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The Paradox of Détente in Italy: United States Perspectives between the Mediterranean Mosaic and the Historical Compromise (1969-1976)

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Introduction

During the Cold War, Italy has always been seen as one of the staunchest US allies, not only in a European perspective but also a global one. Following in the footsteps of the other Axis powers defeated by the Allies in the aftermath of the Second World War, Germany and Japan, Rome firmly oriented its horizon in the Atlantic field: linking the peninsula to Washington DC not only in a political-economic and cultural perspective, but also allowing the establishment of an important number of military installations of high strategic value there. When the so-called period of *Détente* came about during the Nixon administration, its implications were felt not only at the macro-scale thereby directly impacting the big power competition between Moscow and Washington but it also trickled down in unexpected and seemingly counterintuitive ways in all the regional scenarios, encompassing both the two factions and challenging the very nature of the relationships within them. Few cases are as illustrative and at the same time as peculiar as the performance of the *Détente* in Italy. The interest of historiography about Italy during the *Détente* period is justified by the crucial importance of that conjuncture for post-war Italy. The internal repercussions of that period, in all its dramatic declinations between terrorism, political subversion, conspiracies and polarisation, which put the country's democratic stability in great doubt at the time, have generated an echo that is still felt in the Italian collective awareness. Among the countless judicial enquiries into the most obscure matters and the wide production of books, academic and otherwise, those years have remained crystallised in the Italian collective imagination. The sequence of questions has involved many interdependent aspects to which historiography has partly provided answers and analyses. Much focus has obviously been placed on the special relationship that united Rome with the United States. The Cold War and Italy's alliance with the United States looked to be crucial in comprehending both Italy's international position and foreign policy in this setting. Despite the fact that Italy was not always at the center of US foreign policy in the conflict between East and West, it was an essential "test case" for the country's developments and limitations. The main goal in Washington was always to achieve an Italian internal situation marked by stability and strong ties with the West, but between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, US officials also attempted to promote the establishment of a progressive democracy, as well as a modern social system

bolstered by an internationally oriented economy¹. Italy held a unique position in this strange kind of “embedded liberalism”²: it was part of the alliance's more integrated West European component and was expected to be one of the primary beneficiaries of the changes that this order promised to bring. Embedded liberalisation was an aim and a tactic for the United States. It was intended to encourage trade and economic interdependence, therefore assisting growth and providing lucrative possibilities for US investors; It was also a mechanism to help former authoritarian governments like Italy transition to democracy by anchoring a large cluster of allies around the US–Atlantic pole. Economic liberalization and democratic stabilization, according to the thesis, were concepts that needed to be pursued in tandem for mutual benefit³. Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, this grandiose project was shelved. Faced with not only the strongest communist party in the West, but also a country suffering from a serious and long-running social, economic, and institutional crisis, the United States believed that simply stabilizing the situation through various means would be the most important, if not the only, viable option. In particular, Mario del Pero's contributions are relevant in understanding the transition from this “modernising approach”, which characterised the liberal approach of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, to the “freezing” approach that characterised the Nixon-Kissinger duo⁴. The intricacy of the Italian internal balance, as well as Rome's persistent international aspiration to be recognized as a middle-ranking nation, contributed to the difficulties in implementing US foreign policy. The PCI had an exceptional influence on significant segments of Italian society .from the universities halls to the media outlets, and on the political system, from the parliamentary organs in Rome to the control of several major regions, which the moderate parties could not ignore, particularly during the 1970s. This uncertain situation was exacerbated by the détente, which appeared to allow the PCI more leeway in both the Italian and international arenas⁵.

¹ On the modernization approach taken by the US, see also Leopoldo Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra: importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia*, Roma/Bari, Laterza, 1999

² John G. Ruggie, ‘International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order’, *International Organisation* 36, no. 2 (1982): 379–415, Princeton University Press, 2000.

³ Federico Romero, *Storia della Guerra Fredda: l'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009

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

⁵ Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Torino, Einaudi, 2006

In the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Italy attempted to play a significant and active role. Its aspirations occasionally clashed with the interests of traditional European imperial powers, leading to a more ambiguous relationship with the United States, as Italy sought to be recognized by Washington as its "representative," while also attempting to preserve its image as a nation sympathetic to the aspirations and ideals of the "Third World"⁶. Economic considerations influenced Italy's foreign policy once again, while the long-term trends in Rome's international standing and the influence of some geopolitical issues cannot be overlooked.

The start of the lengthy season of Détente between the United States and the Soviet Union had an unavoidable impact on Italy and the United States. Bipolar détente can be understood and explained in a variety of ways. Most historians now emphasize its fundamentally conservative geopolitical character, in the sense that both Washington and Moscow saw it as a way to maintain the status quo in Europe and crystallize the continent's bipolar division, in order to reduce tensions, limit the risk of war, and, in the long run, reduce out-of-control defense spending⁷. However, in the European theaters most impacted by Détente, there existed a contradiction, which was quickly apparent in the case of Italy. A conservative approach aimed at sustaining and consolidating a certain geopolitical order necessitated the fundamental eroding of the ideological conflict that had given rise to that system. This contradiction was especially obvious in Italy, where a powerful, pro-Soviet Communist party still existed. How could the delegitimization and confinement of this party go on if the ideological underpinnings of such measures were no longer critical to the superpower relationship? The difficulties created by this basic contradiction of détente were very hard to manage under Johnson's successors, the Republicans Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, especially when it coincided with a type of domestic thaw between the PCI and the DC. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Washington began to pay more attention to Italian internal issues. The condition of Italian politics, particularly the level of its political volatility (and thus, its overall stability), heightened or diminished US interest in Italian issues, as it has in the past.

Italy was, or re-emerged as, significant for what it was rather than what it did or did not do: for posing a challenge rather than for forming a resource. The topic had shifted away from the

⁶ On Italy and its foreign policy active endeavours in the Mediterranean and the Middle East see e Massimiliano Cricco and Daniele Caviglia, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei. La politica mediorientale dell'Italia dalla guerra dei sei giorni al confitto dello Yom Kippur (1967–1973)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2006.

⁷ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War*, Washington, D.C, Potomac Books, 2013.

transformation and modernization of Italy at this point, especially in light of the liberal modernising crusades' widespread disrepute and unpopularity in the late 1960s. Following the more general ideology that informed US foreign policy decisions and discourses during this period, the US response to the Italian situation was now largely directed by geopolitical considerations. Nixon, Ford, and their national security adviser Henry Kissinger intended to limit the consequences of Détente in Italy, thereby protecting the country from the threat of a DC–PCI rapprochement. They achieved this by funneling cash to right-wing organizations, backing the Christian Democrats' conservative wing, and stating their preference for the establishment of a center-right administration, as well as those inside the DC who supported a similar approach⁸. The intricacies of the Italian crisis were once again read through the lens of the Cold War, especially its possible repercussions across Southern Europe. It appeared to Washington that preventing a reunion between the Communists and the Christian Democrats was both symbolic and strategically important. It was all about limiting the possibility of Italy slipping into a tepid Atlanticism on the verge of neutrality. It was also intended to send an unmistakable message to other nations in a similar predicament, who would be looking to the Italian example to see how much leeway they had inside the Cold War framework. Discussions on the constraints of Italy's autonomy (and sovereignty) within the tight geopolitical borders imposed by the Cold War logic impacted the public and political debate: by the danger, to use the most common and terrifying comparison of the time, of a repeat of the Chilean military revolution in Italy, as well as other nations in Southern Europe, beginning with Portugal. The actuality, on the other hand, was completely different. The bipolar lenses of the Cold War started to be questioned and criticised not only by an ever-growing segment of the public opinion, but also by academics and intellectuals, and Cold War imperatives had lost much of their original, unquestionable sway. Something new had emerged, which, ironically, was not making Italy more capable of defending itself against international dynamics and structural limitations. While the US administration was focused on geopolitics, and both sides appeared obsessed with Cold War logics and their highly simplified rhetorical antinomies, the overall context was radically changing and the way it could influence the Italian scene was radically changing. The new economic dynamics had a significant impact on Italy. The country's fragility and sensitivity to (and dependency on) external patterns and actors were demonstrated by the gradual fatigue of the lengthy season of the "economic miracle" and the dramatic effect of the 1970s' "stagflation." Italy was more than simply the

⁸ Lucrezia Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana negli anni Settanta*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2014

Atlantic Alliance's "soft underbelly," as one of the most prevalent geopolitical analogies of the time put it, and the one that best described Nixon and Kissinger's attitudes toward its issues. It was also one of the "sick men" of a Western liberal and capitalist system whose fundamental structure had been shattered and reshaped. The disorder of the 1970s, which stemmed first and foremost from a "shock of the global"⁹ to which Italy was particularly vulnerable, shattered this state and imposed new and sometimes painful forms of interdependence between the national and international levels, revealing the former's greater vulnerability to the latter's new modes of operation.

The goal of this thesis is to dig further into Italy's participation during that time period, starting with the privileged perspective of the newly desecrated FRUS files¹⁰ linked with the Nixon administration of the US State Department. From diplomatic cables sent by the Rome embassy to Foggy Bottom, to reports issued by American analysis units, to transcripts between President Nixon, his advisor Kissinger, and Italian notables such as President Leone or various prime ministers, the archives contain a diverse collection of documents from the period. The focus of the newly published archive spans from the summer of 1973 until December 1976 and it is mainly centered on the Ford Administration which came into being after the dismissions of the Nixon presidency. By examining these FRUS files, accompanied in this thesis by an in-depth analysis of the immediately preceding archives (Mainly FRUS 1969-1973, the NARA RG 59, pertaining to the Department of State) and a broader contextualisation taken from the most authoritative literature, it is intended to support the main argument of this thesis: The implications of the Détente were so counterintuitive in Italy due to the distinct circumstances of the country and the rigid bipolar vision of the Nixon-Kissinger duo (and then Ford) which was too narrow to accommodate more transformative approaches other than the conservative one they wanted to imprint. As a consequence, the vision of an Italy completely subject to Washington's wishes, and lacking any kind of autonomy (including in foreign policy, which will be explored in the second chapter of this thesis), typical of an "empire-periphery" narrative, is not very much in evidence and is contested also and above all because it does not allow us to grasp the internal dynamics that boiled down to and nurtured the kind of special relationship that existed between Rome and Washington. In fact, as an example, in the light of the paradigm shift from

⁹ Niall Ferguson et al. (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

¹⁰ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/ch9>

modernisation to freezing, at a time when the Americans found themselves forced into dialogue with their party of reference, the Christian Democrats, the latter acted consciously in inflating subversive threats to the domestic system, asking for ever greater political cover and financial support for their objectives. The thesis is divided into four chapters plus a final conclusion. After introductory considerations about the post-war bipolar world, the first chapter focuses on the conditions that allowed the emergence of the Détente in the first place, not only from empirical features (such as the so-called “strategic parity”) but also from ideological considerations of its main architects: Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. It proceeds with a review of the main events that characterised the period, then analyses the internal limits and interpretations of the Détente concept, ending with a bird's eye view of the Mediterranean and its complexities to smooth the transition for the next chapter. Subsequently, the object of analysis in the second chapter is the outlook for Italian foreign policy, especially with regard to the Mediterranean and broader southern Europe neighbourhood. The chapter analyses the foreign policy activism of the centre-left formula in the late 1960s and its differences from previous governments, particularly in the light of the bipolar logic of the Cold War in the Mediterranean Sea basin. It then proceeds to the study of a watershed event par excellence, the Yom Kippur war, in particular for its repercussions not only for the macroscopic dynamics between Moscow and Washington, but also the huge economic and political fallout for Italy, a country particularly exposed to the duties that were imposed by the oil producers' cartel. The formula of *equidistanza* (equidistance), sponsored by the then Foreign Minister Aldo Moro, is explored, as well as the attempt of an Italian posture of mediation between a third-worldist vision and a more Atlanticist one, i.e. the two apparently irreconcilable souls that coexisted, and contrasted, in Rome. Finally, the chapter considers US perceptions of Italy not only in terms of Israeli-Palestinian issues, but also of the fallout in terms of stability from the waves of democratisation that affected the neighbouring countries of Spain, Portugal and Greece: the southern European neighbourhood. The third chapter is devoted to the Italian domestic scenario, starting with the peculiar economic circumstances that enabled the uprisings of the late 1960s, namely the unequal distribution of the wealth produced by the years of the “economic miracle” and the inadequacy perceived by large sections of the population regarding different issues such as trade union bargaining. The various cultural upheavals of the period are considered and how they first resulted in the student clashes and later degenerated into the broader and more widespread armed struggle involving the extremist fringes of both the right and the left. In particular, the focus is on black subversion and coup attempts, supported by deviant state apparatuses, and their

supposed relationship with the Americans. Finally, we focus on the 1973 crisis, in a parallel with the previous chapter but adopting an internal view, and its repercussions on domestic political dynamics. The fourth chapter is intended as a natural continuation of the third because it is still focused on the domestic scenario but based on the FRUS archives of 1973-1976 and therefore mainly on the presidency of Gerald Ford. The post-Nixon era is analysed and we outline what the substantial differences are compared to before, in terms of congressional oversight and Gerald Ford's tendentially more moderate approach. The continuities with before are also studied, focusing on the figure of Kissinger who remains the keystone of American foreign policy, although this time in the role of secretary of state, and the scenario of the apparent unstoppable growth of the PCI and its convergence with the left wing of the DC in the formulation of the "historic compromise" is outlined in the light of the various electoral appointments and events worthy of note up to the important elections of 1976. Finally, we focus on the progressive multilateralization of the Italian question between international finance (IMF, EEC) and political stabilisation that was simultaneous with the end of the Kissinger era and the prelude to the Carter presidency.

1. The international context: Nixon Administration and the contradictions of Détente

1.1 Introductory considerations: the post-war bipolar world

With the consolidation of the new international balance in the immediate post-World War II period, the world witnessed the creation of new logics and dynamics, never before experienced. The world was thus divided into two great blocs, headed respectively by Moscow and Washington DC: the strategic as well as ideological proximity to one of the two spheres determined in this way not only the foreign policy of the various countries, but also, by reflection, their domestic policy. US foreign policy doctrines such as those of Truman and Eisenhower, with the latter extending its focus to the Middle East, sought to stem the so-called domino effect of the countries shifting towards forms of government close to the Soviet galaxy. In the first three decades, the logic of the Cold War led to a heinous ideological clash, characterised by proactive doctrines of global containment that led to the height of nuclear tension in the early 1960s in episodes that have gone down in history such as the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The world teetered on the brink, with the Kennedy administration threatening to declare war if Soviet vessels broke through the “quarantine” perimeter around the island of Cuba. For the first time, DEFCON (an acronym for the DEFense readiness CONdition, which is the description of the alert status used by the US military) reached level 2, which calls for the armed forces to be deployed in a war footing and ready to launch an attack within six hours and for the president to officially announce that war was imminent. Subsequently, the balance based on the usual strategic-military bipolarity was parallel to an emerging economic and political multipolarity. In this mutating context, the American power appeared unexpectedly scaled down, although still powerful. What was considered the most dramatic sign of this relative decline was the stalemate of the armed forces in the Vietnam War, with an American army far more heavily armed and numerous than its Vietcong guerrilla counterpart, and the political and economic rise, especially in the light of post-war reconstruction financed in part by the Americans themselves, of Europe (including the growth of countries otherwise on their knees because of the war such as Germany and Italy), and Japan. The war in Vietnam, in particular, revealed the unsustainability of the concept of global containment as interpreted by previous administrations. The massive deployment of troops and resources in Indochina by the United

States catalysed the antipathies of important sections of the populations of Western Europe: not only in Italy, whose burgeoning Anti-American sentiment managed to cross party lines and graft itself onto the already existing fragmentations (*correnti*) endogenous to the Italian system¹¹, but also in France, as found in the broader context of the so-called May '68 clashes¹², and West Germany¹³. This deficit between US international overexposure (and thus, expectations) and US military projection capacity had widened out of all proportion and made American foreign policy unsustainable and “insolvent”¹⁴ and came to be known as the “Lippman Gap”. The United States position was also destabilised from the point of view of internal accounts: the previous policy of engagement was underpinned by a seemingly unstoppable flourishing economy and by resources that on balance could be considered unlimited, thereby resulting in the American industry being able to enjoy such propelling power as to translate into military hegemony. As soon as economic variables such as the annual growth rate and employment began to crack, the unsustainability of certain endeavours became apparent, increasingly coagulating in the American public opinion a certain disenchantment with global commitments as well as with those activist movements that had characterised previous decades. These upheavals were also the basis for the subsequent development of new voting demographics, creating the backbone of the counterculture movement and paving the way for the cultural revolution of the late 1960s.

It was against this background that in November 1968, Richard Nixon ascended to the White House as the 37th President of the United States. That foreign policy would have played such a prominent role was already apparent in the election campaigns leading up to his victory. In stark contrast to the posture of “escalation” promoted during the Johnson years, which envisaged the prominence of US troops to the detriment of a marginalisation of South

¹¹ B. Zaccaria, V. Lomellini, *Decay and Catharsis: Perceptions of the United States in Italian Political Cultures Between the 1960s and 1970s*, in A. Varsori, B. Zaccaria, *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War: The Underrated Ally*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018

¹² French May or May '68 designates in a global way the whole of the revolt movements that took place in Paris in May-June 1968. It was a vast and spontaneous collection of revolts of social, political, cultural and even philosophical nature, directed against traditional society, capitalism, imperialism and, in the first instance, against the Gaullist power then dominant. The movement of rebellion of the student youth of Paris extended to the working class world and practically to all categories of the population throughout the country, remaining the most important social movement in the history of France in the 20th century.

¹³ On West Germany, see Christophe Hendrik Muller, *West Germans against the West: Anti-Americanism in Media and Public Opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); On France, see On France, see Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French. The Dilemma of Americanisation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: the Cold War between the United States and the communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011);

¹⁴ W. Lippman, *U.S. foreign policy: shield of the Republic*, Boston, Little Brown, 1943; S. Huntington, *Coping with the Lippman Gap*, in «Foreign Affairs», Vol. 66, n. 3, 1987-88; pp. 453-477

Vietnamese forces, Nixon insisted on the logic of “Vietnamization”¹⁵, which consisted in practice of a progressive and direct disengagement but accompanied by a strengthening of the capabilities and solidity of the governmental and military apparatus of South Vietnam, which should have allowed the pro-American state to survive while avoiding a humiliating political-military defeat of the United States. Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Advisor, became the foreign policy *de facto* chief and co-interpreted the new American doctrine. According to many historians, such as Gaddis, this new doctrine was not a replacement for containment, but rather a new interpretation of it in a conservative sense¹⁶. While the fundamental objectives remained unchanged, what changed was the means employed to achieve them. What had been resorted to was a vision of the world and of the American role in it that was perpetually sustainable with substantial recourse to the dogmas of geopolitical equilibrium. In terms of strategic balances, the overwhelming US superiority of the first Cold War (also benefiting from the purely geographical remoteness of the US from the theatre of war in Europe) what had come about was a new balance characterised by greater symmetry between the blocs in terms of armaments: Although the actual achievement of strategic parity by the Soviet Union is still debated in historiography today, if the conduct of the Vietnam War had already shown the limits of the US war machine by undermining the confidence that it could dominate an (after all) regional conflict, the prospect of Soviet rearmament weakened Washington DC's perception of security. Faced with the terrifying possibility of an atomic holocaust, the concept of nuclear deterrence began to waver. In other words, what a military solution to the Cold War would entail would only lead to so-called “mutual destruction” (MAD), i.e. that even in the event of a successful attack on Soviet soil, the Soviet missile arsenal could retain enough missile power to cause a devastating retaliation on US territory.

It is important to take note of the fact that in the fifty years between the end of the Second World War and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Détente was not the only period of cessation of the outright hostility and commencement of some rapprochements, but it was the only one that had the right circumstances to maintain it over time. That process known as the Khrushchev Thaw, following de-Stalinization, is recognised in the West as a brief period of reconciliation, brought about by the concurrence of the Soviet theory of peaceful co-existence with US President Eisenhower's cautious attitude. For example, both leaders attempted to

¹⁵ E. Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, Laterza, Bari, 1999

¹⁶ J. L. Gaddis, *The rise, fall and future of détente*, in «Foreign Affairs», Vol.59, n.3, 1983-84, pp. 354-377.

achieve peace by attending the 1955 Geneva International Peace Summit and developing the Open Skies Policy and Quest for Arms Agreement. The leaders' attitudes allowed them to, as Khrushchev put it, "break the ice" . In contrast, the grand détente lasted for about a decade, from 1968 to 1980 (Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) and was based on a broad convergence of interests on the part of the two superpowers. It is also possible to break this down further by recognising the existence of two sub-chapters: Kissinger's détente (1969-1976), the object of study in this thesis, and Carter's (1977-1980). While in the first case there was a formal attempt, and thus in public declamations and in Kissinger's typical prescriptive terms, to empty the competition of its innate ideological terms, in the second case there was a firm re-launch of the latter which culminated in Carter's firm critic of military invasion of the Afghan territory, thereby decisively ending any talk of détente.

1.2 The Nixon-Kissinger's Grand Design

In the aftermath of the election, newly elected President Richard Nixon and Kissinger ascended to the White House with the knowledge that the political cycle that had underpinned US programmes and strategy had come to an end. It would be up to them to inaugurate a new leadership, a new "Grand Design", as enunciated by Nixon himself, relaunching Washington's role in global affairs. The focal point was, therefore, this bet on an innovative restructuring of the competition between the two superpowers, in the name of a progressive détente with the opening of an official channel of dialogue and the recognition that a greater involvement of Moscow in the Cold War would have been not only desirable, but positively necessary. This strategic change in the American leadership was aimed, on the one hand, at maximising the advantages deriving from an agreed strategy with Moscow on certain themes inherent in international affairs, and on the other, at minimising the risks inherent in the dangers of bipolar strategic competition. This "realist" choice was based not only on the realisation that the US economy was no longer in the prosperous and sustainable condition it had once been in, and that a large section of the electorate felt that US overstretched exposure was unjustified and that it should reduce its global commitments accordingly. An innovation lay in the notion that this antagonism, although deep-rooted, should completely abandon its ideological and totalising dimension and instead acknowledge its 'physiological' nature, and in the meantime induce the Soviets to recognise their share of responsibility. A co-responsible party in the international system that had been created, Moscow in return received legitimisation of its sphere of control and influence in Eastern Europe as well as the

recognised status of a superpower. This approach, although ambitious and innovative, did not represent a genuine attempt by either side to bring about a solution to the Cold War conundrum but remained an antagonistic way of interpreting the conflict.

The most characteristic consequences of this period were undoubtedly the convergence between Peking and Washington (after the famously known “ping pong diplomacy”) which independently of each other developed a convergence of views on Moscow, perceived as a common enemy to be measured against at the expense of marked ideological differences, and the launching of a series of strategic agreements for the mutual limitation of nuclear weapons of war: both necessary to circumscribe the space of competition and avoid spill-over. In particular, agreements on the strategic limitation of nuclear weapons took hold following the widely held perception that strategic parity of both nuclear arsenals had been achieved, albeit still accompanied by the uncertainty of being able to intercept any warheads launched. Many important agreements were signed, such as SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) in 1972, which had to be updated in place of prodigious technological advances that made the signed provisions obsolete. Indeed, despite the establishment of a ceiling for arsenals, the development of MIRVs (Multiple Independently Reentry Vehicles) necessarily led to SALT II related talks.

1.3 The inner limits and different interpretations of the D tente

Although on a macroscopic level there was indeed a reconciliation between the two superpowers, albeit always maintaining an antagonistic character, one should not forget the permanence of conflicts through proxies, especially in the third world. Not only did the war in Vietnam continue undisturbed in its initial stages, keeping the constant flow of funding and aid from the superpowers intact, but different theatres of conflict emerged around the world from South America, what was considered a jealously guarded area of influence for the USA, to the Middle East, a region that had experienced a huge convergence of interests for the production of exportable hydrocarbons. In terms of proxy warfare, in Chile the financial support for Pinochet's authoritarianism through the CIA and the subsequent coup d' tat against Salvador Allende's social-democratic government reverberated around the world and raised awareness of the still existing barriers of bipolar division and the risks of power transitions. In particular, the considerations and possible implications of the “Chilean solution”, as it was defined at the time, had their reverberations also in Europe and especially

in Italy, which in those very years was experiencing the terrorism of the so-called “anni di piombo” (The lead years).

Furthermore, the absence of the strictly anti-communist extremist positions professed by the American ally led many European states to see the prospect that the narrow links of bipolar logic had loosened enough to allow autonomous openings towards their Soviet counterparts. This dynamic was also made possible by the weakening of the so-called American “consensual hegemony”¹⁷ vis-à-vis the Europeans, whose three pillars on which it was based were progressively eroded in the course of the 1960s: (1) strategic preponderance, (2) economic superiority and (3) anti-communist ideology, as already mentioned. This catching up made the Europeans eager to manage the Atlantic alliance on decidedly more equal terms. The beginnings were indeed encouraging, as outlined by historian Hubert Zimmerman, when European leaders breathed a “sigh of relief”¹⁸ following the election of Nixon over Johnson, fuelling the idea that this turnover would strengthen Euro-Atlantic relations in a positive sense, launching a new period of cooperation. In what appeared to all intents and purposes to be an investiture trip¹⁹. Nixon announced his first foreign trip in February 1970, visiting major European capitals. Nixon was aware of the concerns of his European partners who feared that détente might imply the reassertion of a “bipolar condominium” and a rebalancing of the continent that would take place unilaterally, without prior consultation. Reassurance towards the allies was used in the hope of obtaining a policy of greater responsibility in return. In this sense, if on the one hand the United States kept a review of its military commitment out of the equation (an indispensable factor in maintaining a deterrent against the shadow of Soviet overwhelming power in terms of conventional means and troops), on the other hand there was a promise of consultations between allies that would become practice in relations with the East. Meanwhile in Europe, the staggering post-war economic growth of France, Italy, West Germany and the Benelux neighbourhood led this grouping of countries to seek a more autonomous role on the international stage. First of all, the European summit in The Hague in December 1969 signalled a first major visible acceleration, inviting Britain of the pro-European Edward Heath to join the EEC, as well as launching a series of measures for a common European monetary policy and new measures for the full implementation of agricultural policies. The latter two were particularly important because they regulated

¹⁷ C. Maier, *The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy After World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p.148.

¹⁸ H. Zimmermann, *Western Europe and the American Challenge*, p. 99

¹⁹ W. Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, Hill&Wang Pub., London, 2003, pp.59-61

something that had historically been the preserve of individual nation states²⁰. A final innovation, this time in terms of foreign policy, was the decision to entrust the foreign ministers of the member states with the task of preparing a report that would lay the foundations for future European Political Cooperation. By the early 1970s, this process of European integration had moved into high gear, not only thanks to a significant expansion of its areas of competence, which now encompassed aspects such as energy policy and social policies, but also thanks to the beginnings of a redefinition of a European identity that could stand alongside that of the United States. Necessarily, there remained many difficulties and divergent interests that held back the ambitions of a more united Europe, if not a federalist aspiration, as well as the European Defence Community itself. Europeans continued to see NATO's defence shield as inexorably necessary compared to the very costly plans for European autonomy in this regard.

Despite the encouraging beginnings, two episodes showed the European partners the unilateral prerogatives of the Nixon-Kissinger tandem: the first, which barely crossed the radar at the time, was the trip to Romania in August 1969 without prior consultation with the Europeans, thus declaiming the need to establish a dialogue with the East in absolute autonomy, and the second, in an episode destined to change substantially the economic and financial paradigms in force at the time, the interruption in August 1971 of the convertibility of the dollar into gold. In essence, the US government decided to definitively end the system of 'fixed exchange rates' determined by the Bretton Woods agreements of 1944.

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, a European version of détente unfolded with much more ambitious goals than the dialogue between the two superpowers: a more “transformative” perspective emerged, oriented towards bringing about a change in the global balance, marking a move towards a “European détente”²¹. With the election of social democrat Willy Brandt in West Germany in 1969, a set of policies of openness towards the East (the so-called Ostpolitik) was proposed, which aimed to re-establish trust and constructive dialogue between the two blocs. This process led to the crucial result of mutual recognition between the two Germanies, resulting in the Basic Agreement, which in turn laid the foundations for their entry into the UN in 1973. A reconciliation with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe could only take place in a climate of recognition of Germany's

²⁰ M.E. Guasconi, *Il vertice dell'Aja del 1-2 Dicembre 1969: quale via per l'Europa degli anni '70?* pp.151-168 in *Alle origini del presente. L'Europa occidentale nella crisi degli anni Settanta*, A. Varsori, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2007

²¹A. Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente: How the West shaped the Helsinki CSCE*, Peter Lang, Bruxelles-New York, 2009.

responsibility for the atrocities committed by the Nazis. Within the framework of Ostpolitik, Willy Brandt therefore took the initiative and, in a gesture of enormous symbolic value, knelt in front of the monument dedicated to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto, reminding the Germans that the time had come to "accept the consequences of history"²², to metabolise the wounds of the Second World War. Not only did West Germany aim to improve the living conditions of Germans and Europeans by rebuilding dialogue between the two blocs and subsequently establishing broader trade and cultural relations, but it also had the greater ambition of bringing about a gradual transformation of communist societies.

The Nixon administration was incrementally reluctant to consider the European community as an equal partner and even less so to legitimize the protagonism of its members. "Nixingerian" methods went hand in hand with these assumptions, such as the marginalisation of the State Department in the conduct of foreign affairs and the centralisation of power in the White House. Secrecy and high-level bilateral contacts were systematically favoured and encouraged at the expense of moderation and diplomacy. Globally, relations with Europe were put on the back burner, both in the face of Asian problems (primarily Vietnam) and in relation to dialogue with Moscow. A cornerstone of the administration's vision, which will also be critical in the conception of the Italian case, is that the United States, like its Soviet counterpart, conceived the efforts to smooth tensions parallel to an iron interpretation of power politics and a strictly hegemonic consideration of relations within its own bloc.

1.4 the Mediterranean declination of the Détente

Moving our perspective southwards, we move to the Mediterranean basin which since the beginning of the Cold War emerged as one of the most important theatres of confrontation between the two superpowers. The application of the Détente policy in this region of the world would have proved to be a risky undertake because, although many local sources of conflict subsumed into the great cauldron of competition between Moscow and Washington, the region was at the mercy of other upheavals between a plurality of actors with highly divergent interests, welcoming on its shores countries that were extremely different in cultural, political and economic terms. The basin was going through the critical period of decolonisation, especially on its southern and eastern shores, and was home to the

²² G. Neidhart, *Ostpolitik: Phases, Short-Term Objectives and Grand Designs*, in D.C. Geyer - B. Schaeffer, *American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969-1972*, "Bulletin of the German Historical Institute", Washington DC, 2003, p. 123.

Israeli-Palestinian debacle, which had raged uninterruptedly since 1949, and the Greek-Turkish antagonism, all of this while the two shores were diverging greatly in terms of the development trajectories adopted. The northern shore coalesced around a common security and conflict resolution framework under NATO, fostering a generalised climate of prosperity and security and the maintenance of democratic values. Starting from the 1950s, the preponderance of American might in the region started to become challenged by enemies but also from allies. France and Italy, which at the same time also belonged to the nascent European Community, realised the indispensable role of a Mediterranean policy not only for their own national interests (extremely rooted in the basin for obvious geographical and economic reasons) but also on a purely European horizon: The French had come to the realization that “the Mediterranean was one of the few areas in which independent and concerted action by Europe” was possible (Pickles 1973)²³. This French regional activism, although on the one hand it required the abandonment of global aspirations now rendered unrealistic, rested on the erosion of French interests in the Maghreb region (especially after the independence given to Algeri) and resulted on many occasions in an attempt to create a French-led grouping based also on arms sales. This was not a marginal volume, but on the contrary, in terms of the quantity and type of weapons and the number of client states involved, it was an attempt to flood the Mediterranean with a third war industry other than the Soviets or the Americans²⁴. An example of this is how 110 Dassault Mirage fighter-bombers were sold to Libya alone. Attempts to counter this bipolarity were observed not only in European actions but had an impetus in the developments that took shape in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which saw a substantial boost in the 1960s and had its most active members in the shape of Algeria and Yugoslavia, two Mediterranean riparian states. Although both superpowers viewed this movement with perplexity and detachment, seeing it as a puppet in the hands of the antagonist, they recognised the implications for the world scene and tried to bring it into their own path²⁵. With the exception of the state of Israel, all countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean remained fundamentally undemocratic. Expectations of economic revamping remained almost universally unfulfilled, driving entire social classes not only into inadequacy, but also resulting in the exacerbation of the anti-Western positions of the populations, which then allowed political capital to coagulate

²³ D. Pickles, *The Government of France*, London, 1973, p. 326.

²⁴ D. Styan, *France and Iraq: Oil, Arms and French Policy-Making in the Middle East*, London, 2006, p. 103–129

²⁵ H. W. Brands, Jr., *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947–1960* (New York, 1989)

around first Pan-arabism and the to overtly Islamist and authoritarian factions. One should of course not forget the seemingly inexhaustible well of discord of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that continued to emanate tremors and reverberations throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond, resulting in guerrilla tactics such as air piracy, kidnappings, suicide attacks and targeted assassinations that further disrupted the stability of the region. The sheer complexity of these scenarios was connected to dynamics outside the Manichean scheme imposed by the Cold War, yet the interpretative rigidities of the time imposed an all-out zero-sum logic approximating the factors in the field and in fact significantly reducing the room for manoeuvre for dialogue that certain situations required. Another situation that had important developments and resonances in the wider Mediterranean context was the deposition of King Idris of Libya by Colonel Qaddafi in September 1969. The monarchy, which was established in 1949 after independence from the UN mandate of France and England, on the one hand supervised the discovery of huge oil deposits which helped to develop a nascent economy based on oil exports, lifting a country out of substantial absolute poverty, but on the other, failed to distribute the proceeds of the mining activity to those sections of the population that were not immediately close to King Idris' entourage. After this independence, Idris turned his attention to modernising his country, receiving aid from the Americans (who opened bases there, especially the Wheelus air base, which was the largest US military installation outside the United States at the time) and the British. These good relations with the United States and the United Kingdom (maintained even after the latter intervened militarily against Egypt in 1956 during the Suez crisis), somewhat dashed the expectations of Arab nationalists within the country and pan-Arab supporters in neighbouring states. The discontent generated by these dynamics was intercepted by an ideological movement that emerged in the region with preponderance: Nasserism and pan-Arab nationalism. Although Qaddafi's conduct initially suggested a marked Soviet bias, not unlike what happened in Egypt, the dictator's mercurial character made him unpredictable and volatile. The new government categorically rejected communism, in part because it was primarily atheistic, and espoused an Arab interpretation of socialism that integrated Islamic principles with precepts of political, economic and cultural reform. It declared its neutrality with respect to the superpower confrontation, emphasising its dedication to Arab unity as well as support for Palestine against Israel, viewing the latter as nothing more than an illegitimate Western and neo-colonialist outpost in the middle of the Middle East. In the name of Arab Nationalism, he decided to nationalise most foreign oil properties, to close down US and British military bases, especially the "Wheelus" base,

renamed "Oqba bin Nāfi" (after the first Arab-Muslim conqueror of the North African regions) and to expropriate all assets of the Italian and Jewish communities, expelling them from the country. Without holding any permanent official position, but only the honorary title of Guide and Commander of the Revolution of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Qaddafi was Libya's highest authority for the next forty-two years. At the beginning he established a military dictatorship; later, after an initial approach to the Arab socialism of Gamal Abd el-Nasser, he proclaimed the "republic of the masses", based on a new ideology, which he himself theorized in the "Green Book" and known as the "Third Universal Way"²⁶.

Despite the unrivalled match posed by the Sixth Fleet and the impressive number of US military bases and installations, the Soviet ambition to carve out its own slice of the Mediterranean remained and found new vigour in the aftermath of the Six-Day War (or third Israeli-Palestinian war), which was perceived as an earthquake in the region's balance and presented numerous opportunities for Moscow. A substantial number of military, economic and political agreements were signed with many countries in the region, exploiting the bitterness of these countries against the West such as those with Algiers, Rabat and Tripoli. To get an idea of Soviet activism in this regard, it is sufficient to consider that among the 10 non-communist recipients of Soviet assistance between the 1960s and 1970s there were five Mediterranean countries: Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Syria and Algeria²⁷. Soviet ambitions went beyond the south-eastern quadrants and even went so far as to establish economic agreements with Italy and financial relations with the colonels' junta in Greece.

In the eastern quadrant of the Mediterranean, the winds of war foreshadowed the emergence of a first major crisis, so great in magnitude that it would shock the world and bring it to the brink of disaster. After the Six-Day War of 1967, where Israeli troops routed the Arab countries against all odds, the Arab countries, aware of their stinging defeat, reworked a strategy aimed at reconstituting the decimated armies. In the lead was Anwar Sadat's Egypt, which after the third Arab-Israeli conflict found itself in a very short time losing the Sinai Peninsula and having to share the Suez Canal (a crucial junction for the transit of commercial vessels and therefore of very high strategic value) with its enemy, Israel. Just as Israel found in the United States its patron to receive financial and war assistance, for a defense budget otherwise unsustainable in the medium to long term, Egypt had to find his in the figure of

²⁶ On Libya, see, M. Cricco, F. Cresti, *Storia della Libia Contemporanea*, Carocci Editore, 2015; M. Cricco, F. Cresti, *Gheddafi: i volti del potere*, Carocci Editore, 2011.

²⁷ *FRUS, 1969-72, vol. 1, Document 71*

Moscow: despite the initial reluctance, the latter found itself forced to launch not only a plan to export war material but also sent a corps of military advisers who would have to train the Egyptian army. The USSR feared that a lack of support would drive the Egyptians into the arms of the United States, giving it unacceptable power. Thanks to a strict secrecy over the war arrangements as well as the invasion plans, Egypt was able to keep its intentions hidden until the beginning of the armed confrontation. The invasion would take place, with the help of Syria from the north, on the day of Yom Kippur: a Jewish holiday that traditionally calls for the entire country to come to a standstill for 25 hours, including the media and all commercial activities, except for a small section of the emergency services. It is a day when not only observant Jews, but also a substantial proportion of secular Jews fast, abstaining from all “work” including the use of fire, electricity and any means of transport. It is the day when, for all these reasons, Israel is at its most vulnerable militarily, with most of its forces demobilised. The fact that Yom Kippur coincided with the fasting month of Ramadan, reinforced the idea in the minds of Israeli intelligence services that the Egyptians were only conducting training operations along the border (a practice established over the years) and that there was no imminent danger of an invasion. These expectations were completely overturned in October 1973 when, in a pincer movement towards Israel, Egypt invaded Sinai and Syria attacked towards the Golan Heights in an attempt to take back by force the territories lost in the disastrous 1967 campaign. The war lasted just under a month and ended with the Egyptian reoccupation of Sinai and a UN ceasefire, which was achieved following relentless diplomatic work by the US and Russia. Despite the fact that towards the end of the conflict the Israeli war superiority managed to gain the competitive advantage by encircling the Egyptian third army, the US managed to imprint a course of events in favour of Cairo. Kissinger understood that the situation presented the United States with an opportunity more unique than rare: Egypt was completely dependent on the United States for the salvation of the trapped Army, because Israel would follow the American directives, and because for the Egyptians, the situation was desperate, given the thousands of soldiers in the desert without food or water. A quick assessment led the United States to propose itself in the delicate role of a strong mediator, with the opportunity to push Egypt out of Soviet influence. As a result, the US exerted formidable pressure on Israel to prevent them from destroying the encircled army, including threatening to support a UN resolution that would force the Israelis to return to the October 22 front line if they did not allow humanitarian supplies to reach the soldiers. In a phone call to Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz, Kissinger said that the destruction of the

Egyptian Third Army was "an option that does not exist"²⁸. In this context, OPEC member countries decided to espouse the pro-Arab cause, through robust increases in the price of oil and embargoes on the more pro-Israeli countries. The OPEC measures led to a surge in prices and a sudden interruption of the flow of oil supplies to importing countries. The crisis ended the cycle of economic development that had characterised the West in the 1950s and 1960s. The process led to a dramatic rise in the price of oil, which in many cases more than tripled compared to previous rates. Governments in Western European countries, which were hardest hit by rising oil prices, took measures to reduce oil consumption and avoid waste. The United States proved to be more resilient than the Europeans because it was relatively less dependent on Middle Eastern exports, but it still experienced a particularly difficult period, and the entire Western world experienced the consequences of the oil embargo, not least through the austerity reforms that were enacted to mitigate consumption and safeguard oil stocks. The West's estimates of the reluctance to use hydrocarbon exports as a political weapon proved to be fallacious, with OPEC's embargo that seriously threatened not only the economic growth of importing countries but also their social cohesion, throwing panic into the population.

The challenge posed by the oil crisis proved transformative for the European perspective and had the role of bringing the Palestine issue to the top of European priorities, galvanising the "Euro-Arab"²⁹ dialogue and challenging certain transatlantic prerogatives: firstly, the notion that any preferential regional agreement was discriminatory against the US and contrary to the clauses of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT)³⁰, and secondly, the formulation of proposals for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the belief that only a collective and concerted effort could bring about a political solution. In particular, the latter assumption was antithetical to the conventional approach to the matter: the conflict was merely an aspect of the Cold War and as such, the only plausible perspective was to minimise the Soviet Union's strategic gains as much as possible (Hurewitz 1976)³¹. To summarise, what Yom Kippur provoked was not only an escalation of US-USSR competition but yet another blow to the already strained transatlantic relationship.

In July 1974, a second crisis hit the Mediterranean theatre, this time involving two countries on the brink of war that on paper would have been allies under the NATO umbrella: Greece

²⁸ A. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 2005

²⁹ H. A. Jawad, *Euro-Arab Relations: A Study in Collective Diplomacy* (Reading, UK, 1992), 21– 80,

³⁰ FRUS, vol. III, *Foreign Economic Policy; International Monetary Policy, 1969–1972* (Washington, DC, 2001), Documents 43, 91, 102–105, and 108.

³¹ J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *Oil, the Arab-Israeli Dispute and the Industrial World: Horizons of Crisis* (Boulder, CO, 1976).

and Turkey. For Dimitrios Ioannides, the colonel who had recently deposed George Papadoupoulos, compromise was considered anathema and he led a regime substantially less sophisticated and exponentially more chauvinistic than the previous one. The idea that the island of Cyprus, culturally very close to Greece, should remain an autonomous island was out of the question and so the project of Enosis, the Greek word for “fusion”, took place, culminating in the forced deposition of Archbishop Makarios (who ruled the island) and his replacement by his loyalist Nicos Sampson. The escalation of events convinced Turkey, which had its eyes on the large Turkish minority on the northern shore of Cyprus, to act and invade the island to protect its interests. The two invasions led to the division of the island into two republics, which still exist today, and mutually declare the only legitimate sovereignty, and to a refugee crisis known as the Cypriot diaspora.

From the American perspective, an attitude of substantial caution and “wait-and-see” emerged and when events took a more decisive turn, Nixon was no longer in control of the events. Kissinger, who in the meantime was in what can be regarded as the apogee of his power, found himself in a crisis he did not want to engage in but at the same time did not want to see the break-up of NATO's south-eastern flank over a diatribe between what, on paper, were allies. Kissinger's main concern was to avoid at all costs a spill-over of the conflict and thus its internationalisation through a marked involvement of the international community through the UN. The US attitude was firmly anchored in its inability to distinguish between Greek and Turkish actions and thus to design policies that would reason with national interests and aspirations, rather than focusing solely on strategic value in the light of Cold War logic³². The consequence was a pronounced emphasis on realism and a certain shortening of focus that only stiffened the positions of the actors, almost providing the USSR with a motivation to intervene in the conflict³³. The Russians tried to the last to internationalise the affair in the forums of the United Nations but unfortunately they too failed because they were not exempt from the same rigidity of thinking.

Subsequently, despite the tragedy of the division of Cyprus, the junta of colonels collapsed as a result of their ineptitude and the conservative politician Constantine Karamanlis returned from his Parisian exile to lay the foundations of a democratic Greece. The Greek transition was not the only one of its kind, and indeed was part of a larger wave of upheavals that also brought democracy in a relatively short space of time to Spain, after the death of

³² M. Stearns, *Entangled Allies: US Policy Toward Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus* (New York 1992)

³³ *FRUS*, vol. XXX, 1973–76, passim

Generalissimo Franco, and to Portugal after the fall of the Gaetano regime. But despite this democratisation³⁴ (to the extent that all NATO countries were now democratic) the alliance emerged from these upheavals not without criticism. The United States came under increasing criticism for its proximity to the various dictators in the region, as well as its difficulty in cultivating relations with the democratic elements in those countries during the Détente years. Despite these disillusion and changes, NATO's southern flank remained intact (Berman 2004)³⁵. This was so not only because of American strength and the Soviet inability to capitalize on American difficulties, but because of the fact that, ultimately, the North Mediterranean countries shared the core values of the West.

With the arrival of democracy in Greece, Portugal and Spain, these countries returned to a redefinition of their foreign policy objectives, which although not always in line with Cold War NATO logic³⁶, were ready to be included in the wider European concentration within the emerging EEC. The north coast countries, although they found themselves repeatedly supporting non-alignment, anti-American or “Mediterraneanist” demands, remained committed to the western camp. In particular, in the following years these same countries turned to the European perspective for stability and prosperity and at the same time turned their gaze away from an increasingly distant south coast that would continue to regress economically, politically and increasingly fragment in its social components. The divergence between the two shores began to increase and, parallel to this centrifugal action on the North-South axis, East-West tensions contributed to further fragmenting the Mediterranean mosaic. An area made so volatile did not lend itself to the conceptual lens of the détente, whose two proponents, the US and the USSR, failed to conceive a new way of managing their smaller allies and micro-managing local affairs in the sensitivity of states. In return, this made disputes even more difficult to negotiate. The Mediterranean, although seemingly homogeneous through the perspective of a single geopolitical concept, proved to be much more fluid and articulate than its detente and 'conceptual coherence' would imply. As the crises progressed, Nixon thus began to work out more concerted approaches with the countries involved, while still retaining US prominence, to prevent what was taking place in the Mediterranean from threatening global peace. It is quite instructive that Nixon himself instructed Kissinger that “only minor countries in Europe which I want to pay attention to in

³⁴ On the wave of Democratisation in Southern Europe, see M.E. Cavallaro, K. Kornetis, *Rethinking Democratisation in Spain, Greece and Portugal*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.

³⁵ R. Berman, *Anti-Americanism in Europe, A Cultural Problem* (Stanford, CA, 2004)

³⁶ F. Rodrigo and J. Story, eds., *Democratic Spain: Reshaping External Relations in a Changing World* (London, 1995), 107–22

the foreseeable future will be Spain, Italy, and Greece. I do not want to see any papers from any of the other countries.”³⁷. The atmosphere of détente between the two superpowers did not translate into a more open attitude towards the domestic developments of their allies. While in the Soviet camp there was the so-called “Brezhnev doctrine”, also known as the doctrine of “limited sovereignty”, which had its main fulfilment in the Prague crackdown of 1968, the United States developed a certain “uneasiness” towards those countries that were experimenting with their own representative system³⁸. In Italy, while the country remained shocked and devastated by red and black terrorism, the Italian Communist Party attempted to breach the *conventio ad excludendum* in order to enter the executive and establish the much coveted status quo party status. What later became known as “Euro-communism”, carried forward in particular by its secretary Enrico Berlinguer, was too ambivalent a concept to be fully accepted by the two superpowers and was therefore opposed as being either completely naive or an attempt by Moscow or Washington to play with a Trojan horse. And so, while for example the Nixon administration refused to consider this route because of its potential to strengthen Italian democracy in the face of the enormous challenges of the “anni di piombo”, in neighbouring Greece, Nixon himself rewarded the colonels despite their abysmal human rights record, lifting the arms export proposed by the previous administration. In Italy, aspirations towards a Mediterranean foreign policy had always been present since the beginning of World War II and although more subtle than in France, they were nonetheless resolute. From the outset, Italian policy was to adopt a pro-Arab posture, not only to clean its record after the faults accumulated during the colonial experiences (especially in Libya and Ethiopia), but also to obtain privileged access to the oil in the Middle Eastern markets that proved so crucial for industry thirsting for energy at discount prices. Consequently, Italy wanted to translate its geographical position as a bridge between the cardinal points into a role as a political (as well as cultural and economic) bridge between the EEC and the Arab world. This new prominence also meant entering more actively into the nearest open issues. It also meant an increased volume in terms of foreign assistance flowing into the coffers of the southern riparian countries, including crucially, into the pockets of Colonel Qaddafi for his 1969 coup d’état. As will be highlighted and analysed in the next chapter, foreign policy directives, in means and objectives, did not always coincide with its partners like London and Washington DC, with the latter in fact dismayed at developments like this.

³⁷ P. McCarthy, *The Crisis of the Italian State: From the origins of the Cold War to the Fall of Berlusconi* (London, 1995), 103–22;

³⁸ P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London, 1990), 298–404

2. The Mediterranean Mosaic: Italian foreign outlook

2.1 The centre-left and foreign policy in the late 1960s

In keeping with a long diplomatic tradition, post-World War II Italy maintained a particular focus on the Middle East and the Mediterranean sea. In the context of this orientation, which attributed a crucial importance to the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Italian diplomacy found itself confronted with a series of variables: the dynamics of the Cold War itself, the effects of the Arab-Israeli rivalry, the requirements of national security, and Atlantic constraints. All variables that are difficult to reduce to a single line of action free of contradictions and of ambiguities. However, the narrow margin of action did not prevent Italy from participating actively in the attempts to resolve the Middle East conflict within the framework of a progressive evolution in a pro-Arab direction which, on more than one occasion, did not fail to provoke contrasts between the same political forces that made up the government majority, and against Washington's line of action. In the mid-1960s, Italy was governed by a "centro-sinistra" (centre-left) coalition formed by the DC, PSD, PSDI and PRI. This government had an impressive Mediterranean heritage behind it, coming especially from the Christian Democrat left. On the one hand, it was a mindset designed to give Italy a special role in the Mediterranean and, at the same time, to give it greater autonomy vis-à-vis its US ally. On the other, an ideological vision that saw the Mediterranean as an area culturally, socially and economically close to Italy (if not homogeneous in certain cases), such as to constitute a convenient alternative projection to the Atlantic and Euro-American one. While in the 1960s some of these Mediterranean ambitions were dispensed with and the focus was mainly on the West-East axis³⁹. However, in parliament, political forces and civil society, not infrequently even within the same forces committed to supporting the government, the

³⁹ More specifically, starting from the good and strong political and economic relations that the Italian government and companies had developed in the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the early 1950s, Gronchi and Fanfani proposed to Washington that Italy would act as a bridge, i.e. mediate in relations between Arab and Western countries, through formal consultations between the two groupings. The United States refused without hesitation. In those years, therefore, the focus of foreign policy was on international initiatives aimed at promoting détente and providing the international system with a greater degree of security, as well as proposals aimed at restructuring the Atlantic alliance in a more cohesive and inclusive direction. The socialists, in particular Giuseppe Saragat and Pietro Nenni (Foreign Ministers from December 1963 to February 1966 and from December 1968 to August 1969) were decidedly more interested in tackling these issues than those of the Mediterranean, from an allied perspective.

previous ideological legacy was not lost. A broad movement of opinion persisted that saw the Mediterranean as an emblematic place not so much of national autonomy but of autonomy from the United States and NATO. Moreover, with the evolution of the war in Vietnam, the emergence of Palestinian nationalism after the 1967 war and the influences of the 1968 movements, this trend of opinion tends to strengthen and transcend the Mediterranean, emerging as a generically pacifist, anti-imperialist and, more specifically, anti-American force destined to remain in Italian politics as a transversal and lasting movement. In other words, at the end of the 1960s, two tendencies, differently rooted in political forces and civil society, confronted each other with regard to the Mediterranean: the Euro-Atlantic tendency and the Mediterranean-third worldist tendency⁴⁰.

From August 1969 the left-leaning Christian-Democrat Aldo Moro held the post of Foreign Minister⁴¹. Compared to his predecessors, foreign affairs were conducted with a certain characteristic dynamism and proactivity, in light of a certain awareness of the importance of multilateralism (whose fora were almost systematically preferred to bilateral dialogues) and of the latter's capacity to protect human rights. In the Middle Eastern issues and crises that followed one another in the years of the Détente in the Mediterranean basin, Moro perpetuated this attitude of equidistance that had the task not only of advancing national interests but also of safeguarding the Italian posture vis-à-vis his partner, the United States. Despite the professed equidistance, it was clear to keen observers that Italy had far more vested interests with its Arab partners than Israel. The foreign policy's formula of the "equidistanza" (equidistance) and favour for the application of Security Council Resolution 242⁴², remained the cornerstones of his foreign policy regarding the Israeli-palestinian issue. The centrality of the Palestinian question in Moro's thinking emerged clearly in his visit to Egypt on 21-24 May 1970⁴³, in the meeting in Istanbul on 30 April-1 May 1970 with Italian diplomats in the Middle East and in the meeting with the heads of Italian missions. The

⁴⁰ D. Caviglia, M. Cricco, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei*, Rubbettino, 2006.

⁴¹ On Aldo Moro's biography see, G. Formigoni, *Aldo Moro: lo statista e il suo dramma*, il Mulino, 2016.

⁴² The non-binding UN resolution recalled one of the cardinal principles of international law: the impossibility of territorial acquisition through the use of force. Above all, it established two conditions for achieving a "just and lasting" peace in the Near East region: an Israeli military withdrawal and mutual recognition between states. This doctrine is often summarised in the formulas "peace for territories" or "territories for peace" - depending on the perspective.

⁴³ At a meeting on 22 and 23 May 1970 with Mahmoud Riad, Foreign Minister of Egypt, Moro, referring to Italy's Middle East policy, said that "in matters of refugees we have always supported UN resolutions and we realise the potential explosiveness of the problem, all the more so since it no longer presents itself only as humanitarian and social but increasingly as political"; tel. 20491 incoming, Italian arrival, Italian Embassy in Egypt to MAE, "Message from Hon. Minister for Mr. President of the Republic and Prime Minister about his talks with Minister Riyadh", 24 May 1970, in ACS, FAM, b. 128, "Visit to the United Arab Republic of the Visit to the United Arab Republic of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Aldo Moro (21-24 May 1970)".

goodness of Aldo Moro's action on the Palestinian issue in the eyes of the Arab countries was, for example, witnessed by the daily newspaper "Al Ahram", a pro-government Egyptian newspaper, which appreciated the Italian attempt⁴⁴ to shake up the situation that had become substantially static after the approval of Resolution 242, paying particular attention to the Palestinians. Moro's line of equidistance from the parties involved, of safeguarding the existence of the State of Israel and, at the same time, of paying close attention to the Palestinians, was met with growing support from the Italian public opinion and various politicians alike.

2.2 Italian foreign policy and the Mediterranean sea in the bipolar order

Between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the alarming presence of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean and the emergence of Palestinian-based terrorism⁴⁵ highlighted the strong instability of the entire area and further contributed to drawing the attention of Italian and international politics and public opinion to the Palestinian cause, as part of a broader solution to the Middle East question. For Italy, moreover, Gaddafi's seizure of power in Libya in September 1969 made it even more necessary to capitalise on its good relations with Arab countries and at the same time testify to Italy's lack of aversion to Arab nationalism. In those years, Italy's usual twofold concern was evident: on the one hand, the desire to remain the principal ally of the United States in the Mediterranean, maintaining an identity of views with Washington, above all, with regard to the defence of the Middle Eastern area from the increased Soviet threat (the concept of the "Southern flank of NATO" emerged often as to describe this instance with regard to the broader geopolitical framework of NATO); on the other hand, the need to cautiously distance itself from the increasingly pro-Israeli policy of the US, so as not to compromise the policy of equidistance with respect to the Middle East crisis, which gave the government in Rome the possibility of playing the role of privileged interlocutor for the two sides in the conflict. As we have seen, however, since Moro had taken office as foreign minister, Italy's policy of equidistance had increasingly winked at the Arab world and the military escalation in the Middle East in the summer of

⁴⁴ The Cairo daily expressed itself in these terms following Moro's visit to Cairo in the spring of 1970. Cairo in the spring of 1970; see G. Baget Bozzo and G. Tassani, *Aldo Moro. Il politico nella crisi 1962-1973*, Sansoni, Firenze 1983, p. 425.

⁴⁵ Beginning with the execution of Jordanian Prime Minister Wasfi Tal in Cairo on 28 November 1971, the Palestinian terrorist group "Black September" was responsible for hijacking of planes and ships, attacks on industrial plants, embassies, airline agencies and massacres of civilians. With the start of Israeli retaliation against Palestinian movements in the early 1970s, the Middle East conflict de facto fell into an even worse spiral of violence.

1970, with the intervention of the two superpowers alongside the contending parties in the Arab-Israeli conflict, had increased Italian concerns. The government in Rome, in fact, was perfectly in line with Washington's intentions to reaffirm its interest in the Mediterranean with the strengthening of the Sixth Fleet in an anti-Soviet function, but it could not have a perfect identity of views with the Americans on the solution to the Middle East crisis, even less at a time when US policy was becoming more pro-Israeli, with Nixon's decision to speed up the delivery of military aircraft to Tel Aviv⁴⁶. For this reason, the Italian government chose to place particular emphasis on the fundamental role of the United Nations in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. After all, Italy, in managing its foreign policy, had traditionally preferred to discuss the most important issues in the UN forum, where it enjoyed a certain credit and had a better chance of being heard, rather than confronting the great powers directly⁴⁷. During the talks between the Italian executive and Nixon on the occasion of his visit to Rome, on 27 and 28 September 1970, an identity of views was reaffirmed between the two countries on the fundamental role of the Sixth Fleet in maintaining the military and strategic balance in the Mediterranean, but, with regard to the solution to the problems of the Middle East, Italy maintained a general position, hoping for a more incisive role of the United Nations in the negotiations for peace. From the American point of view, the Middle East scenario essentially presented two options: on the one hand, a "soft" approach, i.e. adopting a modest profile, open to dialogue and distant from the polarisation of the conflict, and on the other hand, a "containment" approach. The choices made by the United States in the region seemed to indicate the abandonment of the first option in favour of the second. Even if in the first years of the Nixon government the two attitudes coexisted, entrusting the management of the Israeli-Palestinian question to Secretary of State William Rogers, who tried to open a dialogue with the Arab world and to promote a joint US-USSR action for the resolution of the Palestinian problems, launching an ambitious plan that took the name of Rogers Plan⁴⁸, which subsequently failed and attracted criticism from almost every actor involved⁴⁹. But it was Kissinger's line that gradually took hold, aiming to make Israel the prosecutor of American

⁴⁶ G. Valdevit, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Mediterraneo. Da Truman e Reagan*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1991.

⁴⁷ M. De Leonardis, *La politica estera italiana, la NATO e l'ONU negli anni del neatlantismo*, in L. Tosi, *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali. Diplomazia multilaterale nel Novecento*, Padova, CEDAM, 1999, pp. 201-233

⁴⁸ A. Preston, *Nixon in the World, American Foreign Relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.

⁴⁹ The negotiations leading up to Rogers' plan were hampered not just by Israel-Egypt hostilities, but also by the Soviet Union's and the United States' contrasting approaches to the negotiations. During the peace talks, the Soviet strategy was to "bring the Egyptians with them every step of the way." The American approach was quite different. It was never in the cards to try to persuade the Israelis to support every American initiative as it was undertaken. To get Israel's approval, the Americans calculated that they would need Egypt's and the Soviet Union's first.

interests in the Middle East, completely contradicting the State Department's earlier approach (for whom, essentially, only an equidistant policy would allow long-term solutions with the Arabs) and giving the region a so-called "decidedly bipolar twist"⁵⁰. When the USSR subsequently began to rearm Egypt, the United States undertook to channel direct military aid to Israel as part of a multi-year programme, which would strengthen its military capacity to such an extent that the Soviet role would be significantly reduced and the Arab states would consider the United States as the sole mediator and arbiter in the region.

Just as the Jordanian crisis of 1970 saw its epilogue, sealing a truce between Jordan's King Hussein and Yasser Arafat's Fedayeen, Gamal Abdel Nasser died suddenly on 28 September, depriving the regional political scene of a major figure who was both Egypt's leader and a point of reference for the entire Arab world. His successor, Anwar El-Sadat, did not want to hide the Soviet sympathies of his predecessor, but his first act was to reaffirm the closeness of Cairo with Moscow, signing a joint Soviet-Egyptian communiqué at the end of the visit of Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin at the end of Nasser's funeral. The text stated that:

“The Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic⁵¹ intended to unite and coordinate their efforts for the settlement of the Middle East conflict and other important international problem”^s⁵².

It was precisely following the death of Nasser and the realisation of the strengthening of Soviet positions in the Mediterranean that Italy felt the need to strengthen ties with the United States in the area but, at the same time, enhance the relevant aspect of Italian-Arab friendship in the guidelines of its foreign policy. The first evidence of this new direction of Italy's foreign policy with respect to the Middle East crisis emerges from a conversation between Ambassador Egidio Ortona and the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Joseph J. Sisco in October 1970. In the course of the discussions, the ambassador reported that Minister Moro had recently held talks with Egyptian politicians:

⁵⁰ F. Romero, *Storia della Guerra Fredda*, cit., p. 232 in L. Cominelli, *L'Italia Sotto Tutela, Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana degli anni Settanta*, Le Monnier, 2014.

⁵¹ The United Arab Republic experiment took place between 1958 and 1961 and attempted to unite Egypt and Syria under a single federal formula. Egypt, even after 1961, continued to maintain this denomination and used the flag of the UAR until 31 December 1971. Syria, on the other hand, after the detachment from the UAR, adopted for a short period (1961-1963) the flag it had used until the Union with Egypt, and then recovered the UAR flag as its national flag in 1963. Thus, from 1963 to 1972, Syria and Egypt, although no longer united in a single state, used the same flag and the same coat of arms. It was only in 1972 that Egypt changed its name to the Arab Republic of Egypt and changed its flag and coat of arms. Syria, on the other hand, retained the flag of the UAR, known from then on as the Syrian national flag.

⁵² *La personalità di Nasser nella commemorazione di Kosygin*, “Relazioni Internazionali”, n.41, 10 Ottobre 1970, p.951.

[Moro] had received the clear impression that the new government intends to continue Nasser's last policy lines, oriented towards the independent interests of the UAR and the search for peace, but at the same time fears pressure from radical elements in the military cadre or from pro-Soviet groups⁵³.

According to Moro's perspective, the moderate elements in the government and in the country would have been strengthened by a greater interest of the international community in reaffirming the fundamental principles of UN Security Council Resolution 242, and in maintaining the ceasefire between the parties to the Arab-Israeli dispute. While the Americans shared Italian worries about the Palestinian dilemma and the importance of maintaining good relations with the Arab world, they also recommended that Israeli positions not be overlooked, as Sisco's response reveals:

Israel agrees to direct negotiations and the principle of withdrawal. The UAR and Jordan are committed to making peace with Israel and to providing full recognition of the borders that will be decided in the negotiations. We therefore consider it essential not to lose these commitments, which are an integral part of American peace initiatives. With regard to the Palestinians [...], there are strong territorial implications to the idea of a Palestinian entity, which cannot be easily resolved. Although the US generally agrees with the Italian assessments, we need to move with extreme caution⁵⁴.

The Americans, therefore, although in principle favourable to the Italian positions, were not prepared to take a position on the recognition of a Palestinian national entity, since this would have provoked an irremediable contrast with the Israelis, something that the government in Washington could not and did not want to afford at that juncture. There were further talks between the Italians and Americans on the Middle East crisis and this time Italy stressed the desirability of the United Nations being more directly involved in the peace process.

Once again, the American and Italian positions differed in their assessment of Arab and Israeli demands: while Rome was prepared to give credence to the claims of the Arab countries, Washington almost always regarded them with suspicion and assumed that the basic issue was to guarantee Israel's security. As we have already seen, the Italian and American governments also disagreed on the role of the United Nations in resolving the crisis: The former, in fact, believed that the Arab-Israeli dispute could only be resolved in the final instance at the UN Headquarters; the latter, on the other hand, fully endorsed the thesis of the Israelis, who

⁵³ NARA, NPMS, CF, Europe b. 695, Telegram from Department of State to American Embassy Rome: "Middle East Situation", Washington, 9 Ottobre 1970.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

argued that an intervention of multinational peacekeeping forces in the area would have deprived the Israeli armed forces of full control of the territories, placing a serious mortgage on the possibility of using them to obtain, in exchange, security from neighbouring Arab states. The Tel Aviv government was also convinced that the deployment of a peace-keeping force would indefinitely delay the conclusion of a peace agreement.

This was precisely the first objection of Undersecretary Sisco to the Italian proposal to establish a peacekeeping force under the direct responsibility of the UN Secretary General. The text of the proposal, still in draft form, had been sent to Egidio Ortona by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to show it to Sisco and receive his opinion. The key elements of the Italian draft were:

(1) Include in the system of guarantees a pondered representation of the states most concerned with peacekeeping in the Mediterranean; (2) Establish a military force directly subordinate to the UN Secretary General; (3) Establish a commission of observers created by the representation of states and empowered to ask the UN to send troops to the "most sensitive and demilitarised areas"; give troop commanders limited flexibility in adapting to the level of existing tensions; and (5) assign any decision on troop withdrawal to the Security Council⁵⁵.

Numerous objections were raised and in conclusion, Sisco, diplomatically, affirmed that the Italian proposal was still interesting and that, with the necessary modifications, it could have constituted an opportunity for the solution of the Middle East crisis, but in reality, it was clear that the American government would not have attributed great importance to it, if not as testimony to the intention of Rome to contribute to the achievement of a peace agreement between the Arabs and the Israelis.

While geopolitical tension remained high in the Middle East, the Italian Prime Minister Emilio Colombo, accompanied by Aldo Moro, visited the American capital between 17 and 22 February. In the memorandum from Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon, dated 11 February, great importance was attributed, among the main topics to be discussed with Colombo, to the role of the Mediterranean in Italian foreign policy:

“Italian concerns with respect to East-West relations focused on the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Europe, in that order. The primary interest of the Italians is the continuation of the

⁵⁵ NARA, NPMS, CF, EUR, b. 695, *Telegram from Department of State to American Embassy Rome: “Jarring talks and Italian proposal for Mediterranean Peace-keeping force”*, Washington, 14 January 1971.

American presence in the area. However, they cannot be reassured too often of our commitment to an active defence role. [...] The Italians try to make themselves useful in the Middle East, since they have fairly good relations with both the Arabs and the Israelis. [...] We have about 10,000 troops in Italy [...] and the naval installations near Naples constitute a real military presence. Further reductions could lead the Italians to doubt the sincerity of our commitment to Italian defence⁵⁶.”

This document shows that the main concern for the Italians in 1971 was indeed security in the Mediterranean, which in the eyes of Rome was to be guaranteed by the United States. As seen above, the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict was, in the perceptions of the Italian government, an element of destabilisation that favoured the increase of the Soviet presence in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean. For this reason, Italy wanted to take advantage of its so-called position of equidistance, trying to play a limited mediation role between the parties involved in order to contribute to the pacification of the regional chessboard. The reopening of the Suez Canal⁵⁷, the re-establishment of normal trade relations with the eastern riparian states and the reduction of Soviet influence in the region were all objectives that interested Italy, much more than the recognition of its role as an emerging power, which had instead been energetically pursued during the executive of Amintore Fanfani with his policy of “presenza” (presence). In this context, the American Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean became crucial as a deterrent to the Soviet threat and a guarantee of security. This is what emerges from the paragraphs of the Secretary of State's memorandum to Nixon on the Middle East and Mediterranean situation:

Italians show a vital interest in the Middle East conflict. They have worked to maintain good relations on both sides and want to help: occasionally, they make proposals such as the suggestion of setting up a peace-keeping force. It is therefore recommended that you:

- (1) Report to PM Colombo how we assess the prospects in the Middle East, emphasising our view that regular negotiations between the parties under the auspices of Ambassador Jarring and continued observance of the ceasefire form the basis for progress towards a solution to the crisis [...].
- (2) Expresses appreciation for Italy's willingness to cooperate in general and especially in the effort to represent American positions in Syria and Yemen [...]

⁵⁶ NARA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, POL 7 IT, *Memorandum for the President. The Colombo Visit: Perspectives*, Washington, 11 February 1971.

⁵⁷ After the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli forces occupied the Sinai peninsula, including the entire east bank of the Suez Canal. Unwilling to allow the Israelis to use the canal, Egypt immediately imposed a blockade which closed the canal to all shipping.

- (3) Recall your visit to the Sixth Fleet last September and reassure Colombo of our continued interest in the Mediterranean;
- (4) Ask Colombo what his views are on further steps to be taken to strengthen Western influence in the area⁵⁸.

Colombo's visit took place in an atmosphere of great cordiality and the talks on the Middle East also showed a certain cautious optimism on the part of the Americans regarding the continuation of the ceasefire between the parties and a substantial convergence of interests between Italy and the United States in the area. In March 1971, Minister Moro went to Israel to test the feasibility, according to Tel Aviv, of a peace-keeping mission. The final impressions of Moro's meeting in Israel could be summed up in the observation that the Israelis were in a situation of such strength that they could resist any pressure. This implies the need for an American commitment to make solid security guarantees. In the telegram from the State Department to the American Embassy in Rome, one can read in addition that in Moro's report there was a reference to "the need to find a peace-keeping solution"⁵⁹. Commenting on the Italian note, Sisco had reiterated in Ortona that, although the United States was well disposed towards the constitution of a peace-keeping contingent that would naturally exclude American and Soviet troops, the Israelis, as Italy already knew, had not yet accepted the idea of an international peace-keeping force. However, the US was proposing, during the upcoming visit of Abba Eban (the Israeli foreign minister) to Washington DC, to ask him to "lay the cards on the table and make the Israeli government's positions on the territories more understandable"⁶⁰, in exchange for bilateral Israeli-American agreements that would include long-term programmes of economic and military assistance. Subsequently, and despite continuing Italian diplomatic efforts to facilitate negotiations for the reopening of Suez, American recommendations persisted in trying to dissuade Rome from launching separate initiatives on the issue. Significant in this regard is a diplomatic cable from Rogers to the American Embassy in Rome, in which the Secretary of State recommended discouraging any possible Italian initiative regarding the Suez Canal, stating that Rome's keen interest in the matter was mainly dictated by economic reasons. Rogers added that the American government had the impression that the Israelis were looking at Sadat's proposal with a certain interest, therefore an Italian plan or initiative at that delicate moment "could constitute

⁵⁸ NARA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, b. 2392, POL 7 IT, Memorandum for the President. "The Colombo Visit: Perspectives", Washington, 11 February 1971.

⁵⁹ NARA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, b. 2392, POL 7 IT, Telegram from Department of State to American Embassy Rome: "Exdis", Washington, 16 March 1971.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*

a disturbing element"⁶¹. However, the Secretary concluded by saying that the fact that both Sadat and Golda Meir had indicated to the United States their mutual willingness to reach an interim agreement on the reopening of the Canal as an intermediate step on the road to a global agreement could be reported to the government in Rome.

Secretary of State Rogers' failure of his visits to the Middle East (which included Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt), made worse by his failure to narrow the gap between the parties' positions, which instead widened due to the Suez Canal problem, was followed by his last speech to the UN General Assembly. In conjunction with this speech, Rogers had the opportunity to have a conversation with Minister Moro, during which the two politicians also discussed the situation in the Middle East. More important, however, was the meeting of the Italian Foreign Minister with President Nixon, the topics of which are summarised in an American memorandum, which shows that, with regard to the Middle East question, Italy's main concerns had not changed:

Italy's strategic position and its fears about the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean underline Rome's deep interest in developments in the Middle East and the prospects for maintaining a ceasefire. The US keeps in close contact with the Italians on the Middle East situation and they have supported all our efforts to reach an interim agreement for the reopening of the Suez Canal⁶².

The document continues with a series of talking points, in which Nixon was indicated the line to take in the course of the talks with Moro, starting from the assumption that the Foreign Minister had wanted to meet the President for two reasons: firstly, to receive confirmation of the importance that the United States continued to attribute to the consultations with Italy; secondly, to strengthen his image on the Italian political scene in view of the presidential elections, in which Moro was one of the favoured candidates. As can be read in another passage of the document, the Christian Democrat leader did not expect any form of support from Nixon in the electoral campaign, but counted on the effect that a meeting with the US president in the run-up to the elections could have on his party's currents. In any case, American analysts suggested that Nixon discuss the Middle East situation with Moro, arguing as follows:

⁶¹ NARA, NPMS, NSC, CF, EUR, b. 695, Telegram from Department of State to American Embassy Rome: "Exdis", Washington, 2 April 1971.

⁶² NARA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, b. 2392, POL 7 IT, Memorandum for Mr. Henri A. Kissinger: "The President's Meeting with Foreign Minister Aldo Moro of Italy, October 11, 11:30 AM", Washington, 7 October 1971.

- (1) Indicate the United States shares Italian concerns about the growth of the Soviet military presence in the eastern Mediterranean [...];
- (2) Stating that we believe that the best strategy at this time is to continue efforts for an interim agreement to open the Canal and partially demilitarize it. Such an agreement could diminish the opportunities for renewed military conflict between the major powers;
- (3) Emphasise that an interim agreement would help create the climate of confidence necessary for the effective resumption of Ambassador Jarring's mission to implement the principles of Security Council Resolution 242⁶³.

From the memorandum, therefore, it appears that, in October 1971, US positions with respect to Italy's Mediterranean policy remained constant and not even the American strategy towards the Arab-Israeli question had changed, at least on paper. In fact, as early as November, the Egyptian position with regard to the negotiations for an interim agreement had stiffened and, shortly afterwards, the December talks between Richard Nixon and Golda Meir in Washington DC marked another turning point in Israeli-American relations which would lead the United States to resume the supply of Phantom fighters to the Israeli air force by the end of the year.

In the Middle East, Italian diplomatic initiatives were significantly reduced in 1972. In fact, that year saw a double alternation of governmental groupings: on 15 January, in fact, the Colombo government resigned and was succeeded, on 17 February, by a single-party DC government led by Giulio Andreotti, with Aldo Moro reconfirmed as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The decision to bring forward the general elections to 7 and 8 May transformed the first Andreotti government into a transitional government, with little incisive action even in foreign policy. It was only later, after the general election, that President of the Republic Giovanni Leone entrusted Andreotti with the task of forming the new government, made up of a centrist majority, with the participation of the Christian Democrats, the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. The government was presented to Parliament on 26 June 1972 and, for the first time since 1969, Aldo Moro was not confirmed as Foreign Minister: in his place was appointed Christian Democrat Senator Giuseppe Medici.

With the fall of the Andreotti government, on 12 June 1973, and the appointment on 7 July of a new executive led by Mariano Rumor, Italian initiatives in the Middle East were reduced to

⁶³ Ibidem.

consultations of ordinary administration with the Arab countries with which Italy had privileged relations, also because of the changed international order, which saw the warring parties settle on absolutely irreconcilable positions. This aspect was emphasised by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger during a meeting held in the American capital between 16 and 17 July 1973 with the Italian Ambassador in Washington, Egidio Ortona, the Secretary General of the Farnesina, Roberto Gaja and the Director of Political Affairs of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Roberto Ducci:

In the Middle East [...] there has been an incredible number of exploratory talks in the last four years. People are saying that we should "squeeze" the Israelis, but this is academic. The two positions are completely irreconcilable. The two sides have to be led to a negotiable area and agree, to interpret it differently. If Israel enters the negotiations with the conviction that we will support it in any case, or if the Arabs decide to enter the negotiations with the conviction that Israel will soon leave, then the situation can only explode⁶⁴.

2.3 The Yom Kippur War and its fallout

Kissinger's words turned out to be prophetic, since it was precisely the Yom Kippur War, which began on 6 October 1973, that was to decree the failure of five years of diplomatic initiatives to resolve the Middle East crisis. The new Arab-Israeli conflict provoked a radical change in American foreign policy towards the region, with Henry Kissinger, who had meanwhile become Secretary of State, launching the formula of "triangular diplomacy"⁶⁵. The start of this new phase would mark a decisive turning point in the history of the Middle East, characterised by greater involvement by the United States and, at the same time, a further reduction in the already limited room for manoeuvre available to the United Nations, European countries and Italy.

The Yom Kippur War and the ensuing oil embargo caused a serious economic catastrophe in Italy. The government of Italy imposed harsh economic restrictions on its citizenry.

The first Italian reaction was in line with the European approach pursued by Moro in previous years. On 7 October, the Italian minister called for a rapid convening of the Council of

⁶⁴ NARA, NPMS, NSCI, HAK, OF,CF, EUR, b. 65, Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation: "Dr. Kissinger's Conversation with Italian Foreign Office Officials", Washington DC, 16 July 1973.

⁶⁵ Triangular diplomacy is a US foreign policy created by Henry Kissinger during the Vietnam War as a way to manage ties amongst the two competing Communist states. The policy was designed to use the ongoing conflict between the two Communist nations as a means of strengthening American hegemony and diplomatic interest, and it was closely linked to the corresponding policy of linkage.

Ministers of the eec countries so that the Nine could adopt a common position and examine together the economic and political stakes of the conflict⁶⁶. The Italian attitude to the crisis, from the beginning of the conflict, had been clearly influenced by Moro's desire to safeguard the excellent relations he had established with the Arab countries in the first years of his mandate, but also by economic motivations - linked to the fear of the interruption of energy supplies - and by internal political considerations. In this respect, it is necessary to take into account the profound changes in public opinion regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that had occurred in the previous years. In 1967, the majority of parties and public opinion had been in favour of the Israeli state, while subsequent events, and in particular the prolonged occupation of Arab territories in violation of UN resolutions, had gradually affected support for Israel by fostering a growing sympathy for the Palestinian cause. While the Communist Party found this development fruitful in order to continue its polemic against "American imperialism", a certain complacency for Arab demands was now common in society and even within the Christian Democracy (Calandri 2003)⁶⁷.

In any case, Italian efforts to formulate its traditional "active balance policy" (equidistanza) the Middle East conflict in a way that was most favourable to the Arabs could only lead to growing tension with the United States, in a context of incomprehension between the two sides of the Atlantic. Several meetings and talks between the partners show the incompatibility between the unconditional American support for Israel, expressed through military and diplomatic aid, and the attitude of Italian diplomacy. A first confrontation took place in Washington on 16 October between Italian Defence Minister Mario Tanassi and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger⁶⁸. Kissinger took advantage of the meeting to explain the reasons why the United States had come to the rescue of the Israelis once again. Washington's objective was above all to avoid giving the Soviet Union the impression that it could impose its influence in the Middle East without any obstacles; Moscow's arms supplies to Egypt and Syria constituted a threat to the stability of the region that had to be dealt with firmly. In relation to this strategy, all the Americans were asking of Italy and the other NATO Allies was "full understanding". Tanassi countered by pointing out that the Italian government much preferred a political solution to military interference by a foreign power. On this Kissinger remained rather evasive, saying only that a lasting political settlement of the conflict was also

⁶⁶Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), « L'Italia nella politica internazionale – annuario 1973 – '74 », Rome, 1973, p. 141.

⁶⁷ E. Calandri, *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana?*; A. Giovagnoli, S. Pons (dir.), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni '70 – vol. 3, Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2003, p. 365.

⁶⁸ ACS, archivio Moro, serie 6, file 163, telegramma da Washington (top secret), 16 ottobre 1973.

the long-term goal of the White House and that this could only be achieved by putting pressure on the parties to negotiate. Two days later, Italy's ambassador to Washington, Egidio Ortona, made Italy's reservations about US involvement in the conflict clear in a meeting with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Porter⁶⁹. Rome was convinced that a race for military supplies in the Middle East would end up benefiting the Soviets rather than ensuring regional stability. According to Ortona, the choice to militarily assist Tel Aviv had so far served no purpose except to prolong hostilities indefinitely. Porter, like the Secretary of State, believed that a cease-fire was essential, but he believed it was only possible if it was "acceptable to all parties". This meant, in short, that the Americans wanted to wait a few more days before imposing a diplomatic turn in the crisis so that the Israelis could make the most of the military setbacks taking place on the ground.

The challenges posed by the Middle East crisis, not only for the economy but also for Italian internal security, became even more evident after the terrorist attack at Rome's Fiumicino airport on 17 December 1973⁷⁰. On that day, a Palestinian commando, later disavowed even by the PLO, launched a bloody attack with phosphorus bombs against a plane of the American company Panam, killing 30 people, including four Italians. The terrorists managed to escape on another plane and find asylum in Kuwait, after murdering some of the passengers taken hostage; despite Italian insistence on the group's extradition, the Kuwaiti government only agreed to hand them over to the Palestinian authorities, who had undertaken to try them. If we add that, according to British sources, the terrorists had been directly financed by the government in Tripoli, we understand how the Fiumicino attack, relegated by some analysts to the level of a news item, in fact testified to the growing difficulties in relations between Rome and its Mediterranean neighbours and questioned Italian diplomacy on the effectiveness of efforts to improve these relations⁷¹. In mid-January, the visit to Rome of the Saudi Minister for Petroleum Resources, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, and the Algerian Minister of Industry and Energy, Belaid Abdessalem, offered an opportunity to discuss and clarify positions⁷². The two "oil ambassadors" had been appointed at the Algiers summit to tour Western countries and explain to European governments and the United States the political conditions for normalising relations between oil-consuming countries and producers.

⁶⁹ ACS, carte Moro, serie 6, file 163, telegramma da Washington (top secret), 18 ottobre 1973.

⁷⁰ A. Giuseppetti, S. Lordi, Fiumicino 17 dicembre 1973: la strage di Settembre Nero, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2010.

⁷¹ IAI, op. cit., p. 47.

⁷² ACS, archivio Moro, serie 6, file 163, telegramma partenza (segreto), 16 gennaio 1974.

Moro could therefore express to these two influential interlocutors his perplexity about the strategy adopted in Algiers and insist on the role played by Italy in the adoption of the Community declaration that had provoked strong Israeli protests. The two Arab envoys affirmed that they understood the Minister's point of view and assured him that "there were no political difficulties in bilateral relations"; moreover, the choice of the Arab producer countries to differentiate their trade policy did not imply a rigid plan and in the Italian case, the government in Rome was simply asked to make its position on the Middle East conflict, which was not sufficiently clear in the eyes of the Arab countries, more explicit even at the national level. Aldo Moro's important speech to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on 23 January, five days after the signing of a disengagement agreement on Sinai between Israelis and Egyptians, did indeed take into account his meeting with Yamani and Abdessalem and their request for "clarity"⁷³. After defending the work of Italian diplomacy from the beginning of the crisis in October and expressing his congratulations for the completion of an agreement on Sinai, obtained thanks to the "tireless, intelligent and inspired action" of Secretary of State Kissinger, the Italian Minister spoke words clearly aimed at satisfying the Arab demands. Moro reaffirmed Italy's support for the Euro-Arab dialogue process initiated in Copenhagen with a view to its genuine institutionalisation and hoped for the start of a new cooperation with the producer countries, capable of going beyond the strictly economic sphere to include the political, cultural and scientific fields. The most significant statements, however, concerned the situation in the Levant and the Palestinian question. In this respect, Moro stressed the importance of self-determination for the Arabs of Palestine "who are not looking for assistance, but for a homeland". The position against the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories was equally forceful:

"The need to leave the occupied territories derives directly from the illegitimacy of the occupation [...] evacuating these territories is the only condition for a peace to be imagined as the result of a political negotiation aimed at building Israel's security, now and forever, on the basis of international guarantees rather than military balances".

Moro's statements were both an immediate response to the visit of Yamani and Abdessalem and the fulfilment of a longer process of change in Italian foreign policy towards the Middle East, which had occurred in parallel with the transformations in public opinion starting from

⁷³ G. Di Capua (ed.), *Aldo Moro – l'Italia nell'evoluzione dei rapporti internazionali*, Roma, Ebe Edizioni, 1986, p. 436-438.

the Six Day War, and of which the Christian Democrat Minister had been one of the main authors. The prudence and gradualness with which this process had been carried out does not prevent us from noticing a striking contrast between the Italian position in 1967 and the declarations of January 1974. Obviously, this rapid rectification in favour of the Arabs was linked above all to fears of an energy shortage that could have caused a real paralysis of the national economy. Faced with such a serious threat, Italian diplomacy was called upon, at the end of 1973 and the beginning of 1974, to play on two different levels: on the one hand, multilateral European and Atlantic concertation, and on the other, a new "unilateral" offensive to strengthen relations with the Arab world, of which Moro's declarations in the Senate were only the beginning.

The tensions between Europe and the United States, which had characterised the management of the conflict and its immediate consequences during the first months of 1974, gave way to different views on the energy policy to adopt in the face of Arab pressure. The Washington Energy Conference, convened in February on the initiative of Kissinger, was marked by these oppositions and in particular by the counter-position between the Americans and the French. The Italian position was all the more delicate as Farnesina hoped to maintain a high level of European cooperation in this area without coming into direct conflict with American interests. Moro's speech in Washington on 11 February therefore reflected an effort to remain conciliatory: the Minister considered it "essential to strengthen cooperation between Europe and the United States, especially in research and development of new energy sources", but he still reaffirmed Italian support for the Euro-Arab dialogue project and also welcomed the French idea, of Algerian origin, of a world conference on raw materials, in order to include the less developed countries in the discussion⁷⁴. According to the report Moro sent to the main Italian embassies in the following days, the conference had been a half-success for the Americans, since Kissinger had persuaded most Western governments to engage in energy coordination, but without convincing them to suspend the dialogue with the Arabs. Behind the facade of European solidarity, Moro was also rather sceptical about the French position; Jobert's speech seemed to him "a reminiscence of the old Gaullism: if France wanted to be free to 'toast around' without renouncing the American nuclear umbrella, today it wants to be the only power that is friendly to Islam, while hoping to enjoy the joint action programme on energy that it claims to oppose"⁷⁵. In the end, Italian diplomacy remained attached to its principles of European solidarity; Moro gave a new demonstration of this on 9 March when,

⁷⁴ ACS, archivio Moro, serie 6, file 162, documento interno, 8 febbraio 1974.

⁷⁵ ACS, archivio Moro, serie 6, file 163, telegramma partenza (segreto), 9 marzo 1974.

during a brief meeting with the American ambassador in Rome, John Volpe, he assured him that the Community initiative could be harmonised without problems with the mediation carried out by the Americans in the Levant and with the initiatives taken following the Washington conference. Moro further rejected Volpe's accusation of weak Atlantic consultation on this issue, recalling that European intentions to engage in dialogue with Arab governments had been clear at least since late November 1973⁷⁶. Italy's action within multilateral arrangements was therefore severely limited by opposing Allied pressures, and this forced Farnesina to pursue a parallel unilateral policy to strengthen ties with Arab countries and especially with producers in the Gulf region. While Italy's diplomatic action in the Middle East and North Africa could rely on a solid tradition of political contacts at the highest level, relations with the Gulf countries, some of which had recently gained independence from the United Kingdom, were still rather weak or even non-existent. Saudi Arabia, which was undoubtedly the key player in the region, had developed a strong commercial relationship with Rome, mainly relating to oil supplies, which by 1972 had reached an estimated volume of over 300 billion. Political relations, on the other hand, were limited, although a visit by Minister Medici in February 1973, followed by a visit by King Faisal to Rome in June, had contributed to a first rapprochement between the two governments. The Yom Kippur crisis and Riyadh's leading role in Arab oil strategy provided a new basis for bilateral relations. An opportunity to resume the cooperation between the two countries, interrupted by the outbreak of the Middle East conflict, was provided by the visit to Italy of Saudi Foreign Minister Omar Saqqaf on 3-4 December 1973. During the meeting with the President of the Republic, Leone, Saqqaf affirmed that despite the "painful decisions" that the OPAEP⁷⁷ had had to adopt, "Saudi Arabia's friendship for Italy would never disappear" and that "a strong Europe was an essential condition for a strong and peaceful Middle East". He also promised, in response to Italian appeals, to promote Rome's cause at the next summit of Arab producers, with a view to a "particular strengthening of relations with Italy within the framework of the new relationship between Europe and Saudi Arabia". The January developments, with the visit to Rome of the "oil ambassadors" and Moro's speech to the Senate, were therefore part of this context of dialogue and opened the way to further progress. Moro's trip to the Middle East from 28 January to 3 February was an opportunity to

⁷⁶ ACS, archivio Moro, serie 6, file 164, telegramma partenza (segreto), 9 marzo 1974.

⁷⁷ On 9 January 1968, three of the then-most conservative Arab oil states – Kuwait, Libya, and Saudi Arabia – agreed at a conference in Beirut, Lebanon to found the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, aiming to separate the production and sale of oil from politics in the wake of the halfhearted 1967 oil embargo in response to the Six-Day War. Such use of the economic weapon of oil embargo in the struggle against Israel had been regularly proposed at Arab Petroleum Congresses, but it took the Six-Day War for the embargo to happen.

translate the proclaimed intentions into more concrete agreements. Moro visited Cairo, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh. Moro's last stops were in any case the most important. On 3 February, King Faisal and his closest advisors received Moro in an atmosphere of great cordiality to discuss the political aspects most relevant to the Middle East conflict; Moro found Faisal "in excellent physical and mental shape", but above all fully aware of the developments in European, and particularly Italian, positions regarding the situation in the Levant⁷⁸. Faisal agreed with Rome's point of view and believed that the conditions were ripe for strengthening the ties between Europe and the Arab world, of which Italy had been a virtuous example. At the summit of Arab oil-producing countries in Vienna on 14 March, a clear and positive response was given to the Italian diplomatic activism of recent months, with Italy placed alongside France, Britain, Belgium and Japan among the countries friendly to the Arab world and thus protected from commercial retaliation. The success of Moro's trip was also marked by rapid developments in the Italian-Saudi negotiations after the minister's visit. The ambassador in Riyadh Alberto Ramasso Valacca reported on 20 February that his talks with Oil Minister Yamani and the heads of the Saudi state-owned company Petronim had led to the signing of a draft agreement to supply eni with more than 30 million tonnes of crude oil in exchange for the construction of a refinery and the sale of a number of large oil tankers. Moro's trip thus marked a kind of "return to normality" for Italian energy policy after the upheavals caused by the war. Despite the difficulties of the preceding months, it also expressed a certain success of the Christian Democrat minister's efforts to ensure Italy's favourable relations with the Arab world and to safeguard the country's many interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East even in a period of deep crisis. This objective was at least partially achieved by Moro, thanks to a series of declarations and symbolic gestures, commitments within international organisations, where conflict among the Allies posed many obstacles, and above all through pragmatic "bilateral" diplomacy, focused on economic cooperation and assistance to the commercial penetration of the ENI.

2.4 The falling regimes and the interdependencies of Southern Europe

As the Arab-Israeli debacle took on a new balance, perpetuating tensions without ever reaching a long-term political solution, the Mediterranean would once again attract global attention in 1974. While in the first half of the 1970s attention had been focused on East-West

⁷⁸ ACS, archivio Moro, serie 6, file 163, telegramma da Gedda, 3 febbraio 1974.

détente, in 1974 the most worrying front in the European scenario concerned the countries of the southern area: Greece, Spain, Portugal. In these countries, a picture of generalised instability was emerging, unprecedented in its seriousness and spread. Southern Europe had until then occupied a largely secondary role in international balances, and although these countries were part of the western camp, their economic and political systems were much closer to countries like Turkey or Yugoslavia than to the rest of the continent. In all three countries, there were authoritarian governments: the regime of Antonio Salazar in Portugal, replaced after his death by the dauphin Marcelo Caetano, the Franco dictatorship in Spain, and finally the colonial regime in Greece.

At the beginning of 1974, all three countries went into turmoil. In Greece, the fall of the military regime paved the way for a transition that would bring democracy back to Athens with the election of the conservative (who up to that point was in exile in Paris) Karamanlis in November 1974 and the abolition of the monarchy in 1975. The problem of succession was felt more acutely in the Spanish regime: Franco was over 82 years old and struggled to contain the centrifugal thrusts of social tensions and internal dissent that had emerged thanks to a progressive, albeit slow and unbalanced, economic modernisation. But it was above all Portugal that attracted Washington's attention (as well as the rest of the Atlantic alliance) when the Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*) decreed the end of the Salazarist regime and opened a long and very troubled phase of transition to democracy that would last almost two years. On 11 March 1975 the situation in Portugal took a sharp turn for the worse: Antonio de Spínola and his supporters had attempted a military coup to reverse the course of the revolution, but the attempt had failed, providing the justification for a further shift to the left. The "hot summer" of 1975 saw a number of banks, insurance companies and industries seized as the new Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves, with declared pro-communist sympathies, implemented a land reform to abolish the latifundia and redistribute land to the peasants. Although Kissinger acknowledged Moscow's detached and moderate attitude, showing that the dialogue with the USSR was working, he also felt that this was not sufficient reassurance. A Portugal with Communists in government would have disastrous consequences for the very future of NATO, not only from a strategic point of view but especially, he noted, in psychological terms for the other member countries of the alliance⁷⁹:

Our problem is the impact on NATO of a revolutionary government in which the communists reserve some key role that allows them to pursue an essentially neutralist policy and use NATO, as they say

⁷⁹ J. Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, OUP USA, 2005, p. 400

publicly, to prevent us from doing anything. The impact on other European countries, that's the key thing⁸⁰.

In December 1975, the National Security Council sent the State Department and the White House a lengthy analysis document on the situation in southern Europe⁸¹. The NSC's task was to point out the problems and identify possible solutions, with the President and the Secretary of State choosing the best hypothesis from among these. As the analysts had to “define the type of role and intervention that the United States should adopt in southern Europe and the Mediterranean area”, they also had to consider the role of western Europe. "Should we promote," the drafters asked, "the development of closer political, economic and military relations between the southern European states and the rest of the western Europeans, even at the cost of paying some price in terms of political influence, interests and perhaps even in military terms?" And also:

Should we accept a diminished role for ourselves? [...] Or should we try to control events by making clear our determination to resist unfavourable trends, by strongly opposing any reduction in military rights, by rejecting partial participation in NATO and by excluding members with governments deemed incompatible with the nature of this alliance?

Faced with these questions, the NSSM concluded that “the growth of Western European influence” was a stabilising factor. Neither the European Community nor its members were in a position to “take over the role of the United States” but they could contribute to an orderly evolution of the area, through economic assistance and the political influence they, to varying degrees, possess. The analysts, therefore, suggested implementing "Euro-American coordination in policies towards Southern European countries", an important objective if influence was to be exercised most effectively⁸². Although placed in the context of southern Europe, the Italian case naturally presented markedly different characteristics compared to Greece, Spain and Portugal. In fact, while the latter had just emerged from full-fledged dictatorial regimes and were moving towards democratic transitions, not without obstacles,

⁸⁰ May 1, 1975. *Transcripts of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's Staff Meetings*. NARA, RG 59, Office of the Secretary of State, 1973-1977, box 7.

⁸¹ The request to open a wide-ranging discussion on NATO's “Southern Flank” had come from the White House several months earlier, in April 1975, when President Ford and Kissinger had requested a new National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM 222, entitled US and Allied Security in Southern Europe) to analyse the problems and possible solutions to the crisis on NATO's southern flank. *National Security Study Memorandum 222: US and Allied Security Policy in Southern Europe*, GFL, NSC Files, NSSM, 1974-1977, box 2, folder: NSSM 222).

⁸² December 15, 1975. *Paper Prepared in Response to NSSM 222: US and Allied Security Policy in Southern Europe*, in FRUS 1969-1976, vol. XXX, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, doc. 56.

Italy was a democratic, industrialised country, a founding member of all the major European and Western organisations: from the Council of Europe, through the Atlantic Alliance to the European Community. However, Italy seemed to waver in the eyes of many observers and many feared that its political system and its very international posture had been called into question by the apparently increasingly plausible possibility of the Communists entering government. As a result, even in the Italian case there was the difficult choice for the United States of whether to intervene unilaterally or try to exert joint influence with the major European countries.

3. The Historical Compromise: Italian domestic outlook

3.1 Italy between economic miracles and its uneven distribution

Italy had just emerged from one of the most turbulent periods in its young republican history. The economic and social climate, in many ways positive, was the result of the greatest transformation that Italian society had ever known. Impressive aid from the Allies through the so-called Marshall Plan and the liberalisation of trade, but above all the participation of a people determined to remake their country, were the basis of a rebirth with great successes and heavy costs. A society that was predominantly agricultural and partly underdeveloped (especially in comparison to some European colleagues of comparable demography) faced a complex, rapid and often contradictory development whose results configured what, with a certain emphasis, was called the "economic miracle"⁸³. Once the peasant culture within which fascism had germinated had been marginalised, the country grew with a strong and modern industrial vocation. The increase in productivity and the increased purchasing power of a

⁸³ The Italian economic miracle (also known as the economic boom) is a period in the history of Italy, between the 1950s and 1960s, belonging therefore to the second post-war period in Italy or to the first decades of the First Republic, characterised by strong economic growth and technological development after the initial phase of reconstruction. The economic system was running at full speed, national income was rising and people were refreshed by the increase in employment and consumption. The dark years after the Second World War, when the country was in tatters, had finally been forgotten. It is true that there were still many problems to be tackled, including the lack of public services, schools, hospitals and other civil infrastructure. But on the whole, a climate of optimism prevailed.

large part of the population favoured the expansion of consumption. An increasingly numerous set of products, until yesterday foreign to the average citizen's home, entered everyday life: the object-symbol of this household revolution became the household appliance, which brought with it different life habits, from leisure to food. But this epoch-making change did not equally involve all fringes of the population. In particular, state structures are unable to keep pace with such tumultuous change. The need and demand for stable and socially relevant goods, such as housing for all, the adaptation and development of school buildings, medical services and public transport, remain largely unmet. Unresolved issues that multiply and amplify each other, germinating among the fractures of a complex society, and which will soon take their toll. While the cities of the so-called industrial triangle (Milan, Turin and Genoa) were growing fast, reaching levels of prosperity unknown in the country, at least 1.5 million people are migrating from the southern areas to the development areas. Such a massive exodus is a sign of the absence of a national planning policy capable of preventing economic imbalances, social inequalities and cultural inequalities. Obviously, it is the weakest members of the community who pay the price. The rebirth of the country thus generates, paradoxically, a new category of poor who, aware of their marginalisation, express their protest in increasingly harsh forms. Around them, solidarity was mobilised not only by parties and trade unions, but also by intellectuals, students and the unemployed. The people excluded from change, who are concentrated above all in the "Meridione", are present throughout the country, whose non-homogenous growth accentuates the distance between two different communities. Italy lives in a democracy that has put down strong roots in society and yet is incapable, in its more conservative circles, of understanding the new that is emerging. The wave of protest gave rise to others: from trade union uprisings to political clashes, from battles for new working conditions to those for a different management of justice, health and education. These are impulses that accelerate the growth of a complex society, destined, within a few years, to express dramatic violence, rejected by the majority of citizens, but for which it will be necessary to find an origin, perhaps imprecise and distant. The great, and for some unfinished, bonfire of Sixty-Eight generated a strong subversive climate, which seized on trajectories often generated in foreign universities (in particular Berkeley in California and Nanterre in France) and brought new cultural and political references: Mao Tse-tung's "Little Red Book", which provoked and accompanied the great ideological and armed clash of the Chinese cultural revolution, was circulated in millions of copies and made the rounds of Italian universities. Maoism is for many a radical provocation.

Other myths were born, the Vietnamese myth of Ho Chi Minh, the Palestinian guerrilla warfare led by Yasser Arafat and that linked to Ernesto Che Guevara⁸⁴.

Student protests find fertile ground in real unease and hardships: universities are not equipped to cope with the new demands. First of all, there is a huge increase in enrolment and, moreover, there has been no change in the courses of study, teaching methods and regulations governing student participation in university life. On the other hand, the student movement is taking on an identity increasingly marked by a project of open, explicit struggle⁸⁵. This will lead to the occupation of a large number of universities. In a few months, the protest moved out of the lecture halls and into the streets. In the meantime, in the factories, the majorities who were not interested in politics, with which the Sixty-Eight had developed the first assonances, are increasingly flanked by minorities, instead, strongly politicized, determined to contest the meanings of a growth which has transformed the country, sensibly improving the general conditions of life, but which has not been able to involve the entire society.

If 1968 was the year of the students, 1969 was the year of the blue-collar workers. Between September and December 1969, the workers' question erupted with a force that neither employers nor trade unions had foreseen. The so-called "autunno caldo" began. In the background there was the almost simultaneous renewal of 32 collective labour agreements⁸⁶. More than five million workers in industry, agriculture, transport and other sectors were determined to make their demands heard. Discomfort and dissatisfaction, which have long been simmering in the folds of accelerated and convulsive development, are finally coming to light. Unprecedented and sensational events took place in the factories; dialectics and methods of trade union struggle emerged from below.

While America was still celebrating the inauguration of the new president Richard Nixon, Italy found itself facing yet another government crisis. Giovanni Leone's government resigned in November 1968, paving the way for a new government headed by Mariano Rumor. Despite the congenital instability, the only plausible majority remained the centre-left coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Republicans. It was in this context that contact between Rome and the Nixon administration first took place in February 1969, in an atmosphere of

⁸⁴ A. Mangano, A. Schina, *Le culture del Sessantotto, gli anni Sessanta, le riviste, il movimento*, Massari, 1989

⁸⁵ On 1 March 1968, in Rome, in the gardens of Valle Giulia, something sudden and very harsh happened: students and police forces started an unprecedented clash. In the end, hundreds of people were injured, 228 were arrested and 10 were detained. For the first time, the country is confronted with something imprecise, but strong, which declares itself against everything and everyone.

⁸⁶ Paolo Ferrero, *1969: quando gli operai hanno rovesciato il mondo - sull'attualità dell'autunno caldo*, Roma, Derive Approdi, 2019

great tension. In the prospectuses on Italy relating to the dossiers prepared by the National Security Council, a cautious and careful attitude prevailed. In particular, Henry Kissinger emphasised the importance of the visit to open up dialogue with the major Christian Democrat exponents, providing high-level reassurances for the European partners. It was also suggested that the meeting should not be handled as if Italy “were a power of inferior rank”⁸⁷, an argument on which Italy always showed itself to be congenitally susceptible. It is interesting to note that initially, the Italian scenario was not particularly tinged with dramatic tones, and indeed, as Kissinger himself confessed years later in his memoirs⁸⁸, the purpose of US visits to Italy was already achieved upon landing at Fiumicino. What was important was that the US showed that it took Italy seriously, providing tangible proof to public opinion, the press and the parties that Italian leaders were indeed being consulted on all the issues on the European agenda on a par with Berlin, Paris and London. The scenario depicted regarding domestic politics was “fairly stable”, although social tension was growing, particularly among the younger fringes of society such as students, and the issue of the influence of the Italian Communist Party obviously remained to be resolved. With this in mind, the watchword was to strengthen the political platform sponsored by Prime Minister Rumor, a notoriously difficult task given its precariousness, without however upsetting Saragat and Nenni. In spite of the extremely tense atmosphere of those days, when anti-Vietnam student mobilisations were pitted against the police who were struggling to contain the unrest spreading through the city (violent police charges and clashes led to dozens of injuries and even one death), the talks continued and Nixon and Saragat found themselves discussing the international situation as well as the internal Italian situation in private⁸⁹. The talks revealed a certain overlap on foreign issues, but the crux of the conversation was on domestic issues: Saragat, addressing Nixon in a confidential tone, described a situation that was anything but stable, in contradiction to what was predicted by the National Security Council's files, trying to anticipate what he saw as irreversible signs of strong changes on the horizon, in an attempt to make himself the most reliable and predictable link in Rome in the light of the Atlantic relationship.

⁸⁷ 13 February 1969, Talking Points to Italy, NARA, NPM, NSC Files, President Nixon's Trip to Europe-Italy, box 443. in L. Cominelli, *L'Italia Sotto Tutela, Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana degli anni Settanta*, Le Monnier, 2014.

⁸⁸ H. Kissinger, *The White House Years*, Simon & Schuster, 1979, p. 101,

⁸⁹ On the Anti-american sentiments brewing in Italy see, B. Zaccaria, V. Lomellini, *Decay and Catharsis: Perceptions of the United States in Italian Political Cultures Between the 1960s and 1970s*, in A. Varsori, B. Zaccaria, *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War: The Underrated Ally*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.

He debunked the myth of the PCI distancing itself from its PCUS sibling, painting a harshly critical picture of party members whose real goal remained: to overturn the Atlantic alliance from within. Thus, attempts to show themselves as a respectable party that adhered to the constitutional provisions was just fog that would mislead: the Italian communists remained loyal to the Moscow line and the secretary, Luigi Longo, was the vanguard of the Soviet fifth column in Italy. The condemnation of the results of limited sovereignty in Czechoslovakia was yet another instrumental attempt to gather favour with the Italian population by distancing themselves only apparently. What, however, according to Saragat, remained the main problem was the intrinsic difficulty of the parties (first and foremost the DC) in effectively opposing the PCI because of the presence of currents within the parties that should have been anti-Soviet sentinels and that instead winked favourably at an eventual entry. What Saragat began, Mariano Rumor finished in his personal conversation with Nixon at Palazzo Chigi⁹⁰. The Prime Minister hoped that the United States would seriously consider any drift of Italy within the framework of the Atlantic alliance, asking them to put in place countermeasures and to do "everything possible" to strengthen the system's champion parties in an anti-communist key. The Italian rulers did not allay the concerns of their American interlocutors, but rather amplified their doubts about the resilience of the system and, above all, asked the US for a greater commitment to helping the domestic democratic forces, which they considered to be on the edge of the knife. Here emerges a tendency that can be defined as structural on the part of the Italian leadership of those who had to talk to the American allies and at the same time manage Italian public governance, and therefore also called upon to break up the inter and intra-party competition: the tendency to inflate the dangers and resort to unscrupulous alarmist use of the country's political stability, exaggerating the communist threat and at the same time accrediting themselves as the only reliable interlocutors in a political scenario that was otherwise fragmented to the point of ungovernability⁹¹. It was precisely in those years, under the previous Democratic Johnson administration, that substantial cuts were made to the economic aid systematically provided to pro-American parties because of growing impatience within the National Security Council with this clandestine funding programme, and it is easy to imagine that the calls for attention made by Saragat and Rumor alluded not too implicitly to the resumption of these hidden funds.

⁹⁰ 28 February 1969, *Memorandum of Conversation: Nixon - Saragat*, NARA, NPM, NSC Files, Country files-Europe, Italy, box 694.

⁹¹ L. Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto Tutela*, cit., p. 80

Thus, the arrival of Nixon, a Republican of incontrovertible anti-communist faith, was framed, as emerges from these early exchanges, as an opportunity for a renewed commitment to the recovery of party funding and that at least some of the alarmism injected into considerations of domestic scenarios was motivated by such considerations. The initial aspirations of the Italian parties to see Nixon as a new, decisive, stabilising factor in Italy's fragmented politics evaporated when the first effects of détente, promoted at a macro level with Moscow, trickled into Italy, highlighting the demise of a conception of the Cold War as it had been known for at least the first two decades after the war. Thus, the very logics that had apparently made the foundations of the Italian political system unalterable and static began to waver, weakening the extremist dialectic of anti-communism and Atlanticism and consequently blowing on the crisis that was affecting the country's already precarious equilibrium, multiplying the internal fractures and external shocks. A first, strong signal of this change can be seen in the bottom-up growth of social movements, vanguards of unprecedented countercultures that found particularly fertile ground in the protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This conflict, first cultural and then translated into political clashes, broke down established patterns of belonging and loyalty that the young '68ers began to doubt and subject to new critical lenses. What was, for example, an anti-American posture affiliated to a membership of a local communist or Marxist party and that was perceived as synonymous with pro-Sovietism. Thus there was a harsh judgement against real socialism, based on an aversion to bureaucratisation as opposed to a democratic foundation from below, collective mobilisation, direct democracy, as well as an explicit condemnation of Soviet foreign policy. Even within the strategic electoral visions of the established parties there was a wake-up call for change. On the left, while the Socialist Party collected defeats on all fronts, the new secretary of the PCI, Enrico Berlinguer, carried out a courageous ideological and strategic renewal that he believed could have declined Italian communism into modern times. Thus the "double movement" was born, which, in the light of the strong Soviet repression of the Prague Spring and the launch of Ostpolitik, decided on a concomitant distancing from Moscow.

This split was notarised at the conference of communist parties convened in Moscow in June 1969, when the PCI stood firm in its condemnation of the repression in Prague, and for the first time such a forum refused to sign the concluding declaration outright, thereby asserting its right to dissent from the CPSU. However, despite some people's early fears and others' early hopes of a definitive break between the PCI and the CPSU, it soon became quite clear that there was no real desire on the part of either party to make the break. Over the course of

the following year, the armed normalisation of Czechoslovakia was also accepted by the PCI leadership, in the name of stark realism and the fear of compromising détente. The repression did not therefore generate a real split and the PCI continued to consider itself part of the socialist bloc, sticking to a line that the historian Silvio Pons has defined as “neither orthodoxy nor heresy”⁹².

Despite the reconciliation with the USSR, the invasion of Czechoslovakia buried any illusion of reformability of the socialist system and made the link with Moscow impossible to recompose as it had been known in the past, especially in the eyes of the younger generations: the introduction of democracy and consensus as the founding criteria of political action made the myth of the Soviet Union unsustainable and therefore unserviceable in the eyes of many Italian communists, who therefore perceived it as an inflexible dictatorship run by an oppressive bureaucratic system.

For Aldo Moro, who was Foreign Minister at the time, détente was a desirable prospect for the domestic political framework, since it made it possible to maintain the internal balance between the four coalition parties⁹³ and to advance the centre-left, the only formula capable of effectively governing Italy. In fact, in Moro's view, the activism of these young people and workers, who challenged and overcame the mediation of the parties, trade unions and institutions, required the DC to intensify dialogue with the left and the trade union world. The difficulty of finding a political balance could, in Moro's opinion, only be overcome by extending the collaboration to all the parties of the constitutional arc: what the Christian Democrat statesman increasingly proposed was the opening of a dialogue with the communists, who should have remained excluded from the government, but not from the parliamentary and political-social agreements.

The so-called “strategia dell'attenzione” (strategy of attention) constituted, in Moro's intentions, a new type of containment strategy which would limit the outcome of the social conflict and reaffirm the irreplaceability of the DC as guarantor and centre of gravity of the system. Although with very limited room for manoeuvre, due to its isolation and minority position within its own party, Moro's current introduced a more transformative version of détente into the Christian Democrats as well, grasping its destabilising internal implications, but also its potential with respect to the European panorama. Similarly to what was happening within the PCI, the intuition of a connection between the new international climate and the

⁹² S. Pons, *L'Italia e il PCI nella politica estera dell'URSS di Breznev*, “Studi storici. L'Italia repubblicana negli anni Settanta (Ottobre-Dicembre 2001)”, pp. 929-951

⁹³ C. Meneguzzi Rostagni, *La politica estera italiana e la distensione: una proposta di lettura* in F. Romero - A. Varsori, *Nazione, Interdipendenza, Integrazione*, cit. p. 356.

greater freedom of manoeuvre of the minor allies broadened the terms of comparison and made it possible to find analogies and correspondences in the reflections of other European political forces. The relations between East and West, the changing priorities of US foreign policy, the weakening (at least in terms of shared perception) of the Cold War, the different models of development, burst into public discourse and opened up a conflict between the visions more anchored to consolidated balances and those that saw in the transformations taking place the possibility of inaugurating innovative solutions, even at national level. However, what characterised the evolution of the Italian debate was that the clash between the various political lines was not resolved, as was the case in federal Germany, in the choice of a clear direction or the prevalence of one formula over another. Despite Berlinguer and Moro's proposals and this sort of "dialogue at a distance"⁹⁴ that was established between the two leaders, Italy lacked the punch of a European policy that could make détente the cornerstone of a new project both at home and abroad. And it is precisely in the attempt to understand these difficulties that the peculiar characteristics and limits of the Italian political system, as well as the weight of external constraints, come to the fore. Within the large Christian Democrat party, opposing solutions and exclusionary interpretations coexisted, alternating and clashing harshly. While a large part of the DC considered the relationship with the Americans and the defence of Atlanticism to be the cornerstone of its political action, it would not easily shift to positions that in any way implied a loosening of ties with the United States. For many Christian Democrats, the so-called "American card" remained a crucial source of internal legitimacy.

Aldo Moro's political proposal thus never became hegemonic in the party, but neither could it be definitively abandoned, due to the impossibility of conveying sufficient consensus on more conservative lines. The clash between Moro's positions and those that we could usefully summarise in Rumor's, did not result in the prevalence of one or the other. The two formulas simply coexisted, if not contaminated each other, giving rise to a "perverse interweaving"⁹⁵ that guaranteed the system's stability and the centrality of the Christian democracy, but also laid the foundations for the progressive debasement of public debate.

Finally, Moro and Berlinguer's political reflections suffered from a common limitation. From the point of view of the leadership of Moscow and Washington, détente was designed to constitute the most suitable framework for a "disciplining"⁹⁶ intervention, which would

⁹⁴ N. Tranfaglia, Parlamento, partiti e società civile nella crisi repubblicana, "Studi storici", n 4, 2001, p.830

⁹⁵ L. Nuti, *La carta americana nella politica estera italiana. Ovvero, il padrone più ricco e più lontano è sempre il migliore*, "Italianieuropei", n.2, 2003, p.136.

⁹⁶ M. Del Pero, *Kissinger e la politica estera americana*, Laterza, 2006, pp. 973-988

correct certain disintegrating attitudes (in the light of the need for compactness of the blocs) and which could, therefore, subsequently relaunch competition in its more traditional forms in other theatres of the world: only a single control of their areas of influence would, in fact, have guaranteed the two superpowers a freedom of manoeuvre considered essential. These distensive interpretations led the country to a convergence between the Communists and Christian Democrats, albeit in terms of an openness that did not envisage the formal entry of the PCI into the executive, but only a necessary collaboration to share responsibility for a difficult political (but also economic) season. Such a prospect never succeeded in winning a majority in the government coalition because the constraints of the Cold War had been central instruments of legitimation for a substantial part of the Italian ruling class for more than twenty years. The mere hypothesis of this rapprochement was enough in those years to turn the international spotlight on the Italian stage, since the Italian path to détente was proposed as a model on an open collision course with the intention of freezing and stabilising the European order implicit in the détente openings on the part of the two superpowers and in particular Rome's major ally, the United States.

The months following Nixon's visit to Europe saw a sudden rise in the level of alarm over the Italian political situation. At the top of the list of concerns was the debilitation of the greatest ally and representative of US interests in Italy, the DC, torn by growing internal conflict and by now clearly divided in two: on the one hand the right wing of Rumor, Emilio Taviani, Mario Scelba and Franco Restivo, on the other the left wing, more or less close to the figure of Moro and his loyalists: Tina Anselmi, Benigno Zaccagnini and Luigi Gui⁹⁷. To Washington's observers, for whom a rapprochement of the communists with the government forces remained unpalatable in any form, Aldo Moro's openings were all the more unwelcome because they risked converging with the PCI's attempts to increase its autonomy from Moscow and to rebuild its political legitimacy on a national basis. Such concerns were obviously not new to the US administration: the officials of the embassy in Rome, located in Via Veneto, as well as the intelligence services, had never ceased to closely monitor the Italian left and had been observing for years the evolution taking place in the largest western communist party with a mixture of concern and interest. The first element of the US strategy in Italy was careful monitoring of the PCI: articles in "L'Unità"⁹⁸, internal discussions,

⁹⁷ 17 April 1969. *National Intelligence Estimate: The Center-Left Experiment in Itali. Accomplishments, Shortcomings and Prospects*, DDRS.

⁹⁸ L'Unità was an Italian political newspaper, founded on 12 February 1924 by Antonio Gramsci, a historic Italian communist newspaper and newspaper of the PCI. It gradually embraced more moderate and reformist positions following the evolutions of the party of reference, moving progressively towards democratic-socialist, social-democratic and then social-liberal positions.

speeches by the leaders at congresses, everything was examined and reported from Via Veneto to try to understand to what extent the Italian communists wanted to use the dissent expressed towards the USSR to regain credibility at national level and accredit themselves as a left-wing interlocutor as an alternative to the socialists of the PSI. On the other hand, since the PCI's desire to drop the prejudices against its participation in the government was not surprising, it was necessary to monitor above all the resilience of the parties that had prevented this from happening in the past, in particular the Socialist Party. The constitution of a strong moderate and reformist left in Italy was at the heart of the American strategy of the previous decade (Kennedy and Johnson administrations), as demonstrated by the fact that the reunification of the PSI and PSDI had been widely supported by Washington itself. It did not escape the Americans, however, that the resilience of the centre-left coalition, already severely weakened by the results of the 1968 elections, was constantly called into question not only by internal party rivalry but also by the diminishing ability of the socialists' political proposals to take root, which were increasingly losing ground to the communists.

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Some of the talks that took place during the summer of 1969 seem to have definitively fuelled the climate of alarm surrounding Italian affairs. First of all, there were the representatives of the right wing of the constitutional arc who came to the embassy requesting support as they were extremists of Atlanticism. Giovanni Malagodi, secretary of the Liberal Party⁹⁹, in June 1969, for example, drew a rather dramatic picture of the political situation for the American officials, in which the judgement of some Christian Democrat leaders stood out, who were, according to him, about to start collaborating with the PCI. Malagodi not only openly accused Moro of plotting with the Communists, but also pointed to Amintore Fanfani's personal relations with some PCI senators as suspicious and even considered worthy of reporting a remark by the right-wing leader of the Christian Democrats, Mario Scelba, according to whom an agreement with the Communists was preferable to the introduction of divorce in Italy. Malagodi warned in strong terms and foreshadowed 'the destruction of the democratic parties and a division of power between the PCI and the DC', concluding that only 'the

⁹⁹The Italian Liberal Party (PLI) was an Italian political party, founded on a liberal, liberalist and secular approach to the State, which ideally represented the moderate tradition of the Risorgimento, heir to the Liberal Union, or also the Constitutional Liberal Party (or Historical Right), which had had Camillo Benso di Cavour as its greatest representative.

Americans can rely on the support of the Liberal Party'. This was in an explicit anti-communist sense but also in "opposition to any hypothesis of a military solution to the Italian crisis"¹⁰⁰. Not only did he paint a scenario that was substantially detrimental to American interests, taking for granted the inevitability of a PCI-DC convergence, but he went so far as to recognise the concrete possibility of a military coup, although he avoided going into the details of the hypothesis of a possible authoritarian drift.

In August, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, who was one of Henry Kissinger's closest collaborators at the NSC, also reported that two anonymous Italians had handed Senator George Murphy a document calling for "American action to support anti-communist forces in Italy". The same document hoped that the US could carry out "a crusade for moral rearmament against communism [...] and prevent a communist takeover in Italy"¹⁰¹.

The dossiers on these Italian lobbying activities in an anti-communist sense began to multiply, invading the State Department from all sides (as evidenced also by Senator Murphy's files) and fuelling doubts about the stability of the already precarious Italian situation. Kissinger informed Nixon about the various activities, and in one of the telegrams there is direct testimony of how the National Security Advisor intended to behave in the face of such pressure and repeated warnings:

"There is some danger, however — which has been underlined by several private Italian visitors to Washington — that over the next two to three years the Italian Communists may work their way into the government, perhaps in a new Popular Front. Some argue that such a development would be facilitated by the current withdrawal of the Vatican from its former anti-Communist stance in Italian politics.

While this danger can be overstated, I think it would be prudent for us to look into the contingency, and I am asking Elliot Richardson to form an ad hoc group with NSC Staff participation to study the implications for US policy of possible Communist entry of the Italian Government"¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ 25 June 1969, *Memorandum of Conversation: Malagodi-DiSciullo-Stout. The Communist Danger in Italy*, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, box 2236.

¹⁰¹ 14 August 1969, *Memorandum for Mr. Kissinger from Helmut Sonnenfeldt: Material on Italy Forwarded by Senator Murphy*. NARA, NPM, CO 72, box 42.

¹⁰² Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969–1972, eds. James E. Miller, Laurie Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 184. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v41/d184>

The most alarmist predictions were therefore discarded: the danger of the Communists entering the government was more objectively fixed in a time frame of “at least two or three years”. In order not to be caught unprepared, prudence recommended, however, that the question be investigated further. It was therefore necessary to carry out this wide-ranging investigation, to be conducted discreetly, which should deal with the following questions: (1) the likelihood of an eventual entry of the Communists into the Italian government, (2) the spectrum of political options and actions that the United States might take to prevent such an eventuality (3) the possible consequences of Communist entry on Italian foreign policy, on Italian participation in NATO and on Rome-Moscow relations. The first act of Kissinger's direct interest in Italian affairs was to entrust the National Security Council with the task of conducting this vast investigation.

The results are still classified, but it is possible to draw some conclusions from a summary memorandum of January 1970 by Martin J. Hillebrand, Head of the State Department for European Affairs, sent to Kissinger himself. According to the document, the entry of Italian Communists into government was considered unlikely "at least within the next two or three years". The general situation, however, presented “inherent dangers of social unrest and political intrigue” that should not be underestimated. The working group also set out to identify “actions that the United States could take to reduce the possibility of the PCI entering the Italian government and help prevent such participation in the near future”, which were summarised as follows:

- “(1). Encourage visits to the US by Italian politicians, including the rescheduling of a visit by Prime Minister Rumor (if he remains in office), or his successor.
- (2). Expand our international programme of Italian visitors (greatly reduced in recent years).
- (3). Advise and assist Italy's efforts to modernise its education system.
- (4). Expand contacts and support for Italian trade unions.
- (5). Emphasise the importance of Italian contributions to the international scene.
- (6). Promote more frequent consultations with the Italians (as we do with the British, French and Germans) on a variety of international issues, emphasising the fact that we consider the Italians to be first-rate allies.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ 22 January 1970, Memorandum for Henry Kissinger, NARA, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973, box 2394.

Although these proposals could not constitute “an exhaustive programme of action”, they represented an attempt to find guidelines, “strengths in our attitude towards Italy for the coming months and years”:

The Italian government parties remain essentially anti-communist. To the extent that we succeed in strengthening their self-confidence and their ability to implement the necessary reforms, we will reduce the possibility of increasing pressure for the communists to help find solutions to Italy's problems. In particular circumstances, minor US interests, such as trade or aviation, will have to be sacrificed for those of greater importance¹⁰⁴.

It emerges with some clarity that, faced with a situation considered problematic, the solutions indicated were 'rather limited in substance and marginal in their potential effects', as Hillenbrand himself admitted when passing them on to Kissinger. It is not improbable, therefore, that some exponents of the United States government began to wonder whether something more incisive could be thought of to flank a useful, but perhaps insufficient, policy of intensification of trade and diplomatic relations. This analysis indicates not only the willingness of the Nixon-Kissinger duo to take a direct interest, but also that the rapprochement of the PCI with the government had by early 1970 become the central issue around which Washington's concerns and strategies revolved.

According to the historian Mario del Pero, the late 1960s saw a renewed interest in Italy on the part of the United States, similar to the early years of the Cold War when Italy's “symbolic importance”¹⁰⁵, even before its strategic importance, had placed it at the centre of Washington's attention and its foreign policy. The timing, in fact, did not contradict one of the constants of Italian-American relations, according to which Italy acquired importance in the eyes of the United States only when it constituted a problem¹⁰⁶. The reasons for this renewed attention were to be found in the growing instability of the political system, which at best foreshadowed a rapprochement of the Italian communists to the government area, and at worst even the exit of Italy from the Atlantic position. As was the case twenty-five years earlier, Italy's centrality stemmed from its geopolitical location, which gave it crucial importance as a nation firmly embedded both in the European context and in the geostrategic

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁵ M. Del Pero, *L'Italia e gli Stati Uniti: un legame rinnovato?*, in F. Romero, A. Varsori, *Nazione, interdipendenza, integrazione*, cit., p. 302

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

balances in the Mediterranean. A persistently passive dimension, albeit set in the keystone between East and West and North and South. By the end of the 1960s, both of these axes had become increasingly uncertain in the systemic balances, just as the United States was experiencing a decline in its hegemonic primacy. Italy's resilience thus ended up assuming crucial importance, making it the object of continuous monitoring and substantial interventions.

In the European context, what aggravated the risk of a communist drift was the general precariousness of Western Europe as a whole. Concerns about the instability of our country were therefore exacerbated by the awareness that Italy could have represented a possible shore in the European context or, on the contrary, an element of further destabilisation. The North-South axis, on the other hand, sanctioned this renewed interest in stabilising the Italian political system in order to contain the growing tensions in the Mediterranean basin, which the Nixon administration was focusing on at the time as an area of fundamental interest for national security.

Kissinger's approach to Italy had both elements of continuity with the past and discontinuity. In the first case, for example, the fear remained that Italy, conditioned by the communists, could constitute the weak link in the western chain, in a sort of Mediterranean re-edition of the domino theory. It was a classic idea implanted in the collective imagination of the United States ("the soft underbelly"), reiterated also by the same Italian interlocutors with obvious instrumental purposes, whenever the need emerged to request a more incisive intervention by the Americans. Elements of continuity coexisted with those of rupture with the past. In the case of Italy, this meant a progressive differentiation between Kissinger and Secretary of State Rogers, who remained more attached to the traditional readings of the Italian case, in the judgements expressed on the Italian political crisis, in particular on its causes, and consequently on the political line to adopt to try to resolve it.

While Rogers denounced the failure of reformism but put the blame on an Italian ruling class that was substantially incapable, when not blatantly corrupt or driven by personalistic ambitions, Kissinger was of an entirely different opinion. As he repeated several times in his memoirs, the responsibility for the Italian crisis was not to be found in the failed reformism, but in the very idea that including the reformist left in the government could have a stabilising effect in itself. The opening to the socialists was therefore judged as an error, indeed the most serious error made by American policy towards Italy in the entire post-war period. The final outcome of the entry of the Socialists into the government coalition had in fact turned out to

be, even after ten years diametrically opposed to what had been hoped for. The rejection of the theory according to which the Italian anomaly could be corrected with an energetic policy of modernisation stemmed from Kissinger's foreignness to the idea of national building as it had been formalised by US liberal thought. Based on a progressive and deterministic reading of history, the classic theory of national building outlined a clearly definable and representable economic, social and political progression, according to which the activation of processes of economic growth would translate into a modernisation of the political system¹⁰⁷. Since countries with weak economies and societies could easily turn towards USSR-sponsored socialism, the United States would have to assist, support and possibly guide the process through development policies. The success of communism in countries not yet fully developed was in fact nothing more than a degeneration of legitimate social and economic demands. In post-war Italy, the strength of communism was therefore, from this perspective, a consequence, in many ways inevitable, of a backward economic system and had to be countered with a constructive and reformist response¹⁰⁸.

3.2 Political violence begins, the beginning of the Years of Lead

But the 1960s were destined to end in violence in Italy. 12 December 1969 fell on a Friday. The headquarters of the *Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura* (National Bank of Agriculture), in Piazza Fontana, is filled with customers from the provinces. It is 4.37 p.m. when an explosion rips through the central hall, detonating seven kilos of TNT. The toll was 16 dead and 87 injured. The same afternoon, three more bombs exploded in Rome, one in the subway of the *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* (National Bank of Work), two on the *Altare della Patria*: 16 people were injured. A fifth bomb, contained in a bag, was found unexploded in Milan, in the premises of the *Banca Commerciale* in Piazza della Scala.

“Italy is shocked over the bombings in Milan and Rome which have killed 14 and injured 107 (no Americans). All government leaders have issued strong denunciatory statements and the Minister of the Interior has promised swift action. There are no solid facts on who is responsible, though the official speculation is that the ultra-left (the Maoisti and the anarchists) are to blame. No one has connected the incidents with labor strife. Police are rounding up the extremists of both the ultra-left

¹⁰⁷ W.W. Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth*, Norton, New York, 1952.

¹⁰⁸ K.C. Pearce, *Rostow, Kennedy, and the Rhetoric of Foreign Aid*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 2001.

and right who have terrorist backgrounds. All political meetings have been banned, including a neo-fascist meeting which had been previously scheduled for Sunday.

There is no evidence at this time that these events will lead to an immediate change in the government, which is seen to be acting forcefully. The eventual impact on the Italian political scene is unclear¹⁰⁹.

This was Kissinger's comment in a memorandum to President Nixon on the terrorist attacks in Italy. There is no doubt, in fact, that the Piazza Fontana massacre represented a truly traumatic and unexpected event for the Italians. A massacre that was destined to open one of the most controversial and dramatic pages of post-war Italian history.

Some days before the massacre, on the 6 of December, there was a succession of controversial rumours published by the British outlet *The Observer*, starting with a dossier of intelligence documents taken from the Greek colonels' regime that saw on the horizon the probing, by a segment of the governing parties (presumably the DC) and senior American officials, of a coup d'état in Italy. According to columnist Leslie Finer, this group was plotting “[...] a military coup with the encouragement and support of the Greek government and its prime minister, former colonel Giorgio Papadopoulos”¹¹⁰.

To add fuel to the fire on the coup hypothesis, on 14 December 1969¹¹¹, and therefore only two days after the attack, the newspaper published a correspondence from Rome accusing Saragat directly of a “strategy of tension”. In this way, the term was immediately enshrined in the common consciousness as the undeclared objective of an inscrutable section of the state apparatus, which, with the more or less explicit support of the United States, was plotting to disable a democratic order reputed to be incapable of dealing with the backlash from the communist threat. Not only did this term mark the subsequent historiography and political debate, but it would graft the idea of a superior political direction that by sufficiently frightening the population, the latter would abandon the democratic platform with a counter-value of a “strong government” capable of eradicating the supposedly left-wing terrorist threat.

Over time, some of these suspicions proved to be well-founded, at least those that identified this connection between extreme right-wing subversive groups and so-called 'deviant' sectors

¹⁰⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969–1972, eds. James E. Miller, Laurie Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 186. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v41/d186>

¹¹⁰ L. Finer, *Greek Premier Plots Army Coup in Italy*, “*The Observer*”, 6 December 1969.

¹¹¹ L. Finer, *480 Held in Terrorist Bomb Hunt. Italy: Fear of Revolt Returns*, “*The Observer*”, 14 December 1969.

of the state as the cause of the massacres. The same failure to ascertain responsibility, it would be painstakingly demonstrated in subsequent years, was born from the almost immediate decision to conceal the evidence available from the Italian secret services and the Carabinieri, which clearly traced the features of the famous “black trail”. The institutional cover-up enjoyed by most of those responsible meant that the apparatus itself systematically covered up the investigations in order to shift the blame onto left-wing groups. On the one hand, the many heavy-handed deception activities have succeeded in preventing the ascertainment of criminal responsibility, but it now seems historiographically established that the Piazza Fontana massacre was the first operation engineered by this perverse mix of state and fascist groups to criminalise dissent and encourage stabilisation with the above-mentioned call for strong government. The fact that the same massacre was followed by numerous similar acts in terms of methods, people and circumstances makes it very plausible that there was an effective collaboration between black subversion and state figures for the installation of a right-wing authoritarian regime on the Greek model.

As for the hypothesis raised by the Observer, i.e. the possibility of US support for the subversive design, it is difficult to investigate. In the present state of documentation, however, there is nothing to suggest that the United States had actively decided to favour such a drastic strategy, and above all, one with uncertain results. The idea of a reactionary coup constituted for the Americans an extremely risky eventuality and difficult to manage, both for the risks connected to the presence of the largest and most rooted communist party in the West, and for the repercussions in political terms and on world public opinion. All the indications were that the forces in the field had neither the military nor the political strength to withstand the foreseeable reaction of the left, which would obviously have formed a united front in the face of a coup d'état, making the hypothesis of a bloody civil war with an unintuitive conclusion highly probable. The difficulties that support for the Greek colonels' regime was causing the American government also led to the prediction that an anti-democratic turn of events in Rome would be very difficult to defend internationally, and above all would carry an intolerable risk of a split in NATO. Notwithstanding the still significant presence of totally or partially desecretised documents, it seems quite improbable that such a complex decision did not leave the slightest trace in the US archives. On the contrary, there is a certain probability that those who foresaw this subversive change, hoped for sympathetic, if not logistic, support from certain sectors of the American intelligence and political-diplomatic world, and above all, on the possibility of receiving, when the "games were done", the solidarity of a US Government always less interested in defending the Italian institutions and always more

inclined to support a freezing of the political situation, even at the cost of renouncing the democratic platform: an awareness that was an extremely important factor in coagulating men and resources in this diversionary design.

3.3 The attempted coup d'état: *Il Golpe Borghese*

A few days after the resignation of the government in August 1970, increasingly insistent rumours began to reach the US Embassy about an alleged coup d'état project being prepared by the apparatus close to Valerio Junio Borghese, now close to extreme right-wing groups such as *Avanguardia Nazionale* and *Ordine Nuovo*.

"An important American businessman", Martin proceeded in a telegram¹¹², had been approached by an Italian acquaintance who had informed him of a planned coup d'état for the first half of August: a coup that would be supported by segments of the military apparatus and Confindustria. The same businessman was given the task of ascertaining whether the Americans were willing to recognise such a regime once it came to power, and whether they were interested in further contacts. At this point the briefing became more like a spy story. "The businessman" is then given a briefcase-recorder and meets another of the conspirators in the car. From the conversation, which is recorded, a fairly complete picture of the project emerges:

- (1) The organisation involved is called the National Front
- (2) The leader is Valerio Junio Borghese
- (3) Mainly retired military personnel are involved, presumably with contacts in Italian society (industrialists, unions, active military personnel), not linked to any political party; it is not a monarchic organization and has a paramilitary structure
- (4) Nationalistic, anti-communist and pro-American motivations
- (5) There were organisational meetings throughout Italy with the intention of plotting a coup d'état that would be assisted by the armed forces, but once installed the military would be subordinate to civilian authorities. Ten to fifteen days from now are estimated to be necessary to carry out the coup.
- (6) The group claims to have had contact with the CIA in the past, who would only reply "no comment" to their plans.

¹¹² 7 August 1970, *Telegram from AmEmbassy Rome to SecState*, NARA, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-1973, box 2384.

(7) They want the US government to be informed and recognise the group once it is installed in power. They do not ask for specific help and their only request is that their plans be kept secret and undetected.

(8) The Italians state that a report on the situation and a programme of action were passed to a general accompanying President Nixon in Rome (General Walters) but that there had been 'no reaction'.

(9) It was specifically stated that operations would be set up with or without US support.¹¹³

In view of the urgency, Ambassador Martin instructed the State Department to distance itself immediately from Prince Borghese, stating that the United States would not consider it appropriate to resort to force to stabilise the situation. The State Department's reply fully agreed with the Ambassador's choice and the response to be given to Borghese:

We remain as sceptical as you about the possibility of a coup this week. However, your information correctly indicates that there are groups in Italy ready to take irresponsible action, with potentially disastrous results¹¹⁴.

From the exchange of letters with Washington, the embassy's clear opposition to a coup d'état emerges, obviously not by virtue of any sincere concern for Italy's fragile democracy, and therefore out of ideological proximity, but out of pragmatism: the intuition was that a coup d'état was considered of such extreme variability in the Mediterranean neighbourhood as to be intolerable. There were too many variables and too many questions, not to mention the fact that although the forces of the apparatus could appear to be impossible to ignore, there would certainly have been the emergence of an entity of comparable dimensions but of opposite signs, with the result that all the structures in the middle would have been arranged according to the extemporaneous circumstances of the moment and leaving a serious unknown factor as to the outcome of an eventual uprising in an authoritarian direction. Martin underlined:

If unsuccessfully attempted, the coup would probably cause a major movement to the left in the political spectrum. If unsuccessful, however, such a government could not be maintained without violent opposition and the consequent need for massive repression. Both of these outcomes would seriously weaken the structure of the Alliance with unpredictable repercussions on the balance in the Mediterranean and on our initiatives in the Middle East, and would probably endanger the success of

¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969–1972, eds. James E. Miller, Laurie Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 196.. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v41/d196>

the SALT dialogue. The current domestic political difficulties over the regimes in Spain and Greece would be magnified¹¹⁵.

In spite of the fact that the United States was not involved in the coup hypothesis, Washington did not consider such an upheaval in military circles to be necessarily negative, but on the contrary, it broadened the anti-communist front and was a further instrument of pressure on the Christian Democrats. The path chosen by the Americans, as emerges from the correspondence of May 1970, was to considerably increase the volume of covert financing to the DC by clandestine means, in order to match what in the US perception, fomented by the interlocution with the Italian leadership, was the solidity of the emoluments paid by the PCUS to the PCI. In particular:

[...] The Communist Party is well financed. Saragat told me that the Communists had available about 8 million dollars from within Italy including contributions from such enlightened industrialists as Agnelli, and with an additional 30 million dollars coming through various devices from the Soviet Union. Rumor has quoted figures slightly under these which are more in accord with [less than 1 line not declassified] estimates of overall Communist Party income. This is a hefty figure and beyond the ability of the non-Communist parties to match, particularly since we have eliminated our subsidies to these parties¹¹⁶.

Subsequently, in a Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Hillenbrand, to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Johnson:

Italy: Ambassador Martin Recommends providing [less than 1 line not declassified] to assist moderate Leadership and strengthen Organization of [less than 1 line not declassified] beginning with Regional and Administrative Elections on June 7, 1970.

The Government of Italy is in serious disarray. The Center-Left Coalition has not worked as its sponsors had hoped. Very few of the badly needed reforms have been accomplished. There is very little chance for the survival of a Center-Left Government because the doctrinaire compulsions and rigidities of the Socialist Left will continue to paralyze any coherent program. [6½ lines not declassified] plans to use the regional elections on June 7 to obtain the election of local [less than 1 line not declassified] candidates who are Centrist and will strengthen the Center. These locally-elected officials will elect the Central Committee and Directorate which, [less than 1 line not declassified]

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁶ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969–1972, eds. James E. Miller, Laurie Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 192. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v41/d192>

hopes, will enable the party to go into the 1973 elections with modernized machinery and updated techniques. Since 1948 United States covert operations in Italy have been designed to strengthen pro-western democratic political and private organizations willing and able to compete with communist organizations and to contribute to the strength of democratic institutions. Over the 20 years from 1948 to 1968 the United States provided nearly [less than 1 line not declassified] in support of political parties, labor unions and various political action programs. [1 line not declassified] The program of covert assistance was phased out entirely in 1968. Since then Italian political leaders concerned have come to realize that annual grants-in-aid cannot be expected from the USG. [1 line not declassified] When American assistance was provided in the past the object was to strengthen the non-communist parties; [7 lines not declassified]¹¹⁷.

In December 1970, in the night between the 7th and 8th, segments of the army close to Borghese, made up of battalions of the forest rangers and some former paratroopers, actually attempted to occupy the Ministry of the Interior, only to withdraw after a mysterious telephone call. Notwithstanding the fact that the sequence of events has never been fully clarified by the magistracy or by historiography, the majority of the latter agrees in affirming the very low possibility of success of the operation, in which many of the National Front, Ordine Nuovo and Avanguardia Nazionale, as well as army men, participated. Nevertheless, once again, consistent evidence emerges of support and connivance within the State and close links between the extreme Right, parts of the services and the military leadership. In fact, the US documents confirm that the Italian authorities had been well informed of the movements of Borghese's group for at least four months. Suddenly, and for reasons that remain substantially obscure, the operation was stopped halfway through, leaving barely enough time for the coup plotters to track down the truck with the weapons taken from the Ministry of the Interior and return them to their places.

Following the resignation of the third Rumor government (28 March - 6 August 1970), the government of Emilio Colombo was inaugurated with a four-party platform formed by the DC, PSI, Republican Party and United Socialist Party. Despite the initial appreciation of the American establishment, in particular Kissinger, many in Washington were convinced that an irreparable process of slippage towards the Communist government had been set in motion. Crucially contributing to this conviction was the election on 4 September 1970 of Salvador Allende, the well-known social democrat of Unidad Popular, in Chile. Not only did this event

¹¹⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969–1972, eds. James E. Miller, Laurie Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 193. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v41/d192>

come to general attention, but it garnered enormous support from the left fringes of the western world. The latter, in particular, became progressively disenchanted with Cuba's experience in the Caribbean, judged as too authoritarian and not replicable in the peninsula. According to many left-wing intellectuals and politicians, the Chilean party system, with its mass parties reflecting the Italian structure, was far more desirable and integrable.

But while within the American establishment the Nixon-Kissinger tandem constantly clashed against the State Department network (of the moderate Rogers), with the latter was urging not to apply too rigid interpretative schemes and not to forget that the DC, despite Moro's openness, was not at all inclined to allow the Communists to enter the government, Kissinger's line prevailed. The history of such interventions is necessarily a classified history, so it is difficult to reconstruct an intact history. But it is possible to collect several fragments that have emerged over time (secondary sources) that outline a coherent narrative about the famous covert actions taken against Italy in those years. The most reliable is certainly the report drawn up by the Pike Committee, one of the three commissions of enquiry set up in the mid-1970s to shed light on the work of the intelligence structures and federal agencies of the United States: the Church Committee, the Rockefeller and finally the Pike. Established respectively by the Senate, presidential appointment and finally by the Congress House of Representatives.

Thanks to the Pike report, we know that Kissinger asked the Secret Service, unbeknownst to Rogers, to run an \$11.8 million programme. The idea was to use this money as a show of solidarity with the DC and to try to soften internal dissension within the Christian Democrat party, while strengthening the right-wing parties. But once the approval of the plan had been obtained from Committee 40, the US Government body responsible for examining and authorizing covert actions, Kissinger decided, amidst the protests of the CIA, to relieve the intelligence services and entrust the entire management to Ambassador Graham Martin. The way in which the operation was conducted reflected the style of the administration by raising contempt for bureaucracy and a greater centralisation of decisions and executions in the hands of the central government. Finally, the Pike report also reveals the amount of funding as well as its recipients:

A large party received 3.4 million dollars; an organisation created and supported by the CIA 3.4; other organisations and parties 1.3 million. Important sums were also given to several parliamentarians [...].

Of a total sum of 11.8 million approved, only 9 million were actually spent. The rest was set aside for the future¹¹⁸.

In the meantime, the issue of the presidency of the Republic took centre stage in Italy: Amintore Fanfani, now siding with the centre-right, struggled to get the Christian Democrats to officially nominate him, but failed to pass the threshold to be elected. The winner was Giovanni Leone, who was elected by 518 votes out of 1008. The intervention of Giorgio Almirante's Movimento Sociale Italia, an extreme right-wing party, was decisive in reaching the quorum. Martin's warm comments show a genuine enthusiasm for the capitulation of the centre-left:

The election of a new president without the help of the socialists and communists and despite the Christian Democrat left's attempt to oppose it will have the effect of halting the drift to the left that has been a constant feature of Italian politics in recent times, and may even trigger an opposite process¹¹⁹.

The election of President Leone was tangible proof at the time that clandestine financial support was indeed the right instrument to empower and bring out the components of society and politics that wanted a return to order and centrism. The positive effects were further confirmed in the administrative elections of June 1971, which marked an overall advance of 5% for Almirante's MSI, votes snatched from those Christian Democrats who were suffering the effects of Almirante's extreme right-wing competition and a decisive shift to the right of the electorate.

However, Colombo's government suffered a setback in 1972, when an intra-governmental dispute led to the fall of the government. Faced with a new political crisis, the new President Leone, for the first time since the post-war period, opted for the early dissolution of the Chambers one year before the elections. Since there was still a centre-left majority to entrust a government to, Leone's decision was by no means inevitable, but the result of a precise political choice, confirming that Martin's judgement on the crucial importance of the Quirinale had been well-founded. The electoral campaign was conducted in an extremely tense climate, due to the resurgence of certain extremist fringes, both red and black. Clashes in the streets quickly turned into full-scale attacks with explosives on the offices and rallies of their opponents.

¹¹⁸ CIA, *The Pike Report*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1977 cit. 194-195.

¹¹⁹ 24 December 1971, Memorandum for Dr Kissinger, DDRS.

In this process of "brutalisation of the political struggle"¹²⁰ the neo-fascist offices were systematically attacked and the dynamic culminated in the fire set against a local secretary in Rome, in which his two sons were killed. There was no lack of attacks of an opposite colour, such as the one at Peteano, in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, where five carabinieri were killed in an explosive ambush. In addition, the terrorism of the Red Brigades made an appearance, when an executive of Sit Siemens was kidnapped and photographed with a sign around his neck and then released.

The elections were seen by Washington as a key opportunity to test the country's pulse and assess the effectiveness of the funding to vaccinate Italian politics from communist inclusion. The results recorded were widely regarded as a success. On the one hand, in fact, the DC's electoral results, which stood at 38.7%, certified once again its centrality in Italian political life. Almirante's party, which was included in the electoral list together with the monarchists of the Destra Nazionale (National Right), had arrived at a consistent 8.7% (although far from the 15% predicted by the newspapers of the time). What was considered a well-struck blow was the "complete disintegration of the PSIUP"¹²¹, and the failure of the extreme left to enter parliament by dispersing millions of votes. The defeat was also clear for the PSDI, which stood at 5.1%; while the PSI lost slightly fewer votes but settled at a very modest 9.6%.

In reality, however, the posture of the PCI recorded a certain solidity if not a progressive increase in the electorate, at the expense of a general strengthening of the conservative components of the political spectrum the Communists did not interrupt their electoral ascent, rising from 26.9% to 27.1%. The political line of Berlinguer, who was elected secretary in March, confirmed itself as an acclaimed proposal and able to gather a lot of consensus in the party structure, but also allowed a glimpse of the possibility of a concrete approach to the government area. Ambassador Martin was not unaware of this mutation in the Party, and Berlinguer's new leadership relaunched a posture seen as a 'quantum leap' from the 1969 congress. The Italian Communist Party was now aiming to enter government by conventional means. Notwithstanding the fact that the electoral results met with a difference of opinion between the State Department and the personalities close to Kissinger (and therefore Martin), when the DC gave birth to a centrist government (thus, re-proposing the 50s centrist formula albeit with new semblances), excluding the possibility of the centre-left, with the inclusion of social democrats, republicans and liberals the satisfaction in Washington was palpable. In

¹²⁰ G. Panvini, *Ordine nero, guerriglia rossa*, cit., pp. 264-265

¹²¹ 11 May 1972, *Telegram from AmEmbassy Rome to SecState: Elections Results - The PCI and the Far Left*, NARA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973.

addition, the government was headed by the very loyal Andreotti, who enjoyed a certain sympathy among many key members of the Nixon administration.

But what was perceived as an uplifting return to centrism did not give full clarity to the weakness of the new government's political proposal. The political and programmatic vacuum left by the centre-left was, in other words, replaced only by a generic need to return to the reassuring centrist formula, and thus left unresolved the questions that had convinced various areas of the country of the need for an enlargement of the governmental ranks. The centrist turn, although actively favoured by the American administration, was unable to produce solutions to social problems (partly because of the difficult economic situation) and thus contributed to alienating large sectors of society from a ruling class judged to be inconclusive, outdated and corrupt. This mistrust was subsequently crucial for the PCI and its further electoral growth.

The halting of the unbridled economic growth that characterised the immediate post-World War II period triggered a severe phase of stagnation that affected most Western economies indiscriminately.

3.4 The 1973 crisis

The autumn of 1973, for its part, added the further shock of the oil crisis following the embargo by the cartel of producer countries against those countries that were considered as co-responsible for Israel's conduct or in any case supporting the latter's cause in the Yom Kippur war. In Italy, the consequences became apparent very quickly, because its economy, so integrated and dependent on Euro-Atlantic circuits (especially in terms of trade) was particularly vulnerable to the winds of embargo blowing, and hence it ended up falling victim to the heavy repercussions of the recession¹²². Italy was therefore particularly exposed, and this was compounded by the country's chronic weaknesses: a fragile currency and an uncertain and globally contractionary monetary policy¹²³.

The year 1973 also brought about some significant changes in relations between Italy and the United States, among which the replacement of Ambassador Graham Martin certainly played an important role. He was replaced by John Volpe, an Italian-American who was Minister of

¹²²A. Giovagnoli, S. Pons, *L'Italia Repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta*, Rubbettino, Catanzaro, 2003.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

Transport in the first Nixon government. An Italian-American had never succeeded in becoming a representative of the USA in Rome: the State Department simply believed that emotional ties with the country of origin could have a negative influence on the judgement and operativeness of diplomats. Andreotti's trip to Washington in April was organised in such a way that every formal and ceremonial element served to reaffirm in the eyes of all Washington's full support for the Andreotti government's line. Andreotti's loyalty was also reaffirmed in the private meetings that followed in those days:

The President remarked that, while he certainly did not wish to “interfere in Italian politics”, he could not fail to express his admiration for Premier Andreotti’s efforts, even with only a small majority, to have a government that stands for something, rather than accept having perhaps a larger majority, but which would lead to much compromise and really not stand for anything. He understood the Premier’s problems in government with such a small majority, but expressed his certainty that Premier Andreotti, as a leader and as an individual, is able to speak to his people more firmly, decisively, and unequivocally than any previous head of government¹²⁴.

Apart from a few mentions of serious international problems, here too the subtleties of the domestic situation ended up prevailing over any foreign issues. In terms of domestic policy, therefore, the centrist government did not disappoint any of Nixon and Kissinger's expectations. In February 1973, the Ambassador praised the "Law & Order" measure, aimed at increasing the powers of the police to deal with the violence that was now spreading daily through the streets and squares of Italy. Apart from a few mentions of serious international problems, here too the subtleties of the domestic situation ended up prevailing over any foreign issues. In terms of domestic policy, therefore, the centrist government did not disappoint any of Nixon and Kissinger's expectations. In fact, in February 1973, the Ambassador praised the "Law & Order"¹²⁵ measure, aimed at increasing the powers of the police to deal with the violence that was now spreading daily through the streets and squares of Italy. For the Americans, strikes, demonstrations and riots were a worrying phenomenon because of their impact on the political system. Hence, the constant pressure on Rome to devise new legislative packages or investigative instruments to suppress these phenomena, even harshly. A retrospective glance allows us to highlight a certain inadequacy in the reading

¹²⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 344. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d344>

¹²⁵ 7 February 1973, *Airgram from AmEmbassy Rome to Department of State. Law and Order: The Government Takes the Initiative*, NARA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973.

of these upheavals. Considering the social instances to be entirely subordinate and irrelevant to the political balance, the only solution identified was as simple as harsh repression and a return to order. But this same social conflict remained at the base of the obstacles to any project of stabilisation, a wall destined to become almost impassable in the course of the Years of Lead.

Despite the support offered by Washington to the centrist government of Giulio Andreotti, the majority of Christian Democrats judged a return to the centre-left formula to be practically inevitable, since the platform of the incumbent government was too immobilised to undertake the longed-for reforms in the socio-economic field to overcome the impasse of the crisis of those years. So it was that the new enlargement of the government took place: Rumor returned to the presidency of the council. The equilibria within the DC started to show its inevitable cracks, and old rivalries were put aside to establish the emergence of a new government:

In view of its narrow majority, the survival of Andreotti's government for nearly a year was in many ways a tribute to his political skill and agility. Andreotti was also helped by the absence of a clear consensus in the Christian Democratic Party (DC) about alternatives to his government, and whether and how the DC should move back toward collaboration with the Socialists in a revival of center-left government which ruled Italy from 1962 to 1972.

The Christian Democrats reached a consensus in their five-day congress which ended on June 10 to move cautiously toward a new alliance with the Socialists. Their reasons for doing so reflected the increasing difficulties in parliament caused by the narrow majority of Andreotti's center government. The Congress' decision also reflected maneuvering on the part of former Prime Minister Fanfani who in order to reassert his leadership found it necessary to line up with his old rival Aldo Moro. Moro's price was restoration of the center-left¹²⁶.

On 10 June, the 12th DC Congress concluded in Rome, taking note of the new balance and effectively removing parliamentary support from the government. In its place, as mentioned, there was the return of Rumor, who was called to preside over his fourth government, with a government of socialists, social democrats, Christian democrats and republicans. This

¹²⁶ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 345. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d345>

outcome was obviously not viewed positively by the Americans because an enormous volume of political and financial means were used precisely to sponsor the revival of centrism, which turned out to be a short-lived experiment. Faced with the immobility that seemed to characterise it, it was the PCI itself that resumed a proactive role, launching, this time openly, the proposal for a collaboration between the left and moderate forces: the famous “compromesso storico” (historic compromise). Although on several occasions the moderate openness to joining the executive perimeter became apparent in the PCI's ideology, such as the great alliance with the Catholic world in the aftermath of the Second World War, what was new was the explicit assignment of this strategic objective to the communist agenda. The PCI was also partly responding to impulses coming from the moderate left wing of the DC: in July 1973, Aldo Moro himself had declared that the course of history would have made the prejudice against the communists fall “perhaps, in unpredictable times”¹²⁷. But above all, what the historic compromise represented in its most explicit form was an attempt to formulate a response to the dramatic acts that took place in Chile in September. On 11 September, General Augusto Pinochet carried out a bloody coup d'état to overthrow the duly elected social-democratic government of Salvador Allende. The coup led to the establishment of a military dictatorship in the country, with extremely harsh repression of left-wingers and trade unions. Shortly before the total defeat, the events in Chile were followed with increasing apprehension by communist party members, with the result that when news of Allende's execution came to light, the emotional impact was extremely profound and was also felt by a large section of public opinion.

Enrico Berlinguer wrote three articles, in the magazine “Rinascita”¹²⁸, that over time would gradually be considered complementary parts of a manifesto about the historic compromise, especially in light of the Chilean coup. The articles were obviously dedicated to the drama of

¹²⁷ A.Lepre, *Storia della Prima Repubblica*, il Mulino, Roma, 2006, cit., p. 263.

¹²⁸

Rinascita n° 38 of 28 September 1973: "Imperialism and coexistence in the light of the Chilean events - Careful reflection on the world picture necessary";

Rinascita n° 39 of 5 October 1973: "Democratic way and reactionary violence - Reflection on Italy after the events in Chile";

Rinascita No. 40 of 12 October 1973: "Social alliances and political alignments - Reflections on Italy after the events in Chile".

Allende had been elected in 1970, winning by a narrow margin, and his government had to endure three years of violent attacks from the opposition before being overthrown by a bloody coup d'état. Berlinguer therefore wrote that in Italy 'it would be completely illusory to think that, even if the left-wing parties and forces managed to reach 51 per cent of the votes and parliamentary representation [...], this would guarantee the survival and work of a government that was the expression of that 51 per cent', hence the need for a majority that included the PCI and DC, whose votes in the 1972 elections added up to around 65 per cent.

Santiago de Chile, but the precepts were dedicated to those problems that by analogy arose in Italy. The articles were published in a climate of profound awareness of the parallels perceived by Italians between Chile and Italy, and were widely read and discussed. Berlinguer's proposal was also crucially affected by a broader reflection on détente, now openly interpreted as a transformative process capable of changing the rules of the bipolar game. Once the new line was made official, it was necessary to try to gain sympathy in Moscow. During the Berlinguer-Brezhnev conversation, all the necessary antipathies emerged and the dual interpretation of détente emerged, with the latter leaning towards a decidedly more conservative version, in rigidly bipolar terms. As explained by historian Silvio Pons, what emerged in those days was:

By establishing a link between the normalisation of Czechoslovakia and the launching of détente, Brezhnev implicitly rejected any argument for change as a consequence of Ostpolitik in Europe, and also showed a total insensitivity to the image of socialism. This meant that the opposite assumption implicit in Berlinguer's vision (i.e. the link between the PCI's Europeanist conversion and the defence of the Prague Spring) was seen in Moscow as smoke and mirrors, potentially a threat of destabilisation for Central and Eastern Europe¹²⁹.

Despite efforts not to diverge too much from the Moscow line, the PCI would find itself in an increasingly uncomfortable position. The ideological framework of the “historic compromise”, however, lent itself to being interpreted and declined in different ways, at times emphasising the more orthodox if not openly revolutionary aspects, at other times bringing out the more pragmatic aspects. In view of the fact that public opinion was finding it increasingly difficult to find a plurality of credible interlocutors in the governmental structures, an increasing number of people turned to the formulas of the left, which was perceived less and less as a subversive agent and more and more as a resource, in the hope that a real season of reform would open up for the country. But those same ambivalences would soon re-emerge, and this time not in the guise of resources but in the more damaging guise of forcing.

¹²⁹S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, cit., p. 28

4. The Ford Administration: Italian domestic outlook II

4.1 The post-Nixon Era

In August 1974, due to the Watergate scandal¹³⁰ President Nixon handed in his resignation in order to avoid a more ignominious retaliation as part of the impeachment process. He was replaced by his vice-president Gerald Ford, who had recently replaced Spiro Agnew. Ford was regarded by his party colleagues, as well as the majority of the contemporary observers, as a man of proven confidence and rigour, but he did not particularly excel in charisma. Despite this, he became the 38th President of the United States of America and was called upon to intervene in a White House that had been heavily debased, discredited and under indictment by the actions of the previous administration. Despite the hopes of some observers, Ford's presidency began with strong signs of continuity with its predecessor by maintaining an extremely detached if not overly negative approach to the inclusion of communists in government, or to a transformative interpretation of detente. In the visit of Leone and Moro, the latter as foreign minister, to Washington in September 1974, these aspects clearly emerge:

President Ford to Leone: Your observations are very important to us. We have the view that the stability of Italy depends on the Communists not participating. If NATO is to be strong, we can't have the Communists participating in the political life of any member. It is reassuring to hear that the center and center-left won't take to the Communists. We laud your past exclusion of them and think it vital they continue to be excluded from your government as such. [...] We think movement in the broad areas is beneficial, but we don't think détente will change the ideology of either. We hope for a change in the Soviet Union, but détente is not directed toward that. We are trying to make progress in détente for the welfare of the world. We don't know what kind of response we would get¹³¹.

¹³⁰ The Watergate scandal, or simply Watergate, was a political scandal that erupted in the United States in 1972, triggered by the discovery of some illegal wiretapping carried out at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, by men with ties to the Republican Party and in particular to President Richard Nixon's "Re-election Committee".

The scandal, which led to Richard Nixon's impeachment and resignation, was named after Watergate, a Washington building complex housing the Watergate Hotel, the hotel where the wiretaps that started the scandal were carried out.

¹³¹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 350. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d350>

Moreover, Kissinger made it clear that even a PCI that showed itself even superficially as a respectable and therefore not inherently subversive governing force could pose a threat to the integrity of the alliance.

[...] but frankly we are more worried about a responsible than an irresponsible Communist party, because if they appear responsible they will be a bigger threat to democracy in the long run¹³².

Despite the intense use of third-world rhetoric with socialist and internationalist overtones, Berlinguer showed that he fully understood that the policy of détente had by no means eliminated the rigid constraints of the bipolar system on the countries of both blocs. On the other hand, however, he remained convinced that the only way forward was to slowly and progressively broaden his own legitimacy base, both internally, by continuing to press for an increasingly legitimate collaboration with the Christian Democrats, and internationally. Between the end of 1974 and the beginning of 1975, Berlinguer's PCI further intensified its pro-Western efforts, deploying a series of initiatives aimed at qualifying as a legitimate and responsible government force. Berlinguer presented a new programme platform at the end of 1974, in which, remarkably, he pledged his personal commitment not to call for a future Italian exit from NATO. This was a significant breakthrough: for the first time it was officially stated that the PCI no longer wanted to leave the network of the Atlantic alliance.

However, there remained a certain American hesitancy in recognising the compactness of the PCI in bowing to the responsibility turn pivoted by the Berlinguer secretariat. In an October memorandum to Kissinger, CIA director Colby asserted:

4. It is not certain that the PCI wishes to join the government. There are factions within the party which feel that the famous “historic compromise” would vitiate both party discipline and the will of the party to take over and govern Italy on Leninist principles. There are political operations we can run to increase this intra-party debate. Such operations will cost little; current approved funding will suffice¹³³

¹³² Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 350. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d350>

¹³³ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 351. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d351>

In the same memorandum, the need to carry out clandestine support campaigns for the most US-loyal groups in the Italian political arena emerged and it was also noted how internal discord within the PCI could be exploited to undermine party discipline and split it into several fronts in order to weaken it.

Commenting on the inauguration of the new Moro government in 1974, Kissinger's deputy, Scowcroft noted a worrying trend for the next local administrative elections:

Next spring's nationwide local elections, involving as they do the near totality of the electorate, may provide Italian politicians with a better clue to the mood of the voters. Recent limited electoral samplings indicate a significant shift to the Socialists and Communists which appears to be the most pronounced of the past 20 years. A confirmation of this trend in a major electoral test such as the upcoming spring elections would leave the Christian Democrats with even less flexibility in choosing their coalition partners than they now have and would force them to stick to their alliance with the Socialists and the other two minor center-left parties¹³⁴.

At the beginning of 1975, in the famous speech he gave in Livorno together with Spanish communist leader Santiago Carrillo, Berlinguer launched the so-called "Eurocommunism"¹³⁵, making the autonomist ambitions of his international strategy even more explicit. This journalistic formula quickly gained a great deal of attention, later mutating into a new concept expressing the desire to launch a European communism that would be able to combine democracy and political freedoms with communist precepts. It is possible to find in this concept the purely Italian declination of the numerous and heterogeneous attempts by Europeans to interpret détente autonomously, or to force its limits. A fundamental presupposition was a favourable geopolitical context, characterised by détente at the bipolar level but also at the European level. These conditions began to waver more and more by the end of 1974. In fact, European politics seemed to be going in the opposite direction to what the PCI had predicted: the forces that had had a more transformative vision found themselves counting for less, and so the most innovative instances of European politics were fading away. As much as the PCI tried to appear respectable and as much as its pro-European option

¹³⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 353. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d353>

¹³⁵ Eurocommunism refers to the political-ideological project of a Marxism intermediate to Leninism and democratic socialism, i.e. a communism developed in a reformist and democratic sense. It was a project that from 1975 involved the three main communist parties of Western Europe: the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). It also had the support of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

constituted a new legitimising force, from the point of view of international relations its strategy was proving to be weak and incapable of altering the balance and the terms of the question: the total incompatibility of Italian political evolution with its international positioning¹³⁶. As far as Kissinger was concerned, his position on the 'communist question', although still in line with his ideas expressed many times during his career, had been articulated in a more general form: Unlike before, his firm opposition to any hypothesis of historical compromise or Eurocommunism (which was his international extroversion) did not come from Moscow's supposed attempt to subvert the Italian system in its favour, but rather budded from a consideration of the compactness of the Western bloc and the risks to which it would be exposed, in the event of a progressive loosening of the Cold War as an ordering principle. Once in government, the PCI would in fact inevitably lead Rome into a more neutralist drift. Italy, in other words, could have become “a Yugoslavia”¹³⁷ of the western sphere¹³⁸.

According to his reasoning, even if the communists would have found a way to enter the government by legitimate and democratically sanctioned means, there was no guarantee that in the medium to long term they would remain there with the same democratic prerogatives. According to his reasoning, even if the communists would have found a way to enter the government by legitimate and democratically sanctioned means, there was no guarantee that in the medium to long term they would remain there with the same democratic prerogatives. Consequently, the question of whether or not to depend on Moscow was totally irrelevant, while the centre of the issue remained the fact that bringing the Communists to power in Western Europe would completely change the face of the post-war world. Despite Kissinger's very clear position on the matter, in an analysis published by the CIA in June 1975, the Americans' difficulty in clearly framing not only the PCI's ambitions but also its internal structure emerges vividly:

¹³⁶ G. Cubeddu, *Alla ricerca della solidarietà nazionale*, “30 Giorni”, Aprile 2008.
http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_17702_11.htm

¹³⁷ Reference was therefore made to a divisive role that Italy may have played in the Western bloc, similar to what happened in the Yugoslav-Soviet conflict. The latter refers to the strong contrast that divided the Soviet Union and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, made official at the Cominform meeting of 28 June 1948, which led to the temporary detachment of Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia from the constituting communist bloc of Eastern Europe. Relations between the two countries began to normalise following the death of Stalin (5 March 1953), and in particular after Nikita Chruščëv's visit to Belgrade in May 1955.

¹³⁸ 23 April 1975, Transcripts of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's Staff Meetings, NARA, RG 59, Office of the Secretary of State, 1973-1977

More than most communist parties, the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) poses problems for analysts who try to categorize it. There are those who subscribe to the “Trojan Horse” theory that every major move of the PCI is dictated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and that such differences as may appear are designed by the CPSU to push an overt image of a democratic world communist movement which, in fact, remains completely under CPSU control. At the other end of the spectrum is the belief that the PCI is totally independent and perhaps shouldn’t even be called a Marxist party. The Party is unique, but it’s not enough to say that its uniqueness lies in the degree of its “independence,” the “Italianate” nature of its ideology, the sheer size and diversity of its membership, or any other single factor. The reasons are all of these and more; the whole explanation is greater than the sum of its parts¹³⁹.

It also commented on the new strengthened position that the PCI had taken, discussing what the party's vision was towards the United States and the DC:

The PCI’s view of the United States is still dominated by its conviction that Italian foreign and domestic policies are largely decided in Washington and implemented through the DC, whose dominant center and rightist factions are believed to be controlled through the American Ambassador. It thinks that the US is committed to forestalling meaningful PCI influence at the national level and is prepared to use the CIA to abet a rightist coup if such is considered necessary. The leadership also believes, however, that there is now sufficient coincidence of views among the PCI, the Socialist Party, all of the left (and some of the center) factions of the DC, and large elements of the middle classes to make it impossible for any rightist coup to succeed.

The PCI, aware that its earlier anti-NATO stand was a basic obstacle to improved relations with potential coalition partners, a few years ago decided that it would not oppose continuing Italian participation in NATO should the Party enter the government. From a policy of “Europe without blocs” it has subtly changed to a policy of *equidistanza* (“equidistance”) between the US and the USSR, and recognition that the blocs will not disappear in the near future¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 355. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d355>

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

4.2 Clandestine support between congressional control and Ford's moderation

In the meantime, parallel clandestine support lines were severely restricted, if not stopped outright in some cases. While in Rome John Volpe kept the political situation under control, by reporting crucial events and personalities to Washington for leverage, from Saigon the ambassador Martin, to where he was transferred, was pulling the strings of covert financing. These different approaches were not opposed but rather complementary. Volpe's cautious diplomatic action was flanked by a counter-intelligence action to all effects and purposes, managed thanks to the ties woven by Martin with the forces which, in Italy, gave the greatest guarantee of anti-communism. Despite this, the circumstances of those years suggest that the desirability of maintaining this double level was soon questioned.

The Chilean affair, the Watergate scandal and the abuses perpetrated against American dissent prompted Congress to increase controls on intelligence agencies and secret services as part of a wider attempt to limit executive discretion in foreign policy. Under the watchful eye of the press and investigative committees, the most controversial intelligence programmes were quickly suspended or shelved by the new CIA director, William Colby, who was determined to cooperate with the ongoing investigation. With the Congress intent as much as ever on limiting the excesses of presidential power and making the management of foreign affairs more transparent, the illegal operations conducted for years in Italy became more politically risky. It was, for example, during the investigations of the Pike Commission that the plan for Italy in the early 1970s came to light, as well as the involvement of Vito Miceli, representative of the deviated security apparatus, and of the Italian extreme right. In the words of a bitter Martin:

Never has an Ambassador had such a simple instruction: halt the drift to the left in Italy and nudge it back to the center if you can. Never was there such a unanimous conclusion by the experts that it couldn't be done. Yet I did just exactly that. And if it had not been for the leak in Washington, it was done so smoothly, that the American hand never appeared. The fact that it was all thrown away after I left, cannot change the fact that it was done¹⁴¹.

In Italy, the forces that tried to force the democratic order found themselves without American backing, which was considered fundamental. In this context, the Italian government's decision

¹⁴¹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 352. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d352>

to strike at the highest levels of the state that were most compromised by black subversion appears unquestionable. Giulio Andreotti, appointed Minister of Defence in April 1973, quickly proceeded to remove Vito Miceli, who was then charged in the judicial enquiry into the attempted Borghese coup and finally arrested in October 1974. The Ufficio Affari Riservati of the Ministry of the Interior was then dissolved and two new anti-terrorist offices were created in its place: one of the MOI and the other of the Carabinieri, entrusted to General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa. At the end of 1974, therefore, the phase that can be more properly defined as the “*strategia della tensione*”¹⁴² (strategy of tension), which began in 1969 with the Piazza Fontana massacre in Milan and was characterised by the association of armed subversive groups of the extreme right with state apparatuses, could be considered extinct. The resumption of terrorism in 1974 with the Brescia¹⁴³ and Italicus¹⁴⁴ massacres marked its epilogue¹⁴⁵, as opposed to many commentators at the time that advocated its resurgence.

Following the collapse of the Rumor IV government, i.e. the sixth government since February 1972, Aldo Moro returned as Prime Minister for the fourth time, with a two-party (DC-PRI) executive, guaranteed by a sort of external support from the Socialists, abstention from the Liberals and an encouraging prospect of a softer opposition from the PCI. Italian politics seemed somewhat suspended, awaiting a clarification that would only arrive with the 1975 administrative elections. The latter marked a rather abysmal picture for the Americans:

Kissinger: The Italian elections were a disaster. The Kennedy Administration started most of our foreign policy disasters. He wanted an opening to the left to wean the Socialists from the Communists—and also thought the Embassy was on the right. I told him then that it was a disaster. It undercut the Social Democrats, because it then became a centrist party and people voting left had to go

¹⁴² The strategy of tension in Italy is a political theory that generally indicates a very tormented period in Italian history, particularly in the 1970s, known as the 'anni di piombo' (years of lead) and which, by means of a subversive design, tended towards the destabilisation or disintegration of pre-established balances. The strategy is based on a prearranged series of terrorist acts aimed at spreading a state of insecurity and fear among the population, such as to justify, demand or hope for authoritarian political changes; it can also be implemented in the form of military tactics consisting in committing bomb attacks and attributing their paternity to others.

¹⁴³ The massacre of Piazza della Loggia was a neo-fascist terrorist attack carried out on 28 May 1974 in Brescia, in the central Piazza della Loggia. A bomb hidden in a rubbish bin was detonated while a demonstration against neo-fascist terrorism was in progress. The attack caused the death of eight people and injured 102 others.

¹⁴⁴ The Italicus massacre was a terrorist bomb attack carried out on the night of 3 to 4 August 1974 on the Italicus train as it passed through San Benedetto Val di Sambro, in the province of Bologna. Twelve people died in the attack. It is considered one of the most serious attacks of the years of terrorism, together with the massacre of Piazza Fontana on 12 December 1969, the massacre of Piazza della Loggia on 28 May 1974 and the massacre of Bologna on 2 August 1980. For the Italicus massacre, as for the other massacres, several members of Italian neo-fascism were indicted as perpetrators, but the trial ended with the acquittal of the accused. The attack is part of the final phase of the strategy of massacre carried out by the extreme right, with the intent to destabilise the country and facilitate an intervention of the military.

¹⁴⁵ G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato*, Donzelli, Roma, 2005

to the Socialists. It also pushed the Liberals out to the right. Kennedy also took the missiles out of Italy after the right-wing Christian Democrats had waged a bitter fight with the Communists and Socialists over their installation¹⁴⁶.

Returning to the Moro government, whatever its awareness of détente and its implications for the United States, the expressions of national solidarity or historic compromise sounded extremely nonreassuring to the American interlocutors, empty formulas of a political vocabulary little suited to understanding. But it was above all in the conversation with Kissinger and Ford held on 1 August 1975 that Moro had to realise how incompatible his vision was with the American line in every respect and how vain his attempts to explain the Italian peculiarity sounded:

[...] Unfortunately many of the Italian voters prefer to look at Berlinguer and the Italian communists. They are trying to be very moderate now and I am afraid that their push had more effect than the Portuguese situation on Italy¹⁴⁷.

Thus, many Italians were beginning to believe the Communists' attempts to appear moderate:

The trouble in Italy is that most people have excessive trust and they are beginning to think that the communists are just Social Democrats—even some small businessmen. The communists have made a great appeal to all classes. They tried to stand for order and tranquility. Many people listen to this and forget what the communists are really like and that they are undemocratic. What you must remember is that not everyone who votes communist is in fact a communist. Most of them are also in favor of freedom and liberty¹⁴⁸.

Faced with Moro's attempts to explain the peculiarities of Italian communism Ford responded rather formally, recalling how an eventual entry of the PCI into government would make it very difficult to “justify Italy's membership of NATO”. But Kissinger, for his part, replied in an undiplomatic manner, making it clear what was at stake:

¹⁴⁶ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 356. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d356>

¹⁴⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 357. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d357>

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

Kissinger: If I may speak more bluntly than the President, we don't care if they sign into NATO in blood. Having the communists in the Government of Italy would be completely incompatible with continued membership in the Alliance. There is a difference between an election tactic and reality. There is no way that we can be persuaded to be in an Alliance with governments including communists which is supposed to be against communism, no matter what you say.

President Ford: Henry is a very subtle diplomat.

Kissinger: If the President wants me to, I can say these things in undiplomatic language¹⁴⁹.

Moro continued to insist, trying to appeal to the sensibility of his interlocutors regarding public opinion

Here there is a problem of public opinion: people listen to the speeches and think that all this is part of the trend of détente and that the barriers against communism are not as substantial as in the past. People wonder why they have to respect these rigid barriers when they see an American President talking to Soviet leaders. And people are not very subtle¹⁵⁰.

Ford replied harshly:

This is certainly not the meaning of détente. It is not the same thing. I don't understand how people don't see the difference between an apple and an orange. We need firmness to go ahead with détente. We need to resist communism in our countries to achieve détente. The fact that I shake hands with Brezhnev does not mean that I want him as vice-president!¹⁵¹

Ford's position was therefore substantially in line with that of Kissinger, who in fact continued to be entrusted with the management of the Italian question even in the new administration: "détente is a way of regulating competition, not a way of disarming the West", Ford concluded.

The apprehensions of Ford and Kissinger in the face of the transformative perception of the PCI, and the backing it had found in the Christian Democrat left in the figure of Moro, were not calmed by the analyses of the June vote in local and administrative elections. The electoral round of 15-16 June 1975, which was defined by Italian public opinion as the "earthquake", signalled a clear demand for change on the part of the electorate. The salient fact was that the forces of the left added together reached 47% against 36.7% in 1972, with

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

the distance between the two major parties dropping to the slender figure of 2%. The PCI's result was particularly impressive: at the close of the polls with 33.4% the party was able to claim an increase of six percentage points over 1972. The success extended to municipal and provincial elections, leading the PCI to govern in five regions (Umbria, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont and Liguria), in twenty-nine provinces including the top five Italian cities: Rome, Milan, Genoa, Turin and Naples. In the November 1975 CIA memorandum, called "Prospects and Consequences for Increased Communist Influence in Italian Politics" the American opinion emerged that the Christian Democrats had, on the whole and in recent years, undergone a progressive deterioration: corruption, clientelism, and widespread inefficiency were by now unanimously recognised characteristics of the Christian Democrat ruling class, on whose abilities the Americans relied less and less:

The vote had little to do with Italy's foreign policy. It reflected increasing frustration over inefficient government, inadequate services, tax inequities, and a host of other complaints for which the Christian Democrats were held responsible. It also reflected the sentiments of several million new voters enfranchised when the voting age was recently lowered to 18 and economic strains (which have hit the middle class harder than in the past). A marked deterioration in the economy, though we do not think it likely, would hurt the Christian Democrats and thus might help the Communists duplicate or improve on their success when the next national elections are held¹⁵².

The elections had allowed the PCI a "quantum leap" (as described by Volpe) towards its goal of historic compromise. The reasons for the Communists' success lay in a complex of public resentment and a desire for change, to which one had to add:

a growing acceptance by the electorate of the idea that the PCI has proven by its performance in local government that it can and will offer honest and efficient government and that it is a responsible democratic party¹⁵³.

The ambassador's interpretation of the election results was essentially the same as that of the Italian commentators, who saw in the Communist vote the demand for a reformist turn by a large section of the Italian electorate. Rather than a mass conversion to communism, it was a

¹⁵² Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 358. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d358>

¹⁵³ 25 June 1975, *Telegram from AmEmbassy Rome to SecState: Italian Regional Elections. Early returns Show Heavy PCI Gains*, NARA, RG 59, CFPE, EI, Tel, <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=106409&dt=2476&dl=1345>.

vote that expressed the need for real change. In fact, as early as 1974, Volpe had realised that in the face of the DC's "disintegration" and misgovernment, the Communist Party offered a "strident and revolutionary" solution:

[the PCI] has no difficulty in maintaining a high level of discipline, honesty and responsibility towards the community. The local administrations of the "red belt" are models of efficiency and honesty compared to the rest of Italy: mindless political patronage, corruption and links to improper sources of support are generally avoided by the communists¹⁵⁴.

At the beginning of 1976, the Italian political scene seemed to confirm the Allies' worst fears. De Martino's Socialist Party was in those days prey to a growing restlessness, which found a contingent cause in the disappointment over the small electoral advance, but more deeply was due to the fear of a progressive marginalisation by the Moro-Berlinguer agreement. The socialists were increasingly uneasy about supporting a government that showed it appreciated and was more willing to pursue the new forms of collaboration offered by the constructive opposition of the communists than the alliance with the PSI.

In a rather unexpected move, the Socialist Party decided to withdraw its external support for the Moro government, in relation to which it felt increasingly marginal¹⁵⁵. A heavy rain of criticism fell on the socialists, who were accused of maximalism and lack of responsibility. The communists, too, judged the PSI's move to be imprudent and declared themselves opposed to early elections, worried about facing an election campaign prematurely. De Martino responded to the criticism in a famous interview, accusing the PCI of being only interested in buying time to advance its own march towards power:

Why, dear Berlinguer, do you want to force us to support a government that we don't like and that you don't like either? [...] because you want to be free to fire on the government, but you want the government to stay alive and you want us socialists to keep it going¹⁵⁶.

For the Americans, the crisis had come at the "worst possible time". The DC had to find a way to "give itself a new image and a new political line" in a difficult process of "rejuvenation" to which the Americans themselves had recommended and committed

¹⁵⁴ 20 September 1975, *Telegram from AmEmbassy Rome to SecState: Reflections on the Current Italian Political Scene*, NARA, RG 59, CFPF, El.Tel, <http://aad.archives.gov/aa/createpdf?rid=135559%dt=2476&dl=1345>.

¹⁵⁵ S. Colarizi, M. Gervasoni, *La cruna dell'ago. Craxi, il Partito Socialista e la crisi della Repubblica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2005, pp. 7-9.

¹⁵⁶ E. Scalfari, *Metti le carte in tavola, compagno Berlinguer*, La Repubblica, 14 gennaio 1976

themselves, and if the eighteen months that remained before the end of the legislature seemed little, an even shorter period could hardly be sufficient. No one could say whether the DC was actually able to react or whether it was heading for an "electoral defeat equal to or even worse than that of June 1975"¹⁵⁷.

In the convulsed days of the government crisis, the major political forces seemed increasingly uncertain about the direction to take. The only formula that seemed possible at that point was a single Christian Democrat government based on the abstention of the parties of the old majority. After almost a month of exhausting negotiations, on 12 February 1976 the fifth Moro government came into being, a single Christian Democrat government that followed the previous one (Rumor at the Foreign Office, for example).

In the meantime, in February, the DC was again under indictment due to the publication of excerpts from the Pike Report that revealed the extent of illegal funding of government parties by the CIA and the American embassy. In the New York Times, Seymour Hersh wrote that the CIA had provided at least \$6 million "to individual anti-Communist political leaders in Italy since Dec. 8 in an effort to prevent further Communist Party gains in national elections"¹⁵⁸. In a telegram from Volpe to Kissinger's assistant, Hartman, the high level of apprehension on the part of the US administration is noted:

As you know, I have previously expressed my real concern about leaks from the Pike Committee on alleged CIA activities in Italy during the 1972 elections. The latest stories about current activities are perhaps even more damaging. The decibel level in yesterday's press here was very high; every newspaper gave the story prominent treatment with glaring headlines. The result was denials from the non-Communist parties (but, as always, the denials never catch up with the initial story) and three high level approaches to the Embassy expressing worry about the damage such stories are doing to the US and to our friends in Italy.

It also highlighted the victory that PCI had inadvertently achieved:

The damage, he said, is not only to the Italian parties and politicians who stand accused, but also to the US. The credibility of both is gravely hurt and the ability of the US to exert a positive and helpful

¹⁵⁷ 6 January 1976, *Briefing Memorandum for the Secretary: Italy Faces Difficult Political Crisis (from Saunders)*, NARA, RG 59, Records for Henry A. Kissinger

¹⁵⁸ S. Hersh, *C.I.A. Is Reported To Give Anti-Reds in Italy \$6 Million*, New York Times, Jan. 7, p. 77

influence on the Italian political scene will be seriously curtailed. The only beneficiary is the Communist Party, which he said undoubtedly receives help from the USSR but that help has and will remain unpublicized. The Soviet Union, and the PCI [...] could not have worked up a propaganda campaign that would be even fractionally as helpful to them as the one we are giving them for nothing.

In April, it was the turn of the “Lockheed scandal”¹⁵⁹, even more ruinous than its predecessors. During the Church Commission's investigations, evidence emerged of huge bribes paid around the world by the aerospace company to secure orders and contracts. The names of Italian politicians were indicated in code and this ended up casting a shadow of suspicion over many Christian Democrat leaders. Three ministers were investigated: Tanassi, Rumor and Gui, and a parliamentary commission was set up. In a few days, the attempt to give the DC a new and more decent veneer of morality, represented by the election of Benigno Zaccagnini (a man who was judged of proven moral rigour among its party peers and beyond) as secretary, was thwarted.

In the light of the June parliamentary elections¹⁶⁰, the climate in the US administration was thickening with concern and the possibility of the PCI's eventual overwhelming success was being explored. In a briefing memo titled “Italy: If the Communists Come In” from Winston Lord to Secretary Kissinger, the consequences and options of the American armamentarium were assessed:

The issue of Communist participation in an Italian government has become more urgent than when we began this exercise, as a result of recent developments which make early elections more likely than we had thought. I would still bet against an historic compromise any time soon; but I would not bet more than I could afford to lose¹⁶¹.

The document outlines the predictions for what will happen in Italy, as well as the reactions of other Western European governments, the impact on the fortunes of other Western

¹⁵⁹ The Lockheed scandal in Italy concerned the supply of C-130 transport aircraft received by the Italian Air Force from 1972 onwards. In 1976, many people involved in negotiations with Lockheed were accused of accepting bribes worth billions of lire to facilitate the purchase of these aircraft by the Italian Ministry of Defence, and some of them were later convicted.

¹⁶⁰ The 1976 Italian parliamentary elections for the renewal of the two branches of the Italian Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic, were held on Sunday 20 and Monday 21 June 1976. They were the first political elections in which 18-year-olds were allowed to vote.

¹⁶¹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 366. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d366>

Communist Parties, and the expected Soviet response. It then goes into the various options open to the United States, as well as the costs and hazards connected with each. The idea was to carefully assess the consequences of a carrot-and-stick approach, and so if on the one hand it was envisaged to:

[Consider] Our sources of influence on the Italian situation [which] would include the PCI's desire for signs of US acceptance; our influence over Italy's access to international financial assistance and the role of American investment in the peninsula; and our ability to modify, if not end, Italy's membership in the Atlantic Alliance. We could use these assets either to punish the Italians for having taken Communists into the government at all (to demonstrate beyond doubt to Italians and other West Europeans that they must choose between coalition with Communists and cooperation with us) or to bargain with an historic compromise government for behavior (relatively) pleasing to us, or for some mixture of the two¹⁶².

On the other hand, the costs were taken into account, which could have been substantial:

The costs of a hard line could include damage to other Western economies and restrictions on the use of our military bases in Italy, if not the loss of the bases altogether. Moreover the policy might boomerang, generating sympathy among moderate Italians for a PCI which could pose as a martyr to our imperialistic meddling in Italy's internal politics. We might only give the PCI a foreign scapegoat if it failed to be the force which finally could make the Italian government "work."

Less than a month before the elections, in May, the first proposals for a programme of covert operations also began, which, although "scaled down", aimed to wrest from the PCI the 1-3% needed to avert the advent of the communists; "CIA is not able to predict the outcome of the elections or to measure with any certainty the impact of its proposed program. It is aimed at influencing a small percentage of the voters to decrease the total PCI vote by 1% to 3%.". Moreover, although the risks were well known in the light of the scandals involving the intelligence services, the risk of doing nothing and the consequences for the Atlantic alliance were to be avoided at all costs:

While we would still run the risk of exposure and publicity, I believe that the impact will be softened by substantial approval of our aims. Finally, I believe that the consequences of a PCI electoral victory

¹⁶² *Ibidem*.

are so severe that this small-scale media and propaganda effort is warranted, despite the risks. In fact, should we do nothing and the PCI emerge victorious, we could be severely criticized for total inaction in the face of such a threat¹⁶³.

4.3 The 1976 elections

In the meantime, the election campaign in Italy had ended and the country was heading towards the elections with bated breath. However, the outcome of the polls was difficult to measure: the electorate had become polarised, with the two parties receiving almost equal awards. With an electoral campaign almost entirely based on the theme of overtaking, the vote was sharply divided between the two mass parties: the PCI continued its advance, reaching an all-time high of 34.4%, but failed to overtake the DC, which recovered the votes lost in the administrative elections to reach 38.7%. The consequences of the vote were not long in coming. A wave of panic swept over De Martino's Socialists once they realised that, despite the break with the government, they had remained pinned to 9.6%: not so few as to evoke the spectre of extinction but enough to condemn the PSI to the role of minor party (inevitably subordinate to a PCI from which it was now 25 points behind). It was also enough to trigger a bitter internal showdown with Nenni, De Martino and Mancini, who were considered responsible for squandering the historical heritage of Italian socialism. The result was an internal struggle that saw the younger members of the party manage to wipe out the top management of the PSI and impose themselves at the helm with the election of the young Bettino Craxi as secretary¹⁶⁴.

A CIA mid-term review conducted by George H. W. Bush, the then-CIA director, acknowledged a substantial tie between the two major parties. Bush noted that while the elections had “avoided the “worst case” outcome, they had “...solved nothing”. The immediate outlook is for some weeks or even months of intricate maneuvering as the parties sort out their relationships and a temporary government presides, a poor position for any attack on Italy’s economic problems, which will not wait.”

¹⁶³ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 370. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d370>

¹⁶⁴ In search of a new identity to re-launch the party, on 16 July the PSI Central Committee held an extraordinary meeting at the Hotel Midas in Rome, electing Bettino Craxi, who had only a few days before become leader of the Chamber of Deputies, as its new secretary. The choice of the Lombard MP was the result of mediation between the various socialist currents, which were highly fragmented and therefore unable to produce a secretary supported by a solid majority. The desire emerged to elect a 'transitional secretary' to lead the party out of the crisis.

The Italian elections solved nothing. The Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats (DC) both claim a kind of victory, but the margin between the two parties is the narrowest since 1948. The Socialists, who suffered substantial losses at the polls, nevertheless remain pivotal, since no governmental combination can be formed without them, and they are insistent that the PCI be associated in the responsibilities of governing. In the election aftermath, the DC party remains weak and divided. The PCI is undecided as to the nature and scope of the role it should play in any solution to the present governmental crisis—formal participation in the government or tacit cooperation with the governing coalition. The result is that Italy remains ill-prepared to deal effectively with its chronic problems¹⁶⁵.

The 1976 elections had handed the country a difficult result, highlighting a bipolar structure that offered no solution to the problem of governability. The only possible alternative remained a Christian Democrat single party system based on the abstention of the major parties of the constitutional arc: the PCI, PSDI, PLI and PSI. The compromise was unprecedented: the Communists did not enter the executive, but their support became decisive and in some form recognised. It was the so-called government of the *non sfiducia* (non-rejection) or *governo delle astensioni* (government of the abstentions) entrusted to Giulio Andreotti. In other words, in a not unusual turnaround in Italian politics, the protagonists of the 1972 centrist turnaround returned to government with the decisive support of the PCI¹⁶⁶.

Within DC, however, there were different interpretations of how to understand this collaboration. For Aldo Moro, the government of national solidarity was not so much a point of arrival as the start of a “third phase”¹⁶⁷ in the history of the republic, after those of centrism and the centre-left. It was a passage to be explicitly marked in two stages: an initial moment characterised by solidarity between all the political forces, in order to deal with the economic and political-social emergency, which would be followed by a “stabilisation of the democracy of the alternation”¹⁶⁸ between political forces fully legitimised to take on the leadership of the

¹⁶⁵ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 372. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d372>.

¹⁶⁶ F. Barbagallo, *L'Italia Repubblicana*, Carocci Editori, 2009

¹⁶⁷ On the “third phase”, see: R. Ruffilli, *Slstema politico italiano: la terza fase nel pensiero di Aldo Moro*, “Appunti di cultura politica”, marzo-aprile 1982, pp. 24-27; M.S. Piretti, *Il progetto politico di Aldo Moro dalla Costituente Ila Terza Fase, intervento presentato al convegno Il governo delle società nel XXI seoo*. RIpensando ad Aldo Moro, Roma 17-20 Novembre 2008.

¹⁶⁸ P. Scoppola, *Una crisi politica ed istituzionale*, Bologna, Edizioni Quattro Venti, 2002, cit., p. 8

state. For Moro, national solidarity thus constituted a moment of transit towards a more stable solution, towards an accomplished competitive and plural democracy. Giulio Andreotti, on the other hand, represented a much more modern point of view within the DC and aimed to have a minimum agreement with the communists aimed exclusively at overcoming the difficult situation.

Seen from Washington, Andreotti's presence in Palazzo Chigi represented perhaps the last element of reassurance, so much so that one wonders how an executive forced to rely on the support of the Communists without this element of guarantee would have been judged. In fact, as Prime Minister he would have shown great ability in managing the alliance while remaining within the limits of international constraints. In this uncertain and fluid situation, the American government found itself forced, in spite of itself, to update its position: it had no choice but to support and encourage Andreotti's moves, suggesting that the "emergency" nature of the government agreement should remain in place¹⁶⁹. The greatest efforts were made to encourage economic reforms. As Kissinger assured in a private message, the Americans were ready to give their full support to the reorganisation programme that Andreotti announced he was putting in place¹⁷⁰. The new government gave absolute priority to economic issues and the objective circumstances dictated this. In 1976, the Italian lira experienced the strongest speculative attacks since the post-war period on several occasions¹⁷¹: in September, these attacks pushed it above 870 against the dollar. The Council of Ministers passed a series of urgent measures: an increase in the discount rate, a 10% surcharge on currency purchases. But the crisis, and hence the international banks, called for far more incisive measures, as Andreotti announced on the television screens¹⁷².

The Americans had quite clear ideas on how to help Italy. In fact, the guidelines for the recovery programme had already been drawn up before the Puerto Rico summit¹⁷³, which in a sense served to sanction its legitimacy. The US archives give us a picture of great frenzy and work on studies over the Italian economic system:

¹⁶⁹ U. Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia Sospesa: La Crisi degli Anni Settanta vista da Washington*, Einaudi, Torino, 2009

¹⁷⁰ 17 September 1976, *Telegram from USdEl Lusaka to AmEmbassy Rome: Message to Prime Minister Andreotti*, GFL, International Economic Affairs Files, 1975-1976, Country file: Italy.

¹⁷¹A. Verde, *La crisi della lira del 1976: cause, conseguenze e schemi interpretativi*, Studi e Note di Economia/2, 2015

¹⁷² 2 October 1976, *Telegram from AmEmbassy Rome*, NARA, RG 56, General Records of the Department of Treasury

¹⁷³ The second G7 summit was held in Dorado, near San Juan, Puerto Rico, on 27-28 June 1976.

It was the second edition of the informal summit between the heads of state and government of the major industrialised market economy countries, and the first to be held in a seven-member format, with Canada joining France, West Germany, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Our analysis is that Italy will probably require \$1.0–\$1.5 billion in financing next year—funds that will have to come from official sources, e.g. the IMF, since the Italian Government is not an acceptable borrower on the world money markets. We are particularly upset by the possibility that if the Andreotti government appears to be failing to deal with the country's problems the PCI will use that as the basis for discontinuing its policy of abstention on votes. If the Andreotti government fell it appears probable that the PSI might join the PCI in forming a government, or all parties would join in forming a “government of convergence.”¹⁷⁴

A sophisticated analysis by Undersecretary of the Treasury Edwin H. Yeo at that time suggested a number of corrective actions¹⁷⁵. The stabilisation programme envisaged first of all immediate measures to control inflation, then a sharp reduction in expenditure, an increase in the tax burden, a ceiling on the issue of the lira and a modification of the “escalator”¹⁷⁶ clause in labour contracts. It was a very articulated plan that would have brought Italy into line with the economic policies of the major capitalist countries, but it was also a difficult plan to implement: the American technicians were obviously aware of the political difficulties that any government would encounter in implementing it. For this reason, in order to convey the necessary credibility to Italy, the Americans did their utmost to sponsor the Andreotti government's economic manoeuvres:

Under Secretary Ed Yeo went to Rome last week for quiet talks with Prime Minister Andreotti and other Italian Ministers. Yeo told Andreotti that if the Government of Italy were willing to put together an economic program, the U.S. would act as a “facilitator” with the International Monetary Fund to develop a program for IMF financing. In this event the U.S. would be anxious to provide any and all help possible. [...] Yeo made clear that the program would have to be a “daring” and politically demanding one. It would need to hold down the rise in wages, to cut the expenditures of local

¹⁷⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 378. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d378>.

¹⁷⁵ June 1976, *Memorandum for the President (from Edwin Yeo)*, GFL, Council of Economic Advisors Records 1974-1977, Alan Greenspan Files, Folder; Puerto Rico 4.

¹⁷⁶ The escalator was an economic instrument in the field of wage policy aimed at automatically indexing wages according to increases in the prices of certain goods, in order to counteract the decrease in purchasing power due to increases in the cost of living, as measured by a special consumer price index. In 1975 the escalator, applied until then only to the banking sector, was unified to the other sectors by an agreement between Confindustria and the three major trade unions: CGIL, CISL and UIL.

governments and to cut the expenditures of the central government. Such a program ought to be psychologically rewarding and helpful in stopping the fall of the lira exchange rate¹⁷⁷.

The communist question in this discussion remained rather limited because the problem of reform went beyond the need to halt the advance of the PCI. The key point was to make it clear that the ability of the US to help would be very limited unless structural reforms were carried out as soon as possible. The opportunity to officially obtain US endorsement for the rehabilitation programme came with Andreotti's visit to Washington between 6 and 7 December 1976.

Prime Minister Andreotti's visit to Washington on December 6–7 will provide the opportunity for the first exchange of views between the highest-level Italian and American policymakers since the Andreotti government came into power last summer¹⁷⁸.

In fact, Andreotti also showed himself capable of getting his interlocutors to accept that if a certain degree of involvement of the PCI was inevitable, this would also increase the chances of the DC catching up, since the communists would be forced to take a much more conservative line compared to the expectations of their own electorate¹⁷⁹.

The primary purpose of Andreotti's visit is to demonstrate to the Italian people (and to rivals within his own party) continued American support for his government and his efforts to stabilize the Italian economy. He is reported to have said that he hopes to obtain U.S. assurances of support in the event of any new speculative attack on the lira¹⁸⁰.

In the months that followed, the government continued to consolidate, relying mainly on tax increases: between the autumn of 1976 and the spring of 1977, tax increases amounted to

¹⁷⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 379. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d379>.

¹⁷⁸ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 380. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d380>.

¹⁷⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 382. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d382>.

¹⁸⁰ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 381. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d381>.

4,900 billion lire¹⁸¹. The economic manoeuvre made it possible to limit the credit crunch, while the devaluation of the dollar against the mark placed the lira in a middle position, with the advantage that in the following years Italian companies would be able to buy their raw materials in dollars, selling their finished products in the area that used the German mark¹⁸². In the following year, the IMF and the European Community also agreed to provide Italy with two large loans of some 500 billion lire each¹⁸³.

Andreotti: One thing we have worked hard on is combating tax evasion and the misuse of government revenues. We have increased revenues 48% in one year, which is real progress. We have even submitted a special program to increase revenues by another 34%, for a total of 75% for two years—which was unimaginable in our country. We also got legislation to jail people who are sending currency out of the country. We have saved \$1 billion through this. We have also eliminated seven holidays and made them work days, five religious and two secular¹⁸⁴.

4.4 Between international financial assistance and political stabilization

In terms of immediate effectiveness, the economic manoeuvre of 1976-1977 was a positive isolated case in the long series of uncertain stabilisation measures implemented by the governments of the First Republic, even though it left unchanged the most serious structural problems of the Italian economic system, first and foremost the uncontrolled growth of the public debt, which at the end of the decade exceeded the average debt of other European countries by one and a half times¹⁸⁵. To some extent, therefore, national solidarity worked and allowed the government to take unpopular measures to reverse the economic cycle. Indeed, collaboration with the PCI proved essential, since stabilisation of the Italian economy had to pass through the resolution of two problems, the public deficit and labour costs, which could only be addressed with a broad consensus that included the left and the unions.

¹⁸¹ F. Barbagallo, *L'Italia repubblicana*, cit., p. 135

¹⁸² S. Rossi, *La politica economica italiana dal 1968 ad oggi*, Laterza, Bari, 2020, cit., p. 32

¹⁸³ 8 December 1976, *Memo of Conversation: DeGuiringaud - Crosland - Genscher - Kissinger*, NARA, RG 59, Records of Henry A. Kissinger.

¹⁸⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-15, Part 2, Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976, Second, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Rasmussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 382. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d382>

¹⁸⁵ S. Rossi, *La politica economica italiana dal 1968 ad oggi*, Laterza, Bari, 2020, cit., pp. 27-42

Collaboration with the communists continued to be totally unacceptable to Kissinger as it was incompatible with his political vision. At a meeting in December 1976 between Kissinger and the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Great Britain (DeLaboulaye, Genscher and Crosland), when the subject came up on Italy, Kissinger expressed all his pessimism about the evolution of the situation:

In my last meeting with Andreotti I told him clearly how things are in Italy: there are two parties, each trying to outsmart the other. The Christian Democrats are trying to push through reforms in order to outsmart the Communists; the Communists are calculating that the passage of reforms will make them more respectable in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. So one of the two is wrong. And he couldn't give me an answer¹⁸⁶.

Kissinger's bitter and defiant tone was perhaps also due to the knowledge that he was in such a forum for the last time and that the fate of American politics would soon be in the hands of a new administration. In the autumn of 1976, the former Democratic governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter¹⁸⁷, won the presidential election, defeating Gerald Ford and marking the end of Kissinger's political career, who had been in charge of America's foreign policy for eight years. As he himself had criticised the assumptions and methods of the Johnson administration, a new breed of diplomats, political scientists and a new Secretary of State were ready to inaugurate a new phase in US foreign policy, and many signs were already heralding a new course, including specifically in relations with Italy¹⁸⁸.

Despite Kissinger's pessimistic views, the view seemed to prevail that the Communists had bet on the wrong horse. The compromise left the Communists with far more burdens than advantages, putting the PCI in the difficult position of having to approve restrictive measures needed to overcome the serious economic situation, while remaining outside the direct management of the recovery. The journalist Luigi Bianchi in the *Corriere della Sera* wrote that the communists were in the middle of the ford: "they left the bank of the opposition without

¹⁸⁶ 8 December 1976, *Memo of Conversation: DeLaboulaye - Crosland - Genscher - Kissinger*, NARA, RG 59, Records of Henry A. Kissinger.

¹⁸⁷ In 1976 he won the Democratic nomination and in the following election defeated the Republican Gerald Ford, who had taken over from Nixon after the Watergate scandal forced him to resign. When he stood for election, Carter was new to the national political scene. While this was a weakness, being unknown was his strength, given his lack of involvement in the many scandals that had rocked the Democratic Party in the 1960s.

¹⁸⁸ For the American foreign policy on Italy during Carter's administration, see: O. Njolstad, *The Carter Administration and Italy. Keeping the Communists Out of Power Without Interfering*, "Journal of Cold War Studies", vol 4, n.3, 2002, pp. 56-94.

reaching the bank of the government", thus losing their main attraction: that of representing an alternative to the current system¹⁸⁹.

Satisfaction with the election results for the PCI would soon fade, replaced by the dilemma of the "stangata": to accept, in order to avert the economic collapse of the country, to take co-responsibility for the cuts to the world of work, or to refuse, inevitably losing the opportunity to show responsibility and legitimacy to govern. This was a difficult dilemma to resolve, not least because the government was proceeding much more slowly on the second aspect of consolidation, namely the reforms that would have prevented for the future the degeneration of bad governance, corruption and inefficiency that the country had witnessed in recent years.

"Unfortunately", the Americans themselves noted, the Christian Democrat figures who were most opposed to the PCI were also those "least interested in promoting social housing, health care, more effective administration, putting a stop to property speculation and unbalanced urban development". The problem had been the same for at least a decade: the elements most supported by the United States were motivated not so much by "an attachment to NATO and the alliance with the United States, but by far more parochial economic and political interests". There was no need to pretend to believe that "their interests included the implementation of reforms or the renewal of the political system"¹⁹⁰. It was an awareness that could create in the American government "a certain dilemma"¹⁹¹ Kissinger himself admitted, but which could hardly be resolved without recognising a more positive role for the PCI in Italy's stabilisation projects. A prospect, as we have seen, unacceptable to the Secretary of State from every point of view. As the months went by, the pendulum of the balance of power shifted further in favour of the DC. The economic line was by now marked by the agreements signed with international bodies, and the PCI did not obtain any real reform that would open up a different production model, favour the entry of young people into the labour market, or reduce social tension¹⁹². The communists had thus fulfilled Togliatti's perspective of entering the government area, but they had made themselves co-responsible for choices that they did not control, and for which they paid the price, without the possibility of ensuring the realisation of the commitments made.

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¹⁹⁰ 5 February 1975, *Briefing Memo from Winston Lord to the Sec: Italian Vesper, The American Role*, NARA, RG 59, Director's Files 1975-1977

¹⁹¹ 6 April 1976, *Telegram for Ambassador Volpe from Sonnenfeldt and Hartman*, GFL, NSA, Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada

¹⁹² F. Barbagallo, *L'Italia Repubblicana*, Carocci Editori, 2009

5. Conclusions

In the bipolar stabilisation project pursued by the Nixon administration, the Italian situation constituted a risky and problematic scenario from 1969 onwards. It was difficult not to consider how what was seen as the range of problems afflicting Italy did not derive in good substance from the failure of the political formula of the centre-left of the 1960s, which the Kennedy administration first and then the Johnson administration had openly encouraged and financially supported. With the idea of being able to cannibalise the consensus of the PCI in the light of a progressive left, attentive to the needs of the most marginalised fringes, but at the same time respectful of democratic and constitutional designs, the modernising work of Schlesinger Jr. and his liberal colleagues did not have the hoped-for impact. On the contrary, the shocks of the *autunno caldo* (“hot autumn”) showed that Italy as a whole was about to slide further and further to the left. From the outset, the posture that Italy decided to adopt on the international front also became worrying. Aldo Moro's arrival as foreign minister meant for Italy the inauguration of many initiatives that intended to exploit the European and Mediterranean position of our country to find an Italian way to Détente: opening up to China, for example, but also promoting dialogue and strengthening the role of the United Nations in the Mediterranean. Although in many cases vague rather than incisive, these initiatives did not constitute a welcome development for the allies and Washington tried, with mixed approaches, to convince Rome to rejoin the ranks of a foreign policy more in tune with the wavelength of the alliance.

Despite the close alliance, this did not mean a homogeneity of vision between the various agencies, ministries or centres of power that interfaced with the Italian situation: the relationship between Rogers' State Department and the Nixon-Kissinger White House tandem was not free of contradictions. In spite of many similarities with some European foreign policies that were able to interpret in an innovative and transformative way the new spaces that came with détente, Italian foreign policy remained timid, often contradictory, conditioned as it was by internal constraints and urgencies. Faced with the almost unstoppable growth of Europe's largest Communist Party, the Americans decided to invest their resources and ambitions in the Christian Democrats and other moderate forces that would act as a check on the red tide from within. Unlike the De Gasperi era, however, and hence the centrism of the 1950s, the governing parties were proving to be unreliable allies both as anti-communists and as political forces with which to share a common path with the same aims: The DC itself, lacerated by internal fragmentation aggravated by internal struggles for power, appeared

increasingly unreliable due to the strengthening of progressive currents within it, which, without questioning their Atlantic affiliation and loyalty, showed a lukewarm attitude towards NATO and pressed to experiment with forms of collaboration with the left.

With the arrival of Aldo Moro's philosophy of the "strategy of attention", and thus the implicit recognition of the PCI's growing role as the interpreter of a segment of the population that could not be ignored, a new element of concern was added for Washington, which attempted in the first place to marginalize the PCI as much as possible because it represented a far more serious and worrying unknown factor than Italian foreign policy alone could have represented in its innovative attempts to approach the Mediterranean basin. With the advent of the *Grand Design* of Nixon and Kissinger and the launching of the period of détente, the dialogue between Moscow and Washington unintentionally encouraged these concerns to be exacerbated: the projection of the climate of détente within Italian politics thus favoured visions and ambitions of convergence between the country's reformist areas and cast doubt, for the first real time, on the rigid *conventio ad excludendum* that had made the idea of the Communists entering the governmental perimeter practically anathema. The problem was easy for Italians to understand, and it was no coincidence that the most conservative were always uncomfortable with détente, which they tended to minimise as a minimalist project relegated exclusively to the upper echelons of international politics, demonstrating that in Italy it was extremely difficult to be both anti-communist and pro-détente.

Thus, the détente promoted by Moscow and Washington turned out to be more of a limited blanket in its area of application, particularly in Central Europe, and as we moved further away other dynamics and logics came into play, showing more contradictions than anticipated. In this perspective, the Italian system appeared as a case of the "paradox of détente"¹⁹³: a policy designed in a conservative and bipolar sense ended up undermining the internal cohesion of the blocs. A contradiction in terms between the ambitions of the Nixon-Kissinger tandem and the consequences of their foreign policy. The ambitious project launched by the White House could in no way tolerate a relaxation of internal discipline in the Western bloc and its revolutionary outcomes. The risk of Italy slipping outside the Atlantic alliance, into a posture more or less affiliated with Moscow, but in any case outside Washington's sphere, was a danger for both European and Mediterranean balances. The risk therefore had to be defused. Italy's eventual defection would have signalled a serious blow in the collective imagination, undermining the US position precisely at a time when the greatest

¹⁹³ J. Hanhimaki, *Conservative Goals, Revolutionary Outcomes: The Paradox of Détente*, "Cold War History", n. 4, 2008, pp. 503-512

possible solidity in negotiations with the Soviets was needed, in order to keep the US's credibility as a global power intact. This same credibility, which had received major blows following the Vietnam disaster and the progressive weakening of Atlanticism, had to be defended, since despite the “realistic” arguments used to justify their foreign policy, Nixon and Kissinger were convinced that in foreign policy credibility was the fundamental key to success¹⁹⁴.

The problem that arose was therefore how to intervene in the peninsula to stem the slide to the left, but while support for the centre-left was set aside (which in essence was the guiding principle for the administrations during the 1960s), a decisive strengthening of the right wing of the Italian political system was opted for. The mission was entrusted to a man of proven anti-communism and extremely close to President Nixon, the diplomat Graham Martin. The line followed by the ambassador was that of unscrupulously conditioning Italian politics using all the classic instruments of containment: diplomatic appeals, political pressure, financing and support of the Atlanticist components of the political spectrum. The main weapon used was the systematic distribution of hidden funds to the pro-Atlantic sides of the parties. Notwithstanding various resistances, in particular from Secretary of State Rogers, the ambassador managed to get a vast programme of covert operations approved, thanks to which, between 1970 and 1972, he distributed at least nine million dollars to Italian forces interested in abandoning the centre-left.

It is important to note precisely how this move to resume covert funding (which had been interrupted by the previous administration) had been systematically sought by the Italian pro-Atlanticist forces themselves, who were primarily interested in securing access to substantial resources available to them without public scrutiny. The innovative approach was also to grant resources to the more radical right-wing, which up to that point had been considered taboo by the Americans. With its notable successes in local elections, the MSI was set to become a valuable ally both in curbing the Communists and in pushing the DC to position itself in the centre. But the possible consequences of the Italian situation justified, according to Martin and Kissinger, a further step: ignoring the indications of the State Department and the admonitions of the CIA, the extreme right was also included in the list of forces which, by virtue of their anti-communist function, had to be financed by the USA. At the right time, certain subversive circles could also be useful and needed to be monitored. The various investigations carried out by both the judiciary and the numerous enquiry

¹⁹⁴ R. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, vol I, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1978, p. 422

commissions have shown how, over the years, a certain link was consolidating between this extreme right and deviated state apparatuses with the aim of giving the political framework a conservative turn.

In the light of the documentation available, it makes no sense to claim that the United States had as its objective the preparation of a coup in Italy, an eventuality considered extremely risky and difficult to manage both because of the risks connected with the presence of the largest and most deeply rooted communist party in the West, and because of the repercussions in terms of public opinion. All the indications were that the forces in the field had neither the military nor the political strength to withstand the foreseeable reaction of the left and democratic forces to a coup d'état, making a civil war with a highly uncertain outcome highly probable. The difficulties that support for the Greek colonels' regime was also causing for the American government led to the prediction that an anti-democratic turn in Italy would be even more difficult to defend publicly with the risk of causing an irremediable rift in NATO. Nevertheless, the veiled threat of a coup, or of a "Greek-style" (or "Chilean-style") solution, could in itself become a strong deterrent to pressure on the government line-up and in particular on the left-wing components of the Christian Democrats. In other words, the attitude of the United States towards the subversive groups behind the massacres of those years was ambivalent and contradictory and so were their results. In general, the cautiously interlocutory attitude of the embassy, the closeness and familiarity with the elements of the state and the forces of law and order involved in the subversive plots, deliberately hinted at the possibility of support, but then left themselves free to retract at the decisive moment.

In 1972, there was a centrist turn and it managed to give Washington a feeling of satisfaction with the result. Kissinger's strategy seemed to have borne fruit while Martin found confirmation for his clandestine efforts. But the reading of the Italian case through the univocal lens of the bipolar conflict, even in the updated version of détente, imposed a certain analytical rigidity which largely reduced the complexity and the facets of the Italian situation. In fact, the idea of countering the détente as a 'repressive' attitude proved to be a counterproductive choice that would not bring any kind of stability to a country. On the contrary, it would have led to a net increase in violence and political radicalisation, dramatically increasing the instability of the system.

Once the positive approach was abandoned, because the right-wing variables became far less reliable than anticipated and because numerous scandals hit the United States' credibility, American policy towards Italy was relegated to a careful game of vetoes and limits. In particular, there was the arrival of the freeze strategy (as described by the historian Mario del

Pero), which supplanted the modernisation strategy that had characterised previous democratic American administrations. Notwithstanding the optimistic predictions of the turnaround, the State Department and the new US ambassador to Rome, John Volpe, soon realised that the instability had not been resolved by the simple marginalisation of the socialists, but that under the ashes of the newborn centrism there was a growing dissatisfaction, more and more palpable, with the chronic inability of the ruling class to offer convincing answers to the growing problems of society: a mistrust and resentment crucial to understanding the electoral success that would lead the PCI to the threshold of government in the following years. Italy was also suffering from a difficult economic situation, caused as much by the 1973 oil crisis as by the very characteristics of its development model, which was unbalanced and heavily burdened by a vast clientelistic and corrupt system, as well as by a heavy debt that was growing exponentially. The DC's defeat in the referendum on divorce and its heavy loss in the 1975 administrative elections meant that the hypothesis of a historic compromise between the two major parties became increasingly probable and consequently the alarm about the Italian situation returned to its highest levels. Internationally, anxiety about the possible convergence of the two major Italian parties was amplified by developments in southern Europe. The conflict between Greece and Turkey for control of the island of Cyprus, the uncertain transition of Greece and Spain and the Carnation Revolution in Portugal were composing a picture of widespread instability that projected Southern Europe at the centre of American and European concerns. Italy's interdependence, shared with other Mediterranean countries, became even clearer and evoked the old pillars of the containment strategy declined in the context of southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin: credibility and the domino effect.

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question remained substantially under the watchful eye of Henry Kissinger (albeit as secretary of state and no longer as security advisor) who had become guarantor of foreign policy. Although substantially in line with the ideas he had already expressed repeatedly during his political career, Kissinger's position took on a more precise shape in those years, articulating itself in a coherent political discourse that specified the reasons for such concern and justified the need for intervention. The FRUS 1969-1976 on Western Europe documentation to which we have had access proposes several reasons: the symbolic risk that the United States would lose its prestige and therefore its credibility, the concrete possibility that the PCI, once in government, would press for a neutralist foreign policy (thus mimicking in the Western bloc what Yugoslavia represented in the Soviet bloc) and finally the risk of a collapse of the southern shore of NATO. According to Kissinger, even if the USSR did not seem willing to undermine détente, it could still benefit from confrontation with a weakened West. Moscow's strategic interests in other words could be perfectly served by independent communist parties in Western Europe. The fact that Berlinguer had declared that he did not question NATO membership did not offer any reassurance in this sense, indeed it risked increasing the level of confusion by convincing the modern electorate that the PCI's participation in government was compatible with the Atlantic Alliance. But the convergence hoped for by Moro and Berlinguer was decisively ruled out a priori by the US government because it would have inevitably altered the international balance. Therefore, as much as the PCI tried to show itself "respectable", as much as its Europeanist option constituted a strong source of legitimacy, from the point of view of international relations its strategy proved incapable of substantially altering the terms of the question: the total incompatibility of the proposal of the "historic compromise" with respect to the location of the "historic compromise" in the United States was not enough. Even those who had supported a more open conception of détente thus ended up fearing the hypothesis of the historic compromise, which risked calling into question balances and spaces of freedom opened with difficulty in the previous years. The Europeans' interest in the Italian question also pushed the United States towards an alternative model of intervention: favouring the use of economic instruments in close collaboration with the EEC and IMF. This change restored a certain constructive horizon to American policy towards Italy. The huge loans of dollars (and deutschmarks) could have buffered the financial emergency, but to be sure of not throwing money down the drain, or worse, of not lending money to a government that would soon welcome the PCI, it was necessary to help the Italians to put in place plans to reorganise their economy in order to avoid a repetition of similar scenarios. Starting in the summer of 1974, US policy towards Italy shifted from mere

freezing intentions to a broader stabilisation that implied not only a system of vetoes against the enlargement of the government area, but also an effort to reorganise an economic and political set-up that would last over time and be self-perpetuating. Complementary international political and economic pressures played a crucial role in the defeat of the historic compromise. The economic support that Italy needed was also conditioned by precise political repercussions that the PCI, as a co-responsible party, was obliged to discount, but without directly influencing the decision behind these choices. It paid the price, without receiving the dividends. The credibility of the PCI, and thus of the Eurocommunist phenomenon, was irreparably compromised, while, on the contrary, a Christian Democrats in crisis were offered the opportunity to assert themselves once again as the irreplaceable party in Italian politics. The moderating influence of the Ford presidency and the greater degree of oversight impressed by Congress (thanks to the various Commissions of Inquiry that emerged following the scandals of the previous years concerning hidden funding and the excessive centralisation of decision-making in the White House) succeeded in diluting many of Kissinger's approaches, who considered a participatory discussion with the Europeans of Italian problems as an ineffective approach. But irrespective of Kissinger's posture, this change took place and made the policy towards Italy more effective than the methods adopted in the previous period (1968-1974), inspired by a substantially more rigid idea of containment, favourable to investing in anyone who opposed the PCI. In the second half of the 1970s, political and economic instruments were multiplied on the Italian forces to erect effective embankments to the disintegration, while the demands of the difficult economic situation (in particular IMF and EEC loans) proved capable of affecting also that political level that for years had proved so difficult to modify.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

During the Cold War, Italy has always been seen as one of the staunchest US allies, not only in a European perspective but also a global one. When the so-called period of *Détente* came about its implications were felt not only at the macro-scale, thereby directly impacting the big power competition between Moscow and Washington, but it also trickled down in unexpected and seemingly counterintuitive ways in all the regional scenarios, encompassing both the two factions and challenging the very nature of the relationships within them. Few cases are as illustrative and at the same time as peculiar as the performance of the *Détente* in Italy. The interest of historiography about Italy during the *Détente* period is justified by the crucial importance of that conjuncture for post-war Italy. The internal repercussions of that period, which put the country's democratic stability in great doubt at the time, have generated an echo that is still felt in the Italian collective awareness.

Much focus has obviously been placed on the special relationship that united Rome with the United States. The Cold War and Italy's alliance with the United States looked to be crucial in comprehending both Italy's international position and foreign policy in this setting. Despite the fact that Italy was not always at the center of US foreign policy in the conflict between East and West, it was an essential "test case" for the country's developments and limitations. The main goal in Washington was always to achieve an Italian internal situation marked by stability and strong ties with the West, and between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, US officials also attempted to promote the establishment of a progressive democracy, as well as a modern social system bolstered by an internationally oriented economy. Italy held a unique position in this strange kind of "embedded liberalism": it was part of the alliance's more integrated West European component and was expected to be one of the primary beneficiaries of the changes that this order promised to bring. Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, this grandiose project was shelved. Faced with not only the strongest communist party in the West, but also a country suffering from a serious and long-running social, economic, and institutional crisis, the United States believed that simply stabilizing the situation through various means would be the most important, if not the only, viable option. In particular, Mario del Pero's contributions are relevant in understanding the transition from this "modernising approach", which characterised the liberal approach of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, to the "freezing" approach that characterised the Nixon-Kissinger duo. In the

Mediterranean and the Middle East, Italy attempted to play a significant and active role. Its aspirations occasionally clashed with the interests of traditional European imperial powers, leading to a more ambiguous relationship with the United States, as Italy sought to be recognized by Washington as its "representative," while also attempting to preserve its image as a nation sympathetic to the aspirations and ideals of the "Third World". Economic considerations influenced Italy's foreign policy once again, while the long-term trends in Rome's international standing and the influence of some geopolitical issues cannot be overlooked.

Bipolar détente can be understood and explained in a variety of ways. Most historians now emphasize its fundamentally conservative geopolitical character, in the sense that both Washington and Moscow saw it as a way to maintain the status quo in Europe and crystallize the continent's bipolar division, in order to reduce tensions, limit the risk of war, and, in the long run, reduce out-of-control defense spending. However, in the European theaters most impacted by détente, there existed a contradiction, which was quickly apparent in the case of Italy. A conservative approach aimed at sustaining and consolidating a certain geopolitical order necessitated the fundamental eroding of the ideological conflict that had given rise to that system. How could the delegitimization and confinement of this party go on if the ideological underpinnings of such measures were no longer critical to the superpower relationship? The difficulties created by this basic contradiction of détente were very hard to manage under Johnson's successors, the Republicans Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, especially when it coincided with a type of domestic thaw between the PCI and the DC.

Washington intended to limit the consequences of Détente in Italy, thereby protecting the country from the threat of a DC–PCI rapprochement. They achieved this by funneling cash to right-wing organizations, backing the Christian Democrats' conservative wing, and stating their preference for the establishment of a center-right administration, as well as those inside the DC who supported a similar approach. The intricacies of the Italian crisis were once again read through the lens of the Cold War, especially its possible repercussions across Southern Europe. It was all about limiting the possibility of Italy slipping into a tepid Atlanticism on the verge of neutrality. Meanwhile, the overall context was radically changing and the way it could influence the Italian scene was radically changing. The new economic dynamics had a significant impact on Italy. The country's fragility and sensitivity to (and dependency on) external patterns and actors were demonstrated by the dramatic effect of the 1970s' "stagflation." Italy was more than simply the Atlantic Alliance's "soft underbelly," as one of the most prevalent geopolitical analogies of the time put it, and the one that best described

Nixon and Kissinger's attitudes toward its issues. It was also one of the "sick men" of a Western liberal and capitalist system whose fundamental structure had been shattered and reshaped. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate deeper into Italy's role during that time period, particularly with the unique perspective of the newly desecrated FRUS files which cover the period from the summer of 1973 to December 1976, and it is mostly focused on the Ford Administration. It is intended to support the main argument of this thesis by examining these archives, which are joined in this thesis by an in-depth analysis of the immediately preceding archives and a broader contextualisation taken from the most authoritative literature. Due to the country's unique conditions and the Nixon-Kissinger duo's (and later Ford's) strict bipolar vision, which was too narrow to permit more transformational approaches than the conservative one they intended to imprint, the consequences of the Détente proved to be particularly counterintuitive in Italy.

I

The recent historiography has identified the "long" 1970s, i.e. the period between 1968 and 1980, as a fundamental threshold for contemporary history. In fact, the "deep forces" that acted in that context, from an economic, political and social point of view, represented precisely that fracture whose consequences would be felt on a global scale, opening the way to globalisation and to dynamics that would manifest themselves even beyond the Cold War, influencing and characterising even the current system of international relations. The protest against the various forms of power and the imposition of a generation of young people as protagonists found a foothold in the United States, France, Germany, Italy and other western countries, based on their intolerance of the consumer society, capitalism, opposition to the Vietnam War and radical criticism of traditional values and customs, which were considered too obsolete and limiting for a modern society. In this mutating context, the American power appeared unexpectedly scaled down, although still powerful. What was considered the most dramatic sign of this relative decline was the stalemate of the armed forces in the Vietnam War, with an American army far more heavily armed and numerous than its Vietcong guerrilla counterpart, and the political and economic rise, especially in the light of post-war reconstruction financed in part by the Americans themselves, of Europe and Japan. The war in Vietnam, in particular, revealed the unsustainability of the concept of global containment as interpreted by previous administrations. This deficit between US international overexposure (and thus, expectations) and US military projection capacity had widened out of all proportion and made American foreign policy unsustainable and "insolvent" and came to be known as

the “Lippman Gap”. The US position was also destabilized in terms of internal accounts: the previous policy of engagement was underpinned by an apparently unstoppable flourishing economy and resources that could be considered limitless on balance, allowing American industry to enjoy such propelling power as to translate into military hegemony. As soon as economic variables such as the annual growth rate and employment began to crack, the unsustainability of certain endeavours became apparent, increasingly coagulating in the American public opinion a certain disenchantment with global commitments. It was against this background that in November 1968, Richard Nixon ascended to the White House as the 37th President of the United States. In stark contrast to the posture of “escalation” promoted during the Johnson years, which envisaged the prominence of US troops to the detriment of a marginalisation of South Vietnamese forces, Nixon insisted on the logic of “Vietnamization”, which consisted in practice of a progressive and direct disengagement but accompanied by a strengthening of the capabilities and solidity of the governmental and military apparatus of South Vietnam, which should have allowed the pro-American state to survive while avoiding a humiliating political-military defeat of the United States. The great Détente has often been identified with the figure of Henry Kissinger: it is undeniable that US foreign policy during the first half of the 1970s was strongly influenced by the initiatives of the man who, between 1969 and 1973, served as the president's National Security Advisor and then, from 1973 to 1976, as Secretary of State. His vision of the international system was characterised by a number of fixed points: firstly, the concept of “balance”, which he considered to be a fundamental objective for the interests of the American superpower, and secondly, a pessimistic view of the role of the United States that led him to consider it almost impossible for Washington to exercise the same degree of dominance experienced in the immediate post-war period, both because of the relative American economic downsizing and because of the military strengthening of the USSR. Although the actual achievement of strategic parity by the Soviet Union is still debated in historiography today, if the conduct of the Vietnam War had already shown the limits of the US war machine by undermining the confidence that it could dominate an (after all) regional conflict, the prospect of Soviet rearmament weakened Washington DC's perception of security. Faced with the terrifying possibility of an atomic holocaust, the concept of nuclear deterrence began to waver. In other words, what a military solution to the Cold War would entail would only lead to so-called “mutual destruction” (MAD), i.e. that even in the event of a successful attack on Soviet soil, the Soviet missile arsenal could retain enough missile power to cause a devastating retaliation on US territory.

Although on a macroscopic level there was indeed a reconciliation between the two superpowers, one should not forget the permanence of conflicts through proxies, especially in the third world. Not only did the war in Vietnam continue undisturbed in its initial stages, but different theatres of conflict emerged around the world. Furthermore, the absence of the strictly anti-communist extremist positions professed by the American ally led many European states to see the prospect that the narrow links of bipolar logic had loosened enough to allow autonomous openings towards their Soviet counterparts. Moving our perspective southwards, there is the Mediterranean basin which since the beginning of the Cold War emerged as one of the most important theatres of confrontation between the two superpowers. The application of the *Détente* policy in this region of the world would have proved to be a risky undertake because, although many local sources of conflict subsumed into the great cauldron of competition between Moscow and Washington, the region was at the mercy of other upheavals between a plurality of actors with highly divergent interests, welcoming on its shores countries that were extremely different in cultural, political and economic terms. The basin was going through the critical period of decolonisation, especially on its southern and eastern shores, and was home to the Israeli-Palestinian debacle, which had raged uninterruptedly since 1949, and the Greek-Turkish antagonism, all of this while the two shores were diverging greatly in terms of the development trajectories adopted. The northern shore coalesced around a common security and conflict resolution framework under NATO, fostering a generalised climate of prosperity and security and the maintenance of democratic values.

II

In keeping with a long diplomatic tradition, post-World War II Italy maintained a particular focus on the Middle East and the Mediterranean sea. In the context of this orientation, which attributed a crucial importance to the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Italian diplomacy found itself confronted with a series of variables: the dynamics of the Cold War itself, the effects of the Arab-Israeli rivalry, the requirements of national security, and Atlantic constraints. All variables that are difficult to reduce to a single line of action free of contradictions and of ambiguities. However, the narrow margin of action did not prevent Italy from participating actively in the attempts to resolve the Middle East conflict within the framework of a progressive evolution in a pro-Arab direction which, on more than one occasion, did not fail to provoke contrasts between the same political forces that made up the government majority, and against Washington's line of action. In the mid-1960s, Italy was

governed by a “centro-sinistra” (centre-left) coalition formed by the DC, PSD, PSDI and PRI. This government had an impressive Mediterranean heritage behind it, coming especially from the Christian Democrat left. On the one hand, it was a mindset designed to give Italy a special role in the Mediterranean and, at the same time, to give it greater autonomy vis-à-vis its US ally. On the other, an ideological vision that saw the Mediterranean as an area culturally, socially and economically close to Italy (if not homogeneous in certain cases), such as to constitute a convenient alternative projection to the Atlantic and Euro-American one. In other words, at the end of the 1960s, two tendencies, differently rooted in political forces and civil society, confronted each other with regard to the Mediterranean: the Euro-Atlantic tendency and the Mediterranean-third worldist tendency. From August 1969 the left-leaning Christian-Democrat Aldo Moro held the post of Foreign Minister. Compared to his predecessors, foreign affairs were conducted with a certain characteristic dynamism and proactivity, in light of a certain awareness of the importance of multilateralism and of the latter's capacity to protect human rights. Between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the alarming presence of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean and the emergence of Palestinian-based terrorism highlighted the strong instability of the entire area and further contributed to drawing the attention of Italian and international politics and public opinion to the Palestinian cause, as part of a broader solution to the Middle East question. In those years, Italy's usual twofold concern was evident: on the one hand, the desire to remain the principal ally of the United States in the Mediterranean, maintaining an identity of views with Washington, above all, with regard to the defence of the Middle Eastern area from the increased Soviet threat; on the other hand, the need to cautiously distance itself from the increasingly pro-Israeli policy of the US, which gave the government in Rome the possibility of playing the role of privileged interlocutor for the two sides in the conflict. As the Arab-Israeli debacle took on a new balance, perpetuating tensions without ever reaching a long-term political solution, the Mediterranean would once again attract global attention in 1974. In that year the most worrying front in the European scenario concerned the countries of the southern area: Greece, Spain, Portugal. In these countries, a picture of generalised instability was emerging, unprecedented in its seriousness and spread. Southern Europe had until then occupied a largely secondary role in international balances, and although these countries were part of the western camp, their economic and political systems were much closer to countries like Turkey or Yugoslavia than to the rest of the continent. In all three countries, there were authoritarian governments: the regime of Antonio Salazar in Portugal, replaced after his death by the dauphin Marcelo Caetano, the Franco dictatorship in Spain,

and finally the colonial regime in Greece. At the beginning of 1974, all three countries went into turmoil. In Greece, the fall of the military regime paved the way for a transition that would bring democracy back to Athens with the election of the conservative (who up to that point was in exile in Paris) Karamanlis in November 1974 and the abolition of the monarchy in 1975. The problem of succession was felt more acutely in the Spanish regime: Franco was over 82 years old and struggled to contain the centrifugal thrusts of social tensions and internal dissent that had emerged thanks to a progressive, albeit slow and unbalanced, economic modernisation. But it was above all Portugal that attracted Washington's attention (as well as the rest of the Atlantic alliance) when the Carnation Revolution (Revolução dos Cravos) decreed the end of the Salazarist regime and opened a long and very troubled phase of transition to democracy that would last almost two years. Although placed in the context of southern Europe, the Italian case naturally presented markedly different characteristics compared to Greece, Spain and Portugal. In fact, while the latter had just emerged from full-fledged dictatorial regimes and were moving towards democratic transitions, not without obstacles, Italy was a democratic, industrialised country, a founding member of all the major European and Western organisations: from the Council of Europe, through the Atlantic Alliance to the European Community. However, Italy seemed to waver in the eyes of many observers and many feared that its political system and its very international posture had been called into question by the apparently increasingly plausible possibility of the Communists entering government. As a result, even in the Italian case there was the difficult choice for the United States of whether to intervene unilaterally or try to exert joint influence with the major European countries.

III

Italy had just emerged from one of the most turbulent periods in its young republican history. The economic and social climate, in many ways positive, was the result of the greatest transformation that Italian society had ever known. Impressive aid from the Allies through the so-called Marshall Plan and the liberalisation of trade, but above all the participation of a people determined to remake their country, were the basis of a rebirth with great successes and heavy costs. A society that was predominantly agricultural and partly underdeveloped (especially in comparison to some European colleagues of comparable demography) faced a complex, rapid and often contradictory development whose results configured what, with a certain emphasis, was called the "economic miracle". But this epoch-making change did not equally involve all fringes of the population. In particular, state structures are unable to keep

pace with such tumultuous change. The need and demand for stable and socially relevant goods, such as housing for all, the adaptation and development of school buildings, medical services and public transport, remain largely unmet. Unresolved issues that multiply and amplify each other, germinating among the fractures of a complex society, and which will soon take their toll. With the translation of those disaffections first from the student world and then to the working class world, protests and demonstrations began to increase in number and magnitude, spreading throughout Italy. The critical threshold was reached in December 1969, with the detonation of the bomb placed in Piazza Fontana, Milan. The term “strategy of tension” began to emerge in the journalistic outlets, a subversive design plotted by the highest deviated spheres of the Government, having a backing in the United States ally, whereby a series of massacre attacks plotted and apparently revolutionary, in an arrangement of false flags, would have matured in Italy, the support of an authoritarian government in an anti-communist sense, thus preventing the insurgence of the PCI and similar. The autumn of 1973, for its part, added the further shock of the oil crisis following the embargo by the cartel of producer countries against those countries that were considered as co-responsible for Israel's conduct or in any case supporting the latter's cause in the Yom Kippur war. In Italy, the consequences became apparent very quickly, because its economy, so integrated and dependent on Euro-Atlantic circuits (especially in terms of trade) was particularly vulnerable to the winds of embargo blowing, and hence it ended up falling victim to the heavy repercussions of the recession. Italy was therefore particularly exposed, and this was compounded by the country's chronic weaknesses: a fragile currency and an uncertain and globally contractionary monetary policy.

IV

In August 1974, due to the Watergate scandal, President Nixon handed in his resignation in order to avoid a more ignominious retaliation as part of the impeachment process. He was replaced by his vice-president Gerald Ford, who had recently replaced Spiro Agnew. Ford was regarded by his party colleagues, as well as the majority of the contemporary observers, as a man of proven confidence and rigour, but he did not particularly excel in charisma. Despite this, he became the 38th President of the United States of America and was called upon to intervene in a White House that had been heavily debased, discredited and under indictment by the actions of the previous administration. Despite the hopes of some observers, Ford's presidency began with strong signs of continuity with its predecessor by maintaining an extremely detached if not overly negative approach to the inclusion of communists in

government, or to a transformative interpretation of detente. In the meantime, parallel clandestine support lines were severely restricted, if not stopped outright in some cases. The 1976 elections had handed the country a difficult result, highlighting a bipolar structure that offered no solution to the problem of governability. The compromise was unprecedented: the Communists did not enter the executive, but their support became decisive and in some form recognised. It was the so-called government of the non sfiducia (non-rejection) or governo delle astensioni (government of the abstentions) entrusted to Giulio Andreotti.

The Chilean affair, the Watergate scandal and the abuses perpetrated against American dissent prompted Congress to increase controls on intelligence agencies and secret services as part of a wider attempt to limit executive discretion in foreign policy. With the Congress intent as much as ever on limiting the excesses of presidential power and making the management of foreign affairs more transparent, the illegal operations conducted for years in Italy became more politically risky. In terms of immediate effectiveness, the economic manoeuvre of 1976-1977 was a positive isolated case in the long series of uncertain stabilisation measures implemented by the governments of the First Republic, first and foremost the uncontrolled growth of the public debt, which at the end of the decade exceeded the average debt of other European countries by one and a half times. To some extent, therefore, national solidarity worked and allowed the government to take unpopular measures to reverse the economic cycle. Indeed, collaboration with the PCI proved essential, since stabilisation of the Italian economy had to pass through the resolution of two problems, the public deficit and labour costs, which could only be addressed with a broad consensus that included the left and the unions.

Conclusions

In the bipolar stabilisation project pursued by the Nixon administration, the Italian situation constituted a risky and problematic scenario from 1969 onwards. It was difficult not to consider how what was seen as the range of problems afflicting Italy did not derive in good substance from the failure of the political formula of the centre-left of the 1960s, which the Kennedy administration first and then the Johnson administration had openly encouraged and financially supported. From the outset, the posture that Italy decided to adopt on the international front also became worrying. Aldo Moro's arrival as foreign minister meant for Italy the inauguration of many initiatives that intended to exploit the European and Mediterranean position of our country to find an Italian way to Détente: opening up to China, for example, but also promoting dialogue and strengthening the role of the United Nations in the Mediterranean. Although in many cases vague rather than incisive, these initiatives did

not constitute a welcome development for the allies and Washington tried, with mixed approaches, to convince Rome to rejoin the ranks of a foreign policy more in tune with the wavelength of the alliance. Although substantially in line with the ideas he had already expressed repeatedly during his political career, Kissinger's position took on a more precise shape in those years, articulating itself in a coherent political discourse that specified the reasons for such concern and justified the need for intervention. The FRUS 1969-1976 on Western Europe documentation to which we have had access proposes several reasons: the symbolic risk that the United States would lose its prestige and therefore its credibility, the concrete possibility that the PCI, once in government, would press for a neutralist foreign policy (thus mimicking in the Western bloc what Yugoslavia represented in the Soviet bloc) and finally the risk of a collapse of the southern shore of NATO. According to Kissinger, even if the USSR did not seem willing to undermine détente, it could still benefit from confrontation with a weakened West. Moscow's strategic interests in other words could be perfectly served by independent communist parties in Western Europe. The fact that Berlinguer had declared that he did not question NATO membership did not offer any reassurance in this sense, indeed it risked increasing the level of confusion by convincing the modern electorate that the PCI's participation in government was compatible with the Atlantic Alliance. But the convergence hoped for by Moro and Berlinguer was decisively ruled out a priori by the US government because it would have inevitably altered the international balance. Therefore, as much as the PCI tried to show itself "respectable", as much as its Europeanist option constituted a strong source of legitimacy, from the point of view of international relations its strategy proved incapable of substantially altering the terms of the question: the total incompatibility of the proposal of the "historic compromise" with respect to the location of the "historic compromise" in the United States was not enough. The Europeans' interest in the Italian question also pushed the United States towards an alternative model of intervention: favouring the use of economic instruments in close collaboration with the EEC and IMF. This change restored a certain constructive horizon to American policy towards Italy. The huge loans of dollars could have buffered the financial emergency, but to be sure of not throwing money down the drain, or worse, of not lending money to a government that would soon welcome the PCI, it was necessary to help the Italians to put in place plans to reorganise their economy in order to avoid a repetition of similar scenarios. Starting in the summer of 1974, US policy towards Italy shifted from mere freezing intentions to a broader stabilisation that implied not only a system of vetoes against the enlargement of the government area, but also an effort to reorganise an economic and political set-up that

would last over time and be self-perpetuating. Complementary international political and economic pressures played a crucial role in the defeat of the historic compromise. The economic support that Italy needed was also conditioned by precise political repercussions that the PCI, as a co-responsible party, was obliged to discount, but without directly influencing the decision behind these choices. The credibility of the PCI, and thus of the Eurocommunist phenomenon, was irreparably compromised, while, on the contrary, a Christian Democrats in crisis were offered the opportunity to assert themselves once again as the irreplaceable party in Italian politics. The moderating influence of the Ford presidency and the greater degree of oversight impressed by Congress succeeded in diluting many of Kissinger's approaches, who considered a participatory discussion with the Europeans of Italian problems as an ineffective approach. Regardless of Kissinger's position, this shift occurred, making the policy against Italy more effective than the approaches used in the previous period (1968-1974), which were motivated by a far more rigid concept of containment and favored investing in anyone who opposed the PCI. Political and economic instruments were multiplied on the Italian forces in the second half of the 1970s to erect effective embankments against disintegration, while the demands of the difficult economic situation (in particular, IMF and EEC loans) proved capable of affecting also that political level that had proven so difficult to modify for years.