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Revisiting Italian Mediterranean Policy in the 1950s:
Internal or Externally-driven? The Interplay of External
Pressures and Domestic Constraints

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Abstract

This article aims to explore Italy's "Neo-Atlanticist" foreign policy (FP) strand in the mid-1950s to highlight the complex interplay of external and internal political dynamics. It corresponded to the third circle of Rome's FP loadstars - the Mediterranean and Arab world – with Rome intending to conduct an autonomous policy that was often seen as clashing with its Atlanticist commitments. Italian foreign policy was tightly constrained by its integration in Euro-Atlantic alliances, but it was also able to cut for itself a margin of independent maneuver in pursuit of a more autonomous policy in the Mediterranean.

Keywords

Neo-Atlanticism, Italy, foreign policy making, Mediterranean, domestic politics, external determinants

Introduction

Within the constraints imposed by its defeat in World War II, the post-war Republican governments tried to pursue a more independent FP by focusing on the southern Mediterranean. This paper speaks to broader themes in International Relations, namely the conditions in which foreign policies are made: how do states formulate their FP? How do decision-makers and key domestic institutions actually influence or determine the content of their FP, or merely its style? Is it the international environment, or, rather, internal conditions, that drive the shaping of FP?

Our analysis is based on a re-interpretation of secondary sources, mostly a batch of recent publications evaluating the First Republic Italian foreign policy¹ (Varsori 2015). Those publications originate from the field of historiography, and diplomatic history, but also of Political Science and International Relations. This paper aims to weave most recent research on Rome's "Neo-Atlanticist" FP into an argument within the broader literature that examines processes of foreign policy making, a subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis that is still developing (Alden and Aran, 2012: 92). Much work has been done to unravel the interaction of domestic and international determinants of foreign policy (Allison, 1971; Allison and Halperin, 1972).²

We consider worthwhile explaining, in particular, whether Italian foreign policy was conducted within the narrow margins of subordination to Euro-Atlantic allegiances, or whether it was able to promote an autonomous policy in the Mediterranean, as well as the nature of the interplay of external and internal political dynamics within those dynamics (Brighi 2013, 107).

Italian Post-war Foreign Policy: External Determinants

In the aftermath of World War II, the drive for new diplomatic moves in the Mediterranean was determined, firstly, by the natural Mediterranean "vocation" of the country, that is, its geopolitical location and history (Brogi 2011, 332; Di Camerana 1992, 56; Leonardis 2003, 65).

Within the constraints imposed by the Yalta partition, the post-war Italian Republican governments tried to advance their interests in the Middle East and in the southern Mediterranean regions. In order to understand why the Mediterranean assumed such importance for Italy in the post-war years, one must consider the traumatic experience of the war, from which Italy emerged frustrated, and as a humiliated power.

Before long, however, the Italian government realized that the historical and diplomatic conditions would not allow it to achieve this goal. Between 1947 and 1949, Italy was denied the possibility of taking back its colonial territories in Africa and the Mediterranean, as a consequence of the peace treaty clauses, and of the failure of a proposed agreement between foreign ministers, Ernest Bevin and Carlo Sforza. However, the growing Arab nationalism, the obvious difficulties France and Britain faced with their Mediterranean possessions, and the apprehensions regarding a possible expansion of Soviet influence, kept Rome's interest for what was happening in the Mediterranean and Middle East,

¹ Foreign policy can be defined as "a set of goals, directives or intentions, formulated by persons in official or authoritative positions, directed at some actor or condition in the environment beyond the sovereign nation state, for the purpose of affecting the target in the manner desired by the policymakers" (Cohen and Harris 1975, 383).

² Often explanations take as a useful point of departure Putnam's contribution from foreign policy analysis, the two-level game theory, applied to international negotiations (1988). It lays out a framework for understanding the interaction of domestic and international determinants of foreign policy. It posits national-level policymakers face two separate constituencies when making decisions - domestic-level groups and international-level groups -, and must juggle their conflicting interests.

while knowing that this was also the attitude of the United States - the ally to which Italian foreign policy looked up to more attentively.

After 1949, the Italian political class and the diplomatic apparatus advocated three major foreign policy lines. The first was driven by the desire not to be sidelined from the upcoming European organizations, such as the Council of Europe and the European Communities. In April 1949, Rome managed to enter the Atlantic Pact, despite British opposition and as a result of France's good offices. Inclusion in the Pact would secure a privileged relationship with the United States, a source of vital economic support for the reconstruction of the country, and ensure its security. With the heavy constraints imposed by the outcomes of the war, which were like a straitjacket for Italy's action, Rome could not afford to deviate from the line advocated by the Western bloc. The Italian political system (Di Camerana 1992, 56)³ was heavily "penetrated", according to Rosenau's terminology, due to Washington's hegemonic influence in Italian FP (Brighi 2013, 107; Weinberg 1995, 11). The geopolitical context ineluctably constrained its internal politics, leading policy-makers to justify some unpopular choices "as necessary in terms of international politics" (Santoro, 1991, 9,159; 1993, 159; Pasquino 1974, 165-166). American domination, in particular, constrained the unfettered exercise of an active FP (Newell 2011, 49), although on some occasions Rome demonstrated its willingness not to abide by U.S. positions.⁴ Scholars such as Romano, argue in no uncertain terms that Rome's external FP policy environment actually "made" Italian domestic politics' (1993, 159).

The third line, Italy's re-orientation to the Mediterranean (Coralluzzo 2011, 39), was understood by its opponents as a challenge to orthodox Atlanticism. The new trend was coined "Neo-Atlanticism", "Atlantic revisionism", "Atlantic pacifism" or "Mediterranean nationalism" (Mammarella and Cacace 2008, 206). It developed in the mid-1950s within political and business circles, and gained traction in the *Democrazia Cristiana* as an alternative to the European and Atlantic options, as well as within strong currents in the political arena and public opinion which favored pacifism and neutralism.⁵

Eventually, Italian foreign policy followed from a combination, between the positions of those who pleaded for an unambiguous choice for affiliation with the European-Atlantic community (Nation 2011, 44), and those who emphasized the need to cultivate Italy's Mediterranean vocation (Bagnato 1991, 11; Novati 1995, 197). In this context, the repeated attempts, by Rome, to present itself as a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean were a clear testimony to the latter (Tonini 2002, 1). Alcide De Gasperi, the architect of Italy's integration in Europe, and one of "Europe's founding fathers", first depicted Italy's role as "protagonist" in the Arab-Islamic world (Ferraris 1996, 65; Tonini 2002, 5).

However, the three lines of foreign policy were not considered of equal value by some sectors of Italian diplomacy, which looked on to Western Europe and the transatlantic link as the natural culmination of the rehabilitation of Italy on the international scene. The European and Euro-Atlantic community - hinging on the U.S. association with NATO - afforded the country security guarantees, development assistance, and a context for internal democratic consolidation and rehabilitation on the international scene (Nation 2011, 44). Supporters of this line argued that Mediterranean ambitions would be subordinated to other FP priorities, and could only be supported up to the point where they would not collide with European/Transatlantic policy (Bagnato 1992, 308).

³ Italy's system can be classified, according to A. Lijphart's scheme, as a consensus democracy', a typology which refers to a political system where rigid ideological divisions create polarization and, eventually, deadlock of the system: Lijphart 1984 and 1999; Romano 1995, 48-49; Sartori 1996, 137-76.

⁴ In 1948 Italian Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, successfully resisted U.S. pressures demanding Rome's association to Britain's sponsored Brussels Treaty Organization (Ratti 2011, 124).

⁵ Including in the ruling party, DC (*Democrazia Cristiana* - Christian Democratic Party), within which there were strong divisions (Mammarella 1974, 220-25).

This divided sense of belonging, reverberated on the formation processes of Italian foreign policy. The countervailing current - Neo-Atlanticism -, aimed for a greater autonomy, especially in a context of balancing of East/West relations (Kogan 1990, 119). It also combined other desiderata: to refashion NATO in order to employ it as a device for strengthening political and economic cooperation, instead of its exclusive military utility;⁶ to try to recover its position of “middle power”, lost with the defeat; to foster economic relations with Arab countries (Novati 1995, 210; Cacace 1986, 479). In the 1950s, this new approach was seen by many as clashing with the alignment with the United States and European powers (Tonini, 2002, 20). This foreign policy orientation drew together existing strands of pacifism, neutralism, and Third-Worldism. Although a short-lived approach, its premises and appeal survived the contingency of time, and was carried on by many prominent decision makers in the following decades (Pirani 2008, 5; Coralluzzo 2011, 42).

After World War II, the search for synthesis between these competing views became even more difficult due to the Cold War, the internal political situation, and the fact that, striving to regain its lost status as a world power, Italy was forced to consider the interests of more influential powers, in a context where Rome could hardly use its specific weight (“*peso determinante*”)⁷. In the immediate post-war years, the aim of Italian policy in the Mediterranean was to restore its role as a colonial power, such as Britain and France.⁸ To be sure, this goal was also linked to the desire to be readmitted in Europe on an equal footing with the other countries. The Mediterranean was thus one of the scenarios to which Italy had to move back, in order to take its rightful place in the concert of nations (Varsori 1999, 219).

The Mediterranean - as political scientist Carlo Santoro put it - was “an almost virgin ground, where rules did not exist and, therefore, where the space for invention and freedom of maneuver was undoubtedly greater” (Santoro 1991, 235, 182). Italian policy in the Mediterranean was, in the post-war period, its “only instance of power politics” (Ferraris 1996, 63; Leonardis, 2003, 65). It was an area where Italy was able to exert greater “political assertiveness” (Leonardis 2003, 66; Carbone 2007).

In the complex Cold War environment, undergoing rapid mutation, Italy thus played two different roles: first, it was a subordinate ally in the Western bloc, with all the inhibitions it entailed; secondly, it wanted to act as the primary actor in its regional context, where its “specific weight” was undoubtedly greater. It was in the Mediterranean that “it could assume a position closer to the “national interest”, which... means primarily the external recognition of its political independence in the framework of alliances, and a regional role equivalent to its national attributes” (Santoro 1991, 234-5, 226).

Domestic Constraints on Italian Foreign Policy

The emergence of a Mediterranean foreign policy alternative is also explained by the need to conciliate domestic partisan politics and Italian faction-ridden elites. Indeed, a great number of observers of Italian politics stress the subordination of Rome’s FP to domestic politics (Chelotti and

⁶ It derived from the Italian interpretation of the NATO’s Pact, and of how Italy could make the best out of it, in particular pleading for an economic reorientation of the Alliance: Italy was disappointed by the virtual American rejection of NATO’s article two, of permanent consultations, and above all of cooperation with Rome in the Middle East’ (Brogi 2002, 204).

⁷ A Machiavellian FP concept, which claimed that, although not being among the European great powers, Italy had the potential to balance between liberal democracies and the totalitarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany (Mammarella and Cacace 2008, 100).

⁸ Italy was able to make a partial return to its colonies already in late 1950 through the creation of the trust territory of Somaliland, that was placed under Italian administration for a ten-year transitional period (at a time when Rome was not still a member of the United Nations).

Pizzimenti 2011, 82): Neo-Atlanticism reflected the inter-linkage between internal and external politics (Pridham 1981, 17).

Foreign policy initiatives were dependent to a large extent on the domestic stasis, and were calibrated to fit into the internal political scene, especially during the critical period of the opening to the left and the Italian response to the détente policy adopted by the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s, especially after the July 1955 Geneva Conference. The new Italian President, Giovanni Gronchi, elected in 1955, was inclined to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards coexistence, but in the process could not afford to allay his DC allies because of its leftist leanings and Atlanticist misgivings. The debate about the advantages and benefits of Neo-Atlanticism seemed tailor-made to bring the DC and PSI closer together, “to the point of giving the impression that all the agitation of Italy on the Mediterranean theatre, was nothing more than a shift from the undue scene of strictly internal perspectives” (Bagnato 2005, 103; Kogan 1990, 120).

Italy is a case where, in explaining foreign policy, domestic politics cannot be underestimated to the benefit of the primacy of the international environment (Andreatta 2001, 45-65). One of the original features of Italian politics in those years, was that the “system was dominated by the Christian Democratic Party (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), which – confronting a major anti-system party on the left, the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI), and a smaller post-fascist party on the right, the Italian Social Movement (MSI) – was able to remain permanently in office, with the support of a combination of smaller centrist parties” (Carbone 2011b, 5). Italy was politically split between one of the most powerful communist parties in Western Europe, and a number of coalition governments dominated by the DC.

Since the very early days of the Republic, both the Socialists and the Communists were hostile towards Atlantic and European allegiances, perceived as a form of subordination to Washington (Bindi 2008, 5). The PCI – a formidable political force - became the most vocal advocate of Italian interests against perceived subservience to Washington (Brogi 2002b, 11-12). Since 1947, it was formally excluded from the government according to the formula of the *convention ad excludendum*, a situation that lasted until 1976.⁹

Italian FP was, to a large extent, above the parties and consensual: it is, still to this day, to a large extent, according to not a few authors, a reflection of party politics (Newell 2011, 51; Carbone 2011b). Internal politics create the political climate for foreign policy decisions (Ferraris 1996, 5). FP is a terrain where internal party polarization is reflected, and where parties jockey for consensus. Sassoon states that Italy “must be considered as an extreme case of the subordination of foreign policy to domestic politics once the major 'choices' of 1947-50 were made” (1978, 100). In this period, Italian FP was deeply subdued by Italy’s political parties (Chelotti and Pizzimenti 2011, 82; Vigezzi, 1992, 118-20). FP making was a “balancing act” (Andreatta 2001, 48), a delicate consensus-making exercise in a polarized system.

As Romano highlights, during the First Republic, Italy’s “original” political system, (Romano 1993, 41), flawed by great ideological/party polarization, contributed to undermine the cohesiveness of Italy’s FP. FP was reduced to the minimum common denominator because of the need to bring down the challenges to the domestic equilibriums from the external environment (Carbone 2011b, 5; Andreatta 2009, 170). The domestic system “traditionally favored a low-profile policy in order to avoid defense matters becoming an issue of contention between parties traditionally marked by deep cleavages between a pro-Atlantic position and a pro-Soviet position” (Foradori and Rosa 2008, 174; Panebianco 1977, 863 and Panebianco 1982, 16; Foradori and Rosa, 2007, 69; Hoffmann, 1974, 393; Hoffmann 1975, 391; Pasquino 1974, 171).

⁹ Only by the end of the 1970s would the PCI endorse Italy’s membership of NATO and integration into Western Europe, and the DC accepted the idea of further engaging with the Soviet bloc and the Arab world.

Political fractionalization and domestic instability may have constrained the conduct of a purposeful FP. Finding a common platform for external action was close to impossible, in a system where nationalists, left-wing DC, catholic corporatist forces, neutralist socialists and pro-Soviet communists cohabitated. Italian decision-makers also had to meet the demands of a myriad of interest-groups, which highly influenced public policy, if not being themselves the driving forces (Newell 2010, 2907). In some way, as they participated in the national consensus (Linz 1979, 188), the FP line was “the one that better conciliated those different demands” (Romano 1993, 41-42).

The thesis of Italian FP as a mere reflection of internal maneuvering is shared by many observers of Italian politics. Putting it simply, Italian FP “was used primarily as a tool in domestic political struggles” (Laird 1990, 163; Cavazza 1974, 23, Brogi 2002a, 4; Andreatta 2009, 174). The DC, the ruling party, embodied the primacy of domestic politics over FP. Its rare initiatives, away from the orthodox Euro-Atlantic line, had its roots in domestic politics (Hassner 1982, 257; Vannicelli 1974, 61).

Italian ventures in the Mediterranean were timed to the first timid attempts, in the second half of the 1950s, of the “opening to the left (*apertura a sinistra*). Mediterranean policy was a product of the political system, in which the ruling party was forced to “minimize” potential conflicts due to its international allegiances, and open up new FP venues (Carbone 2007, 906; Mammarella 1974, 223). The desire to pursue independent action beyond the confines of the Euro-Atlantic alliance was best represented by some leading left-wing Christian Democrats who emerged after the death of De Gasperi.

Thus, “Neo-Atlanticism” and the overtures to Arab leaders - who were usually socialist or part of the Non-Aligned Movement -, were seen by the centrist parties, in a fractioned political system, as inducements extended to Socialist participation. As Brogi has pointed out, “no doubt, several left-wing Christian-Democrats decided to pursue their Mediterranean “vocation” solely as a pretext to encourage an opening to the Nenni-Socialists” (Brogi 2002b, 10; Romano 2002, 123; Castagnoli 2015, 79).

The Mediterranean policy was promoted by an assorted array of personalities from different political backgrounds motivated by diverging interests. The DC’s new leadership and the intrepid President, Giovanni Gronchi (1955-1962), were set on expanding the Italian influence in the Mediterranean, as part of a general policy for increasing Italian prestige on the international scene. Besides Gronchi, there were other prominent personalities: Amintore Fanfani, party leader in 1954 and Chairman of the Council in 1958-59; Giorgio La Pira, Mayor of Florence for two long periods in the 1950s and the 1960s; and, especially, Enrico Mattei, Chairman of the Italian oil holding company, *Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi* – ENI, and a major influence in Italian foreign policy, as far as the Arab world was concerned. By 1957, Foreign Minister, Giuseppe Pella, despite espousing more conservative views, also came to embrace the plan.

Gronchi led one of the first attempts to achieve that opening, in order to harness the consensus of all or part of the PSI into a governing coalition premised on his vague vision of a more “flexible” Italian FP with neutralist undertones (Brogi 2002b, 10). In 1957, Nenni paved the way for the rapprochement with the DC and the formation of a center-left majority (Tonini 2002, 11). The change in the PSI’s approach to foreign policy allowed the party to join the majority coalition supporting the government in 1958, and then enter the government in 1963.

Exploring Italian “Autonomy” in the Mediterranean

Italy’s return to the Mare Nostrum also derives its particular force and legitimacy from the anti-colonial option completed in 1949 against Italian will. Italy converted to anti-colonialism and embraced the promotion of the independence of colonial territories, although in a non-confrontational way, desiring to start fruitful political and economic relations with the newly independent countries (Bagnato 1992, 301-02; Ferraris 1996, 63; Pizzigallo 2006 and 2008). Italian statesmen realized that

decolonization was the new “battlefield” between East and West (Bagnato 1992, 300), criticizing the policy of other Western countries towards newly independent nations. There were those who argued that Italy should maintain friendly relations with Arab countries in the interest of the entire Western bloc. Italy could help stem the nascent colonial nationalism, and prevent Soviet intrusion in those regions (Novati 1995, 207; Bagnato 1992, 302; Pedaliu 2009, 739).

The need to incorporate the new policy, and to explain it in European and Atlantic terms, was perceived from the outset as a delicate matter. Italy took care to link the defense of those interests within a broader Western design. Only if it managed to establish itself as part of the Atlantic policy, if its own specific objectives were compatible with the strengthening of the Western bloc, would the African/Arab strategy have had chances of success (Bagnato 1992, 302). Specifically, if Palazzo Chigi managed to demonstrate that its policy was aimed at shielding African peoples from the “contagion” of Communism, it would garner the consent of its European and transatlantic partners” (Bagnato 1992, 302; Novati 1995, 209; Onelli 2013, 74).

In order to make its Mediterranean ventures more palatable to Washington, taking advantage of the difficulties faced by European colonial powers, Rome proposed to become the U.S. “privileged partner” in the region, a sort of mediator (Leonardis 2003, 61-93; Bagnato 1992, 307). However, this position was ambiguous due to the nature of its transatlantic obligations and the sympathy Italian politicians - especially the more left-wing Christian Democrats/DC and social democrats, PSDI (Varsori, 1998, 127) -, nurtured towards Gamal Abdel Nasser, Habib Bourguiba, and Moroccan nationalists (Di Nolfo 1992, 425).

In an international political landscape in motion - such as that offered by an international system after Stalin’s death -, the Neo-Atlantic debate starts precisely from the fact that, after 1955 - torn between a “Cold War”, now considered to be easing, and the timidly-felt relaxation of the international system -, Italian foreign policy could pursue political and economic opportunities in the Mediterranean (Ferraris 1996, 91-93; Romano 2002, 85).

In 1951, De Gasperi broached to Washington the prospect of Italian participation in the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), which at the time was being negotiated by the United States, Great Britain, Turkey, and Egypt. Four years later, Prime Minister Mario Scelba inquired about a possible Italian association with the Baghdad Pact, the alliance system that had replaced the failed MEDO (Brogi 2002, 21). In principle, Italy had always refused the idea of separate agreements or Mediterranean pacts, because these initiatives would have excluded it from major decisions taken in Washington and London without consulting the Mediterranean “partners” (Onelli 2013, 74, Brogi 1996, 345, 63, 177). Although excluded from those initiatives, Rome went to considerable lengths to prevent any military agreements in the Middle East that would have kept it at the margins of the Western defense system, and would have inhibited access to its share of U.S. aid.

In endeavoring to regain its role in the Mediterranean, Italy could take advantage of the difficulties that other traditional Mediterranean powers – Britain and France – were going through. The first major opportunity occurred in October 1951, following the crisis that erupted from the unilateral termination of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty by the Egyptian parliament. The timely mediation offer by De Gasperi was not followed by any concrete request by the two governments involved in the dispute. Washington provided only a slight formal encouragement (Novati 1995, 209). As Novati remarked: “it was in practice Italy’s first attempt to present itself as protagonist in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern chessboard without availing itself of the pre-existing channels of the blocs, but avoiding simultaneously the suspicions of `neutrality’” (Novati 1995, 209).

The Suez crisis of 1956 represented an important opportunity to test Italy’s attitude towards the Mediterranean. Before Nasser’s decision to nationalize the Suez Canal, the Italian government was both quite firm in condemning Nasser’s unilateral act, and in excluding the use of force to restore the status quo (Tonini 2002, 10). During the Arab-Israeli war of 1956, Fanfani tried to work out a “third way” for Italy - a pro-Arab one -, without hurting Italy’s Atlantic credentials.

Considering the United Nations as the most appropriate forum to reach a compromise, the Italian government kept a cautious and equidistant attitude. When, in October, the crisis was aggravated by the Israeli-Anglo-French invasion, Foreign Minister Gaetano Martino did not hesitate to distance Italy from London and Paris, confirming his government's opposition to the use of force, and urging that international obligations be respected. Consistent with this policy, Italy supported the resolution tabled by the United States at the UN General Assembly, which demanded the withdrawal of European troops from the Canal Zone. To understand the reasons for such caution on Italy's side, it should be noted that Egypt was, since a few months earlier, one of ENI's most promising economic partners.

The unconventional approach to Nasser's Egypt, launched in 1955 by Enrico Mattei, had led to the conclusion of some commercial agreements, under which the Italian oil company had initiated the exploitation of some deposits in the Sinai Peninsula, and the construction of a pipeline from Suez to Cairo. The growing economic interests in Egypt gave reason to believe that Italian dissent for the Anglo-American decision to withdraw the funding of the Aswan dam project was an expression of an increasingly pronounced pro-Egyptian policy. Indeed, in a letter sent to U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Martino expressed his concern on the consequences of the U.S. refusal, arguing that the decision threatened to undermine the leverage that Italy and the West had, not only in Egypt, but also in the entire Middle East. Those signs of active interest in the Egyptian situation coincided with the inauguration, in the presence of Nasser and Mattei, of the Suez-Cairo pipeline (Ferraris 1996, 122). However, Rome had to assuage its two European allies. For this purpose, the Italian delegation to the UN also refused to support the motion tabled on November 24, sponsored by Afro-Asian countries, which condemned the Anglo-French intervention.

The crisis produced an indirect positive impact on the tone of the Italian-American relationship, despite the ambiguities of Rome's Neo-Atlanticism. While the U.S. strengthened its role as the preeminent power in the Middle East, Italy played a mediating role between the Western alliance and the Arab world, although not in a position to influence the outcome of the crisis (Ortona 1986, 192; Ferraris 1996, 108). During the Suez crisis, Eisenhower decided to give tacit consent to Fanfani's attempts to mediate between Egypt and the West, in order to show that he was willing to allow Italy some autonomous initiative, both to boost the sense of self-esteem, and to satisfy the "increasingly demanding public opinion" (Brogi 2002, 202). Knowing of the good reputation Fanfani enjoyed in Arab countries, Eisenhower acquiesced to putting his mediation skills to the test. However, Fanfani's attempts to mediate between Egypt and the West eventually did not bear fruits.¹⁰

Eisenhower's doctrine, approved in July 1957, marked the American ascendancy in the Middle East. During a meeting at the Quirinale between U.S. Vice-President Richard Nixon, and Gronchi, in March 1957, the latter declared he was convinced that Italy "could usefully be one of the first countries to give an effective contribution of its cooperation with countries in the Middle East, in the interest of the United States" (quoted in Ferraris 1996, 109; Bagnato 1992, 314; Di Nolfo 1990, 2-28). Thus, Italy was supposed to play a double role: as an "honest broker" in the East-West relationship, and towards the Arabs, with U.S. acquiescence, as the West's champion (Romano 2002, 123).

Dulles also tried to oblige to Italy's craving to be consulted on a more regular basis by the United States, particularly in Mediterranean affairs. In November 1955, he invited the Italian ambassador to Washington to join the Committee of Ambassadors, an outgrowth of the Near East Arms Coordinating Committee (NEACC), an organization set up in 1952, in accordance with the May 1950 Tripartite Declaration. Italy's participation in the NEACC satisfied the recurrent Italian need for a "*presenza*" in major international meetings (Brogi 2002, 13), although it was not particularly rewarding.

Comforted by the conversation with Nixon, and convinced that he was acting in response to a tacit agreement with the Americans, Gronchi decided to make an official offer to Eisenhower for a strategic

¹⁰ The Eisenhower administration decided to rely on the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, for mediation: Brogi 2002, 244.

alliance with Italy - a sort of special relationship in the Mediterranean and in the Near East. In the letter, Gronchi proposed a closer bilateral Italian-U.S. relationship in order to conduct a common policy towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East (Wollenberg 1983, 52-61, 583-89; Ferraris 1996, 109). Eventually, Gronchi's letter was intercepted by Foreign Minister Martino, who opposed the former's attempts to conduct a foreign policy of his own.

In September 1957, Foreign Minister Giuseppe Pella, offered Washington a sort of Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The "Pella Plan" envisioned a common fund managed by OEEC (Organization for European Economic Co-operation) member states, to finance economic development projects in Middle Eastern countries. The fund would be fed by the sums due to the European countries benefitting from the Marshall Plan, provided by the United States (Bagnato 2005, 127-28; Brogi 1996, 280 and ff; Romano 2002, 121). Washington's reaction to the Italian proposal was positive in words, but actual facts, was rather mild: the project was studied in some detail, but did not come to fruition, largely because resources would still have to be provided by the United States, which was not willing to sustain a new significant financial effort, and because the aid could be depicted as neocolonialism. The plan also got little support from European countries.

After the summer of 1958, the fact that Fanfani occupied simultaneously the positions of prime minister, foreign minister, and party secretary, enabled him to pursue more adventurous foreign policy initiatives. The chain of events that began with the 1958 *coup d'état* in Iraq, home to the Baghdad Pact,¹¹ underscored just how marginal the Italian role in the region was. This pushed Fanfani to react, openly showing his disagreement with the efforts of the governments in London and Washington, which the new Chairman of the Council accused of acting, once again, without showing any regard for the role of Italy, in an area that he considered of special interest. Between late July and early August, Fanfani visited France, the United States and several European capitals, with the intent of stressing Italy's contribution to the formulation of Western policy towards the Middle East. Fanfani hoped to be able to obtain the recognition of his country as a Mediterranean power, in order to allay the growing voices of dissent within his party against his foreign policy, and the risk of annoying the United States. Fanfani's policy was considered dangerous by some Italian diplomatic quarters, and would prove to be a "risky" undertaking that would test the limits of American tolerance (Romano 2002, 122). Romano described this as practicing "towards the United States a policy on a tightrope, trying to conciliate the maximum of loyalty with the maximum of independence" (Romano 2002, 122; see Giovagnoli and Tosi 2010). In other words, it was a position of "equidistance" with strong pro-Arab undertones (Di Nolfo 1992, 426).

When the new Iraqi government allied itself with the United Arab Republic,¹² the fear of spreading instability in the region led Eisenhower to send troops to Lebanon. Fanfani allowed Washington to use the Capodichino airport for the troops' projection. Almost immediately, he flew to Washington to talk with Eisenhower and Foster Dulles and expose an ambitious economic plan, a sort of Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean. The U.S. administration gave a cold reception to the plan, especially after it became clear that Rome intended to obtain a sort of mandate to deal with the Arabs on behalf of the United States. The plan was seen as an attempt to build a special relationship with Washington, undercutting the integrity of the NATO compact. At a time, Mattei was extending his action range in competition and at odds with the American oil multinationals (Mammarella and Cacace 2008, 211).

The concern of seeing Italy excluded from mediation efforts by the major powers, led Fanfani to proceed independently. In January 1959, he paid an official visit to Cairo, with the intention of proving that a policy of dialogue and openness towards the progressive and nationalist regimes in the Arab world was far more rewarding than an attitude of condemnation and closure (Galante 1992, 189). Sinning, perhaps, for being overly optimistic, Fanfani hoped to convince the U.S. that he was able to

¹¹ The monarchy was replaced by Gen. Abd al-Karim Qasim, a reputed Nasserite.

¹² The United Arab Republic was a short-lived political union between Egypt and Syria from 1958 until 1961.

“persuade Nasser that we will accept him for what he is and we will help him to achieve his legitimate objectives, while continuing insistently to push him to sit down and discuss face to face with Ben Gurion”. He believed that “real secret negotiations [were] possible” and that Italy was ready “to assume a leadership role in organizing such direct negotiations, taking advantage of the widespread desire in the Arab world of accepting this service, which would play in favour of the Western alliance” (quoted in Brogi 1996, 328). No Italian leader had ever expressed itself in such a daring tone in speaking to a U.S. official about a possible Italian role in the search for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Tonini 2002, 14-5). Fanfani further developed the Arab and Middle Eastern politics, by visiting Morocco on occasion of the conclusion of an oil agreement signed by ENI, by receiving the Shah of Iran, by supporting Mattei's initiatives, and by chairing, with Gronchi, the opening session of the first Mediterranean Colloquia organized by La Pira in 1958.¹³

Enrico Mattei was a key driving force behind this orientation. He developed a “parallel external policy” until 1962, when he died in a still obscure plane crash. The President of ENI aimed at extending the influence of the state oil industry in the Mediterranean, in order to assure Italy's energy autonomy (Coticchia 2011, 179). Italy's reconstruction was heavily constrained by the scarcity of raw materials, such as coal, iron and oil, which the country needed to import in order to boost its economic growth.

To that end, he did not hesitate to use controversial means and to defy the “Seven Sisters”. The election of Gronchi as President of the Council greatly boosted Mattei's opportunities. With Amintore Fanfani as DC's General-Secretary, Mattei consolidated his edge over ENI's parallel international policy (Bonnani 1967, 813-4). He developed his strategy of penetration in the Middle East due to the similarity of views on issues, such as the U.S., the Atlantic Alliance, and Italy's neutralism (Coticchia 2011, 180). The energy diplomacy Mattei developed was a delicate exercise in transatlantic relations, as he concluded energy deals with the URSS and Iran that clashed with the country's postwar FP cornerstones (Coticchia, Giacomello and Sartori 2011, 179-180; Votaw 1965; Perrone 1995; Maugeri, 1994; Tonini 2002, 20).

The famous “Mattei formula” assigned to the producer country 75% of the profit, instead of 50%, granted by the Western oil companies until then (Solia 2016, 86-87). It boldly attacked Iran's monopoly on crude, by making a partnership with the National Iranian Oil Company. The agreement was signed in 1957 in Tehran, with Shah Reza Pahlavi, an event attended by President Gronchi, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pella. The agreement broke the 50-50 ratio laid down after the overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq in 1953: “The Seven (or eight) Sisters that controlled the global oil market at the time, and were represented in the Iranian consortium, were furious and tried in all possible ways to stop the agreement... But they failed, and the agreement contributed to Mattei's fame as a protagonist of change in the global oil industry and a paladin of Arab nationalism” (Luciani 2012, 837-838).

Fanfani's meeting with Nasser in January 1959, was the last Mediterranean initiative of his government, and, in some ways, represented its apex: he was the first top Western statesman to visit Cairo in a two-year period. After a lively discussion in Parliament, the Democrat leader was forced to resign from all positions. The political season inaugurated in February 1959 marked a return to the lines of Italian diplomacy, which not only recovered its more Atlanticist and pro-American features, but also ceased to be one of the main topics of confrontation and political debate.

¹³ He authorized the presence of one of the leaders of the anti-colonial movement, Ahmed Boumendjel, a high official of the Algerian National Liberation Front, and Adda Bouguettat, another member of the anti-colonial movement. This caused a diplomatic rift with France (Bagnato 2005, 116).

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to determine how the international environment and domestic actors actually influence or determine the content of a state's FP. The empirical case analyzed was Italy's policy of Neo-Atlanticism, especially its initiatives towards Arab countries in the 1950s.

To fully account for the gist of Italian FP in this period, we accepted the premise that systemic factors and domestic politics interact in the creation of a state's FP: it will always reflect both national security interests and systemic/structural imperatives.

In the case of Italy, international bipolar conditions and domestic politics interacted in a complex way. Both levels actually interplayed in determining Italy's foreign policy behavior. Arguably, the international security environment was determinant in shaping Rome's options, in particular, the imperatives of Cold War alignments and bipolarism. In keeping with systemic realism, Italy responded to the uncertainties of international anarchy, by abiding by the dominant imperatives imposed by the system of alliances to which it belonged: it had little room for maneuver in the external decision making process, and had to operate within the constraints set by its main ally.

Indeed, Italy found it difficult to reconcile its international commitments with the pursuit of its national interests, by asserting its influence in the world. In fact, Rome also sought to control and shape its external environment. It tried to pursue such influence, largely due to internal concerns, to the extent that it was able to do so. As many scholars have argued, Italy's distinctive political system entails, at times, the articulation - if not, at times, actual subordination - of its foreign policy to domestic concerns. Internal aspects were brought to bear on Italian FP due to the nature of the Italian political system, in particular the existence of a hegemonic party, which was permanently wary, due to the role of an opposition that could question Italy's Western and Atlantic orientation. Complex domestic political processes did mediate and direct Italian policy outputs in response to international pressures. Thus, Italy factored in systemic pressures, but also pursued policy opportunities in the Mediterranean.

The interplay of foreign and domestic issues is an enduring characteristic of Italy's post-war political system. A reflection on the period under consideration allows us to conclude that, in certain respects, the terms of the peace treaty and Cold War conditions - although posing considerable constraints -, involuntarily favored a quite original evolution of Italian politics, especially in the Mediterranean. The Cold War stalemate allowed Rome to pursue a heterodox foreign policy that was tolerated, as long as it did not become at odds with the transatlantic orientation.

A constant line of Italian foreign policy in the post-war period was to make Italy a more central player in the Mediterranean by performing a bridging role, as well as by requesting to be associated to the initiatives of its allies. Italy also pursued its own obvious, immediate national interest in the Mediterranean, in the search for reliable energy supplies and export markets. Simultaneously, its range of action in the Mediterranean offered the opportunity to prove its "added value" in the area, thus reinforcing another design: a post-war comeback in the realm of "high" international politics, and a place amongst the great powers.

By and large, in the Arab world and particularly regarding Egypt, Iran and North Africa, Rome maintained on the surface a consistent position, in line with the obligations of Atlantic solidarity. However, it took every possible opportunity to take advantage of openings and channels to approach Arab leaders, even those who opposed the West, such as Nasser or Arab nationalists. The limits of Italian influence often made it impossible to express it openly. Rome often treaded a fine line between refraining from openly supporting certain nationalist Arab regimes, and maintaining the support of its Western allies. Economic circumstances dictated that Italy should espouse a pro-Arab policy, but that policy had different nuances, according to the political players of the moment.

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