

Sovereignty, Democracy and the Risk of Essentialism. Some Reflections on US-Italian Relations during the Cold War

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Résumé

Cet article étudie les relations entre l'Italie et les États-Unis pendant la guerre froide, et le rôle joué par les États-Unis dans la formation et l'histoire de la République italienne. Il examine les nombreuses spécificités d'une relation fortement asymétrique, celle entre Washington et Rome, et son impact sur la politique italienne. Enfin, il lie l'évolution de la guerre froide et de la politique étrangère des États-Unis au contexte italien particulier, essayant de proposer une périodisation de la guerre froide en Italie.

Mots clés : souveraineté ; interdépendance ; puissance ; bipolarisme ; modernisation.

Abstract

This article studies relations between Italy and the United States during the Cold War and the role played by the United States in the creation and history of the Italian Republic. It examines the many peculiarities of the highly asymmetrical relationship between Washington and Rome and its impact on Italian politics. Finally, it links the evolution of the Cold War and American foreign policy to the specific Italian context, attempting to thereby offer a periodization of the Cold War in Italy.

Key words : Sovereignty; Interdependence; Power; Bipolarism; Modernization.

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The Cold War in Italy; Italy in the Cold War

Histories of the Cold War in Italy have traditionally focused on a set of three, strictly interrelated, issues. The first is how post-World War II Italy's sovereignty and young democracy were affected by the deep transformation of the international system and the new US-Soviet bipolar order that had emerged on the ashes of the war. The second is the delicate (and sometimes almost impossible) equilibrium that all the political and social forces were called to maintain in a context where they had to guarantee allegiance and loyalty to two different orders, national and international: to the domestic polity and the Cold War system; to the Constitution regulating the former and the system of alliances defining the latter. What ensued was a structural and inescapable condition which did not generate a plurality of states within the State –a *Doppio Stato* (“double State”) in historian Franco De Felice's renowned definition– but imposed to every political actor, big and small, if not to every Italian citizen, a condition of *Doppia Lealtà* (“double allegiance”): a permanent and sometimes almost unmanageable tension between the allegiance to the Republic, its norms and principles, and that to the Western/Atlantic bloc within which Italy naturally fell, but to which it also democratically chose to adhere.¹ Third and last: the relationship between these actors –particularly the two main political parties the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) and *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI)– and their “external” patrons and senior partners, the United States and the Soviet Union.²

The U.S. looms large –it is indeed the key if not hegemonic actor– in each of these three dimensions. As a consequence of World War II, the ensuing geopolitical bipolarization of Europe and the choices of the Italian electorate, the country fell into the US-led bloc. It was part of the post-1945 American sphere of influence if not empire. Its sovereignty was crucially limited and curtailed as a consequence of this and of the semi-imperial privileges Washington acquired. Historians have long debated whether the dominant position of the United States in postwar Europe can or cannot be categorized as “imperial” and most recent histories of modern US-Italian relations have all stressed how complex, tense and difficult these relations often were: how Italy's governmental forces, the DC overall, frequently contained, resisted and mediated US requests and pressures.³

¹ On De Felice's famous and much debated definition, see Franco De Felice, “Doppia lealtà e doppio Stato,” *Studi Storici*, 3, Luglio-Settembre 1989, pp. 493-563. For a reflection on the uses and, even more, abuses, of De Felice's categories, particularly that of “doppio Stato,” see Alessio Gagliardi, “Le trasformazioni dello Stato e della politica nel XX secolo” e Giovanni Sabbatucci, “Il doppio Stato,” *Dimensioni e Problemi della Ricerca Storica*, 1, Gennaio-Giugno 2009, pp. 71-88 and 89-93. For an application to a specific phase of the Cold War in Italy, see Roberto Gualtieri, “The Italian Political System and Détente,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 4, December 2004, pp. 428-449.

² For a recent, excellent, history of the Cold War in Italy, see Guido Formigoni, *Storia dell'Italia nella Guerra Fredda*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016. For a thorough examination of US policies in France and Italy during the Cold War, see Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America. The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy*, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

³ On the US Empire during the Cold War, its peculiarities and strengths, see Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 3, September 1986, pp. 263-277 and, more recently, A.G. Hopkins, *American Empire. A Global History*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2018. On US pressures and their containment in Italy, see Federico Romero, “Gli Stati Uniti in Italia: il Piano Marshall e la NATO,” in F. Barbagallo (ed.), *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, vol. I, Torino, Einaudi, 1994, pp. 231-289; Federico Robbe, *L'impossibile*

This complex and dialectical relationship was visible on multiple fronts and, again, it has been broadly investigated and discussed by historians. Suffice is to mention here two classical fields of inquiry. The first, which has attracted the interest of scholars from at least the late 1970s/early 1980s, is that of Italy's economic reconstruction, and later "miraculous" boom, and how it was affected by the new international context and the partnership with the United States. Italy –that goes without saying– partook in the golden age of post-war embedded liberalism and Western European commercial integration, and was among the main beneficiaries of Washington's monetary hegemony, economic aid and, over time, trade deficits (the US market acquiring an increasing importance for an export-led economy such as that of Italy). From day one of the post-World War II age, the relationship between Italy and the United States in the economic realm was however anything but easy and smooth. The De Gasperi governments (1945-1953) repeatedly clashed with the senior American partner on the amount of US economic aid (which, pre-Marshall Plan, was judged inadequate and even humiliating), on the conditions attached to it and on the economic policies the country should pursue. These disputes were visible and sometimes even broadcasted by both sides. American Marshall Planners, for example, harshly reprimanded the Italian government for its conservative use of American aid: for deflationary choices that aimed at increasing the (meager) reserves of the country to the detriment of much needed (politically and economically) expansionary policies, capable to spur growth and redistribute wealth. The first report of the US agency in charge of the Marshall Plan (the Economic Cooperation Administration, ECA) submitted to Congress in early 1949 contained a severe "country study" section on Italy, which lambasted not just Rome's protectionism, but also its monetary stockpiling and insufficient "Keynesian" use of US aid and loans. Italy's was by far the most severe 1949 "country study," and while objections were also made to other recipients of Marshall aid, none was criticized as harshly as Rome.⁴ These sort of disputes would continue in the following years, often involving Italian leading industrialists and entrepreneurs, who needed US support, but expressed diffidence if not outright hostility to American productivity recipes and liberal models of industrial relations.⁵

The second realm where Italy and the US often clashed was that of strategic and military affairs, i.e.: intra-NATO relations. Here the power asymmetry between the two sides was clearly more marked and Rome's margin of maneuver consequently quite limited. Nothing seems to highlight the imperial privileges of the United States more than its military presence in the peninsula and the exemptions which American soldiers enjoyed thanks to the 1954 Status of Forces agreement, according to which

incontro. Gli Stati Uniti e la destra italiana negli anni Cinquanta, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2012 ; Mario Del Pero, *L'Alleato Scomodo. Gli Usa e la DC negli anni del Centrisimo (1948-1956)*, Rome, Carocci, 2001 and *idem*, "Containing Containment. Re-thinking Italy's Experience during the Cold War," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 4, 2003, pp. 532-555.

⁴ John L. Harper, *America and the Reconstruction of Italy, 1945-1948*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Pier Paolo D'Attorre, "Il Piano Marshall: politica, economia, relazioni internazionali nella ricostruzione italiana," in Ennio Di Nolfo, Romain Rainero and Brunello Vigezzi (eds.), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa, 1945-1950*, Milan, Marzorati, 1990, pp. 497-546 ; Carlo Spagnolo, *La stabilizzazione incompiuta. Il Piano Marshall in Italia*, Rome, Carocci, 2001 ; Mauro Campus, *L'Italia, gli Stati Uniti e il Piano Marshall*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2008.

⁵ Bruno Settis, *Il contratto sociale fordista. Fordismo, neocapitalismo e human relations nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*, PhD dissertation, Scuola Normale di Pisa/Institut d'études politiques, Paris, 2019 ; Pier Paolo D'Attorre, "Anche noi possiamo essere prosperi. Aiuti ERP e politiche della produttività negli anni Cinquanta," *Quaderni Storici*, 1, 1985, pp. 55-93.

they fell solely under US jurisdiction.⁶ At the same time, even in this specific realm the relationship cannot simply be summarized as one between an imperial patron and a junior and subordinated vassal. At first, in 1948-49 Italy's inclusion in the Atlantic community was not to be granted. President Truman was against it and so were most senior members of Congress, who considered Italy more a liability than a resource. In the end, it was Italy's weakness, what it lacked more than what it offered, that ultimately led Washington to include it among the original signatories of the North Atlantic Pact, fearing that an exclusion could fatally weaken the centrist and anti-Communist government of Alcide De Gasperi. Facilitated by France's pressures –Paris wanting to re-orient the barycenter of the incipient military alliance towards the south and the Mediterranean– Italy's inclusion in NATO was in other words a major concession of the United States. I will return later in the essay to what this meant for the sovereignty of the country; it is important here to stress, however, that such an outcome was actively sought by the Italian government, and not an imposition of the United States. Indeed the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the inclusion of Rome in the alliance –mainly for the strategic importance of Italy's islands in the Mediterranean– initially fell on deaf ears in the Truman administration and the US Senate as they were especially concerned with the risk of overextending Washington's security guarantees and considered Italy a weak and untrustworthy partner. Furthermore, the participation of Italy in NATO was marked by frequent attempts to free-ride –pursuing for example bold and over-ambitious policies in the Mediterranean and the Middle East (the so-called *Neo-atlantismo* of the second half of the 1950s)–, by perpetual American lamentations of Rome's insufficient contribution to common defense, and, finally, by the uneasy combination of participation in a US-led military alliance and widespread anti-militarism, which was influential even within pro-NATO governmental parties, and particularly in the *Democrazia Cristiana*.⁷

Here we get back to the key issue of the *doppia lealtà* to which political and social actors were subjected. One could claim that it constituted somehow a structural condition not just of the Cold War but of an international system characterized by ever deeper forms of geopolitical, economic and even cultural integration.⁸ In the context of post-World War II bipolarism, however, the position of Italy was rendered peculiar, if not unique, by two additional and very distinctive features: it was a key frontline of the Cold War; and it hosted the largest, pro-Soviet communist party of the “West”. Italy's governmental actors were thus called to address this dual, and

⁶ These privileges will long outlast the Cold War, as proved by the Cermis accident of March 1998, when a US military plane flying too low and against basic regulations inadvertently cut the cable of a gondola car taking skiers to the slopes, killing twenty people. The members of the crew were not tried in Italy and eventually acquitted by a military court in the United States. See *Relazione Conclusiva Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sulle Responsabilità relative alla Tragedia del Cermis*, February 7 2001 (<http://leg13.camera.it/dati/leg13/lavori/documentiparlamentari/indiceetesti/xxiibis/001/pdf000.pdf>, last accessed December 12, 2018). See also Simon Duke, *United States Military Forces and Installations in Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 194-213.

⁷ Guido Formigoni, *La Democrazia Cristiana e l'Alleanza Occidentale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996; Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem. The United States and the Cold War. Choices in France and Italy, 1944–1958*, Westport, CT, Praeger, 2002 ; Mario Del Pero, “When the High Seas Reached the Italian Shores. Italy's Inclusion in the Atlantic Community,” in Marco Mariano (ed.), *Defining the Atlantic Community. Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge, 2010, pp. 161–73.

⁸ For some useful methodological and historiographical reflections, see Sebastian Conrad, *What's Global History*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2016.

sometimes almost incompatible allegiance to the republican constitution and to Cold War's alliances and treaties. The *doppia lealtà* was particularly visible in the relationship with the United States. The crucial vote of 1948 saw an active, and publicized, US interference during the electoral campaign. The effective impact of this meddling on the final result has been downplayed in many historical accounts; but the idea that Cold War Italian governments were somehow installed by (and responding to) a foreign power and put international loyalties before (and above) respect of the constitution informed the political imaginary and propaganda of the Italian Left for years to come, and possibly until today.⁹ Following the beginning of the Korean War in June 1950, and increasingly so throughout the 1950s, US pressures to take action against the PCI, the Communist trade union (the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, CGIL), and their militants became very intense. After the election of Dwight Eisenhower, in 1952, and the appointment of the controversial conservative firebrand Clare Boothe Luce as American ambassador to Italy, Italy's governments were more than once asked to outlaw the PCI and the CGIL, or at least to dismantle local Communist governments, such as those of several Italian cities, beginning with Bologna.¹⁰ After the 1953 elections, which –despite the new, controversial electoral law (renamed by opponents *legge truffa*, “fraud law”)– failed to assure a solid majority to the DC, Luce pushed hard for an opening to the Right: she argued in favor of including the Monarchists, and even some “Atlantic” sectors of the Neo-Fascist party *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), in the government.¹¹ Similar attempts were pursued in later periods, in particular during the late 1960s/early 1970s, with Nixon and Kissinger in the White House, and the controversial US ambassador Graham Martin in Rome.¹² It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the involvement of US actors in some of the most controversial,

⁹ Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of Cold War: Waging Political Warfare, 1945-1950*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; *Idem*, “Re-thinking American intervention in the 1948 Elections: Beyond a Success-Failure Dichotomy,” *Modern Italy*, 2, 2011, pp. 179-194; James E. Miller, “Taking Off the Gloves: the United States and the Italian Elections of 1948,” *Diplomatic History*, 1, 1983, pp. 35-55.

¹⁰ Mario Del Pero, “The United States and Psychological Warfare in Italy, 1948-1956,” *The Journal of American History*, 1, March 2001, pp. 1304-1334; *Idem*, “American Pressures and their Containment in Italy during the Ambassadorship of Clare Boothe Luce, 1953-1956,” *Diplomatic History*, 1, June 2004, pp.407-439; Leo J. Wollemborg, *Stars, Stripes and the Italian Tricolor: the United States and Italy, 1946-1989*, New York, Praeger, 1990.

¹¹ The new electoral law modified the proportional system, assigning 2/3 of the House seats to the party or coalition capable of getting 50% plus one of total votes. The law aimed at guaranteeing the DC and its allies a solid majority in the lower, unruly chamber. The 6-party DC-led coalition (“Blocco di Centro”, *Centrist Bloc*) obtained 49,80% of the votes, a few thousand short of the necessary majority. For two different interpretations, see Gaetano Quagliariello, *La legge elettorale del 1953*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003 and Maria Serena Piretti, *La legge truffa*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003.

¹² Succeeded by the more moderate John Volpe, Martin led the US embassy in Italy from June 1969 to October 1973. He established contacts with some members of Italy's extreme Right and tried to put in action Nixon's preference for an “opening to the Right.” After Italy he was assigned to South Vietnam, where he oversaw the fall of Saigon. His activities in Italy became an object of controversy while in Saigon, due the release of the controversial Pike report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, which provided details of the covert operations supervised by Graham Martin while in Italy. During the controversy, Martin sent some frantic letters to Kissinger in which he urged the then Secretary of State to make clear he had just followed the orders of the White House. Still heavily redacted, the documents are now available at the Gerald P. Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Martin's controversial activities in Italy are discussed in Richard N. Gardner, *Mission Italy: on the Front Lines of the Cold War*, Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, pp. 34-37 and Lucrezia Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana negli anni Settanta*, Florence, Le Monnier, 2014.

dark and dramatic episodes of Italy's history, particularly during the period of the so-called *anni di piombo*: the season of terrorist attacks that plagued the country from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. Conspiracy theories have flourished and a sort of para-scholarly industry has emerged, often stressing the central role the US government played in an alleged *strategia della tensione* ("strategy of tension"), planned by Washington and right-wing pro-Atlantic forces with the ultimate objective of preventing the PCI from joining the government and anchoring Italy more solidly to NATO and the anti-Communist West. The partial and very fragmentary body of documents we have at our disposal do indeed reveal the existence of US connections with some sectors of the ultra-Right, as well as American funding of very controversial figures, such as Italian General and, from 1970 to 1974, head of the chief intelligence service *Servizio Informazioni della Difesa* (SID), Vito Miceli.¹³ The impression, confirmed by the most reliable studies produced on the topic, however, is that more than the product of a coherent strategy, what happened was the byproduct of the anarchic and fluid international context of the period that ended up exasperating the terrorist crisis of the 1970s. More than the consequence of the forced and violent attempt to re-impose a Cold War order and its binary discipline, it was the inexorable crumbling of that order that drove the chaos on which terrorism ultimately spread and prospered. With a counter-slogan, we could say that it was the lack of a strategy, and not the coherent application of one (the *strategia della tensione*), that contributed to one of the darkest phases of the Cold War, notwithstanding Kissinger's frequent infatuations for Chilean solutions to the political disorder plaguing the Southern European flank of the Atlantic alliance during the 1970s.¹⁴

This leads us to a further, essential and yet often overlooked element that should be at the center of any examination of US policies and actions in Italy during the Cold War. The thesis that the United States was a key actor, and one of the main planners, of the *strategia della tensione* not only runs counter the documentary record, but is also often explained as part of a US attitude towards Italian matters that proceeded unchanged from the meddling in the Italian elections of 1948 to the bombs planted in Italy's squares and trains in the 1970s. There is, in other words, a sort of essentialism that completely overlooks two fundamental variables informing the context of the Cold War in Italy: the evolution of the Cold War itself; and, more important for our argument, the changes in Washington's approach to the Cold War and to Italian affairs, and the ebbs and flows this determined in Washington's attention to what was happening in Italy.¹⁵

¹³ Gualtieri, *The Italian Political System and Détente*; Lucrezia Cominelli, *op. cit.*; Luigi Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani (1969-1972)*, Milan, Mondadori, 2015.

¹⁴ Victor Gavin, Mario Del Pero, Fernando Guirao and Antonio Varsori, *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature*, Milan, Le Monnier, 2010; Mario Del Pero, "Which Chile, Allende? Henry Kissinger and the Portuguese Revolution," *Cold War History*, 4, 2011, pp. 625-657.

¹⁵ For some purely illustrative examples of this sort of "essentialist" approach to US policies in Italy during the Cold War, see Roberto Faenza and Marco Fini, *Gli americani in Italia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1976; Paul Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003; Giuseppe De Lutiis, *I servizi segreti in Italia. Dal fascismo all'intelligence del XXI secolo*, Milan Sperling & Kupfer, 2010.

Periodizing the Cold War in Italy

US grand strategic variations cascaded on regional and national contexts, and the position of Italy changed and evolved accordingly. To put it very simply, the Italian policy of the Truman administration was not that of the Eisenhower administration, which, in turn, was also different from that of the Kennedy administration, because dissimilar were their foreign policies and general Cold War strategies. Whenever we study US actions in Italy, we must consider this and make an effort to connect the general (US global strategies) to the particular (US policies in Italy), trying to understand how the former conditioned and sometimes shaped the latter. Once we accept this basic, and yet often ignored, methodological premise, we can try to put forward a couple of useful, interrelated interpretative generalizations. The first concerns the periodization. When we look at the experience of Italy during the Cold War, and the role the United States played in it, we can adopt a tripartite chronology. The first phase goes from the immediate post-World War II to the mid-1960s; the second –which corresponds largely with the era of bipolar and intra-European *détente*– goes from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s; the third from then to the end of the Cold War.¹⁶ During phase one, the main goal of the United States seemed to have been that of integrating Italy, rapidly and deeply, into the US-centered Cold War economic and security architecture. This objective was pursued through what historians now tend to define as a strategy of “modernization” of Italy, which entailed the fast-forward promotion of radical political and socio-economic change in order to transform, modernize and indeed “westernize” what was still considered to be a backward country, prone to fall prey of radical extreme forces and utopias, the PCI and communism being just the last of a long list.¹⁷ It is easy, here, to trace some analogies with the policies later promoted by the Kennedy administration in Latin America, particularly the “Alliance for Progress” (*Alianza para el Progreso*), which explicitly referred to the precedent of late 1940s Italy and Southern Europe. Trained in the Keynesian precepts of the New Deal economy, many Marshall planners tried to apply them to Italy, often with frustrating results, as we have seen in the case of the 1949 Country Study. The recipes of these new dealers included public spending to surrogate the paucity of private ones, investments in infrastructures, promotion of a progressive land reform, trade liberalization, increases in productivity via training, higher salaries, and adoption of more advanced forms of industrial relations. But they were applied at best partially and very selectively, and often simply fell on deaf ears or were trumped by more pressing Cold War concerns.¹⁸ They were nevertheless paradigmatic of the very philosophy informing the US attitude toward Italian matters. In the 1950s, they were somehow reversed by a new approach that – while

¹⁶ Federico Romero and I have first tried to propose this periodization in our “The United States, Italy and the Cold War: Interpreting and Periodising a Contradictory and Complicated Relationship,” in Antonio Varsori, Benedetto Zaccaria (eds.), *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War. The Underrated Ally*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2017, pp. 15-34.

¹⁷ For some excellent syntheses of US Cold War modernizing strategies see Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era*, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2010.

¹⁸ Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War. Waging Political Warfare, 1945-1950*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

also aiming at a profound reshape of Italy's society and politics –explicitly abandoned the Keynesian philosophy of Truman's liberals, and proposed instead more conservative, free-trade solutions to Italy's congenital difficulties and backwardness. Clare Boothe Luce and her main economic advisor, Henry Tasca, lambasted the plans of Italian “modernizers” à-la Ezio Vanoni, a DC economist and planner who held the ministries of Finance and Budget in from 1948 to 1956, and who proposed in the mid-50s Keynesian reforms that US officials would have probably endorsed enthusiastically just a few years earlier.¹⁹ Kennedy and his court of liberal “best & brightest” returned instead to an adapted version of the original Truman model, explicitly linking their support to the “opening to the Left” (i.e.: the inclusion of the Italian Socialists, *Partito Socialista Italiano*, *PSI* in the government coalition) to the belief that a DC-PSI government could finally adopt the progressive reforms necessary to modernize the country, and thus reduce the appeal and success of Communism.²⁰ The turning point, here, was the first loosening of the Cold War straightjacket, the opening of the long season of bipolar *détente* and the decreasing importance of Europe in US geopolitical hierarchies and concerns. In the Italian case, these structural conditions were compounded by the disillusion (if not outright anger) with the timid reformism of the new Center-Left government. In 1965, Kennedy and Johnson's National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy gave voice to this disenchantment, bitterly denouncing the propensity of Italian actors to exploit the Cold War and extract aid and concessions from Washington while offering little or nothing in return. It was time –an exasperated Bundy maintained– to drastically reduce American funding for anti-Communist parties: “we have not been getting our full money's worth,” he wrote to Johnson.²¹ Bundy's outburst can be chosen as a convenient opening for the second phase of our chronology during which modernizing solutions to Italy's pathological problems and dilemmas were simply abandoned; and the primary issue became instead avoiding that US/Soviet *détente* could be exploited by those, such as DC leader Aldo Moro, who supported a parallel domestic *détente* in Italy and the gradual re-inclusion of the PCI itself in the governmental majority (an approach that would eventually become known as *compromesso storico*, “historical compromise”, a slogan first coined by PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer in 1973).²² “When you imagine what communist Governments will do inside NATO” –Kissinger thundered in response to the possible participation of communist parties in coalition governments in Italy and Portugal– “it doesn't make any difference whether they're controlled by Moscow or not. It will unravel NATO

¹⁹ A liberal economist, author in the late 1930s of two books on international trade, Henry J. Tasca was the main economic advisor of Clare Luce, and an adamant opponent of Keynesian policies in Italy or possible openings to the Left. His *bêtes noires* were leftist DCs such as Vanoni or the Italian President Giovanni Gronchi. He was later appointed ambassador to Morocco and Greece during the regime of the Colonels (1969-1974).

²⁰ Leopoldo Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra*, Rome, Laterza, 1999; Pietro Nenni, “Where the Italian Socialists Stand,” *Foreign Affairs*, 1, January 1962, pp. 213-223; Mario Del Pero “Gli Stati Uniti e il dilemma italiano” in Pier Luigi Ballini, Sandro Guerrieri e Antonio Varsori (eds.), *Le istituzioni repubblicane dal centrismo al centro-sinistra (1953-1968)*, Rome, Carocci, 2006, pp.212-226

²¹ *Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy to President Johnson, August 4, 1965, in Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), Vol. XII: Western Europe, Washington, Government Printing Office, 2001* (<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v12/ch3>, last accessed December 13, 2018).

²² Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Turin, Einaudi, 2006; Michele Di Donato, *I comunisti italiani e la Sinistra europea. Il PCI e i rapporti con la socialdemocrazia (1964-1984)*, Rome Carocci, 2015.

and the European community into a neutralist instrument. And that is the essence of it.” US backers of the *compromesso storico*, in particular among some intellectual and academic liberal circles, claimed that the newly acquired independence of the PCI from Moscow had to be exploited with a further “opening to the Left”. For Kissinger, instead, “whether or not these parties” were “controlled from Moscow” was “a subsidiary issue.” “We keep saying that there’s no conclusive evidence that they are not under the control of Moscow –he argued during a meeting with his staff– “implying that if we could show they were not under the control of Moscow, we could find them acceptable [...]. A Western Europe with the participation of communist parties is going to change the basis of NATO [...] to bring the communists into power in Western Europe [...] would totally reorient the map of postwar Europe”.²³ The Nixon and Ford administrations flirted, again, with a possible “opening to the Right”; Cold War disciplinary mechanisms were reactivated at the hands of key European allies, especially Helmut Schmidt’s Federal Republic of Germany, which made much needed financial aid conditional on avoiding the opening to the PCI; the Carter administration’s “hands off” policy was mistaken as an almost explicit authorization to the *compromesso storico* until the new Ambassador to Rome Richard Gardner –an old “Atlanticist” hand on multiple counts– made it clear that it was not the case, and the US-Italian *conventio ad excludendum* of the PCI had not lost its value.²⁴ Notwithstanding Reagan’s election and the temporary heated resurgence of the ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in the early 1980s, the Cold War was gradually losing its hold on Europe –where East-West *détente* continued in spite of Washington’s laments– and on Italy. The third and last phase of our chronology is that of a growing unraveling of the elements that had informed and cemented the Cold War alliance between Italy and the United States. In the 1980s, the relationship between the American superpower and its junior Italian partner, as well as the presence (real and imaginary) of the United States in Italy’s political life, lost its salience. There was an attempt by some political forces, Bettino Craxi PSI’s in particular, to use the early 1980s’ “Second Cold War” for domestic political gains: for eroding the support of the PCI by denouncing its connivance with Moscow’s authoritarianism, brutal violation of basic human rights, and persistent repression of political dissent. But Italy was moving clearly in another direction, while the strategic priorities of the Reagan administration –from Central America to the Middle East to Central Asia– were producing a further downgrading of the geopolitical importance of Western Europe and of the Italian theater along with it.²⁵

²³ *Meeting Secretary of State’s Staff*, January 12, 1975 and July 1, 1976, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland (NARA), Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State (RG59), Lot File 78D443, Box 6 and Box 10. On Berlinguer and the inner limits of his strategy, see the excellent Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Cominelli, *op. cit.*; Gardner, *op. cit.*; Olav Njølstad, “The Carter Administration and Italy: Keeping the Communists out of Power without Interfering,” *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, 3, Summer 2002, pp. 56-94; Riccardo Diego Portolani, *Gli Stati Uniti e l’Eurocomunismo, 1976-1980*, PhD dissertation, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, 2015.

²⁵ Silvio Pons, Adriano Roccucci and Federico Romero (eds.), *L’Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta ad oggi. 1.: Fine della Guerra Fredda e globalizzazione*, Rome, Carocci, 2014; Doug Rossinow, *The Reagan Era: a History of the 1980s*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015.

Sovereignty, democracy and systemic conditionalities

The paradox that historians have long overlooked, but seems now all the more visible and felt, is that the waning of the Cold War did not reduce Italy's exposure to external pressures as well as formal and informal conditionalities. The post-Cold War environment, in other words, proved to be more conducive to limitations of Italy's sovereignty and autonomy than the Cold War system itself. From the un-codified, and yet inescapable, effects of dynamics of world integration that followed the collapse of the Bretton Woods regime to the hyper-normed post-1970s EC/EU order, Italy –like the quasi totality of states– found itself constrained as never before by a powerful web of European and global interdependencies.²⁶ And this leads us back to how the Cold War and its key feature for the Italian republic –the asymmetrical relationship with the senior American ally and quasi-imperial patron– affected the evolution of Italy's young democracy and its ability to preserve the full attributes of state sovereignty.

Studying the history of the Cold War in Italy and of post-1945 US-Italian relations warns us against the simplistic interpretative polarities that still dominate the public discussion and, often, the historiographical conversation itself. On the one side, US foreign policy and the Cold War were not static, immutable phenomena: they changed and evolved and so did their impact on Italy. On the other, the very opaque nature of the Cold War system was particularly visible in one of its early, and key, frontlines: the Italian theater. The United States –we can easily argue– played a crucial role in (and was in many ways instrumental to) the process of postwar democracy-building in Italy. From its role in the liberation of the Italian peninsula during the war to its support to the democratic/republican transition, from its economic aid to its (often frustrated) pressures to undertake progressive reforms in various realms (agriculture, education, industrial and labor relations), Washington was at forefront of the process that shaped and transformed Italy during the first phase of post-World War II reconstruction. But this commitment frequently clashed with US anti-Soviet and anti-Communist priorities, which in certain phases of the Cold War –particularly the period 1953-1956, when Clare Boothe Luce led the American embassy in Rome– appeared to trump the promotion, or even the simple defense, of democratic principles. Italy's main actors, and the *Democrazia Cristiana* in particular, actively worked to contain US pressures, whether they were aimed at fostering a progressive change many DC conservatives and economic interests feared and opposed or at violating basic constitutional precepts, as in the case of the request to move aggressively against the PCI and the CGIL and outlaw them. Even the much contested adoption of the measures against the PCI and the CGIL following the inception of the Korean War –the implementation of a form of “protected democracy” that the Left and many scholars have long denounced as the quintessential example of Italy's semi-authoritarian regression in the early 1950s– can (and indeed must) be

²⁶ Del Pero and Romero, *The United States, Italy and the Cold War*, *op. cit.*; Antonio Varsori, *La cenerentola d'Europa. L'Italia e l'integrazione europea dal 1946 a oggi*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2010 and *Idem, L'Italia e la fine della Guerra Fredda: la politica estera dei governi Andreotti (1989-1992)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013.

interpreted as an attempt by De Gasperi and the DC leaders to mitigate US pressures and avoid adopting the more draconian provisions Washington urged.²⁷

In a nutshell (and in a useful dialectical slogan) we could say that during the Cold War the United States fostered and hindered at the same time the democratic evolution of the Italian republic: that in the frequent clashes and tensions between Rome and Washington the two parts could find themselves on different sides –in defending or threatening democracy– depending on time, circumstances and issues. The same plea for avoiding static and essentialist simplifications applies to the vexed question of Italy’s sovereignty. At a first glance it seems even banal to emphasize how such sovereignty was vastly curtailed by the new Cold War order: Italy had to accept on its territory bases on which it had limited control and foreign troops enjoying extra-territorial rights; its military autonomy was greatly limited; its inclusion in the liberally embedded Bretton Woods order imposed accepting US monetary hegemony and the “exorbitant privilege” of the dollar; its second largest party was substantially inhibited from entering the government; its state apparatuses discriminated on the bases of political affiliations and loyalties. And still, a closer (and properly historicized) look reveals a much less neat and more ambiguous picture. Borrowing economist Piero Sraffa’s formula (“production of commodities by means of commodities”) and applying it to Cold War geopolitics, we can argue that in the case of Italy the Cold War granted it the possibility to produce sovereignty by means of sovereignty. The undisputable cession of several attributes of state sovereignty was somehow instrumental to regain a partial (and clearly lost) sovereignty in other realms. The Atlantic Alliance imposed the abovementioned loss of sovereignty, while at the same time freeing Italy from the tight constraints imposed by the 1947 peace treaty; once the Cold War superseded the remnants of World War II, Italy –as other countries– could finally join the new international order and be admitted to the United Nations (in 1955); European integration –which was in part another byproduct of the Cold War– offered a further tool for “rescuing” the Italian state, conferring new possibilities and prerogatives to the young republic.²⁸ Many other examples could follow. The lesson, to the historian, is nevertheless unequivocal: avoid essentialisms of sort; historicize complex and evolving processes; confront without ideological or simplistic lenses the complex opacities of the inherently ambiguous order of the Cold War.

²⁷ Del Pero, *Alleato Scomodo*; Emanuele Bernardi, “La Democrazia Cristiana e la Guerra Fredda: una selezione di documenti inedita,” *Ventesimo Secolo*, 10, 2006, pp. 127-137; Sergio Chillé, “I riflessi della Guerra di Corea sulla situazione politica italiana negli anni 1950-53: alle origini dell’ipotesi degasperiana di “democrazia protetta,”” *Storia Contemporanea*, 5, Ottobre 1987, pp. 895-926; Ilenia Rossini, ““Democrazia Protetta” e “leggi eccezionali”: un dibattito politico italiano (1950-1953),” *Dimensioni e Problemi della Ricerca Storica*, 2, 2011, pp. 75-107. “Protected democracy” was the slogan used by the De Gasperi government, and by the Minister of Interior Mario Scelba in particular, to justify the exceptional laws adopted in the early 1950s to allegedly “protect” Italy’s democracy from anti-democratic forces (i.e.: the Neofascists and the pro-Soviet Left).

²⁸ On this, see the yet unsurpassed Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1992. Cf. also Ilaria Poggiolini, “Europeismo degasperiano e politica estera dell’Italia: un’ipotesi interpretativa (1947-49),” *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali*, 1, 1985, pp. 67-94.