselli, who had long been marginalized in the Italian socialist current. The change sought by Craxi, however, went further, criticizing the illusion of revolution that had taken place, proposed by communism, and seeking a dialogue with democratic, pro-European, and liberal groups, resulting in a more European centralization of the PSI.

2.2.3.2. Socialism as a governing force

Within the institutional sphere, Bettino Craxi proposed a revolutionary change to the socialist tradition that had existed for many years. Socialism was to be transformed from a pure force of denunciation or opposition to a concrete alternative to the government, which, over time, would be able to form a government no longer led by the DC but a socialist one⁴⁸. Italy was, in fact, in a difficult moment; not only was it shaken by an economic crisis, but it

⁴⁷ Renato Caputo. "Il Marxismo Filosofico in Italia Dopo Gramsci - La Città Futura." *Lacittafutura.it*, La Città Futura, 3 Aug. 2019, www.lacittafutura.it/unigramsci/il-marxismo-filosofico-in-italia-dopo-gramsci. Accessed 3 May 2025.

⁴⁸ Federico Paolini. "Il Decisionismo Craxiano Alla Prova Del Governo." *Policlic*, 12 June 2020. www.policlic.it/il-decisionismo-craxiano-alla-prova-del-governo/. Accessed 3 May 2025.

was faced with the terrorist threat of the Red Brigades⁴⁹ and a strong institutional instability generated by the inability to give birth to a stable majority. Having begun the end of the hegemonic era of Christian Democracy, the left had to be able to cease any revolutionary semblance and, at the same time, assume responsibility as a modernizing force.

Craxian reformism, generated for the possibility of government, was characterized by elements distinct from traditional reformism, placing greater emphasis on pragmatism and decisionism. Craxi theorized “governing” socialism⁵⁰, which would bring together elements of different traditions such as individual freedoms, economic growth, social cohesion, and state efficiency. In this sense, the departure from the communist tradition emerged again; these changes also implied establishing a new relationship in the production world. The bourgeoisie and the emerging middle classes were no longer bound to a conflictual relationship linked to the class struggle but were considered indispensable interlocutors in building a modern society.

Finally, an already well-known concept is in, but with a new meaning, as a political value in its own right, “governability.”⁵¹ To create an efficient government that could represent a real alternative to DC, governments had to give rise to credible proposals, solid coalitions capable of obtaining a majority in parliament, and maintain respect for institutions and international authority. According to the Craxian vision, the idea of a socialist alternative based on instability, but above all on utopia, had to be abandoned accordingly.

2.2.3.3. The return to Rosselli and liberal socialism

As mentioned earlier, one of the central points of the new Craxian socialism was the rediscovery of the thought of Carlo Rosselli, a theorist of “liberal socialism.”⁵² Craxi, during his speech at the 42nd Congress of the Italian Socialist Party (Palermo, April 22-26, 1981)⁵³, proposed his vision regarding the completion of the transformation faced by the Italian

⁴⁹ Alessandro Orsini. 2009. *Anatomia Delle Brigate Rosse*.

⁵⁰ Redazione. 2025. “Craxi E Il Governismo: Stimmate O Ossessione Del Psi? Di Salvatore Sechi.” La Giustizia. January 17, 2025.
<https://lagiustizia.net/craxi-e-il-governismo-stimmate-o-ossessione-del-psi-di-salvatore-sechi/>.

⁵¹ Tabasso, Edoardo and Ciuffolletti Zeffiro. 2019. Craxi. Le Riforme E La Governabilità (1976-1993). Il Pozzo di Micene Editore.

⁵² Carlo Rosselli. 2017. Liberal Socialism. Princeton University Press.

⁵³ “Relazione Introduttiva Di Craxi al 42° Congresso Del Psi, Palermo - Patrimonio Dell’Archivio Storico Senato Della Repubblica.” 2018. Senato.it.
<https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/bettino-craxi/IT-AFS-020-000021/relazione-introduttiva-craxi-al-42-congresso-del-psi-palermo>.

Socialist Party. According to his thought, the PSI would have to abandon any ambiguity related to some of the cardinal principles of democracy, namely individual freedoms, political pluralism, which was necessary to have a turnover in government and democracy, and the Rule of Law.

The vision presented here saw freedom from a new perspective, far from the Marxist ideal. Indeed, it was not seen as a purely bourgeois value, which could only conflict with the concept of equality essential in a communist society; instead, it was considered a necessary precondition for social justice. The PSI became the bearer of a new perspective, which represented a “perfect” synthesis of different concepts, such as political liberalism and public intervention, as well as respect for the individual and the fight against inequality. Craxi proposed, in this sense, an evident vision of the state’s role. It was not to fall into the error of becoming a totalizing controller, as happened instead in the Soviet Union, but instead to pose as a guarantor and promoter of opportunity.

Thus, we can define liberal socialism as the political form in which Bettino Craxi developed his political identity. It represented in its canons a project that placed the citizen at the center of its vision and valued personal responsibility. He thus gave birth to a concept capable of abjuring the extremisms of both ideologies, thus rejecting both the bureaucratic collectivism and the selfish individualism of liberalism.

2.2.3.4. Organizational innovation and communication policy

In the previous points, we have devoted an in-depth study mainly to transformations concerning socialist doctrine, but Craxi did not stop there. His idea of transformation extended to the party’s organizational and communicative apparatus. What the party secretary managed to bring to life was a new PSI, distanced from the tradition of the mass party, exclusively tied to the trade unions and local federations, now transformed into a flexible, modern, and media-oriented party.

As will be analyzed more specifically in the third chapter, addressing Craxi’s use of political communication in the sense of foreign policy, he was able to be a forerunner in understanding the necessary transformations that the world of political communication was facing. That historical period witnessed an evolution of the media, which replaced traditional political channels, such as political rallies and party parties, with new tools, and television

became the predominant one.⁵⁴ The increasingly predominant use of this new medium dramatically affected how politics was done, giving rise to so-called personalization⁵⁵. In this context, the figures of political leaders became increasingly central, and parties became increasingly dependent on them. Therefore, Bettino Craxi worked on building a strong and recognizable public image, which could lead people to recognize the strength of the PSI in his figure. In this sense, the party's language was transformed, becoming more direct and consequently closer to real life, thus abandoning a pure centering on ideology. As already mentioned, a change in the PSI symbol also occurred.

Having analyzed the elements that characterized the mutations in the politics of the time, we can state that the transformations that Craxi was able to demand from the Italian Socialist Party were necessary to make it competitive at the institutional level.

2.2.3.5. A socialist identity for the new Italian society

In addition to the media and political communication, society has transformed. The Italy of the 1980s is no longer the postwar Italy. A new middle class developed over time, changing the previous balance of society. The demand for freedom and individualism drove young people, while industry made room in the era of flexibility and services. In this context, the new socialism stood precisely in an attempt to enable the left to respond to the new demands of the era.

The Italian Socialist Party fought several political and social battles.⁵⁶ It was proposed as a party of modernization, Europe, secularism, and civil progress to adapt to this modern society. It became a voice for demands related to changes in civil rights, which were central in those years. From divorce⁵⁷, a law passed in December 1970, to abortion⁵⁸ in May 1978,

⁵⁴ Ricardo Brizzi. 2018. "Piccolo Schermo E Politica Nell'Italia Repubblicana. Dal Rifiuto Della Personalizzazione Alla 'Video-Politica' (1946-2017)." VENTUNESIMO SECOLO, no. 42 (October): 144–68.

⁵⁵ "Spettacolarizzazione E Personalizzazione Della Comunicazione Politica: Riflessioni - Istituto Francesco Fattorello." Istituto Francesco Fattorello. February 7, 2011.
<https://www.istitutofattorello.org/spettacolarizzazione-e-personalizzazione-della-comunicazione-politica-riflessioni/>.

⁵⁶ Pepijn Corduwener. 2022. "The Italian Socialist Party and the Crisis of Party Democracy. The Transformation of the Italian Socialists." Journal of Modern Italian Studies 28 (2): 205–19.

⁵⁷ LAW Dec. 1, 1970, no. 898.

⁵⁸ LAW May 22, 1978, no. 194.

Craxi sought to combine the concepts of freedom and responsibility by moving away from a purely dogmatic vision.

Thus, we can define how the New Socialism proposed by Craxi was able to move away from both the conservatism of Christian Democracy and the radicalism of the Italian Communist Party. It was able to offer the society of the time a new choice capable of differentiating itself from other parties and touching politics, economics, and culture.

2.3. The Craxi I-II governments (1983-1987)⁵⁹

After years in which Italian politics was centered on the centrism of the Christian Democrats as the pivot of the First Republic, Bettino Craxi's figure represented a significant turning point, becoming the first socialist in Italy to hold the office of Prime Minister. His governments, which will be analyzed briefly in detail, led to economic and administrative modernization but were undermined by internal tensions and external criticism. In a balance of successes and failures, they represented a moment of innovation and reformism for Italian politics.

2.3.1. Craxi I government (1983-1986)

The first Craxi government, in office from 1983 to 1986, was undoubtedly a government of turning point and change for the Italian Republic, not only because for the first time a Socialist went to serve as Prime Minister, but also because it was able to unite five very different parties into a stable coalition and demonstrate Craxi's extraordinary abilities as a leader in knowing how to hold it together. There were several areas in which the administration has managed to distinguish itself in its years of government: the economy, the public sector, the social environment, and the cultural environment. It is noteworthy that these maneuvers were possible despite internal divisions within the government.

2.3.1.1. The formation of the government

The years before 1983 were characterized by strong political instability and fragile governments of limited duration. An example in this regard can be found in the Andreotti III

⁵⁹ As for the foreign policy of both Craxi governments, this thesis prone to go on to analyze it more specifically in the next chapter, thus going at this time to focus more on other aspects.

government (1976-1978)⁶⁰, which is commonly referred to as the “government of no-confidence” and which got this nickname because it was held up only by the abstention of the dissenting vote by the Italian Communist Party. However, the situation reached a turning point precisely with the June 26-27, 1983, elections.

The PSI obtained 11.44% of the vote during these elections, making it the third-largest party in Italy. In the following days, the first Craxi government was thus born through a coalition with four other parties: the Christian Democrats, the Italian Republican Party, the Italian Socialist Democratic Party, and the Italian Liberal Party. At the formation of the government, Craxi had obvious ideas regarding his ambition to bring about significant change. To this end, he tried to promote a more decisive leadership of the Prime Minister, a maneuver in line, as noted in the chapter on the PSI Secretariat, with his policies and an agenda to promote change and modernization in the country.

Another change that the formation of this five-party government⁶¹ caused was the creation of a new role for the PSI, which inherently aimed to take its hegemony away from the Christian Democrats while succeeding in doing so without destabilizing the balance of the First Republic. The formation of this alliance was punctuated by intense negotiations, which only highlighted Craxi's great gifts and ability to negotiate and, at the same time, his ability to build beneficial alliances concerning his reformist vision. This ability also manifested itself during his government in his relations with the opposition. Indeed, during this period, an effort was made to include a broader perspective of the nation's needs in the political-institutional dialogue. All of this was very useful for the coalition's success, which, despite differences, brought Italy several important results.

2.3.1.2. The main internal reforms

The reforms proposed by the Craxi I government were varied and related to different areas. The most important, however, were related to the economic, public administration, industry,

⁶⁰ Governo Italiano Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. 2015. “Governo Andreotti III.” [Www.governo.it](http://www.governo.it). November 20, 2015.

<https://www.governo.it/it/i-governi-dal-1943-ad-oggi/vii-legislatura-5-luglio-1976-2-aprile-1979/governo-andreotti-iii/3191>.

⁶¹ Niccolò Meta. 2018. “Atto IV: La Parentesi Del Pentapartito (1981-87) - Policlic.” Policlic. August 17, 2018.

<https://www.policlic.it/parentesi-pentapartito-1981-87/>.

and social fields. They encountered various opinions from other political forces, some supporting and others strongly opposed.

Craxi was particularly dedicated to economic revitalization, creating measures mainly aimed at controlling inflation, which had reached critical levels in previous years. One of the most contested measures in this regard was the so-called “Valentine’s Decree” of 1984, through which a cut was to be made in the so-called escalator, the mechanism that was to cause wages to rise automatically, in line with the increase in inflation.⁶² Despite much criticism, this intervention proved effective in curbing inflation and, at the same time, reaffirmed the government’s decision-making ability.

Regarding public administration and its modernization, his government led to the introduction of computerization systems and the digitization of bureaucratic processes. This intervention represented a significant change in the system by making it more effective and transparent. However, it could also readily respond to the necessary demand for innovation in the relationship between the state and its citizens.

In contrast, the industrial field achieved greater integration between the public and private sectors. This process was fostered through tax breaks and state investment in research and development, leading to business growth. Several strategic sectors, such as manufacturing and technology, were also promoted to boost the country’s economy. Industry-related maneuvers aimed to redesign the face of the Italian economy in order to prepare it for the growing globalized model.

Finally, regarding social reforms, work was done to improve the conditions of the working classes. In this sense, it is possible to observe the change in the ideological sphere of the PSI, which has already been mentioned above; in fact, they sought to achieve these reforms while balancing the containment of public spending and the need to ensure a suitable social protection system.

⁶² Giorgio Cremaschi. 2024. “Il Decreto Craxi Di San Valentino Bloccò La Scala Mobile: Tutti I Nostri Guai Sono Cominciati Lì.” Il Fatto Quotidiano. February 14, 2024. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2024/02/14/il-decreto-craxi-di-san-valentino-blocco-la-scala-mobile-tutti-i-nostri-guai-sono-cominciati-li/7446704/>.

2.3.1.3. Tensions and successes

Because of the presence of five parties in government, tensions during the years of government were varied, both with the DC, which was used to being the dominant party in previous coalitions, and with the minor parties, which were instead intimidated by the ever-increasing growth of power that the Socialist Party was gathering. The issues that awakened these divergences were mainly related to economic and social issues. However, they were handled by the excellent negotiating skills of Craxi, to whom we owe the coalition's maintenance.

The successes of this administration, despite internal disagreements, were several. In the economic sphere, the government played an important role in reducing the inflation rate and economic growth, though only moderately, and increasing foreign exchange reserves. Achievements, though not exceptional, were nevertheless significant for the economy of the time. Important changes also took place in the social sphere, aimed at protecting the weaker sections of the population. Among them was strengthening social safety nets, especially the agreement with social partners, an action that several parties contested.

The Craxi government also paid attention to the cultural plan. A plan for the renewal of cultural and artistic institutions was initiated. This process was developed by promoting and enhancing historical heritage and creating new channels aimed at creative expression. The reform of the television sector⁶³, which allowed the emergence of several private broadcasters still known today, enabled cultural and political change.

2.3.2. Craxi II government (1986-1987)

The second Craxi government, in office from 1986 to 1987, was created against a background of greater stability than the previous one. However, despite a positive start, it came to an early dissolution. The challenges it faced were too complex and came to undermine its stability. The limited duration did not prevent it from making important political, economic, and social moves, focusing increasingly on modernizing the country.

⁶³ LAW Feb. 4, 1985, no. 10.

2.3.2.1. Continuity and change

The formation of the Craxi II government was markedly easier than the first, as not only did it come from a positive administrative experience, which had generated numerous endorsements, but it also faced a favorable political climate. Unfortunately, in the long term, the latter did not have the same good fortune as the former, facing increasing internal and external challenges. Internal opposition had grown compared to the first term, and external opposition was becoming increasingly fierce.

At the policy level, the second government followed the lines of the previous one, focusing on problems of a different nature but adding to it the choice to face new issues related to the country's modernization and international competition. Craxi decided to commit himself to consolidating the objectives and achievements of the previous executive to stabilize them, deciding, in any case, to go even further, imposing an even more decisive change in structural policies.

2.3.2.2. Economic and social policies

Just as in the first government, the second one focused on several reforms concerning the economic sphere, pushing for increasingly ambitious structural changes. Among the most important maneuvers sought by the executive was the overhaul of taxation. In order to reduce tax evasion, more and more interventions were promoted and employed with increasingly strict control instruments. A rationalization of the tax system was also initiated to ensure greater fairness and sustainability. Wanting then to balance the latter's needs, a central point was found in welfare reform.

More funds were allocated to technological innovation to continue the country's modernization process. They were intended to boost scientific and technological research, particularly by being dedicated to stimulating and supporting important sectors to increase Italy's chances in an increasingly connected and economically globalized world. One of these sectors was, of course, industry. To this end, collaboration between the state and private industry was encouraged and intensified, promoting strategic partnerships between them and creating new technologies.

On the social level, one could also observe a maneuver aimed at reforming the market in labor policy. It wanted to introduce more flexible mechanisms within it while maintaining a

stable balance with social protections. The reason for this attempt at reform revolved particularly around responding to the challenges of an increasingly changing labor market, which demanded more and more autonomy and, at the same time, diversified skills.

2.3.2.3. Growing contrasts

While the government distinguished itself in terms of reforms, especially economic and social reforms, and innovation, it was characterized over time by increasing internal tensions. This phenomenon could only sour the delicate balance within the coalition, leading to the government's fall in 1987.

What caused these disagreements? The reasons are varied, but for the most part, they were due to the parties' differences of opinion on proposed maneuvers and reforms, particularly political and economic ones. While internal tensions did nothing but wear down the coalition internally, several external factors equally contributed.

The political system created by Craxi began to crack under criticism from the judiciary and civil society, which led to a questioning of Craxi's management of power. The final phase of the government was eventually linked to accusations of excessive concentration of power and the first shadows of corruption scandals.

2.3.3. Legacy of governments

The legacy of the Craxi governments was important both for the politics of the 1980s and for those of the decades to come. They brought essential change not only from an administrative and institutional point of view but also from that of political culture. Bettino Craxi was a forerunner of an era that would come later, comprised of media and communication, in which there is a more direct relationship with the voter. At the same time, however, his governments were also subject to various limitations in the success of long-term reforms and in the shadow of possible corruption that would later destroy the First Republic.

2.3.3.1. Innovation and continuity

Bettino Craxi's two governments brought several innovations. First, there was a mutation of the traditional role of the Prime Minister, who found himself playing a much more incisive role, thus partly remedying the usual fragmentation of executive power. During the same

period, the Italian Socialist Party took on a new centrality. It was no longer, at least for a limited period, the Christian Democrats who were the predominant force, although still greater in consensus. The failure in this regard of the PSI was its inability to make this transformation permanent, thus becoming a hegemonic force.

A new culture of government also developed at this juncture. The governing forces attempted to abandon the previous consociational logic, giving rise to a new model based on pragmatism and decisionism. It is important to mention, however, how this model created numerous criticisms and Resistance, especially from those who feared and accused Craxi of wanting to centralize excessive power in his institutional figure.

2.3.3.2. Limits and problems

In conclusion, we can define the legacy left by the Craxi government as ambivalent. Numerous maneuvers were certainly aimed at restoring the Italian economic situation and recreating lasting political stability. However, at the same time, there was a failure to respond to the accusations of centrism, referring to the Prime Minister's Office and the discontent generated by the various allegations of corruption and inefficiency. Moreover, the economic reforms proposed in the long run failed to achieve the desired effect, especially in matters concerning public debt and social spending.

3. Chapter 2 - Craxi and Foreign Policy

In the 1980s, having overcome the years of terrorism and severe political instability, new opportunities were sought for Italy both internationally and domestically. Bettino Craxi, always remaining faithful to traditional alliances, tried with his governments to place Italy toward a more autonomous and active role. He then focused more on regional politics, putting the Mediterranean and the Middle East at the center of his interests.

This chapter analyzes the foreign policy of the Craxi governments, focusing on some of the most significant events and international relations. It will look at how Italy attempted to mediate between loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance and the EEC and loyalty to its own national interests, laying the groundwork for an innovative policy that would also influence that of later years.

3.1. Italian foreign policy in the 1980s

In the 1980s, Italian policy maintained its traditional alliances with NATO and the EEC, but expanded its activism and focused increasingly on its regional area, particularly in the Mediterranean.

Italy has always positioned itself in the international sphere as a major supporter of the Western bloc, which it has also used in some circumstances to compensate for its relative weakness.⁶⁴ In any case, her commitment to the pro-American bloc has never prevented her from maintaining at least an independent position in terms of foreign policy. On the contrary, it has repeatedly taken steps to cultivate its specific interests vis-à-vis areas such as the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, careful not to create primary or obvious rifts with its allies.⁶⁵

During the 1980s, Italy sought to change from its previous role and become a more active player in the global arena. For example, it sought to actively participate in the needs and goals proposed by the various alliances.⁶⁶ This mutation in politics depended, of course, on several factors, but primarily on the advent of new governments, which were no longer led

⁶⁴ Roberto Aliboni. "Italy and the Mediterranean in the Nineties". Documenti IAI (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, [1996]), 1.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.

by the Christian Democrats and could bring about change;⁶⁷ examples of this are the governments of Giovanni Spadolini and Bettino Craxi.⁶⁸

One key point on which Italian governments focused its attention to the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas.⁶⁹ This decision effectively created a strategic debate, especially redirecting defensive efforts southward.⁷⁰ In addition, Italy has increasingly engaged in peacekeeping missions abroad with other nations, again with a regionalist perspective, as in the case of actions in Lebanon.⁷¹

At the same time, bilateral policies were also strengthened.⁷² One of the main actions to this end was the increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds. The Mediterranean was one of the primary beneficiaries, as Italy sought to support its foreign policy objectives and economic penetration in the area.⁷³ Work also was done at the political level in relations with several countries in North Africa and the Middle East.⁷⁴ Among the most important initiatives pursued by the Italian state in that area seemed to be obtaining the international guarantee for Malta's neutrality status.⁷⁵

The new international effort pursued by Italy culminated with the Andreotti VI government⁷⁶, when under Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis, an effort was made to forge a "particularly proactive and dynamic combination of bilateral policies inspired by national interest and multilateralism."⁷⁷ This process aimed to project Italy in the international arena as a more constructive and engaged partner; in this sense, initiatives such as the Western Mediterranean Group⁷⁸ were created.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ Enrico Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti e la Ostpolitik italiana," *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Politologica* 23 (2019): 157; Federico Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale dei governi Craxi: rapporti tra Italia e mondo arabo (1983-1987)" (dissertation, LUISS Guido Carli, 2023/2024), 4.

⁶⁹ Aliboni, Italy and the Mediterranean, 1-2; Silvio Labbate, "Alla ricerca di un Mediterranean role: la politica estera italiana agli inizi degli anni ottanta," *Meridiana* 101 (2021): 145.

⁷⁰ Aliboni, Italy and the Mediterranean, 3.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 153-154; Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 36-54.

⁷² Aliboni, Italy and the Mediterranean, 3.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Ibidem; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 151-153.

⁷⁵ Aliboni, Italy and the Mediterranean, 3.

⁷⁶ "Governo Andreotti VI." 2015. www.governo.it. November 20, 2015.

<https://www.governo.it/it/i-governi-dal-1943-ad-oggi/x-legislatura-2-luglio-1987-2-febbraio-1992/governo-andreotti-vi/3172>

⁷⁷ Aliboni, Italy and the Mediterranean, 3-4.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 4.

Naturally, this change was noticed globally. The foreign press welcomed this change, which helped create a new positive image of Italy.⁷⁹

Thus, Italian foreign policy in the 1980s could be summarized as being committed to its traction alliances and regional areas.⁸⁰ This process was accomplished through engagement in both the international sphere and bilateral relations.

3.2. Craxi's vision

Bettino Craxi's vision of Italian foreign policy could only reflect his socialist identity and the aforementioned internationalism, which was shaped as a result of his foreign experience as a representative of the PSI. He envisioned for Italy a role as a "bridge-builder" in the global sphere, in which the country could act as a mediator between countries, bringing about a synthesis between divergent interests, in order to transcend the ideological, geopolitical, and economic divisions that at the time more than ever divided nations.⁸¹ Foreign policy in this perspective moved away from being a mere instrument of government. Instead, it went on to validate itself in the identity of "prime mover" and its "main source of inspiration".⁸² A terrain in which to manifest solidarity, progress, and humanity, according to Craxi, actions in the international arena were an intrinsic vocation for Italy. His work as a mediator, however, was not to stop at states alone, but also to act directly among peoples and international organizations, with the ultimate goal of giving birth to a "smaller, free, interconnected, empathetic and supportive" world.⁸³

A fundamental element of Craxi's vision was the East-West dialogue. As noted in the first chapter, Craxi was always committed to supporting dissenting groups against the communist regime and letting communication relations remain unchanged despite tensions.⁸⁴ Indeed, his "East-West Bridge" strategy aimed to overcome forms of opposition between the Soviet and Western blocs in order to promote communication and negotiation between them.⁸⁵ In

⁷⁹ Valentine Lomellini e Antonio Varsori, "«Italian way of life»: vizi e virtù dell'Italia degli anni '80 nella stampa internazionale," *Memoria e Ricerca* 52, no. 2 (2016): 261.

⁸⁰ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 2.

⁸¹ Enrico Landoni, "Alla ricerca di un ponte tra Est e Ovest e tra Nord e Sud: La politica estera di Bettino Craxi," in *Ermeneutica del "ponte"*, by Silvio Bolognini (Milan: Mimesis, 2018), 857.

⁸² Landoni, "Alla ricerca," 857.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 858; Enrico Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti e la Ostpolitik italiana," *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Politologica* 23 (2019): 157.

⁸⁵ Landoni, "Alla ricerca," 859.

this idea, Italy would have placed itself more autonomously and above all by having a strategic initiative,⁸⁶ of course while respecting the obligations and responsibilities arising from NATO, in order to arrive at a “responsible and balanced concertation between Europe and the United States” and abjuring the ideal of a “bloc subjugated by a hegemonic power”.⁸⁷ The aim would be to achieve two specific goals: “a common European home”⁸⁸ and Italy as the protagonist of “Ostpolitik.”⁸⁹

In addition to this goal, there was another vital importance to Craxi: solidarity between North and South. Indeed, he devoted much of his political and intellectual efforts to the search for solutions to the problems of poverty, hunger, and indebtedness that particularly afflicted areas defined as the Global South; his work was particularly devoted to areas such as the southern Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America.⁹⁰ In order to address this issue, which Craxi defined as “the great social question of our time”,⁹¹ the politician did not rely on the usual rhetoric, which was regarded as “vacuous Third Worldist rhetoric,” but instead rested his work on “facts, figures and concrete solutions”.⁹² In his view, dealing with it was essential as it was directly interconnected with international stability and peace.

For Craxi’s proposed geopolitical vision, the central role was given to the Mediterranean. This was because the country’s engagement in the area was seen as of great importance, both in increasing relations and cooperation with Arab countries and in peacefully resolving conflicts, a still fitting example being the Middle East.⁹³ In which Craxi showed obvious sympathy for the Palestinian people and at the same time recognized Arafat’s PLO as an interlocutor as well.⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that Craxi’s position regarding this area of interest was

⁸⁶ Giorgio Napolitano, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 93.

⁸⁷ Bettino Craxi, *Dichiarazione programmatica alla Camera dei Deputati*, 10 agosto 1983, cited in Giorgio Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace A proposito di Bettino Craxi e della politica estera italiana,” *Italianieuropei* 2 (April 1, 2003).

⁸⁸ Giorgio Petracchi, “L’Italia e la «Ostpolitik»,” in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 287.

⁸⁹ Landoni, “Craxi-Andreotti,” 157; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 271.

⁹⁰ Landoni, “Alla ricerca,” 867; Antonio Badini, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 35.

⁹¹ Landoni, “Alla ricerca,” 867.

⁹² Craxi, *Dichiarazione programmatica*, cited in Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace”; Federico Dal Bo, “La politica mediorientale dei governi Craxi: rapporti tra Italia e mondo arabo (1983-1987)” (dissertation, LUISS Guido Carli, 2023/2024), 29.

⁹³ Craxi, *Dichiarazione programmatica*, cited in Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace”; Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 10.

⁹⁴ The PLO, founded in 1964, was the political and paramilitary organization, which was to represent the Palestinians in their struggle for freedom and the establishment of an independent state.

not only derived from a strategic objective but also the conviction that Italy had to play a role by its very nature.⁹⁵

Despite his strong socialist ideals and natural humanitarian drive, Craxi positioned himself in a pragmatic and realistic foreign policy. He was more than convinced that Italy had to defend its national interests more decisively, though of course respecting international commitments and constraints.⁹⁶ Indeed, he believed that the ultimate goal for any ruler should be in the “harmonious balance in defending and guaranteeing legitimate national interests.”⁹⁷

In general agreement with the vision of the time, Craxi also saw a new role in the global scene for Italy, in a new, more active line. Thanks partly to its position, history, and tradition, it was to be the instrument for achieving détente between the two blocs, East and West. It was also a promoter of relations between South and North and a key player in the Mediterranean. In the Craxian design, it was to work toward the goal of creating a new global order that would be much more peaceful, equitable, and consequently interconnected.

3.3. The Craxi governments' foreign policy

As mentioned in the course of writing the first chapter, Bettino Craxi became Prime Minister in 1983. His governments significantly marked Italian foreign policy, giving rise to its evolution and new centrality in the government program. It aimed to build a role for Italy that combined the relationship of loyalty with the Atlantic Alliance and pro-European commitment, demonstrating a particular objective in defending national interests and creating a new autonomy and activity in the international sphere.

There were also several circumstances in which Italian foreign policy was tested by major international crises in those years, such as the Euromissiles and Sigonella. However, the government responded by knowing how to defend Italian national sovereignty and its

Matteo Gerlini, "Il caso «Achille Lauro» e le sue conseguenze," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 101; Frank J. Piason, "Italian foreign policy: the 'Achille Lauro' affair," *Italian Politics* 1 (1986): 158; Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 56.

⁹⁵ Roberto Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean in the Nineties*, Documenti IAI (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, [1996]), 2; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 151.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ Craxi, Dichiarazione programmatica, cited in Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace."

autonomist line. These events thus made Italian diplomacy again a protagonist in the global sphere.

3.3.1. The European Community

At the juncture of the Craxi governments, the European Economic Community (EEC) became one of the key points of Italian foreign policy; the policy related to it was consequently characterized by a newfound activism and especially by the aforementioned attempt by Italy to reassert its role as a leading player in the international sphere.⁹⁸ Craxi's Italy, under the influence of Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti⁹⁹, was able to effectively insert itself into the reforming impulse carried forward by France (Mitterrand) and Germany (Kohl)¹⁰⁰, managing to juggle a European climate plagued by "eurosclerosis" and institutional deadlock.¹⁰¹ The aim was to overcome the difficulties that would hold back the possibilities and effectiveness of EU actions.

The Milan European Council in June 1985¹⁰² was the culmination of six months of the Italian presidency, which marked a crucial transition for the EEC. When the EEC was deadlocked in a discussion regarding the proposal to convene an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to reform the Community Treaties, mainly obstructed by the United Kingdom¹⁰³, Craxi and his government implemented a breakthrough. For the first time in Europe's history, they chose to use majority voting, as stipulated in Article 236 of the Treaty¹⁰⁴, thus overcoming resistance and giving the green light to the IGC.¹⁰⁵ This act was criticized by some, calling it "decisionism",¹⁰⁶ although legitimate,¹⁰⁷ but in reality, it simply represented a maneuver of great political will. Success required both strong diplomatic

⁹⁸ Ennio Di Nolfo, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, a cura di Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), xi; Antonio Varsori, "L'Italia e l'evoluzione della CEE. Dal mercato comune al mercato unico," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 184.

⁹⁹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 185, 189.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 186, 191-192.

¹⁰¹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 196; Giuseppe Mammarella, "Il Consiglio Europeo di Milano del giugno 1985," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 189.

¹⁰² Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 185-186, 189, 28.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 190, 186.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 29, 193.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 194, 28.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

preparation on the part of Italy, Germany, and France,¹⁰⁸ as well as the ability of the Italian government to create the necessary consensus.¹⁰⁹ What happened that day ultimately proved essential to the revival of the integration process; in fact, the Intergovernmental Conference led to the creation of the Single European Act (1986), which represented the first effective revision to the Treaties of Rome¹¹⁰. It paved the way for creating a true Single Market and the subsequent steps toward Maastricht.¹¹¹ Italy thus positioned itself in these circumstances as a central pivot to drive European integration, abandoning its role as a passive player.¹¹²

Among other successes achieved by the Italian presidency, one of the most important is the enlargement of the Community through the admission of Spain and Portugal.¹¹³ Several problems made their bid for membership complicated, but the main ones were related to agricultural balances, namely competition among Mediterranean products and fisheries.¹¹⁴ Under the leadership of technician Pietro Calamia, however, the Italian presidency concluded the negotiations, achieving entry into force of the accession treaties on January 1, 1986.¹¹⁵ This once again confirmed Italy's renewed capacity at the international level and its willingness to include the Iberian countries in the EEC in order to strengthen the European southern zone.¹¹⁶

Of course, this European activism had a particular purpose. It has already been mentioned, reaffirming Italy's role at the international and European level, shaking off the stigma of being a marginal country and taking on that of an essential and "assertive" partner.¹¹⁷ The goal of the Italians at this juncture was to give birth to a "conscious" Europeanism,¹¹⁸ which combined the national interests of individual states and greater integration, which was seen as highly functional to Italy and its economy.¹¹⁹ In this sense, the Craxi governments sought

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 186, 191-192.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 202.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 188, xi.

¹¹² Antonio Badini, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 31.

¹¹³ Pietro Calamia, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 263-267; Varsori, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 185.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 183.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 266-267.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 182.

¹¹⁷ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 5; Di Nolfo, introduction in *La politica estera*, xiii.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 184.

to create a space that would allow Italy its autonomy of initiative in Europe, while maintaining its loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance. This would help transform Europe, consequently making it a pole of stability and development,¹²⁰ able to emancipate itself and act autonomously from the United States.¹²¹ Craxi stated that his goal was to make Europe the “heart of our relations.”¹²²

In conclusion, we can say that the Craxi government's season marked a period of pragmatism for the affairs concerning the European Community. As we have been able to observe, particularly during its six-month presidency, but not only, Italy made a decisive contribution to overcoming the stalemate that had inevitably blocked European integration and to setting in motion the course that would in the following years lead the EEC to an evolution.¹²³

3.3.2. NATO

As pointed out in the previous subchapters, Italy of the 1980s faced a new phase in its foreign policy. It was characterized by greater dynamism and activity in the international sphere while remaining tied to its pillars, namely the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the European Community.¹²⁴ Within this framework, Craxi was not content with the role often attributed to the country as a security “consumer” or “low-profile” partner.¹²⁵ However, he decided to push himself toward a leading role within the global terrain, becoming a “real

¹²⁰ Giorgio Napolitano, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 95.

¹²¹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 180.

¹²² Bettino Craxi, *Dichiarazione programmatica alla Camera dei Deputati*, 10 agosto 1983, quoted in Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace.”

¹²³ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 202, 188.

¹²⁴ Giorgio Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace A proposito di Bettino Craxi e della politica estera italiana,” *Italianieuropei* 2 (April 1 2003); Giorgio Napolitano, in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 91.

¹²⁵ Roberto Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean in the Nineties*, Documenti IAI (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, [1996]), 2; Stefano Silvestri, “L'Italia: partner fedele ma di basso profilo,” in *La Difesa europea: Proposte e sfide*, by Luigi Caligaris (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1990), 185-202, quoted in Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*.

country”¹²⁶ and contributing to the definition of allied strategies, consequently overcoming the image of instability that had often been attributed to it in previous decades.¹²⁷

Despite the new phase Italy was about to enter in the foreign policy arena, Craxi reiterated several times over time how NATO would remain the “pivot of our politico-military alliances.”¹²⁸ This position was, for example, demonstrated during the handling of the Euromissile crisis. It should be emphasized that, in the Craxian vision, at any rate, this relationship of allegiance was not seen as blind subalternity. Instead, it represented a union among equals. Italy, therefore, had to be able to assert its interests within the alliance. This design is easily observed in Craxi’s 1983 programmatic speech, where he proposed as desirable a “responsible and balanced concertation between Europe and the United States” and rejected the idea of a “bloc subjugated by a hegemonic power.”¹²⁹ The need to give rise to a balance between these two phenomena, that is, the need to work within a union and the need for national autonomy, has been highlighted in several areas, for example, the Mediterranean Projection, European Engagement, Ostpolitik, and Attention to the Global South.

Regarding the Mediterranean Projection, which we will discuss more specifically in the subchapter devoted to it, the Mediterranean was perceived as one of the areas of most significant interest to Italy. For this reason, it became the area on which Italian activism was most focused. In this sense, the Craxi governments were particularly committed to relations with Arab countries. According to Aliboni, the purpose was to promote the emergence of a regional national grouping, which could act together and in tune with the great powers,¹³⁰ but also maintain a form of independence and thus not limit itself to being mere subordinates of the global powers. For Craxi’s vision, Italy was thus supposed to be a bridge between

¹²⁶ Antonio Badini, introductory remarks to *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venezia: Marsilio, 2007), 17.

¹²⁷ Antonio Varsori, “L’Italia e l’evoluzione della CEE. Dal mercato comune al mercato unico,” in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 184; Valentine Lomellini e Antonio Varsori, “«Italian way of life»: vizi e virtù dell’Italia degli anni ’80 nella stampa internazionale,” *Memoria e Ricerca* 52, no. 2 (2016): 281.

¹²⁸ Bettino Craxi, *Dichiarazione programmatica alla Camera dei Deputati*, 10 agosto 1983, quoted in Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace.”

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 94.

¹³⁰ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 3.

Europe and the Arab world, mediating in regional conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹³¹

Craxi's personality proved essential in achieving this change, even in relations with NATO and the new Italian position, being described as pragmatic, decision-making, attentive to the national interest, and able to challenge diplomatic conventions.¹³² An example of the relevance of his character in international affairs is certainly the handling of the Sigonella crisis,¹³³ which will be dealt with in a separate chapter, where there was a firm opposition to American pressure and the risk of the rupture of relations with the United States. This ability to resist and stand up to confrontation, along with overcoming the moment of crisis, and through the "personal chemistry" established with Reagan,¹³⁴ demonstrated Italy's new role and position. The crisis paradoxically established its success by strengthening its status at the international level, which was also evident in the creation of the direct "red line" with the White House¹³⁵ and the abolition of the U.S.-led G5 following the Tokyo summit in 1986.¹³⁶

One of the elements that accompanied this transformation was the raising of the military profile. Using the Defense White Paper as a basis for their strategy, the creation of which began under Spadolini,¹³⁷ which recommended a stronger focus on the southern flank,¹³⁸ increased participation in international missions. Some of the most vivid examples were the missions in Sinai (MFO)¹³⁹ and Lebanon (ITALCON 1982-1984)¹⁴⁰. In the military area, they helped remove the passive state label through Italy's assumption of greater operational risks and the increased deployment of troops.¹⁴¹ Once again, this process attempted to chase away the international sentiment born in the 1970s that saw it as unreliable.¹⁴² Despite

¹³¹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 32, 37.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³³ Matteo Gerlini, "Il caso «Achille Lauro» e le sue conseguenze," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 99-114; Di Nolfo introduction to *La politica estera*, x; Rinaldo Petrignani, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 131-148.

¹³⁴ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113, x.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 147, 19.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-20, 147-148.

¹³⁸ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 3, quoting G. Spadolini; Di Nolfo, introduction to *La politica estera*, 4.

¹³⁹ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 3, quoting M. Cremasco, *Lo strumento militare italiano* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986); Gianni De Michelis, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 44.

¹⁴² Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 184.

sometimes conflicting judgments, the global press generally acknowledged this Craxi-initiated transformation.¹⁴³ Moreover, it is possible to say that these actions were always integrated with the support and development of a European security identity; in fact, Aliboni called this strategy, which aimed to strengthen Europe in the context of the Atlantic Alliance, a “two-track policy.”¹⁴⁴

3.3.2.1. Euro-Missile Crisis

The Euromissile Crisis (1979-1987) was one of the most important events to have involved NATO.¹⁴⁵ It represented for the Craxi government the most challenging test of its NATO presence and ability to influence. The crisis began when the USSR deployed its new SS-20 intermediate-range missiles. They were going to threaten European soil and therefore were perceived as a threat to the Western European bloc. NATO was therefore forced into an immediate response, which came to fruition in December 1979. NATO decided to respond to this action. It should be emphasized, however, that the issue in reality was significantly more complex. Leopoldo Nuti reconstructed it as not simply a response to the missile issue. However, it represented the result of a debate on the need to modernize NATO’s theater nuclear forces (TNF) and the need to increase the credibility of the U.S. strategic nuclear guarantee in Europe.¹⁴⁶

Under these particular circumstances, many European countries pushed to arrive at a strong and visible response, as there was a strong concern in Western Europe, one of the preeminent figures in this was that of German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Indeed, it was feared that if a Soviet attack with the new intermediate-range missiles occurred, the U.S. would not intervene with its strategic nuclear weapons. This phenomenon of fear was called “decoupling” and referred to the idea that NATO defense was no longer united, that is, detaching the European defense from the U.S. defense. This kind of concern also grew more due to the SALT II treaties,¹⁴⁷ between the U.S. and the USSR, which sought to limit the use of long-range strategic weapons, but agreed on nothing regarding intermediate-range ones. For these reasons, many European countries demanded proof from the U.S.

¹⁴³ Lomellini and Varsori, “«Italian way of life»,” 261-282.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 281.

¹⁴⁵ “Gli Euromissili E Il Trattato INF.” 2018. Difesa Online. December 2, 2018.
<https://www.difesaonline.it/news-forze-armate/storia/gli-euromissili-e-il-trattato-inf>.

¹⁴⁶ Aliboni, Italy and the Mediterranean, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Office of the Historian. 2019. “Strategic Arms Limitations Talks/Treaty (SALT) I and II.”
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/salt>.

that the alliance was still solid and that they were prepared to defend Europe should the need arise, all while installing missiles on the continent.¹⁴⁸ Two were the central elements of the Atlantic Alliance's so-called "double decision," the 572 new U.S. missile systems in five European countries¹⁴⁹ and the opening of negotiations with Moscow,¹⁵⁰ to limit or eliminate SS-20 missiles on both sides.¹⁵¹

Italy played a key role at such a complex historical moment, which observed the "second Cold War" at its height. The government of Francesco Cossiga,¹⁵² through the support of the more secular parties and the studied abstention of the PSI, immediately supported the "double decision," as opposed to other European states that initially chose a more cautious attitude to the issue.¹⁵³ The firmness of the Italian government became even more significant between 1981 and 1983.¹⁵⁴ During this period, tensions intensified exponentially, giving rise to several pacifist movements in European states and going so far as to challenge the governments of Federal Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. This choice of constancy and steadfastness was confirmed for the entire duration of the Craxi governments, even declaring readiness to host the 112 Cruise missiles planned for the Comiso base; in this decision, it was essential to maintain cohesion among the NATO countries and to start deployment at the end of 1983. Germany had made it a condition for the country's yes that another major continental country agree to host the armaments.¹⁵⁵ So, without Italian actions, we cannot know whether the Atlantic Alliance would have survived.¹⁵⁶

It is possible to define Craxi's work during this crisis as a pure representation of political balance. Indeed, he faced several domestic political problems related to this choice. The Italian Communist Party, which had previously accepted NATO's guarantee of military security and protection, the so-called "NATO umbrella",¹⁵⁷ strongly opposed the installation

¹⁴⁸ Leopoldo Nuti, "L'Italia e lo schieramento dei missili da crociera BGM-109 G «Gryphon»," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venezia: Marsilio, 2007), 47-76.

¹⁴⁹ 108 Pershing II ballistic missiles in Germany and 464 ground-launched cruise missiles - GLCMs - in Germany, the UK, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

¹⁵⁰ INF negotiations in Geneva.

¹⁵¹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 49-55.

¹⁵² "Governo Cossiga." 2015. www.governo.it. November 20, 2015.

<https://www.governo.it/it/i-governi-dal-1943-ad-oggi/viii-legislatura-20-giugno-1979-4-maggio-1983/governo-cossiga/3187>.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55-60.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 62-63, ix.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-67, 38; Lelio Lagorio, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 85-86.

¹⁵⁷ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 63-64, 85.

of the missiles in Italy, resulting in protests in Comiso and mobilizations in the squares.¹⁵⁸ Catholic and civil society pacifist movements, which had already created unrest in Europe, mobilized several times to pressure the government. Finally, the Italian Socialist Party itself was also split, with the left wing reluctant and trying in every possible way to add conditions and clauses to the agreement that might reduce its scope.¹⁵⁹ Craxi succeeded, however, in imposing his vision on these parties on more than one occasion. First, at the internal level of the party, a strong consensus was obtained during the Socialist National Executive in October 1979.¹⁶⁰ He then completed the same challenge with the December 1979 parliamentary vote. In general, his position was one of apparent Atlantic loyalty; in fact, he believed that to make any agreement or negotiation with the USSR, it was first necessary to rebalance the forces.¹⁶¹ In this sense, Craxi and Foreign Minister Andreotti, during their time in government, were also strongly involved in negotiation, a fundamental part of NATO strategy. Italy was at the forefront of this phase, even using autonomous negotiations and opening a direct dialogue with Moscow,¹⁶² hoping to reach a solution that would ultimately avoid deploying forces.¹⁶³ Here we can see again a fundamental element of Craxi's foreign policy, already mentioned several times, namely the maintenance of loyalty to the allies and a growing national personal autonomy. We can thus state how Italy's role was fundamental to the continuation of the "dual-track" strategy, contributing to the success of the INF negotiations that led to the elimination of the Euro-missiles in 1987, and at the same time how this allowed the state to confirm its reliability internationally as a key ally.¹⁶⁴

3.3.3. Relationship with the United States of America

The relationship established between the United States and Italy during the time of the Craxi governments had been linked to the tradition of the Atlantic Alliance, thus maintaining

¹⁵⁸ Gennaro Acquaviva, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 79.

¹⁵⁹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 64-65; Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace"; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 79.

¹⁶⁰ "Riunione Della Direzione Nazionale Del 25 Ottobre 1979 - Patrimonio Dell'Archivio Storico Senato Della Repubblica." 2018. Senato.it. 2018.
<https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/bettino-craxi/IT-AFS-020-000310/riunione-della-direzione-nazionale-del-25-ottobre-1979>.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 38-39; Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace."

¹⁶² Ibidem; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 21, 284.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 72; Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace"; Di Nolfo introduction to *La politica estera*, xiii.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 93-94, 39.

the position that had been chosen and maintained since the postwar period.¹⁶⁵ However, a change occurred in this lesson, as seen earlier, Italy began to defend its national interests more assertively, becoming increasingly active in the international sphere and, above all, claiming an equal role in the relationship with the US and within the alliance.¹⁶⁶

The relationship with the Reagan administration may have begun with a certain mistrust on Washington's part toward a socialist-minded premier. However, in the short term, a vision was developed that represented Craxi and his Italian Socialist Party not only as the representation of an allied power but as a reliable interlocutor with a spirit that was strongly detached from communism and firmly rooted in the Western vision.¹⁶⁷ The detachment from the communist world and, above all, the strong support for the Atlantic Alliance were particularly demonstrated with the already discussed Euromissile crisis. Italy was among the strongest supporters of NATO's "double decision," not allowing internal dissensions to move it from its decision.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, as noted earlier, Craxi did not preclude Italy from finding a "responsible and balanced concertation" between Europe and the United States, ruling out the absolute possibility of falling back into the logic of being subordinate in any way to the US.¹⁶⁹

The Italian decision not to stop exclusively at relations strictly related to the US priority was readily observed in Italian foreign policy choices in those years. Projecting its interests toward the Mediterranean and the Middle East¹⁷⁰, seeking to establish an effective dialogue with Arab countries, and initiating a significant opening for Yasser Arafat's PLO¹⁷¹, this process generated a consequent continuous diplomatic work necessary to maintain stable relations with both sides.¹⁷² Regarding Italian relations with the Arab world, calling it a

¹⁶⁵ Giorgio Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace A proposito di Bettino Craxi e della politica estera italiana," *Italianieuropei* 2 (April 1 2003); Giorgio Napolitano, in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 91.

¹⁶⁶ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 91-92.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 53, 85.

¹⁶⁸ Leopoldo Nuti, "L'Italia e lo schieramento dei missili da crociera BGM-109 G «Gryphon»," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta* by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 47-76.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph La Palombara, "Socialist Alternatives: the Italian Variant," *Foreign Affairs*, primavera 1982, pp. 924-942, quoted in Ennio Di Nolfo, "La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 8.

¹⁷⁰ Craxi, *Dichiarazione programmatica*, quoted in Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace"; Napolitano, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 94.

¹⁷¹ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 3; Silvio Labbate, "Alla ricerca di un Mediterranean role: la politica estera italiana agli inizi degli anni ottanta," *Meridiana* 101 (2021): 145.

¹⁷² Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 32; Matteo Gerlini, "Il caso «Achille Lauro» e le sue conseguenze," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio,

“difficult friendship”,¹⁷³ there was a cautious climate in the United States, fearing that this could become a shared Atlantic strategy.¹⁷⁴ At the same time, as we will observe more carefully in the dedicated section, Italy also pursued Ostpolitik, a focused dialogue with Western bloc countries.¹⁷⁵

Bettino Craxi's personality, characterized by strong decision-making and attention to the interests and dignity of his nation, played a considerable role in the success of this redefinition of U.S.-Italian relations.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, he established a frank and direct personal relationship with US President Ronald Reagan. This relationship proved essential during his rule in dealing with the complex dynamics and tensions that had arisen. Important help came from the two ambassadors, Petrignani in Washington and Robb in Rome.¹⁷⁷

The achievement of a mutation in relations with the US, and thus a greater role for Italy internationally, can be observed at the Tokyo summit in 1986 in the achievement of the abolition of the U.S.-led G5, a goal achieved in part thanks to Italian pressure, and the subsequent birth of the G7, in which Italy sat in full parity with other nations.¹⁷⁸ The ultimate goal was international recognition of its new role as an autonomous and capable author, especially by the United States.¹⁷⁹ In this sense, one of the most important events that enabled this change was the Sigonella crisis, which occurred in the months prior to 1986.

3.3.3.1. Sigonella crisis

The Sigonella Crisis of October 1985 tested U.S.-Italian relations.¹⁸⁰ The events involved the seizure of the Italian ship Achille Lauro by four Palestinian men and the subsequent

2007), 101; Frank J. Piason, "Italian foreign policy: the 'Achille Lauro' affair," *Italian Politics* 1 (1986): 158.

¹⁷³ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 101; Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 158; Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 10-12.

¹⁷⁴ Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 159; Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 105-106; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 160.

¹⁷⁵ Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 10; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 159.

¹⁷⁶ Giulio Andreotti, interview in Oreste Foppiani and senator Giulio Andreotti, "I SEGRETI DELLA POLITICA ESTERA: L'ITALIA E GLI ALTRI" [The secrets of foreign policy: Italy and the others], *Il Politico* 66, no. 1 (196) (January-April 2001): 82.

¹⁷⁷ Rinaldo Petrignani, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, edited by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 131-148; Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 19-20.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 147-148.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 62-63, ix.

murder of Leonn Klinghoffer, an American national. Under these circumstances, the two countries demonstrated different propriety and action methods.¹⁸¹

The Craxi government, through the direct intervention of the latter and Foreign Minister Andreotti, wanted to adopt a more democracy-focused solution that would see the involvement in the negotiations of both Mubarak's Egypt and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), particularly Abu Abbas, later revealed to be the organizer of the hijacking. The aim was to secure the ship's and its passengers' release by granting safe conduct for the hijackers.¹⁸² Reagan had a different view on how the operation should be handled. He wanted at all costs to capture the terrorists, who were guilty of murdering a US citizen, and to do so, he sought to put as much pressure as possible on Italy and Egypt.¹⁸³ The two designs collided on the night of October 10-11, 1985, when the interception by a US Sixth Fleet F-14 fighter jet of the Egyptian Boeing 737 plane occurred. Inside were the four hijackers, Abu Abbas and another Palestinian official. Sigonella being the nearest NATO base, the aircraft was forced to land there.¹⁸⁴

Internationally, it was clear that the Americans intended to arrest and take custody of the Palestinians using force.¹⁸⁵ What happened next, however, would be unprecedented. When American special forces from Delta Force surrounded the Egyptian plane, they were immediately in turn surrounded by Italian military personnel. Craxi, who had taken direct command of that operation,¹⁸⁶ had ordered any attempted raid to be blocked, stating that the only state entitled to exercise its sovereignty over the base was Italy, and the same applied to jurisdiction over crimes committed on the Italian ship.¹⁸⁷ That night, there was a risk of an armed confrontation, while the two governments had telephone conversations on the verge of tension.¹⁸⁸ Andreotti described American behavior in those circumstances as unacceptable, resulting in wrongdoing, as Italy's national sovereignty had been violated.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 61; Enrico Landoni, "Alla ricerca di un ponte tra Est e Ovest e tra Nord e Sud: La politica estera di Bettino Craxi," in *Ermeneutica del "ponte"*, by Silvio Bolognini (Milan: Mimesis, 2018), 859.

¹⁸² Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 66-67, 38, 85.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 63-64, 85-86.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 74-75, 39-40.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 92.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 92, 38.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 65, 79.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 79-80.

The result of that night of turmoil would be that the Italian view would prevail over the American view. The men who had hijacked the ship were brought before the Italian justice system. At the same time, Abu Abbas, despite US protests, received permission to leave Italy on October 12, due to the lack of direct evidence of his criminal responsibility for the hijacking and the obstacles associated with his status as a diplomat.¹⁹⁰ Although based on more than reliable legal principles and a political line more than consistent with previous actions in the sense of Italian relations of dialogue with the Middle East, what ensued from these events was a severe Italian political crisis. Craxi government ministers belonging to the Republican group resigned under the leadership of Spadolini, who directly accused Craxi of giving in to the Palestinians, and the fall of the government subsequently ensued.¹⁹¹ Internationally, on the other hand, Italy faced a diplomatic crisis with the US.¹⁹² Even the US press reacted strongly to the tense situation¹⁹³, and the Reagan administration had to deal with conflicting positions internally, even with sectors, such as the counterterrorism branch, pressing for a hard line to be implemented against Italy.¹⁹⁴

The situation was resolved relatively quickly despite the strong tension between the two nations. Several factors contributed to this outcome. First of all, the firmness with which Craxi defended the position taken by his government, explaining the Italian reasons on several occasions. One of the most important speeches was the one to parliament on October 17 of that year.¹⁹⁵ Instead, the Americans soon understood the strategic importance of the alliance with Italy and the risks that an irremediable rupture could cause. Also essential was the intense diplomatic activity following the crisis, culminating in Reagan's letter of reconciliation between the two presidents addressed to Craxi.¹⁹⁶ The Craxi government regained confidence, and when Bettino Craxi visited New York on October 24, a return to normalization of relations was sanctioned.

In general, the Sigonella crisis can be defined as the most serious crisis between the US and Italy since the end of World War II. It was also a demonstration that the Italian state had resumed its role as an active player in international politics, capable of asserting its national

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 38-39.

¹⁹² Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace"; Luigi Vittorio Ferraris intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 295-320.

¹⁹³ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 284, 21, 93.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 296-300.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 72, 93.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 39, 75.

interests and sovereignty while remaining tied to the Atlantic Alliance.¹⁹⁷ Of course, this affair left aftershocks in the mutual perception between the two nations, but it proved the resilience of their alliance relations.¹⁹⁸

3.3.4. Soviet Union

The period in which the first Craxi government was formed is often called the “second Cold War.” In fact, at this juncture, a precipitation of East-West relations had taken place.¹⁹⁹ Several successive events in a short span had frozen the dialogue again and rekindled the mechanism of bipolar opposition, among them were the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Polish crisis, and the most heated situation of all, that over the Euromissiles.²⁰⁰ At this internationally complex time, the Italian government, under the leadership and work of Craxi and Andreotti,²⁰¹ was distinguished by a particular approach to the countries of the USSR and the Soviet Bloc, namely the so-called Italian Ostpolitik.²⁰² The idea proposed by Italy was to reopen the channels of communication, defend specific national interests, encourage a gradual evolution within the Eastern Bloc, and, above all, carve out for its own country the role of bridge while maintaining its Atlanticist role.²⁰³

The origins of Ostpolitik are well rooted in the Italian diplomatic tradition; Italy has been trying to maintain margins of economic cooperation and dialogue with the Soviet bloc since the 1960s.²⁰⁴ With the Craxi government, in any case, a substantial shift in its importance took place, rediscovering a central role in Italian foreign policy. This decision depended on several reasons. First and foremost were economic ones; Soviet gas was essential for Italy, and many of its large enterprises²⁰⁵ were linked commercially and in terms of relations with the Soviet Union and other states in the Comecon.²⁰⁶ The Siberian gas pipeline crisis (1981-

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁹⁹ Giorgio Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace A proposito di Bettino Craxi e della politica estera italiana," *Italianieuropei* 2 (April 1, 2003); Giorgio Napolitano, intervention in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 91.

²⁰⁰ Enrico Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti e la Ostpolitik italiana," *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Politologica* 23 (2019): 157; Giorgio Petracchi, "L'Italia e la «Ostpolitik»," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 272.

²⁰¹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 287-288, 21.

²⁰² Ibid., 271.

²⁰³ Ibid., 287-288, 21.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 272, 318.

²⁰⁵ ENI, Nuovo Pignone, Fiat etc...

²⁰⁶ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 273-278.

1982) highlighted the need for relations even more, as the Italian state had struggled to resist U.S. sanctions by trying to protect its contracts as much as possible.²⁰⁷

On the other hand, from a political point of view, Italy could use these relations to increase even more its role and autonomy at the international level, also distancing itself from Reagan's more rigid view, and also being able to become a mediator²⁰⁸ in matters between the two blocs over time. Had the country succeeded in achieving this, it could also balance the power and influence of the Franco-German axis in Europe.²⁰⁹ Among Italian socialists and progressives, moreover, the thought had developed that it was possible to positively influence internal developments in the East by encouraging greater openness.²¹⁰ Andreotti stressed to the Chamber of Deputies in December 1984 how it was necessary to address each country, beginning to have specific contacts, since treating them as an "indistinct monolith" would be neither practical nor profitable.²¹¹ Finally, at the level of domestic politics, the opening of this dialogue could have favored the interests of the Italian Socialist Party, as it could have contained the monopoly of relations with Moscow held by the Italian Communist Party.²¹²

Within the Craxi governments, this policy issue was entrusted to Craxi himself and Foreign Minister Andreotti. The latter put his extensive experience in the diplomatic field at the government's disposal, working in particular to consolidate communication with the Soviet Union, especially that with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko.²¹³ In addition to the minister, Craxi's role was also essential. It was he who provided the decisive strategic vision and imprint to enable Italy to achieve greater autonomy.²¹⁴ Common goals linked the two government members: revive the dialogue with the East and create a stable and lasting relationship. The Farnesina at this stage was very important as a communication channel, but both authorities used and often favored direct ones, especially personal meetings.²¹⁵

Despite the decision to create this stable dialogue with the East, the Craxi government had to come to terms with situations in which it was necessary to take a pro-West position, a

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 274, 276-277.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 74, 281.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 280.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 94, 21, 284.

²¹¹ Ibid., 280.

²¹² Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 157; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 281-282.

²¹³ Ibid., 290.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 31, 287.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 21, 287-288.

case in point indeed being the Euromissile crisis, already covered in a dedicated chapter. In this case, Italy was able to stand firmly in favor of NATO, making itself in favor of the installation of Cruise missiles in Comiso.²¹⁶ Indeed, it was thought that this firmness was necessary to create any form of credible negotiations with the Soviet Union. In any case, the Italian state did not want to close the possibility of resorting to negotiations to resolve the issue. Craxi, within his programmatic speech, showed a position that hoped for “new Soviet proposals.”²¹⁷ Although he had to reckon with the harsh retorts of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, Andropov²¹⁸, he could insist on continuing the INF negotiations in Geneva until their natural expiration in 1988.²¹⁹ In the Lisbon Declaration, which took place in May 1984, he wanted precisely to express the need to initiate a negotiation that would be able to include all European nuclear forces, whatever side they were on.²²⁰

Italy was also involved in intensifying various bilateral contacts with some individual countries of the Soviet bloc, dealing with what was an essential strategy for Andreotti. In particular, Craxi visited Budapest in April 1984,²²¹ meeting with Kádár, the then prime minister of Hungary, and East Berlin in July of that year,²²² then under the leadership of Honecker. The government also devoted itself to normalizing relations with Poland, a country in which a coup led by General Jaruzelski in 1981 had occurred and which had been isolated as a result. Within a few months, Andreotti and Craxi visited Warsaw in December 1984²²³ and May 1985²²⁴, respectively. The signal that these two visits brought to the global scene was essential, arguing that Italy was ready to maintain dialogue even with nations with a difficult domestic situation, while at the same time emphasizing the need for the maintenance of civil society and the gradual process of opening up the Eastern bloc nations.²²⁵

²¹⁶ Ibid., 17, 42.

²¹⁷ Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 157; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 291.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 58-60, 71-72, 93-94, 85-87.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 94, 21.

²²⁰ Ibid., 284.

²²¹ Ibid., 87, 21, 284.

²²² Ibid., 292.

²²³ Ibidem.

²²⁴ Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 159; Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 291.

²²⁵ Ibid., 287, 21.

The real change, however, in relations between the two states, came with the election of Michail Gorbačëv²²⁶ as General Secretary of the Communist Party. Craxi immediately understood the novelties and opportunities of *perestroika* and *glasnost*,²²⁷ and this prompted him to seek new contacts with Moscow.²²⁸ The subsequent visit to Moscow in May 1985 would be considered a symbolic political event,²²⁹ during which the two countries were described as practical, frank, constructive, and thorough.²³⁰ Defensive were the topics dealt with within the talks, but among the most important appeared to be Craxi's appreciation of the moratorium by the USSR concerning SS-20s, which, however, emphasized several times the need to agree on this type of missile based on "operation zero",²³¹ the possibilities regarding global disarmament, European security, and especially the need to establish cooperation between the EEC and Comecon.²³² Being among the first states globally to move toward the USSR allowed Italy to obtain a privileged role in relations between Moscow and Washington, becoming an essential bridge in this new historical phase.²³³ Gorbačëv recognized the importance of the beginning of the relationship with Italy, showing interest in its position and the importance of possible bilateral cooperation in Europe.²³⁴ In this context, Craxi also devoted himself to the issue of human rights, bringing the question concerning the Sakharov case as an example.²³⁵

In the years following Gorbačëv's appointment, Italy devoted itself to strengthening this privileged relationship with Moscow. It supported the INF negotiations, which eventually achieved the goal of eliminating the Euromissiles through the Washington Treaty of December 1987.²³⁶ Bilateral economic and cultural relations were also intensified,²³⁷ while the Italian state worked to intensify relations with other Eastern countries; work that was

²²⁶ Sala, Àlex. 2022. "Michail Gorbačëv, l'Ultimo Presidente Dell'URSS." *Storica National Geographic*. National Geographic Storica. September 4, 2022.

<https://www.storicang.it/a/michail-gorbacev-lultimo-presidente-dellurss> 15761.

²²⁷ Franceschini, Enrico. 2022. "Perestroika E Glasnost: Il Significato Delle Due Grandi Riforme." *La Repubblica*. August 30, 2022.

https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/08/31/news/perestrojka_gorbaciov_significato_riforme-363559770/.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 287-288, 21.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 288; Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 163.

²³⁰ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 288; Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 161.

²³¹ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 94, 288.

²³² *Ibid.*, 289.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 25, 289.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 289; Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 163.

²³⁵ Si tratta caso relativo alla persecuzione di uno scienziato russo dissidente politico del regime. Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 25, 289.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 57-58; Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 163.

²³⁷ Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 313.

reflected in Honecker's April 1985 visit to Rome.²³⁸ Ostpolitik thus proved to have been an effective policy for its purposes, making an important contribution to the détente between the two blocs, increasing Italy's political relevance abroad, enshrining once again Italy's desire for autonomy of maneuver, and giving rise to new possibilities for dialogue and cooperation. The effectiveness of a model was thus demonstrated, and it went on to combine both firmness and dialogue.²³⁹

3.3.5. Mediterranean

As introduced earlier, Craxi's presidency gave new centrality to the Mediterranean question, turning it into a pillar of his governing agenda.²⁴⁰ The goal was to project Italy toward a greater role at the regional level, devoting more attention to an area considered vital to national interests.²⁴¹ The approach taken by Craxi and Andreotti²⁴² combined both the international commitments due to membership in the Atlantic Alliance and national interests, as well as the search for a new role as a major player.²⁴³

The "Mediterranean vocation" concept can be considered recurring within Italy's foreign policy.²⁴⁴ It reappeared, in any case, particularly in the 1980s, inserting itself in a complicated international context, divided by a Europe split into two blocs and by complex and rapidly changing regional dynamics.²⁴⁵ Thanks to energy interests,²⁴⁶ the Mediterranean had already been an important element for the Italian economy in the 1950s and 1960s, but in the 1980s, new challenges and opportunities arose. From the 1940s onward, a process of decolonization had begun. At this juncture, once subjugated to colonial empires, numerous nations had united into independent countries. The result was a change in the international

²³⁸ Ibid., 286.

²³⁹ Ibid., 290.

²⁴⁰ Silvio Labbate, "Alla ricerca di un Mediterranean role: la politica estera italiana agli inizi degli anni ottanta," *Meridiana* 101 (2021): 145; Antonio Badini, introductory remarks to *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 17.

²⁴¹ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 145; Roberto Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean in the Nineties*, Documenti IAI (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, [1996]), 2.

²⁴² Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 17; Giorgio Napolitano, "Solo in missioni di pace A proposito di Bettino Craxi e della politica estera italiana," *Italianieuropei* 2 (April 1, 2003); Enrico Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti e la Ostpolitik italiana," *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Politologica* 23 (2019): 159.

²⁴³ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 151.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 145-146; Landoni, "Craxi-Andreotti," 157.

²⁴⁶ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 145; Giorgio Petracchi, "L'Italia e la «Ostpolitik»," in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 274.

situation, which caused existing states to readjust to this system.²⁴⁷ Italy, in particular, had developed the need to establish stable relations with Mediterranean producer states and ensure supply security.²⁴⁸ The 1970s, in this sense, had weakened the Italian position, due to political instability and terrorist threats, making it, in the eyes of the allies, an uncertain ally.²⁴⁹ Craxi, in this sense, was able to realize the need for the country to reassert itself internationally. However, more importantly, regionally, Italy was in a “privileged position” strategically speaking in the Mediterranean. Therefore, it had to exploit its capabilities and deal constantly with the external situation while remaining alert to its possible exposure.²⁵⁰

In the previous chapters and paragraphs, we observed how, in the 1980s and particularly with the Craxi governments, a significant change in domestic policy took place compared to the 1970s. This phase saw a new political stability with the birth of the new five-party governing majority and especially an economic recovery.²⁵¹ There followed an attempt to change the image of Italy from the “minor ally”²⁵² to that of a major player²⁵³, also aware of the economic weight represented by the country, which was on the verge of “overtaking” the United Kingdom.²⁵⁴ The Mediterranean in these senses delineated the perfect testing ground to give birth to “political solutions, of mediations, against the law of force,” aiming to transform the nation into a “decisive geopolitical actor for re-establishing a renewed climate of détente and collaboration.”²⁵⁵ As a result, the idea of the “enlarged Mediterranean” came to fruition, a concept that in those years had already begun to spread among both those involved in strategy and the Navy itself.²⁵⁶ The spread of this sentiment highlighted the need to project influence and expand Italian security beyond mere national borders, entering a

²⁴⁷ Labbate, “Alla ricerca,” 145.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 147.

²⁴⁹ Antonio Varsori, “L'Italia e l'evoluzione della CEE. Dal mercato comune al mercato unico,” in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 184; Valentine Lomellini and Antonio Varsori, “«Italian way of life»: vizi e virtù dell'Italia degli anni '80 nella stampa internazionale,” *Memoria e Ricerca* 52, no. 2 (2016): 281.

²⁵⁰ Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 17.

²⁵¹ Bettino Craxi, Dichiarazione programmatica alla Camera dei Deputati, 10 agosto 1983, quoted in Napolitano, “Solo in missioni di pace”; Petracchi, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 284.

²⁵² Emidio Diodato, “L'Italia e il Mediterraneo allargato,” *NEMO* (blog), March 30, 2022, 33.

²⁵³ Bettino Craxi, Camera dei Deputati, seduta del 9 agosto 1983, in *Discorsi parlamentari. 1969-1993*, by G. Acquaviva (Bari: Editore Laterza, 2007), 121.

²⁵⁴ Diodato, “L'Italia e il Mediterraneo,” 32-33.

²⁵⁵ Craxi, Discorso alla Fiera del Levante, Bari, September 9, 1983.

<https://patrimonio.archivio.senato.it/inventario/scheda/bettino-craxi/IT-AFS-020-007686/47-fiera-del-levante-bari#lg=1&slide=0>.

²⁵⁶ Diodato, “L'Italia e il Mediterraneo,” 34.

more regional and global logic.²⁵⁷ Italy was to become and undertake the role of interpreter and bearer of a “policy of peace”²⁵⁸, guarantor also of stability; this is observable particularly with several Italian naval peace-keeping missions in later years.²⁵⁹

3.3.5.1. Tools and Objectives of Craxian Policy in the Basin

The Craxi governments used a well-defined strategy in the Mediterranean, which consisted of several factors. This choice emphasized its multidimensional and pragmatic nature. Diplomacy had to make room for itself in bilateral and multilateral relations, but it also had to include actions on multiple fronts. One example was the decision to intensify contacts with all coastal countries, from the Maghreb to the Levant. Meetings, trips, and summits in the area were increased, trying to give life to Craxi and Andreotti, as well as privileged channels of dialogue with the Arab countries.²⁶⁰ Italy focused most on two targets in particular: Mubarak’s Egypt and Yasser Arafat’s Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Egypt was considered the essential ally to gain access to the region and, simultaneously, the necessary element for achieving peace in the Middle East.²⁶¹ Simultaneously, the PLO was an equally necessary interlocutor in the region.²⁶² In the case of these second relationships, however, Italy had to face strong American and Israeli resistance. Italian foreign policy was seen in the world scene as at times “pro-Arab,” and this perspective often created friction with the U.S.. However, for the Italian state, this position was seen as necessary as it served to defend national interests and promote a peace initiative in the region.²⁶³

There have been numerous crises in which Italy has intervened or proposed itself as a mediator in the Mediterranean area, as we will analyze more specifically in the subchapter

²⁵⁷ Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 32; Matteo Gerlini, “Il caso «Achille Lauro» e le sue conseguenze,” in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venezia: Marsilio, 2007), 101; Frank J. Piason, “Italian foreign policy: the ‘Achille Lauro’ affair,” *Italian Politics* 1 (1986): 158.

²⁵⁸ Piason, “Italian foreign policy,” 159; Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 105-106; Labbate, “Alla ricerca,” 160.

²⁵⁹ Giulio Andreotti, interview in Oreste Foppiani and senator Giulio Andreotti, “I SEGRETI DELLA POLITICA ESTERA: L’ITALIA E GLI ALTRI,” *Il Politico* 66, no. 1 (196) (January-April 2001): 82.

²⁶⁰ Petracchi, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 277-278; Landoni, “Craxi-Andreotti,” 159; Labbate, “Alla ricerca,” 154.

²⁶¹ Labbate, “Alla ricerca,” 162; Piason, “Italian foreign policy,” 159.

²⁶² Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113; Piason, “Italian foreign policy,” 161.

²⁶³ Bruna Bagnato, “L’Italia vista da Palazzo Farnese: La missione di Gilles Martinet (1981-1984),” in *La politica estera italiana negli anni ottanta*, by Ennio Di Nolfo (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 235; Labbate, “Alla ricerca,” 161.

focusing on the Middle East. These include notably the Lebanese civil war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²⁶⁴ The objective of the Italians was to facilitate negotiations, preventing possible conflict escalation. According to Andreotti, Italian action was guided by a vision that was developed on “understanding the neighbors and having a nonconfrontational vision of the Mediterranean basin is wisdom.”²⁶⁵ While diplomacy was Italy’s favorite tool, there were circumstances in which it was not possible to resort to it and necessitated military action, guided in international initiatives, an example being Italian participation in the Multinational Force in Lebanon (ITALCON).²⁶⁶ Despite the controversies associated with the end of this mission, it is possible to say that it represented the manifestation of the Italian decision to take greater responsibility in the area and raise the nation’s international profile, bringing positive acceptability to its Armed Forces.²⁶⁷ In the meantime of these initiatives, the economic field was always a priority, leading the country to enter into energy ties, for example with Algeria’s Transmed pipeline,²⁶⁸ and space was given simultaneously to cultural cooperation.²⁶⁹

In general, the Mediterranean policy aimed at several specific goals. First and foremost was the consolidation and guarantee of national security, which could be threatened by the instability that characterized that territory by terrorism and various ongoing conflicts. At the economic level, they wanted to protect and diversify energy supplies by country, while also promoting the country’s and the business interests of companies in that area. Then there were two ultimate aims of regional activism: to increase Italian influence internationally and contribute to the development of peace and the Mediterranean area, which was seen as essential for Europe and the entire West.²⁷⁰

3.3.5.2. Challenges, Achievements, and Limits of Craxian Mediterranean Activism

Italy faced numerous challenges in developing its foreign policy in the Mediterranean area. From wars to terrorism, the Italian state had to know how to untangle numerous obstacles

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 164; Badini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 32.

²⁶⁵ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 164.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 861; Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113.

²⁶⁷ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

²⁶⁸ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 5; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 151.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 861.

in its actions.²⁷¹ Another significant limitation to the possibility of action was then brought by the influence given both by the superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union, but also by other European states, for example, in the case of Lebanon, with French and British interference.²⁷² As addressed earlier, the Sigonella crisis only highlighted states' differing positions in dealing with possible international crises and terrorism.²⁷³ At the same time, relations with European partners in the area were often threatened by mutual distrust and competition in regional influence.²⁷⁴

Despite these considerable difficulties, Italy managed to achieve some important results. It was able to position itself in the Arab world as the preferred interlocutor for many nations and at the same time the most listened to, going on to create a series of significant relationships for years to come.²⁷⁵ Italy was able to earn through its actions in Libya both the position of a state capable of acting in situations that require great responsibility and praise for its intervention, humanitarian approach, and above all for its neutrality among the conflict forces.²⁷⁶

The so-called "Craxian Mediterranean dream,"²⁷⁷ however, never reached total fruition, remaining largely unfulfilled, due both to the harshness of the conflicts in the region and to the limitations that Italian influence could achieve in a world still characterized by Cold War dynamics and the overarching interests of the superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States.²⁷⁸ Silvio Labbate observed that despite the strategic attempt put in place by Italy, in the end, the government's mission was forced to remain "unfulfilled in the difficult context of the period."²⁷⁹

To sum up, the Mediterranean policy of the Craxi governments was very significant for Italian foreign policy. Indeed, Craxi wanted to change Italy by making it more aware of its

²⁷¹ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 112; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 166.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁷⁴ G. Pastori, *Shaping National Role Abroad: Italian Military Missions since the Eighties*, «UNISCI Discussion Papers», N° 25 (January / Enero 2011), pp. 183-198, quoted in Federico Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale dei governi Craxi: rapporti tra Italia e mondo arabo (1983-1987)" (Dissertation, LUISS Guido Carli, 2023/2024), 54.

²⁷⁵ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 158.

²⁷⁶ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 101; Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 147; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 154.

²⁷⁷ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113; Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 161.

²⁷⁸ Bettino Craxi, *Senato della Repubblica, sittings of November 4 and 6, 1985*, in *Discorsi parlamentari. 1969-1993*, by G. Acquaviva (Bari: Editore Laterza, 2007), 373.

²⁷⁹ Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 153; Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113.

“Mediterranean role.”²⁸⁰ Despite the policy’s failure, he still increased Italy’s international standing and shaped the future of Mediterranean engagement.

Having analyzed in general the events related to Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean basin, the next chapter will deal specifically with the Middle East area and especially the major conflicts with which Italy had to contend, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and those in the areas of Lebanon and Libya.

3.3.6. Middle East

Among the various areas of interest to the Italian government in the Mediterranean, the one that certainly needed the most attention was the Middle East. This region is linked to complex dynamics, whose stability is threatened by conflicts of various kinds, foremost among them the Arab-Israeli conflict. Italy considered this area of great interest and wanted to create a space to act autonomously, becoming the Middle East mediator par excellence. This chapter will analyze the dynamics of the Craxi government's strategy, discussing the approach to the region's central conflicts and the effectiveness of Italian policy.

3.3.6.1. The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Diplomatic Priorities and Lines of Action

Talking about the Craxi governments, it is necessary to mention the Arab-Israeli conflict, which was considered the focal point of instability in the region and would threaten the stability of the security of the entire Mediterranean.²⁸¹ In the period of this executive’s ability to increase its engagement in this region, creating a more specific type of attention,²⁸² Italy tried to reach a negotiated solution that could somehow please both sides of the conflict. Unlike most European and Western states, which recognized only the inalienable right to the existence and security of the State of Israel,²⁸³ Italy went further. It affirmed both the Israeli right and the Palestinian people’s right to have their national rights recognized, even opening dialogue with the PLO, which was seen as the only legitimate representative of the

²⁸⁰ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 109-112; Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 152-153; Petrignani, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 145-146.

²⁸¹ Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 153-154; Petrignani, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 146.

²⁸² Paolo Soave, *Tra Reagan e Gheddafi. La politica estera italiana e l'escalation libico-americana degli anni '80* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2017), 87.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 90.

Palestinians for negotiations.²⁸⁴ The idea was to overcome the rigid thinking of the time, made only of oppositions, thus creating a constructive negotiation between the two nations.²⁸⁵

In choosing its approach, the Italian state relied on several principles within the international system. First of all, it relied on the Venice Declaration adopted by the European Economic Community in June 1980, which wanted a solution to this type of conflict based on the ideal of "territory versus peace," as defined within UN Resolution 242, and then on the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people, affirming the need to work on negotiations with the PLO as an interlocutor.²⁸⁶ Craxi and Andreotti had to work excellently and strategically to translate these theoretical principles into concrete action.

One of the first steps was to establish a direct personal relationship with Yasser Arafat, who visited Rome several times, visits that received a variety of criticism and opposition both in Italy and abroad.²⁸⁷ The man was considered an essential interlocutor for achieving regional peace and progress.²⁸⁸ Italy thus became one of the major supporters of the moderate PLO in the West. It became involved in establishing relations with the international community, particularly Israel and the U.S., achieving a status as a potential reliable partner.²⁸⁹

In parallel, the government worked to create a united and cohesive front of moderate Arab states that could support Italy in the search for a negotiated settlement. Mubarak's Egypt was among the first nations in the Arab world to which they turned, establishing a strong understanding over time.²⁹⁰ They then also turned to Jordan's King Hussein.²⁹¹ The decision to also address the other states in that area stemmed from the goal of creating a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation that would be able to deal with Israel.²⁹² The high point of this

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 110; Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113.

²⁸⁵ M. Bucarelli, *L'Italia e la crisi libanese: tra sollecitazioni all'intervento e volontà di disimpegno*, «Rivista italiana di storia internazionale», n. 1/2022, pp. 5 – 32; Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 44.

²⁸⁶ Ibidem.

²⁸⁷ Soave, *Tra Reagan e Gheddafi*, 90-95.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 96.

²⁸⁹ M. Bucarelli, «L'Italia e l'«ossessione libica» dell'amministrazione Reagan», in M. Bucarelli, L. Micheletta, Andreotti, Gheddafi e le relazioni italo-libiche, cit.; Soave, *Tra Reagan e Gheddafi*, 99.

²⁹⁰ Ibidem.

²⁹¹ Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace*, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 2, ISBN 9781400078288

²⁹² Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 160.

diplomatic work was reached between 1984 and 1985, when, with Italian support, a preliminary agreement was drawn up between Arafat and the King of Jordan.²⁹³ Italy's role at this stage was that of a proposed guarantor and facilitator for the project's success, in an attempt to overcome the stumbling block represented by Israel in the negotiations and the equal concerns from Washington.²⁹⁴ In this complex diplomatic context, the turning point seemed to come with the state visit of Prime Minister Shimon Peres to Rome, which not only represented the first presence in Italian history of an Israeli president on his national soil, but also guaranteed Craxi's ability to discuss the conflict with him, presenting his perspective that it was the "drama of a people, the Palestinian people, who have suffered and continue to suffer from the lack of a homeland."²⁹⁵

Despite the promising premise and especially the Italian commitment to the issue, this strategy never came to fruition, having to contend with both the conflict itself and with various obstacles that went with it. The leading actors in this war, namely Israel and the Palestinian movement, were the first obstacle, one with its rigid opposition to any concession. At the same time, the other was too internally divided to agree. It was then that the other states created considerable blockades. Hafez al-Assad's Syria stopped any agreement that it perceived could lead to the marginalization of Damascus.²⁹⁶ The Reagan administration, on the other hand, refused to consider any possibility of exposure with Israel to bring it into significant concessions. With time, each of these elements led to the failure of the Italian action and the sinking of the Arafat-Hussein agreement.²⁹⁷ The real end of the "expansive phase of Italy's Middle East policy"²⁹⁸ came, however, following events related to the Israeli bombing of the PLO headquarters in Tunis, an act described by Craxi as undermining Italy's credibility as a mediator and, above all, which would make the fight against terrorism²⁹⁹ even more difficult, and the hijacking of the ship Achille Lauro in October 1985.³⁰⁰ These events highlighted the difficulty of completing a negotiation and how Italy's action was limited.³⁰¹ As a result of the events just analyzed, Craxi and Andreotti had to accept the impossibility of

²⁹³ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 101; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 159.

²⁹⁴ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, *La politica estera*, 113; Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 162.

²⁹⁵ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

²⁹⁶ Aliboni, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, 5; Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁹⁸ Bettino Craxi, *La notte di Sigonella. Documenti e discorsi sull'evento che restituì orgoglio all'Italia*, by the Fondazione Craxi (Milan: Mondadori, 2015), 73.

²⁹⁹ Craxi, *Camera dei Deputati*, sitting of march 14, 1985, in *Discorsi parlamentari. 1969-1993*, 258.

³⁰⁰ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 166.

³⁰¹ Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 106.

implementing their strategies in that area and, while maintaining an open dialogue with Arafat, they had to scale back their ambitions.³⁰²

3.3.6.2. Regional Crises: Lebanon and Libya as Test Benches

Italy had to deal with the many regional crises during in the 1980s, which tested its ability to prove itself a reliable ally for other powers, particularly the United States. Within this subchapter, we will address two specifically: the one in Lebanon and the one in Libya.

During the outbreak in Lebanon, the incumbent Italian government was Spadolini, who was in the last months of his term. However, the most dramatic phase of this conflict was experienced under Craxi. Italy participated in this regional crisis through the Multinational Force, a multinational force comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, under the auspices of the UN. Several missions were carried out with it, the first taking place two days after the end of the Spadolini administration, on August 21, 1982.³⁰³ The task that ITALCON was supposed to perform in this context was to enable the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut and to help stabilize the nation.³⁰⁴ On this occasion, the Italian contingent managed to distinguish itself by its humanitarian and neutral approach toward the various factions, at least in perception.³⁰⁵ This behavior earned him a strong consensus in both local and international circles.³⁰⁶ Indeed, Craxi repeatedly pointed out that Italian soldiers were used exclusively “in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.”³⁰⁷ Despite the humanitarian actions carried out, particularly by Italy, the situation degenerated definitively after the escalation of the civil war and the bloody suicide bombings against American and French barracks.³⁰⁸ As a result of this and the enormous losses suffered,³⁰⁹ in 1984, it decided to withdraw its contingent,³¹⁰ although it showed more reluctance than other states³¹¹ in coordinating with its allies.³¹² This mission, although a failure from a strategic point of view,

³⁰² G. Andreotti, Camera dei deputati, session of July 7, 1982.

³⁰³ Ibidem.

³⁰⁴ Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 45.

³⁰⁵ G. Pastori, Shaping National Role Abroad: Italian Military Missions since the Eighties, cit. in Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 45.

³⁰⁶ Craxi, Senato della Repubblica, sitting of November 8, 1985, in Discorsi parlamentari. 1969-1993, 373.

³⁰⁷ Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 106.

³⁰⁸ Soave, Tra Reagan e Gheddafi, 98.

³⁰⁹ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 157.

³¹⁰ Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 146.

³¹¹ Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 45.

³¹² Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 158.

served in any case to increase the operational capabilities of the Italian Armed Forces and consolidate Italy's position as an ally ready to assume responsibilities at the international level.³¹³ Moreover, an Armed Forces modernization, which had begun under Spadolini, was underway at that time. Moreover, this military initiative represented a first for the Republic³¹⁴, as for the first time, military forces were used in a context related to multilateral foreign policy.³¹⁵

The situation in Libya was decidedly more controversial for Italy, which was caught between two fires. On the one hand, there was the U.S.; on the other, a neighbor that was problematic but equally important economically.³¹⁶ The tension in the country would later culminate in the Gulf of Sirte crisis and Operation El Dorado Canyon, or the U.S. bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986.³¹⁷ The Italian government immediately took a double action, yes, condemning Gaddafi's actions³¹⁸ and his provocations in the Mediterranean. However, at the same time, it also criticized the American actions, calling them unilateral and, above all, forbidding the use of NATO bases in Italy for this type of attack, also for fear of possible repercussions.³¹⁹ Subsequently, however, there was a missile attack by Libya towards the island of Lampedusa, which did not cause any material damage,³²⁰ but sharpened the pressures around the government. It found itself in a situation where it had to know how to balance Atlantic solidarity with national interests, while also protecting all Italian citizens currently on Libyan soil.³²¹ Unlike the Reagan administration, which tended to prefer a harder line, the Craxi government always preferred the diplomatic or economic line; there was, in fact, a "clear opposition of the Italian government to any hypothesis of war and military actions of allied countries in the Mediterranean regions"^{322, 323} This choice on Italy's part is easily observed in the actions of Minister Andreotti, who did everything he could to

³¹³ Ibidem.

³¹⁴ Dal Bo, "La politica mediorientale," 44.

³¹⁵ Ibidem.

³¹⁶ Soave, Tra Reagan e Gheddafi, 89.

³¹⁷ Ibidem.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 91.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 95.

³²⁰ Ibid., 97.

³²¹ Ibid., 98.

³²² Craxi, Camera dei Deputati, sitting of November 6, 1985, in Discorsi parlamentari. 1969-1993, 356-373.

³²³ Soave, Tra Reagan e Gheddafi, 99.

keep the dialogue with Gaddafi open, positioning himself as a possible moderating force in case of other degenerations.³²⁴

3.3.6.3. Balance sheet and legacy

If one were to make an overall assessment of the Craxi government's experience in the Middle East, it would certainly swing more to the negative; indeed, this policy has few positive returns.

Of course, these actions led to a new visibility for Italy internationally, manifesting the newfound initiative.³²⁵ Italy also succeeded in positioning itself as a credible and reliable interlocutor for many countries in the region, both Arab and non-Arab,³²⁶ actively seeking peaceful solutions that did not require the use of violence in conflicts.³²⁷

However, most of the goals set by the executive, such as the creation of stability and peace in the region, remained largely unfulfilled.³²⁸ The various factors that influenced the area, such as the complexity of the conflicts or the resistance of the primary or secondary actors in the conflict, and Italy's inability to manage the situation concerning its influence effectively, prevented the program's success.³²⁹ The constraints created by being a NATO member and international situations hampered Italian ambitions,³³⁰ which were often threatened even in the context of areas commonly refractory to interference.³³¹

In conclusion, Craxi's Mediterranean policy faced many limitations and obstacles. However, it succeeded in strengthening Italian international politics and laid the foundation for policies that are still in place today concerning the Mediterranean/Middle Eastern area.³³² According to Craxi, "the sense of balance and realism that inspired his action" (Italy)³³³ was essential for a state that wanted to play a leading role in the Mediterranean and the world at large.³³⁴

³²⁴ Andreotti, in Foppiani e Andreotti, "I SEGRETI," 82-83; Soave, Tra Reagan e Gheddafi, 98.

³²⁵ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

³²⁶ Piason, "Italian foreign policy," 155.

³²⁷ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

³²⁸ Ibidem.

³²⁹ Ibidem.

³³⁰ Gerlini, in Di Nolfo, La politica estera, 113.

³³¹ Labbate, "Alla ricerca," 167.

³³² Ibidem.

³³³ Craxi, Camera dei Deputati, sitting of march 14, 1985, in Discorsi parlamentari. 1969-1993, 258.

³³⁴ Diodato, "L'Italia e il Mediterraneo," 34.

4. Chapter 3 – Communicating Foreign Policy: Bettino Craxi's Political Messaging on the International Stage

This chapter deals with political communication related to foreign policy, analyzing how Bettino Craxi turned it into a fundamental tool of international action and legitimacy. In an era of transformation, the PSI Secretary understood the potential of new forms of communication early on, exploiting them to create consensus, influence interlocutors, and consolidate Italy's role internationally.

The analysis opens with a theoretical framework, which first analyzes the theory of communication and then its relationship to foreign policy. It will later be applied to the vision and concrete experience of the socialist leader. Three emblematic cases will be examined: the Euro-missile crisis, the Sigonella case, and the Mediterranean and Middle East strategy. These will allow the Craxian approach to be explicated concretely and differently. Finally, there will be a reflection on the relationship between Craxi, the media, public opinion, and the legacy of his communicative style.

4.1. Theoretical Framework: Political Communication and Foreign Policy

Political communication is one of the focal elements in understanding the actions of a political leader or state. It is “the exchange and comparison of public-political interest content produced by the political system, the media system, and the citizen-voter”³³⁵ and has significant strategic value. It also presents substantial differences from its use in domestic or foreign policy. Unlike the other, the latter refers to a much broader and exceptionally heterogeneous audience. It includes domestic public opinion, which legitimizes democratic choices,³³⁶ political and bureaucratic elites, governments and diplomacies of partner countries,³³⁷ and also adversary ones,³³⁸ international institutions and organizations,³³⁹ and

³³⁵ Gianpietro Mazzoleni, *La comunicazione politica*, 4^a ed. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 23.

³³⁶ Douglas C. Foyle, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Elite Beliefs as a Mediating Variable," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 141–70.

³³⁷ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2001).

³³⁸ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

³³⁹ Ian Hurd, *International Organizations: Politics, Law, Practice*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

public opinions of third countries.³⁴⁰ The plurality of receivers of the communicative message consequently imposes a strategic choice of the message conveyed, which very often must manage to move on the fine line that divides transparency and confidentiality.³⁴¹

From a more theoretical point of view, several key concepts enable us to understand the functioning and formation of international political communication. The first one to consider is that of “public diplomacy.” It is understood by Nicholas J. Cull as, “...public diplomacy is the attempt by an international actor to conduct its foreign policy by interacting with foreign audiences (traditionally government-to-people contacts)”³⁴² and by Jan Melissen as, “The process by which international actors seek to influence the attitudes and opinions of foreign audiences and elites in order to achieve foreign policy objectives.”³⁴³ It is consequently a key element of intergovernmental diplomacy. There are multiple ways to use public diplomacy, from cultural and educational exchanges to communication through various media forms, starting with radio and ending with social media.³⁴⁴

“Framing” strategies³⁴⁵ are then essential to creating effective communication. These represent the ability to select, emphasize, and organize some specific aspects to define the problem, assign causal responsibility, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions.³⁴⁶ When referring to international relations, framing becomes essential for several purposes: mobilization of domestic consensus,³⁴⁷ influencing the perception of events abroad, and understanding different types of narratives presented by other states, which are referred to as “counter-framing.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁰ Piers Robinson, Philip Seib, and Romy Fröhlich, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Media, Conflict and Security* (London: Routledge, 2017).

³⁴¹ James N. Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: An Operational Formulation* (New York: Random House, 1961).

³⁴² Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

³⁴³ Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁴⁴ Eytan Gilboa, "Media Diplomacy: Conceptual Framework and Modes of Operation," *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy* 83 (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2002).

³⁴⁵ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (Autunno 1993): 51–58.

³⁴⁶ Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³⁴⁷ Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁴⁸ William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (July 1989): 1–37.

Then there is “agenda setting,” understood as the power given to politicians and the media to determine what people should think about through the choice of topics of public debate.³⁴⁹ An example is when a government places media attention on its diplomatic successes while willfully omitting to place it on its failures, consequently influencing people’s perceptions of the state’s priorities in the international sphere.³⁵⁰

“Signaling,”³⁵¹ on the other hand, is how states communicate through actions to influence other powers. However, these signals are not always effective; their credibility is proportional to the costs incurred by the sending nation.³⁵² It should be emphasized that this credibility is essential, however, for deterrence, coercive diplomacy, and confidence-building.³⁵³ In this sense, reference can be made to the “two-tiered games”³⁵⁴ perspective, which Robert Putnam created. It establishes how difficult a position negotiators are in when acting abroad, as they are forced to both work to establish internationally beneficial agreements (Level I) and ensure that the agreements reached can actually be ratified and sustained internally within their nation (Level II). Without public communication, one would not be able to manage this type of situation; in fact, it allows positions reached internationally to be presented in the most effective way to be supported domestically as well, and vice versa, it can be used to use domestic constraints for leverage in negotiations abroad.³⁵⁵

Finally, the last important concept to consider is the leader figure.³⁵⁶ Over the years, it takes on an increasingly fundamental role, as does his or her communication style, especially in the era of media-linked politics.³⁵⁷ A personification of politics takes place in this sense, with parties increasingly identifying with the person of the leader, greater use of the media, and

³⁴⁹ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 176–187.

³⁵⁰ Maxwell McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

³⁵¹ Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

³⁵² James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1997): 68-90.

³⁵³ Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁵⁴ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427-460.

³⁵⁵ Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert D. Putnam, eds., *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

³⁵⁶ Margaret G. Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (March 1980): 7–46.

³⁵⁷ Lidia Avella, "Spettacolarizzazione e Personalizzazione della Comunicazione Politica: Riflessioni", (Istituto Francesco Fattorello, 2011), Introduction.

especially the building of a more direct relationship with the public.³⁵⁸ Within a short time, these become essential elements in politics, capable of helping a party gain support, while also becoming tools for international perception and the ability to exercise “soft power.”³⁵⁹ It corresponds to achieving desired results without coercion, but through attraction and persuasion, using various elements such as cultural resources, political values, and the perceived legitimacy of one’s nation internationally.³⁶⁰

4.1.1. Application of the theoretical framework to the Italian 80s

Italian politics was dominated by a system called “partitocracy.”³⁶¹ In this kind of system, mass parties, which dominated electoral competition and government formation, also influenced various aspects of society: civil society, the economy, and especially communication systems.³⁶² RAI found itself subject to a monopoly regime and a system of “allotment,” in which editorial control and appointments to management positions were divided among the main parties, both government and opposition.³⁶³ This system represented the actual manifestation of the “rejection of political personalization”³⁶⁴ that was widespread in Italy for a long time. It depended on several reasons, but particularly on the still too vivid memory of the cult that had arisen around Mussolini’s personality³⁶⁵ and on the very nature of the party system and mass parties, which favored a collective identity.³⁶⁶ In those years, there was a leaning toward a formal type of political communication, tied to

³⁵⁸ John B. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

³⁵⁹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-11.

³⁶¹ Pietro Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti: Profilo storico della democrazia in Italia (1945-1990)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991).

³⁶² Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi: Società e politica 1943-1988* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), spec. cap. 10-11.

³⁶³ Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: Costume, società e politica*, 6^a ed. (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 287-288, 320-325; Gianpietro Mazzoleni, “Media ‘Lottizzazione’ Italian Style,” in *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, ed. Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122-124.

³⁶⁴ Riccardo Brizzi, “Piccolo schermo e politica nell'Italia repubblicana. Dal rifiuto della personalizzazione alla «video-politica» (1946-2017),” *Ventunesimo Secolo* 42 (2018): 146-148.

³⁶⁵ Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993).

³⁶⁶ Brizzi, “Piccolo schermo,” 148; Gianfranco Pasquino, *Nuovo corso: Il sistema politico italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

ideologies, linked to pure political language, and proposed almost exclusively toward the structures set up by the parties.³⁶⁷

However, a new era of change began in the 1980s amid twists and turns and contradictions. The so-called traditional parties began their decline, and the very legitimacy of the system was undermined in the eyes of the public. Several factors participated in this. First was the decline in electoral participation and militancy,³⁶⁸ the fading of the ideological contrasts that had characterized the Cold War system for years,³⁶⁹ a political instability, which the five-party governing formula only managed to cushion, and the first scandals related to corruption and illicit financing occurred.³⁷⁰

Parallel to these political events, the media's transformation also began. Within a short time, numerous private television stations, the so-called "Wild West of the Airwaves," came into existence due to the liberalization of broadcasting over the airwaves permitted by Constitutional Court ruling No. 202 of 1976.³⁷¹ The great challenger to the RAI monopoly, however, is Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest group, which gave birth to national networks and which proposed both a model of commercial television that collects centralized advertising and aggressive schedules that collected new types of programs often based on American formats and especially on the creation of light entertainment products.³⁷² The dualism between the two networks³⁷³ will lead to a radical change in the Italian communication sphere. With the emergence of a broader catalog of television offerings, the language and genres offered on television also changed. TV became more spectacular, simplified, and fragmented, leading to the personalization of information and politics.³⁷⁴ Thus, political talk shows,³⁷⁵ "face-to-face" interviews, and using polls took over, all while political reporting,

³⁶⁷ Michele Sorice, *La comunicazione politica* (Rome: Carocci, 2009), 35-39.

³⁶⁸ Renato Mannheimer, ed., *La Lega Lombarda* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1991).

³⁶⁹ Carlo Tullio-Altan, *La coscienza civile degli italiani: Valori e disvalori nella storia nazionale* (Udine: Gaspari Editore, 1997).

³⁷⁰ Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia*, cap. 12; Donald Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy: Politics, Economy and Society since 1945*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1997), 150-156.

³⁷¹ Enrico Menduni, *Televisione e società italiana (1975-2000)* (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), 19-40.

³⁷² Peppino Ortoleva, *Un ventennio a colori: Televisione privata e società in Italia (1975-1995)* (Florence: Giunti, 1995); Carlo Sartori, *La grande sorella: Il duopolio televisivo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1989).

³⁷³ Brizzi, "Piccolo schermo," 154, 156-157.

³⁷⁴ Avella, "Spettacolarizzazione," Introduction p. 3.

³⁷⁵ Brizzi, "Piccolo schermo," 154-155; E. Novelli, *La democrazia del talk show. Storia di un genere che ha cambiato la televisione, la politica, l'Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2016), 73-81.

gossip, and entertainment mixed.³⁷⁶ Politics at this juncture is in danger of turning into a “consumer space,” in which the role of the leader becomes increasingly principal and the elite chosen by specific criteria no longer belong only to politics.³⁷⁷ In the new television, a form of information that is faster and capable of stimulating emotion, so-called “contingent information,” is favored over that which is deeper, slower, and more reflective.³⁷⁸ Even the daily press changes this sense; in fact, it is forced, while trying to maintain its role of in-depth coverage and debate for the elite, to adapt to the pace of television.³⁷⁹

Into this tumultuous context came the communication strategy created by Bettino Craxi and the Italian Socialist Party. Craxi is not the first to experiment with these new forms of communication.³⁸⁰ However, he was nevertheless the first leader of a major Italian party and government and Prime Minister to understand its potential and know how to exploit it to strengthen his leadership, modernize the PSI's image, and promote his political agenda.³⁸¹ He used several distinctive and recognizable elements for this purpose, making him even more recognizable and appreciated in the media. He had a marked attention to personal image, carefully chose both clothing and gestures to be made and in what situation to make them; he had a more direct and assertive language, unlike the traditional language adopted by mass parties; he then agreed to participate in new television formats, political and otherwise,³⁸² and sought a more direct relationship with public opinion.³⁸³ Each of these choices will consequently become a hallmark and can inherently analyze his government and choices.

4.2. Craxi's Style of Political Communication

Speaking of Bettino Craxi more specifically, political communication was not a mere accessory to his political action but a fundamental, strategic, and essential element. This

³⁷⁶ Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Anna Sfardini, *Politica Pop: Da «Porta a Porta» a «L'isola dei famosi»* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), quoted by Avella.

³⁷⁷ Avella, "Spettacolarizzazione," Introduction.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁷⁹ Giovanni Bechelloni, ed., *Il mestiere di giornalista* (Naples: Liguori, 1995).

³⁸⁰ Brizzi, "Piccolo schermo," 153.

³⁸¹ Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica: 1943-2006* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007), 250-260.

³⁸² Brizzi, "Piccolo schermo," 154-155; S. Rolando, *Una voce poco fa. Politica, comunicazione e media nella vicenda del Partito socialista italiano dal 1976 al 1994* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 151 e passim.

³⁸³ Marco Gervasoni, *Storia d'Italia negli anni Ottanta: Quando eravamo moderni* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), 184 ss.

highlights how Craxi effected a real change from the expressive traditions of the First Republic. The 1980s are often described as the “prehistory of showmanship”³⁸⁴, representing the first phase of transition for the political and media areas. During this phase, the Secretary of the PSI stood out among other politicians of the time for quickly understanding the potential arising from this innovation, becoming capable of shaping image and message for his national and international interests. According to linguistic studies, his way of expressing himself is defined as a “precursor trait of what today is summarized in the concept of spectacularization of the political leader.”³⁸⁵

In this new phase, he abandoned what are considered to be the canons of the so-called “politichese,”³⁸⁶ which was characterized mainly by caution and complexity, self-referential traits, and strong ideology.³⁸⁷ Craxi’s style is characterized by “rather original semantic options, pragmatic strategies and rhetorical tactics”³⁸⁸ and is cemented on some fundamental pillars.

The first is undoubtedly marked personalization. Within a short time from the beginning of Craxi’s secretariat in the PSI, the party’s political communication gradually transformed, becoming increasingly synonymous with the man’s figure.³⁸⁹ In this sense, people began identifying the party with Craxi himself, as if the two were one entity. The first signs of this phenomenon are already visible in the 1979 elections; on the election posters, where once the placement of the party symbol, a symbol of collective identity, was favored, the face of the Secretary appeared instead. Of course, this decision on the part of the PSI generated a stir within the political sphere. However, it only signaled a change taking place, in which “the spotlight is beginning to turn on leaders” and where citizens are looking for charismatic figures with whom they can identify.³⁹⁰ Bettino Craxi then took meticulous care of his public image, choosing his clothing with extreme care, which often stood out from the formal sobriety chosen by other politicians, and, among other elements, controlled his gestures,

³⁸⁴ "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 19.

³⁸⁵ Silvia Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi: Analisi linguistica dei discorsi di Craxi Segretario del PSI (1976-1993)" (Master's Thesis, University of Padova, Academic Year 2015/2016), 7.

³⁸⁶ Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi," 9.

³⁸⁷ Michele Sorice, *La comunicazione politica* (Roma: Carocci, 2009), 35-39.

³⁸⁸ Paola Desideri, *Il potere della parola* (Venice: Marsilio, 1987), quoted in Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi," 11.

³⁸⁹ Riccardo Brizzi, "Piccolo schermo e politica nell'Italia repubblicana. Dal rifiuto della personalizzazione alla «video-politica» (1946-2017)," *Ventunesimo Secolo* 42 (2018): 153.

³⁹⁰ "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 20-21.

preferred a posture capable of conveying confidence and dynamism.³⁹¹ The narrative he proposed to his electorate, which began to prefer a more direct and human relationship with its representatives, was that of a “self-made man of Italian politics, dragging, ambitious, hungry”,³⁹² who had no problem showing “strengths and flaws and his weaknesses.”³⁹³

He then chose to resort to direct, assertive, and sometimes even polemically sharp language. Thus, a break with the tradition of political language took place, which had prominent examples from the Communist “wooden language” and the curial eloquence used by the Christian Democrats.³⁹⁴ Instead, the PSI secretary opted for “an informal, almost winking tone,” which mixed “proverbs, sayings, popularising locutions” with the lofty political Italian, wanting in his words “chiamare le cose con il loro nome.”³⁹⁵ Craxi did not shy away from the emergence of controversy or the use of calculated provocation, demonstrating his dedication to showing clarity in his positions and shaking up the establishment.³⁹⁶ The lexicon evolved while also making room for greater clarity and modernity, broke away from speeches of pure ideologism, and moved closer to a greater pragmatism that could be more easily understood.³⁹⁷ He then strengthened the use of rhetorical figures, emphasizing key messages or passages in his speeches.³⁹⁸ All these elements enhanced the image of “decisionism” that Craxi wanted to create around his political figure.³⁹⁹

On the other hand, the third pillar was the early and strategic use of the media, understanding the endless possibilities they were acquiring during the 1980s.⁴⁰⁰ In Italy, television was gaining more and more space, quickly becoming the “stage of political leaders,” where Craxi became one of the “most representative actors of the decade.”⁴⁰¹ Indeed, he was not only able to be highly present in the media, thanks in part to the help of Silvio Berlusconi, but also to generate a substantial media impact. He never shied away from the opportunity to participate in the new television formats, in which he tried to have a

³⁹¹ Marco Gervasoni, *Storia d'Italia negli anni Ottanta: Quando eravamo moderni* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), 184-187.

³⁹² Dalle Rive, “Le parole di Bettino Craxi,” 19.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹⁴ Gianfranco Pasquino, *Nuovo corso: Il sistema politico italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

³⁹⁵ Dalle Rive, “Le parole di Bettino Craxi,” 12.

³⁹⁶ Stefano Rolando, *Una voce poco fa. Politica, comunicazione e media nella vicenda del Partito socialista italiano dal 1976 al 1994* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 127.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150-155.

³⁹⁸ Dalle Rive, “Le parole di Bettino Craxi,” 46, 103.

³⁹⁹ Piero Craveri, *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992* (Turin: UTET, 1995), 540-545.

⁴⁰⁰ Brizzi, “Piccolo schermo,” 154.

⁴⁰¹ “Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione” cap. II, 26-27.

leading and especially dominating role, adapting them to his own communicative needs. In these interviews, as in the famous one with Gianni Minoli for Mixer, emerged the man capable of holding his own in confrontation, conveying direct messages through his appearances and building a well-defined public image.⁴⁰² He also takes advantage of election commercials, in which he is the central figure of both the narrative and the proposed message.⁴⁰³ Indeed, he can seize the potential of these tools to reach out to a broader electorate that does not belong to any political side in a well-defined way, consequently avoiding resorting only to traditional mediations. Craxi's image tool has, over time, become a hallmark of socialist electoral politics.⁴⁰⁴ Finally, the relationship with the press was also managed strategically, wanting to influence their agenda setting and respond to any criticism they posed.⁴⁰⁵

The communicative style devised by Bettino Craxi was exploited to pursue a well-defined political and strategic line. Indeed, the PSI secretary has been described as "the first politician of the time to intuit, and thus exploit, the promoted amplification resources of the television medium."⁴⁰⁶ In the sense of domestic politics, there were three main objectives of his communication strategy: the consolidation of his leadership, the modernization of the party regarding its image and its electoral base,⁴⁰⁷ and making socialism a central, reformist, and modern force.⁴⁰⁸ In regards to the foreign one, on the other hand, it was exploited to project globally the image of a more autonomous and leading Italy,⁴⁰⁹ consequently wanting to "affirm a more incisive presence of Italy in international politics."⁴¹⁰ This concept will be observed more specifically within the following subchapter by taking advantage of some case studies.

It should be noted that this type of communication approach has been subject to several criticisms. The strong personalization has often been subject to the label of "stardom"⁴¹¹,

⁴⁰² Edoardo Novelli, *La democrazia del talk show. Storia di un genere che ha cambiato la televisione, la politica, l'Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2016), 79-81; "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 29.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 27-29.

⁴⁰⁴ "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 29.

⁴⁰⁵ Rolando, *Una voce poco fa*, cap. 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi," 11.

⁴⁰⁷ "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 27.

⁴⁰⁸ Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica: 1943-2006* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007), 250-255.

⁴⁰⁹ "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 21.

⁴¹⁰ Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi," 12.

⁴¹¹ Gervasoni, *Storia d'Italia negli anni Ottanta*, 186-188.

also fearing that this kind of approach could, over time, degenerate into authoritarian drift. Craxi's political language was criticized by the audience, which was divided between those who appreciated him and those who simply considered him a symbol of arrogance and bullying. The same relationship with the media fluctuated over time into moments of attempted control and open confrontation, in which both sides accused each other of instrumentalization.⁴¹² Despite the ambivalences presented, the Craxi model can be said to have effectively transformed political communication, proving its capacity. He is still considered today, in any case, a "forerunner of political spectacularization",⁴¹³ while his legacy in this field continues to be subject to debate.

4.3. Case Studies in Communicative Strategy

In the previous chapter, this thesis dealt with the analysis of several crises faced by the Craxi governments during their term in office from the pure point of view of international relations and foreign policy. This section will instead devote itself to an analysis of the communicative strategy used by Bettino Craxi to respond to said crises and exploit them to increase Italy's position internationally.

4.3.1. The Euro-Missile Crisis and NATO

As addressed in the previous chapter, the Euromissile Crisis involved the Soviet Union's placement of SS-20 missiles in Europe, which caused a climate of uncertainty and danger on the continent. This caused NATO to need a response. The resulting strategy was the so-called "double decision." On the one hand, Pershing II and Cruise medium-range missiles would be deployed in several Western European countries, including Italy, and on the other hand, the goal was to disarmament these types of weapons through negotiations with the USSR. The situation would later be resolved with the INF Treaty, which led precisely to the goal of the Atlantic Alliance.⁴¹⁴ Italy's role during these events was essential. Indeed, by its firmness in its decision to host those missiles on its territory, it also pushed other nations to support the choice.

A constant dual narrative register distinguished Craxi's communicative strategy in the sense of this crisis. First and foremost, he dealt with the affirmation of absolute Italian loyalty

⁴¹² Rolando, *Una voce poco fa*, 180-190.

⁴¹³ "Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione" cap. II, 30.

⁴¹⁴ David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance's New Roles in International Security* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 22-25.

to NATO, accompanied by the need for it to show firmness and absence of any yielding in the face of the threat that the Soviet Union was posing to Europe and the entire Western bloc.⁴¹⁵ He took care in his political communication to present both to his Italian and foreign interlocutors the need to resort to a response such as the “double decision,” that is, thoughtful but firm action, which could at the same time guarantee both the security of the West and the preconditions for negotiations with equality of forces.⁴¹⁶ The concept Craxi chose to pursue to achieve stability was that of “credibility of deterrence.”⁴¹⁷

The other view, on the other hand, already evident in the foreign policy presented by the Craxi governments, was the need for negotiation, linked above all to the need to continue a dialogue with the USSR in order to avert an uncontrolled and potentially catastrophic arms race.⁴¹⁸ This message was also conveyed to reassure various sectors of public opinion, particularly pacifist ones,⁴¹⁹ and to project Italy in the international world as a responsible and mature power. Indeed, it was to be a “loyal but not subordinate ally”⁴²⁰ who could contribute to decisions and the search for peace.⁴²¹

Craxi’s audiences were diverse and varied, so the messages were carefully calibrated. When the Prime Minister addressed the domestic population, the attempt was to pass off an unpopular message that was inevitable and extremely necessary and could only be implemented as imperative for defense.⁴²² He then turned to the pacifist movements and the Italian Communist Party, which opposed his government’s line. On the one hand, he branded them naive, consequently favoring the Soviet position,⁴²³ but at the same time, he took care to give them adequate answers concerning their questions and concerns.⁴²⁴ Communication with the United States and other European partners was primarily devoted to showing how Italy was a reliable partner capable of fulfilling its commitments to NATO.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁵ Bettino Craxi, Intervento alla Camera dei Deputati, December 6, 1983.

⁴¹⁶ Marco Clementi, Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 48-50.

⁴¹⁷ Cfr. Bettino Craxi, *Il socialismo e la pace: Scritti e discorsi sulla politica internazionale* (Milan: SugarCo, 1987), passim.

⁴¹⁸ Papers of the XXXII Congresso del Partito Socialista Italiano, Verona, May 11-15, 1984.

⁴¹⁹ Philip Everts and Guido Walraven, eds., *The Politics of Persuasion: Implementation of Foreign Policy by the Netherlands* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1989).

⁴²⁰ Clementi, Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana, 45-52.

⁴²¹ Antonio Varsori, “Italy’s Foreign Policy During the Craxi Governments (1983-1987): Between Atlanticism, Europeanism, and a ‘Mediterranean Vocation,’” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 68.

⁴²² Bettino Craxi, Discorso programmatico al Senato, August 9, 1983.

⁴²³ Articles by Bettino Craxi published in *Avanti!* 1980-1984.

⁴²⁴ “Bettino Craxi e la preistoria della spettacolarizzazione” cap. II, 20.

⁴²⁵ Official accounts of Craxi’s meetings with Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher.

At the same time, however, he wanted to emphasize how the European nations and the need for the maintenance of an open channel of negotiation needed to be taken into account.⁴²⁶ Finally, the relationship with the Soviet Union was also bipolar, on the one hand showing Italy's firmness in the possibility of the installation of missiles⁴²⁷ and on the other hand that it offered a constant possibility of dialogue.⁴²⁸

There were also different channels in which Craxi expounded his vision, creating the need to adapt his speeches concerning the environment in which they were made. When he was in parliament, he resorted to a form of language that could balance the seriousness of the international situation and the Italian commitment, using those occasions to articulate the governmental position as best he could.⁴²⁹ In speeches made through the press, on the other hand, he presented a much more personal type of style, which we previously described as direct and assertive.⁴³⁰ Not shying away from responding frankly to criticism, always remaining ready to defend governmental choices.⁴³¹ Finally, working through diplomacy and various international contacts, whether formal or informal,⁴³² the government worked to promote the negotiating line, wanting to have Italy accredited as a promoter of dialogue between East and West.⁴³³

Craxi saw the Euromissile issue as the framing of an imminent challenge to European security, cohesion, and future autonomy.⁴³⁴ For this view, the positioning of the missiles had nothing to do with a pure military issue, but rather with a necessary element in order to be able to reach a negotiation in the balance of power, which could lead to a reduction of armaments toward a lower balance.⁴³⁵ Indeed, in order not to cause destabilization at the European level, it was important to arrive at a disarmament implemented in parallel and not unilaterally.⁴³⁶

⁴²⁶ Nuti, *La sfida nucleare*, 325-330.

⁴²⁷ Statements by Giulio Andreotti in support of the government line.

⁴²⁸ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1020-1025, on East-West diplomacy.

⁴²⁹ Stenographic reports of parliamentary sessions, Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Republic, Ninth Legislature (1983-1987).

⁴³⁰ Stefano Rolando, *Una voce poco fa. Politica, comunicazione e media nella vicenda del Partito socialista italiano dal 1976 al 1994* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 150-165.

⁴³¹ Bettino Craxi's interview with Mixer (RAI), episodes from 1983-1985.

⁴³² Rolando, *Una voce poco fa*, 110-115.

⁴³³ Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi," 103.

⁴³⁴ Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5-10.

⁴³⁵ Intervention by Craxi al Comitato Centrale del PSI, July 15, 1983, quoted in *Avanti!*, July 16, 1983.

⁴³⁶ Craxi's speeches emphasized "firmness in negotiation" as the way to peace.

Along with government action, Craxi's communication strategy proved effective in keeping Italy firmly anchored in the decision taken by the Atlantic Alliance, also making it capable of overcoming the opposition present regarding the decision.⁴³⁷ This allowed the installation of the Cruise missiles at Comiso.⁴³⁸ In addition, the Italian position always aimed to facilitate negotiation, ensuring that it played a significant role in the diplomatic process that led to the signing of the INF Treaty.⁴³⁹

Perceptions about its communication strategy differ domestically and internationally. In the former case, the situation is ambivalent. The majority appreciated his governing ability to demonstrate firmness and responsibility at the international level.⁴⁴⁰ However, by the peace movements and the PCI, he was instead accused of reinvigorating possible nuclear rearmament.⁴⁴¹ More moderate public opinion groups also later acknowledged their support for Craxi's work, thanks to his actions in negotiations and in pursuing an international autonomous Italian line.⁴⁴² At the international level, however, Italy's position and Craxi's leadership were particularly appreciated, as they enabled the cohesion and resolve of the Alliance.⁴⁴³ They also felt that the Italian contribution in insisting on dialogue and coordination was a pragmatic and constructive contribution to managing the crisis.⁴⁴⁴

In the communicative management of the Euro-Missile Crisis, Bettino Craxi effectively combined the message of NATO firmness with that of the need for dialogue. To this end, he could exploit the media and his political influence, especially using his direct language, to build and consolidate internal consensus towards his choice and position. His communication strategy aimed to assert how taking such a risky decision was imperative for collective security and building a stable and lasting peace for Europe.

4.3.2. The Sigonella Crisis

The Sigonella crisis was the decisive test for Italy and Bettino Craxi, where it had to demonstrate its newfound autonomy and power in the international sphere. When

⁴³⁷ Documents related to the parliamentary approval of the missile installation at Comiso.

⁴³⁸ Coticchia and Moro, "Italy's Fight Against Terrorism," 1030.

⁴³⁹ Strobe Talbott, *The Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).

⁴⁴⁰ *Il Giornale* and *La Stampa*.

⁴⁴¹ *Pace e Guerra* and *Critica Marxista*.

⁴⁴² Renato Mannheimer, *Capire il voto: Comportamento elettorale e comunicazione politica in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), per un'analisi generale del voto in quegli anni.

⁴⁴³ Henry Tanner, "Italy's Stand on Missiles Wins Praise," *New York Times*, December 8, 1983.

⁴⁴⁴ Richard Latter, *The Euromissile Crisis in Western Europe: A Study in Alliance Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

confronted with its most powerful ally, the United States of America, the government had to orchestrate an operation capable of using a complex political and media strategy.

At this juncture, the main objective was to assert Italy's national sovereignty. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Sigonella crisis occurred following the 1985 hijacking of the Italian ship Achille Lauro by four men of Abu Abbas' FLP and the subsequent killing of American Leon Klinghoffer.⁴⁴⁵ The events culminated when Washington forced the plane, containing the four hijackers, Abu Abbas, and another diplomat, to make a forced landing in Sigonella.⁴⁴⁶ At this point, the Italian government was faced with a choice: whether to give in to U.S. demands or assert the primacy of its own law and national sovereignty.⁴⁴⁷ The Italian decision was soon clear. In an attempt to arrest them, the Americans were blocked by the Italian armed forces, reaching the legendary air and land standoff.⁴⁴⁸

Under such dangerous circumstances, Craxian communicative strategy manifested itself with extreme lucidity and consistency. The entire action moved around a simple pivot: the defense of Italian sovereignty and the primacy of legality. They were placed not as a discretionary political choice, but as a moral and, above all, legal obligation for the Italian state. Naturally, the U.S. prepared to exert intense pressure on Italy in an attempt to bring about a yielding in their firmness of decision. At this juncture, direct telephone calls took place between U.S. President Reagan and Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, resulting in Craxi's opposition to attempts to influence and, above all, his unyielding demand for compliance with Italian law and international conventions.⁴⁴⁹ Within these conversations, the message was also consistently enforced that Italy maintained its role as a reliable and loyal ally, while firmly reiterating how the state was not a vassal of the United States, but an entity with national capacity to make autonomous decisions.⁴⁵⁰ Moreover, Craxi stressed Italy's iron opposition to terrorism, but in strict compliance with legal procedures and especially taking into consideration the delicate relations with moderate Arab nations.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁵ Michael K. Bohn, *The Achille Lauro Hijacking: Lessons in the Politics and Prejudice of Terrorism* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2004), 35-50.

⁴⁴⁶ David Hoffman, "U.S. Jets Force Down Egyptian Plane Carrying Hijackers," *Washington Post*, October 11, 1985, A1.

⁴⁴⁷ Bettino Craxi, Speech to the Chamber of Deputies, October 12, 1985, in Bettino Craxi, *Discorsi Parlamentari 1969-1993*, edited by Fondazione Bettino Craxi (Rome, 2009), vol. II, 1345-1358.

⁴⁴⁸ Antonio Varsori, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2001), 238-240.

⁴⁴⁹ Craxi, *Discorsi Parlamentari 1969-1993*, vol. II, 1350.

⁴⁵⁰ Marco Clementi, *Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 120-122.

⁴⁵¹ Ennio Di Nolfo, *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali, 1918-1999* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000), 1180-1185.

As in the case of the Euromissile crisis, Craxi could also calibrate his messages concerning the publics he was referring to. Addressing Italian public opinion, the image Craxi undertook to convey was that of a proud Italy, which for no reason would bow to foreign interference; this gave rise to a return of a sense of patriotism, leading to a broad political consensus.⁴⁵² A celebrated example of this action can be traced to his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on October 17, 1985, in which, in assertive and direct language, he vindicated the government's actions.⁴⁵³ On the other hand, the message conveyed to the United States was one of legal and political firmness on the part of Italy and was proposed through various communication channels, from the most institutional, such as diplomatic channels, to telephone conversations with Reagan.⁴⁵⁴ In the management of relations with the Arab countries, on the other hand, a communication was used that in no way compromised Middle Eastern balances, again proposing the Italian state as a possible credible interlocutor.⁴⁵⁵

Media management was similarly orchestrated with strategic precision. Extensive news coverage was used to reinforce Italy's sovereign position, particularly the image of the Italian military, which was turned into the symbol of this newfound power and autonomy.⁴⁵⁶ What Craxi was able to do was the transformation of an act that could have been understood as a sign of hostility toward the United States, into a necessary affirmation of his principle of international legality and international sovereignty, thus shifting the debate, rather than on terrorism and its implementers, to who had the right to proceed under such circumstances.⁴⁵⁷ Calculated assertiveness and theatricality, central to Craxi's communication style, were perfectly functional to his political strategy.

The impact of this event was significant, both immediately and in the development of subsequent relations. Italy asserted its jurisdiction through the trial of the four hijackers in an Italian court and the release of Abu Abbas, despite American pressure.⁴⁵⁸ In the United

⁴⁵² Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 420-421.

⁴⁵³ Stenographic records of the Chamber of Deputies session of October 17, 1985, Historical Archive of the Chamber of Deputies.

⁴⁵⁴ Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 412-418.

⁴⁵⁵ Antonio Varsori, "Italy's Foreign Policy During the Craxi Governments (1983-1987): Between Atlanticism, Europeanism, and a 'Mediterranean Vocation'," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 72-74.

⁴⁵⁶ Stefano Rolando, *Una voce poco fa. Politica, comunicazione e media nella vicenda del Partito socialista italiano dal 1976 al 1994* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 158-162.

⁴⁵⁷ Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 88-92.

⁴⁵⁸ Bohn, *The Achille Lauro Hijacking*, 120-135.

States, the resolution was perceived with a strong sense of irritation,⁴⁵⁹ but for Italy, on the contrary, it turned out to be a triumph. Craxi's popularity increased enormously, soon reaching its widest in his entire career, overcoming political divisions, while the Italian Communist Party recognized the correctness of the decision to defend national sovereignty.⁴⁶⁰ At the international level, on the other hand, this event was used to define more clearly the Italian position on the chessboard, especially in terms of its autonomy of action, especially in the Mediterranean area.⁴⁶¹

In conclusion, the Sigonella crisis represented a masterpiece in both the political management of events and the communicative management by Bettino Craxi. He made the most of his communication skills through his assertive language, an extremely lucid framing strategy, and a mastery of pressure management at both the diplomatic and media levels. His actions in this sense made it possible to transform a crisis into an opportunity in which Italy could stand out and assert its pride and autonomy. It was thus possible to form a vast internal consensus of varied sides; in Italy's collective memory, this historical moment is remembered as the one in which "Italy raised its head."

4.3.3. The Mediterranean and the Middle East

As addressed in Chapter 2 in the subsections devoted to the two specific issues, the foreign policy of the Craxi governments put the concept of regionalism at the center, particularly with a concentration related to the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East. The Italian aim was to create greater leadership and proactivity in the area.⁴⁶² Thus, by becoming the key player, it would have been able to deal with several issues that were fundamental to the governing agenda. First, Italy would have placed itself in the role of "bridge builder," able to create a link between Europe and the Middle East, and would then have been in charge of promoting dialogue and stability in the region.⁴⁶³ By opening up to dialogue with the more moderate Arab states,⁴⁶⁴ it wanted to place itself in the international, but especially Middle Eastern

⁴⁵⁹ Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and the European Allies: The Troubled Partnership," *International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (Winter 1986-1987): 1-10.

⁴⁶⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "U.S. Fails to Get Terrorist Chief; Italy Frees Him," *New York Times*, October 13, 1985, A1.

⁴⁶¹ Roberto Aliboni, ed., *Southern European Security in the 1990s* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992), 55-60.

⁴⁶² Antonio Varsori, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2001), 235-245.

⁴⁶³ Marco Clementi, *Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 85-90.

⁴⁶⁴ Bettino Craxi, *Il socialismo e la pace: Scritti e discorsi sulla politica internazionale* (Milan: SugarCo, 1987).

sphere, as a possible mediator of conflicts. The most important one that fell within Craxi's sphere of interest was the Arab-Israeli one, where a dialogue with Israel was maintained and its right to security was recognized.⁴⁶⁵ However, at the same time, the Palestinian right to self-determination was put to the fore.⁴⁶⁶ For these reasons, dialogue was opened with the PLO, which was recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people. Not in all cases could mediation be effective. For these reasons, the Italian state decided to participate in peacekeeping missions alongside other nations in areas such as Lebanon.⁴⁶⁷ It is also noteworthy that Italy had various economic interests in the region, and this prompted it to act to improve its stability.

The communicative strategy applied by Bettino Craxi in the area was multifaceted. However, it is still possible to establish his key message: that of a protagonist and constructive Italy committed to peace and development in those areas. Italy's specificity and autonomy are emphasized in speeches and diplomatic activity. The reasons why it should have guaranteed its role in the Mediterranean were found both in its history and in its central geographic position and regional dynamics.⁴⁶⁸ Regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, the goal set by the Italian state was to position itself as an interlocutor capable of dialogue with both sides.⁴⁶⁹ He then turned to terrorism, defining it as not to be generalized against Arab populations, but linked to the need to delve into its causes.⁴⁷⁰

Even under these circumstances, the audiences to which his messages were addressed were broad and multifaceted, so he had to adapt them to broaden their effectiveness. In the case of domestic public opinion, the Mediterranean's foreign policy, particularly the Middle East, was presented as a national responsibility and especially necessary to establish a more decisive international role.⁴⁷¹ However, work was being done in Europe to persuade partner states to cooperate in Mediterranean policy through a more cohesive line.⁴⁷² In the communication addressed to the United States, which most of all manifested its perplexity and criticism of the Italian decision to open a dialogue with the PLO, it was going to emphasize how Italy's position was going to contribute in an important way to the stability of

⁴⁶⁵ Clementi, Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana, 95-98.

⁴⁶⁶ Gennaro Acquaviva, Craxi e la questione palestinese (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 2004).

⁴⁶⁷ Massimiliano Cricco, Il Parlamento italiano e la politica estera: Il caso della partecipazione alla Forza Multinazionale in Libano (1982-1984) (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012).

⁴⁶⁸ Bettino Craxi, Speech to the United Nations General Assembly, September 28, 1984.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Craxi's interviews with *La Stampa* or *Corriere della Sera*, 1983-1987.

⁴⁷⁰ Craxi, *Il socialismo e la pace*, passim.

⁴⁷¹ Stefano Rolando, *Una voce poco fa* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), chap. 5.

⁴⁷² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Affairs Series, Italian EEC Proposals.

the region, consequently favoring all nations with interests in the area and in particular not acting in contradiction to the terms established for loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance.⁴⁷³ Finally, in the Middle East area, a two-pronged communicative strategy was proposed concerning the Arab-Israeli question, that is, with the Arab states and the PLO, the aim was to strengthen Italian credibility so that it could be seen as a reliable partner that upheld the rights of the Palestinian people;⁴⁷⁴ while with Israel, friendship was reaffirmed and above all its right to security, while at the same time seeking to urge progress toward achieving peace and a solution.⁴⁷⁵

Equally broad had been the range of channels selected by Craxi to propagate his message. The first to be emphasized is undoubtedly the most institutional, namely that of direct diplomacy, established through numerous meetings and official visits to the Middle East, where communication was studied in great detail to maximize its impact.⁴⁷⁶ In public speeches and interviews, on the other hand, the Prime Minister returned to using his characteristic, more direct and assertive style in order to defend the policy choices implemented by the government, even regarding the most controversial ones.⁴⁷⁷ Concrete initiatives then accompanied the simple use of speeches and verbal language, such as resorting to the proposal of peace conferences and aid programs, which were intended to emphasize and affirm Italy's commitment to the region.⁴⁷⁸ In order to make the most of these acts, Mediterranean policy was included in framing a necessary contribution to international peace and one that invested Italy with a historical role and "responsibility." For example, the dialogue with the OPL was presented as a pragmatic contact with an indispensable actor to reach any peaceful solution.⁴⁷⁹

The impact that both this communicative and political strategy achieved is undoubtedly significant, but it nevertheless had ambivalent outcomes. On the one hand, Craxi's intention to broaden and strengthen Italy's international role, presenting it as an autonomous and proactive actor vis-à-vis the Mediterranean, was implemented in the opening of important

⁴⁷³ Joseph LaPalombara, *Democracy, Italian Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 220-225.

⁴⁷⁴ Historical Diplomatic Archive, Joint Communiqués from official visits.

⁴⁷⁵ Official statements of the Italian government, press of the era.

⁴⁷⁶ ANSA news agency reports on Craxi's visits and meetings with Arafat.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Silvia Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi".

⁴⁷⁸ Italian proposals for a Middle East Peace Conference, 1986-87.

⁴⁷⁹ Analysis of speeches by Craxi and Andreotti on the Palestinian question.

new channels of dialogue and the increase of Italian influence in the region.⁴⁸⁰ The figure of Craxi himself then enjoyed this success, broadening his support and, above all, his career as an international statesman.⁴⁸¹ In any case, the Italian role led to several frictions with some states, particularly with the U.S. and Israel, partly due to the opening of dialogue with the PLO, believing that Rome was sometimes ambiguous on several issues or insufficiently aligned with Western interests.⁴⁸² Craxi's policies had a very positive response in the Arab countries; in fact, they led to the opening of a dialogue with the Italian state, confirming its new role as mediator and increasing its position internationally.⁴⁸³

In conclusion, Italian foreign policy related to the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area was a perfect stage for successfully projecting the image of a leading, autonomous, peace-building Italy. Craxi thus raised the nation's international profile through his communication strategy and framing. Thus, despite controversy and tensions, the Craxi governments' foreign policy in the Mediterranean basin was effective. Leading to an era when Italy sought to make itself a protagonist on the international chessboard, particularly in the Mediterranean area.

4.4. Media and Public Perception

When people talk about a government's foreign policy, they generally think of something abstract, relegated to official meetings and diplomatic documents; in reality, it also takes shape in the public area. This happens through how it is discussed, told, and perceived outside government offices. The media played a key role in this space, having the power to change the public's perception of these messages and actions. For these reasons, we speak of a process that can result in conflict. As mentioned in the preceding subchapters, Bettino Craxi was a forerunner in understanding the role that the media, particularly television, play in political communication and especially in the relationship with public opinion. It therefore becomes essential to understand the relationship between Craxi and the media, while also observing the public's perception, to understand how effective his leadership was and what limitations it faced. Within this section, the analysis of how the PSI Secretary managed his image and conveyed his messages, particularly on foreign policy, through the media

⁴⁸⁰ Antonio Badini, *Diplomazia e socialismo nell'Italia repubblicana* (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 2008).

⁴⁸¹ Commentary by Arrigo Levi and Enzo Biagi.

⁴⁸² Richard N. Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1997).

⁴⁸³ Analysis of Arab press.

channels of the 1980s will be placed as a central element. Indeed, that historical period was still characterized by the strong influence of the press in shaping the debate of the political, intellectual, and cultural elite, which was, however, beginning to be challenged in its dominance by television.⁴⁸⁴ However, it was entering a moment of transformation; thanks to the reform of the television sector,⁴⁸⁵ RAI's monopoly was ending, being effectively threatened by the new private networks, including Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest.⁴⁸⁶ Finally, we will analyze how Italian public opinion, accompanied to a lesser extent by international opinion, reacted to the conduct of foreign affairs by the executive led by Craxi.

As mentioned, Bettino Craxi was among the forerunners in understanding how domestic and foreign politics were increasingly becoming a media affair of growing popular resonance.⁴⁸⁷ He actively devoted himself to the use of the media, shifting them from their predetermined role as mere instruments of information or recorders of events to those of powerful levers capable of influencing public opinion, moving consensus from one side to the other, mobilizing popular support when needed, and shaping the public narrative.⁴⁸⁸ This allowed the government to anticipate, at least in part, alternative interpretations and criticisms from opposition parties or the press opposed to the executive's political vision.⁴⁸⁹ Craxi considered television as the most suitable tool to directly reach the "heart" and "mind" of the country, allowing him to overcome any mediation.⁴⁹⁰

Craxi and the press had a complex, often fluctuating relationship, partly because of the man's strong personality and intolerance of criticism that he considered presumptuous or motivated only by differences in ideals.⁴⁹¹ He took care of the cultivation of personal relationships and connections, along with privileged channels, with some influential journalists, editors, and publishers of the time, through whom he wanted to discreetly influence the editorial line of some newspapers and, above all, create favorable media

⁴⁸⁴ Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: Costume, società e politica*, 6th ed. (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 350-380.

⁴⁸⁵ LAW Feb. 4, 1985, no. 10.

⁴⁸⁶ Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Anna Sfondini, *Politica Pop: Da «Porta a Porta» a «L'isola dei famosi»* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

⁴⁸⁷ Pippa Norris, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁸⁸ Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹⁰ Stefano Rolando, *Una voce poco fa. Politica, comunicazione e media nella vicenda del Partito socialista italiano dal 1976 al 1994* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), chap. 4.

⁴⁹¹ Giovanni Bechelloni, "Il politico e il giornalista: Anatomia di un rapporto difficile, *Problemi dell'informazione* 10, no. 2 (1985): 165-182.

coverage for his governing actions and his figure.⁴⁹² However, when his power came to be consolidated and political tensions escalated, he did not hesitate to openly criticize journalists and newspapers that showed themselves as being in opposition solely on ideological grounds or that more clearly expressed inaccurate positions.⁴⁹³ Naturally, these actions lead to important consequences regarding the climate, with these mainly progressive or independent newspapers settling into a perpetual tension.⁴⁹⁴ During press conferences, on the other hand, there was an attempt to dominate the contradictory, with a view aimed at imposing one's interpretation of events.⁴⁹⁵

The most important medium for the Socialist Secretary, however, was certainly television, which he exploited with brilliant skill in order to present his policies, particularly foreign policy, to the "real country."⁴⁹⁶ He was highly aware of how pervasive TV was and how it could easily reach a huge audience, so Craxi exploited television appearances with extreme care to explain to people his choices, justify his actions, and sometimes even directly appeal to them.⁴⁹⁷ The effectiveness of these moves was mainly due to his telegenic style, explicit language, and image as a decisive leader.⁴⁹⁸ An example already cited, of when television was significant for galvanizing public opinion, is undoubtedly that of the Sigonella crisis;⁴⁹⁹ At the same time, in the Euromissiles issue, it was used for both convincing and reassuring the viewers, balancing Atlantic firmness and openness, and pushing for a negotiation.⁵⁰⁰

As a result, the public perception of the foreign policy of the governments led by Craxi was strongly influenced by his communicative strategy, which succeeded in projecting the image of a more protagonist, autonomous, and assertive Italy on the global scene.⁵⁰¹ The new Italian positioning in the international sphere was welcomed by Italian public opinion,⁵⁰² so much so that it manifested itself in particular moments of crisis, such as the Sigonella crisis,

⁴⁹² Giampaolo Pansa, *I giorni dell'ira: Il caso Moro senza censure* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1998).

⁴⁹³ Carlo Sorrentino, *Il giornalismo in Italia: Miti e realtà* (Rome: Carocci, 2010).

⁴⁹⁴ Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano [History of Italian Journalism]* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006), offers context for these dynamics.

⁴⁹⁵ Bettino Craxi, *Il grande timoniere: Interviste 1976-1992*, ed. Ugo Finetti (Milan: Bompiani, 2004).

⁴⁹⁶ David L. Altheide and Robert P. Snow, *Media Logic* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1979).

⁴⁹⁷ Gianpietro Mazzoleni, *La comunicazione politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012).

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. Silvia Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi," Donatella Campus, *L'antipolitica al governo. De Gaulle, Reagan, Berlusconi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010).

⁴⁹⁹ Marco Clementi, *Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 121-122.

⁵⁰⁰ Craxi's positions on the Euromissiles were widely exposed in parliamentary speeches and television interviews, partly available in RAI Teche archives or *Avanti!* transcripts.

⁵⁰¹ Doxa or Makno opinion polls from the 1983-1987 period can provide data on the perception of government action, including foreign policy.

⁵⁰² Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi: Società e politica 1943-1988* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), 525-526.

generating strong national pride and popular support.⁵⁰³ Equal appreciation was then lavished on the new policies in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.⁵⁰⁴

It should be emphasized, however, that this perception was not received as universally positive by Italian commentators; some criticized Craxi's excessive personalism, also expressed in foreign policy, and some stances, which were seen as too reckless or against the interests of Italy's traditional allies.⁵⁰⁵ Reference was made to his communication strategy as guilty of propagandism and, in some circumstances, as oversimplifying issues that were, to say the least, too complex.⁵⁰⁶

In the international world, the stance toward these new positions was generally seen as positive, accompanied by a certain appreciation for Italy's newfound reliability. However, at the same time, there was no shortage of irritation due to certain initiatives implemented by the Craxi government.⁵⁰⁷ In the Arab countries, on the other hand, the communication policy served to create an Italian image of a balanced and sensitive interlocutor.⁵⁰⁸

It is impossible to measure precisely the influence of Craxi's communication in shaping public opinion regarding foreign policy.⁵⁰⁹ However, it is possible to say that his communicative style and media use undoubtedly contributed to making the issue more present within the national public discourse.⁵¹⁰ He succeeded in this sense in "normalizing" specific international issues, which were soon connected to the nation's pride and interests, thus mobilizing citizens around them.⁵¹¹ Therefore, the themes of public debate and the very perception of events were often influenced by the framing ability of the Craxi governments.⁵¹²

In sum, it is possible to say that Bettino Craxi's relationship with the media and public opinion is multidirectional. He used communication tools to expand and project his vision,

⁵⁰³ Ibidem.

⁵⁰⁴ Antonio Varsori, "Italy's Foreign Policy During the Craxi Governments (1983-1987)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 70-75.

⁵⁰⁵ Norberto Bobbio, *Il futuro della democrazia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).

⁵⁰⁶ Analysis of the opposition press, such as *l'Unità* or *il manifesto*, from the period.

⁵⁰⁷ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

⁵⁰⁸ Press reviews of Arab world newspapers (e.g., *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Hayat*).

⁵⁰⁹ Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁵¹⁰ Roland Cayrol, *La nouvelle communication politique*. Paris: Larousse, 1986.

⁵¹¹ Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁵¹² Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

consequently building consensus, while the media amplified or criticized his actions, consequently favoring public opinion.

4.5. Communicative Legacy and Influence

The legacy left by Bettino Craxi's approach to political communication has been complex, controversial, and enduring, which even influences modern politics.⁵¹³ In order to proceed to an analysis of his communicative legacy, one must consider both the innovations he went on to introduce into the political and media system, as well as the criticisms and debates that this style provoked, and assess how some specific traits have influenced the strategies and languages of subsequent political generations. The phenomenon was reflected in both the Italian and other democratic contexts, which were going through transformations of a similar kind.⁵¹⁴ In this final section of Chapter 3, the short- and long-term impact of the Craxian communicative strategy will be assessed. It will also try to understand his most innovative and lasting ideas in Italian politics, while not neglecting the limitations and problematic issues related to his style. It will then conclude by taking stock of his influence in how foreign policy is discussed in Italy and how it has helped change how politics is done and experienced.

The most obvious legacy left by Bettino Craxi was the definitive establishment of the personalization of politics in Italy. He realized that the crisis of ideological narratives and mass parties,⁵¹⁵ along with the rise of the role of television,⁵¹⁶ was leading to a shift in focus from the party as an entity to its leader.⁵¹⁷ Also paving the way for a more individualized, media-driven, plebiscitary leadership were his insistence on making his figure the center of the Italian Socialist Party's communication,⁵¹⁸ his meticulous care of his public image,⁵¹⁹ and his tendency to embody the policies of his government. The model established by Craxi would later find its culmination of expression in the figure of Silvio Berlusconi,⁵²⁰ who

⁵¹³ Gianfranco Pasquino, *La politica italiana: Dizionario critico 1945-95* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995).

⁵¹⁴ Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb, eds., *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵¹⁵ Angelo Panebianco, *Modelli di partito: organizzazione e potere nei partiti politici* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982).

⁵¹⁶ Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁵¹⁷ Mauro Calise, *Il partito personale* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000).

⁵¹⁸ Archives of Fondazione Socialismo and Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini.

⁵¹⁹ Photographs and accounts of Craxi's public events are widely available in the archives of photographic agencies (e.g., Ansa) and in illustrated publications of the era.

⁵²⁰ Donatella Campus, *L'antipolitica al governo. De Gaulle, Reagan, Berlusconi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 115-150.

inherited his distinctive communication traits and media strategies, implementing them in a new political context and exploiting his television empire.⁵²¹ Finally, foreign policy communication was also linked to personalization, presented to the public as a direct expression of the leader's political will, Craxi's strategic vision, and sometimes even his courage.⁵²²

Another essential innovation was using television as an active and strategic tool for consensus building, public opinion orientation, and emotional mediation.⁵²³ As mentioned, Craxi was among the first to realize its potential and exploited it to build a direct relationship with the electorate, going beyond both party mediations and those of other forces.⁵²⁴ To this end, he developed a more direct and straightforward language, with popular metaphors, that was more suited to the television audience and times,⁵²⁵ going beyond the so-called "politichese."⁵²⁶ This way of "speaking directly to the country" through television, explaining political choices in accessible terms, is still a defining feature of modern politics today.⁵²⁷

In any case, the limitations of the Craxian communicative model are significant. Since its existence, this strategy has been criticized for its ethical and democratic nature. His personalization of politics was often perceived as excessive by opposition forces and those in the intellectual world, emphasizing the risk of its drift toward authoritarian "decisionism" or media "caesarism."⁵²⁸ The fear was that it could lead to the belittling of the power and role of institutions, eroding even the democratic processes within parties, consequently ending in the concentration of too much power in the hands of a single figure.⁵²⁹ A climate of increasing political conflict was then triggered, created by communicative aggressiveness and the polarization of political debate, which accentuated the divisions already present in the country.⁵³⁰ Moreover, his contentious relationship with the press sometimes led to doubts about respect for freedom of information, media pluralism, and the risk of excessive control

⁵²¹ David I. Kertzer, *Comrades and Christians: Religion and Political Struggle in Communist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁵²² Clementi, Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana, 25-30.

⁵²³ Stefano Rolando, *Una voce poco fa. Politica, comunicazione e media nella vicenda del Partito socialista italiano dal 1976 al 1994* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 200-215.

⁵²⁴ John Corner, *Television Form and Public Address* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

⁵²⁵ Gianpietro Mazzoleni, *La comunicazione politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 70-85.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Silvia Dalle Rive, "Le parole di Bettino Craxi,".

⁵²⁷ For an example of simplification, consider the communication on the Sigonella crisis, often reduced to the slogan "L'Italia che alza la testa".

⁵²⁸ Norberto Bobbio, *Il futuro della democrazia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984),

⁵²⁹ Piero Ignazi, *Dal PCI al PDS* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

⁵³⁰ Gino Bedani, *Politics and Ideology in the Italian Republic: From the Fall of Fascism to the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).

by institutions.⁵³¹ Finally, he represented a limitation for foreign policy in that he excessively tied the credibility and continuity of Italian foreign policy to his personal figure.⁵³²

Bettino Craxi, despite the problems with his political strategy and the criticism he received, was able to influence the perception of Italy internationally. Through his model capable of combining innovative and traditional techniques, he has led the Italian state to an increasing international autonomy, capable of asserting its interests and, above all, of diplomatic action that is not afraid to disconnect from that of the allies.⁵³³ Although several tensions were generated, particularly with some Western countries, the perception of a country “raising its head” and not afraid to be a protagonist in the international sphere had a purposeful impact on national pride and the consideration that several nations created of Italy, particularly in the Arab world.⁵³⁴ At present, it is complex to determine how much of the achievements of the time on the new Italian position survived the fall of the First Republic.⁵³⁵ However, it is undeniable how Craxi contributed to its achievement and the international perception achieved.⁵³⁶

Ultimately, it is possible to say that Bettino Craxi’s communicative legacy is undoubtedly complex and somewhat ambivalent. There is no denying the innovation he brought to communication, anticipating the transformations in the political and media system, consequently leading to the birth of some of the dynamics of contemporary political communication.⁵³⁷ In this sense, his emphasis on the personalization of politics, the use of television, and more direct language has left an indelible mark on public opinion and politics.⁵³⁸ At the same time, however, the limitations of this communicative strategy were highlighted. Indeed, it risked leading to a drift of the leadership toward authoritarianism, creating an extreme polarization of public debate and, above all, giving rise to a relationship with the media and institutions that undermined the democratic principles on which they were based.⁵³⁹ Finally, in foreign policy, he contributed to creating the new Italian image

⁵³¹ Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006), 250-270.

⁵³² Margaret G. Hermann, “Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders,” *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1980): 7–46.

⁵³³ Marco Clementi, *Bettino Craxi e la politica estera italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2007).

⁵³⁴ Assessments of Craxi’s foreign policy in American publications (e.g., *Foreign Policy*).

⁵³⁵ William Wallace, “Foreign Policy and the National Identity in the United Kingdom,” *International Affairs* 67, no. 1 (1991): 65-80.

⁵³⁶ Affari Esteri and Limes.

⁵³⁷ For Craxi’s influence on subsequent communication models, see studies on the communication of leaders like Berlusconi or Renzi.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Paolo Mancini, *Manuale di comunicazione politica* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002).

⁵³⁹ Giovanni Sartori, *Homo videns: Televisione e post-pensiero*.

worldwide, which still influences Italian responsibilities and ambitions today despite its ups and downs.

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes Bettino Craxi's figure through a specific focus on foreign policy and its interconnection with innovative political communication strategies. In a reality, that of the 1980s, in full transformation, Craxi's leadership was able to distinguish itself for its approach aimed at giving Italy greater international autonomy and a role as a greater protagonist, particularly in areas such as the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The work is structured according to a historical-analytical reconstruction, which drew on primary and secondary sources from those years. The first chapter describes Craxi's life and political career in historical-biographical terms to understand the roots of his thinking and his leadership style.

The central element of this thesis, however, lies in the analysis of the foreign policy of the Craxi governments. They have attempted to balance traditional loyalty to commitments with the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the new ones stipulated or to be stipulated with the European Economic Community (EEC), seeking greater autonomy and defense of national interests. Relations with the EEC are first explored, highlighting the six-month Italian presidency and Italy's attempt to push it toward greater growth. Attention is shifted to NATO and handling the Euromissile crisis, then a better understanding of the complex relations with the United States and Italy's stance in defending its national sovereignty with the Sigonella crisis. Finally, the maintenance of the dialogue with the Soviet Union, which finds its realization in Ostpolitik, and the intense activism in the Mediterranean and Middle East area, considered essential to national interests, are investigated.

In the third chapter, a parallel investigation is made into how Bettino Craxi was an anticipator in using the new tools and languages of political communication. The early understanding of the potential of the media, television in particular, and the adoption of a personal style based on personalization, direct language, and meticulous care of his image are highlighted. Consequently, the techniques that were employed to present and legitimize the executive's choices in terms of foreign policy are analyzed. In this sense, the emblematic cases, the Euromissile crisis, the Sigonella crisis, and the Mediterranean policy, show the perfect interconnection between foreign policy and communication.

The result presented by this research demonstrated how, for Craxi, communication and foreign policy were two inseparable dimensions that could be functional. Foreign policy was

the main stage for political communication, while the other was the tool to support initiatives in the international arena. Explaining the positive outcomes, however, the thesis in no way omits the criticalities, limitations, and controversies that characterized Craxi's work. In conclusion, the figure that emerges from this research is that of a man who indelibly marked the 1980s and the following decades.