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Taking Off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948*

JAMES E. MILLER

American intervention in the Italian elections of 1948 was a turning point in the political history of postwar Italy and a watershed in the development of U.S. foreign policy. During the Italian crisis of 1947–48, the United States first experimented with its new national security mechanisms, mounted its first significant covert political operations, and drew conclusions about the best means for combating communism, which were to have a lasting effect on American political activities in Europe and the Third World. Although a number of studies have noted the importance of American intervention and a massive body of documentation has been available since the mid-1970s, no detailed scholarly study has appeared in either English or, more surprisingly, Italian.¹

In early 1948 U.S. leaders feared that Western Europe was on the edge

*This article was substantially written before the author joined the Historical Office of the U.S. Department of State and does not reflect the views of that agency. He would like to thank Robert McMahon, John Harper, Ronald Landa, Antonio Varsori, and Fynnette Eaton for their critical review of the manuscript.

¹Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power* (New York, 1972), pp. 378, 438–39; Richard Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York, 1970), pp. 247, 268ff.; Lawrence Kaplan, “Toward the Brussels Pact,” *Prologue* 12 (Summer 1980): 73–86; Alan Platt and Robert Leonardi, “American Foreign Policy and the Postwar Italian Left,” *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 1978): 197–215. Robert Divine, “The Cold War and the Election of 1948,” *Journal of American History* 59 (June 1972): 90ff., points to the effects that the events of the spring of 1948 had on American foreign policy and domestic politics. Memoirs and studies dealing with the origins of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) also have stressed the importance of the Italian experience to the subsequent development of the agency and its policies. See Tom Braden, “The Birth of the CIA,” *American Heritage* 28 (February 1977): 4–13; William Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men* (New York, 1978), pp. 109ff.; Ray Cline, *Secrets, Spies, and Scholars* (Washington, 1976), pp. 98–102; William Corson, *The Armies of Ignorance* (New York, 1977), pp. 295–302. For a discussion of Italian studies of the 1948 elections, see Antonio Varsori, “La Gran Bretagna e le elezioni politiche italiane del 18 aprile 1948,” *Storia contemporanea* 13 (February 1982): 5–70. Two unpublished studies on the Italian elections also merit mention: Ernest E. Rossi, “The United States and the 1948 Italian Elections” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1964); and Ronald Landa, “The United States and the Italian National Elections of 1948” (1972).

of disaster. On 25 February the Communists seized power in Czechoslovakia. On 20 March the Soviet delegation walked out of four-power discussions in Berlin. At the same time, the Soviets were pressuring Finland to sign a defense pact. General Lucius D. Clay, U.S. commander in Germany, warned Washington that a Soviet military attack might occur within days. American leaders began to fear that a Communist victory in the 18 April elections would signal the collapse of democracy in Europe, while a Communist defeat might provoke Soviet military action. Clearly, a Communist victory would have major international implications, strengthening the bid for power of the Communist parties throughout Western Europe and correspondingly weakening the ability of their moderate middle-class and Socialist opponents to resist. The United States would suffer a severe loss of prestige if a strategic nation within its sphere of influence moved into close collaboration with the Soviet Union.

In Italy, the well-organized, disciplined, and financed Italian Communist party (PCI), allied with the militant Italian Socialist party (PSI), threatened to exploit popular discontent and sweep into power in free elections. These elections thus became an apocalyptic test of strength between communism and democracy for the leaders of the U.S. government. Italian-Americans and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church actively joined in the anti-Communist initiatives of the Truman administration. Millions of dollars secretly were funneled to the Christian Democratic and right-wing Socialist parties. A massive propaganda campaign mobilized Italian voters against the Communist-Socialist coalition. The United States laid contingency plans for a major military involvement in case of an Italian civil war and sent military advisers and equipment to Italy's internal security forces. Economic assistance and the promise of prosperity through the Marshall Plan became a bludgeon, which the United States held against the Left. In collaboration with the government of Alcide De Gasperi and the Vatican, the United States succeeded in reducing the issues before the Italian people to a series of simple choices: democracy or totalitarianism, Christianity or atheism, America or the Soviet Union, abundance or starvation.

The U.S. intervention in Italy's internal affairs took place in three stages. In the first (January to May 1947), American policymakers decided to commit a greater share of U.S. economic resources and political prestige to the person and programs of De Gasperi, the leader of the Christian Democratic party (DC), in an effort to break the deadlock within the Italian government and to promote essential reforms. During the second stage (May to December 1947), De Gasperi responded to American promises of support by forcing the Left out of his government and instituting a stringent program of economic reform. The parties of the Left reacted with a growing campaign of violence that seemed to presage a civil war. The new national security mechanism of the United States coordinated its response to the threat of armed revolution and reinforced De Gasperi's shaky political coalition. At the beginning of the final stage (January to April 1948), public opinion polls predicted a Communist

election victory, and the United States mounted an intensive and effective program of overt and covert action to defeat the Left.

At the beginning of 1947 this country stood at a crossroads in its efforts to stabilize postwar Italy. Political reconstruction was proceeding successfully, but the failure of economic reconstruction programs financed by the United States seriously imperiled the future of Italy's democratic regime. The government that De Gasperi had formed in July 1946 was an unsteady coalition. The three largest parties—PCI, PSI, and DC—were deadlocked on the major issues of reconstruction. As economic conditions worsened, popular discontent erupted into crippling strikes, politically motivated violence, revolts by bands of ex-partisans, and mass rallies and demonstrations.² On 10 November 1946 the Christian Democrats were badly defeated in local elections in Rome. The economic aid that U.S. policymakers counted on to cool off this potentially revolutionary situation was too limited and arrived too late and too erratically to make significant headway against growing instability.³

In an influential memorandum of 21 November 1946, Walter Dowling, the Italian desk officer at the State Department, noted Italy's increased instability. He urged the United States to abandon its hands-off approach to Italian internal affairs in order to defeat the PCI in national elections scheduled for May or June 1947. Dowling recommended that the U.S. government employ a judicious mixture of flattery, moral encouragement, and considerable economic aid, making itself "so damned pro-Italian that even the dumbest wop would sense the drift."⁴ He also recommended that Prime Minister De Gasperi be invited to the United States in formal American recognition that Italy was once again a full member of the international community. This gesture, when combined with meetings with top American officials and a series of highly publicized economic concessions, would reinforce De Gasperi's personal position, while underlining America's concern for Italy.⁵

The prime minister was eager to confer with U.S. officials and to obtain a display of U.S. support for his regime, and he brought with him a long list of requests for economic assistance. His ten-day visit (5–15 January 1947) was a public relations triumph. De Gasperi enjoyed personal audiences with President Harry S Truman and lengthy meetings with outgoing Secretary of State James F. Byrnes and other top American officials as well as with prominent Italian-Americans, congressmen, and members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The American press greeted him warmly and endorsed

²See, for example, *New York Times*, 18 July, 28 August, 10 October 1946.

³James E. Miller, "The Search for Stability: An Interpretation of American Policy in Italy, 1943–46," *Journal of Italian History* 1 (Autumn 1978): 264–86.

⁴Walter Dowling to H. Freeman Matthews, Washington, 21 November 1946, 865.00/11-2146, Record Group 59, Department of State, National Archives and Records Service, Washington (hereafter cited as NARS). Portions of this document were translated and published with a commentary in Ennio Di Nolfo, "Quando l'America passa la guida dell'anticomunismo dal Re a De Gasperi," *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), 20 July 1975.

⁵Dowling to Matthews, *ibid.*

increased aid to Italy. De Gasperi received a number of small but useful new grants of aid, and the State Department used the visit as leverage to force a \$100 million Export-Import Bank loan to Italy from a reluctant National Advisory Committee on International Monetary and Financial Policy.⁶

The personal contacts that De Gasperi made with Truman, his chief advisers, and congressional leaders were equally important. The prime minister's talks with Republican senators Robert A. Taft and Arthur H. Vandenberg were especially crucial. Taft and Vandenberg told the Italian leader that a stable government which guaranteed that American aid would not be wasted and that American interests would be protected could count on U.S. support. De Gasperi set out to convince a skeptical American government that he and the Christian Democrats could provide that stability.⁷

International events aided him. Late in the winter of 1946–47 the Greek crisis solidified the consensus for anti-Soviet containment that was growing among the policymaking elite in Washington. On 12 March 1947, Truman addressed Congress on the crises in Greece and Turkey and pledged the United States to defend "free peoples" who were resisting Communist subjugation. The president and other administration spokesmen warned that only a major new commitment of American economic aid would allow Europe to stave off a Communist takeover. Economic aid and anti-Communist politics were wrapped in a single package.⁸

Since Italy was an essential element in any program for European political and economic stabilization, the United States began planning for Italian participation in a general program of European recovery. On 4 April a special ad hoc committee of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) issued a report that reaffirmed the primary role of economic aid in promoting political and social stabilization in Italy. The heart of the SWNCC report was a call for the reorientation of Italy's economy from production for export to production for domestic consumption. As the surest way to defeat communism while linking Italy with the rest of Europe and the United States,

⁶Alberto Tarchiani, *America-Italia: le dieci giornate di De Gasperi negli Stati Uniti* (Milan, 1947), p. 61. De Gasperi outlined his requirements in conversations with Secretary of State Byrnes on 6 and 7 January 1947. Memoranda of these conversations are printed in U.S., Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947* 3 (Washington, 1972): 838–41, 845–50 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*, followed by the appropriate year).

⁷Tarchiani, *America-Italia*, pp. 46, 67–68. A politically charged historiography grew up in Italy regarding the relationship of De Gasperi's visit and the end of his third government in late January 1947. Documentation published in *FRUS, 1947*, 3:838–61 shows that the United States made no suggestions that De Gasperi oust the Left from his government. Three months later U.S. Ambassador James C. Dunn, a fervent anti-Communist, told Washington that he still saw no alternative to Communist participation in the Italian government, *FRUS, 1947*, 3:871. See A. Gambino, ed., *Andreotti: Intervista su De Gasperi* (Bari, 1977), pp. 78–79.

⁸Harry S Truman, *Public Papers of the Presidents, 1947* (Washington, 1963), pp. 176–80, 167–72. The development of the Truman administration's public relations campaign for the new policy is traced in Joseph Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York, 1955).

SWNCC recommended a vastly expanded program of long-term aid to Italy.⁹

However, the De Gasperi government's continued inability to institute reforms was nullifying the effects of U.S. aid. Ambassador James C. Dunn blamed the Communists and their Socialist allies for the lack of reform and warned the State Department that they would use every available technique to sabotage further American aid programs.¹⁰ A few weeks later Secretary of State George C. Marshall returned from unsuccessful negotiations held at Moscow on the German treaties to warn that Europe was "sinking fast" and that action to save it could not await further discussions with the Soviets.

On 28 April 1947, De Gasperi wrote Truman directly to plead for more economic assistance.¹¹ The prime minister stressed his determination to preserve democratic government in Italy and offered to reshuffle and broaden his coalition government as a guarantee that American aid would be properly utilized. De Gasperi's letter had not yet been delivered when on 1 May the Secretary of State informed Ambassador Dunn in Rome of his concern with the Italian situation and inquired whether De Gasperi could form a government without the Left parties.¹² Marshall also requested an analysis of the U.S. economic and political aid, which would be required to strengthen democratic and pro-American forces within Italy.

Dunn's reply on 3 May reiterated that the PCI's continued presence in the Italian government was the root of its deadlock and instability. He relayed Marshall's queries to De Gasperi on 5 May and made the standard appeal for more vigorous action to deal with Italy's economic problems. The prime minister, as was his custom, promised action on economic reforms but stated that Italy could not be governed without the Communists. However, Marshall's action confirmed reports that De Gasperi had been receiving for some months from Italy's ambassador in Washington, Alberto Tarchiani, as well as the conclusions he had drawn from his earlier conversation with Taft and Vandenberg: the price of full American support for his government was driving the Left out of the coalition.¹³

Three days after the Dunn-De Gasperi conversation, Marshall approved a memorandum outlining U.S. actions in support of a non-Communist government in Italy. The memorandum defined the Italian Communist party as a

⁹SWNCC, Special Ad Hoc Committee, "Draft Working Report on Italy," 4 April 1947, "ABC 400/336 Italy," Records of the Plans and Operations Division, Records of the Department of the Army, RG 319, NARS.

¹⁰Dunn to State Department, Rome, 15 April 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 3:882-83. John Harper makes a detailed study of U.S. aid programs and their problems in "The United States and the Italian Economy, 1945-1948" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1981).

¹¹Cited in Maria R. De Gasperi, ed., *De Gasperi Scrive*, 2 vols. (Brescia, 1974), 2:93-94.

¹²*FRUS, 1947*, 3:889.

¹³Dunn to State Department, Rome 3, 6 May 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 3:889-94; Alberto Tarchiani, *Dieci anni tra Roma e Washington* (Milan, 1955), p. 136; Gambino, ed., *Andreotti Intervista*, pp. 81-82. Tarchiani played a catalytic role in encouraging closer collaboration between both De Gasperi and the American government. On 2 May, for example, Tarchiani sounded out the State Department about possible support for a non-Communist government. Dowling to Matthews, Washington, 2 May 1947, 865.01/5-847, RG 59, NARS.

serious threat to American interests throughout the Mediterranean and identified an “energetic,” reform-minded, anti-Communist government as the best weapon to check the PCI. De Gasperi’s request for help in ousting the Communists from his government would be answered with assurances of “all possible aid.” A public statement of U.S. support for the new government, along with efforts to obtain similar British and French declarations, the quick conclusion of pending commercial agreements, and the sale of surplus military equipment to Italy’s internal security forces at low prices would intensify American identification with the international and domestic objectives of the De Gasperi government.¹⁴

On 12 May 1947 the prime minister stunned his Communist-Socialist coalition partners by suddenly resigning. On 31 May he formed a one-party minority government of Christian Democrats. On 2 June the United States endorsed the new government despite its reliance on neo-Fascist parliamentary support. Three days later Marshall’s speech at Harvard University offered Italy the chance to participate in an American-financed program of European reconstruction. The Marshall proposal promised jobs and a better life to Italy’s people and quickly became a powerful weapon in the battle against that country’s Left.

De Gasperi’s bold maneuvers and the announcement of the Marshall Plan were staggering blows to the PCI. Nevertheless, Communist reaction was swift. The PCI denounced its exclusion from the government and the Marshall Plan as efforts to divide Europe by creating an anti-Soviet bloc of nations. Pointing to Greece, the Communists warned that civil war rather than economic recovery was the likely outcome of American aid.¹⁵ Communist and Socialist paramilitary formations of ex-partisans backed PCI warnings with violence, increasing the psychological pressure on De Gasperi’s minority government. Then on 7 September party chief Palmiro Togliatti told a PCI rally in Parma that the Communists had a force of 30,000 armed men at their disposal and threatened to use it against the government.¹⁶

Togliatti’s statement was probably designed to soften the displeasure of Joseph Stalin and the militant wing of the PCI with the failure of the party’s earlier strategy of cooperation with De Gasperi and the DC. While he privately favored greater moderation, Togliatti’s public actions played into the hands of the prime minister and hard-liners within the Truman administration. PCI threats and violence, combined with Soviet rejection of the Marshall Plan in July 1947, solidified American support for De Gasperi and permitted the United States to place the burden of public responsibility for dividing Europe

¹⁴Matthews to Marshall, Washington, 8 May 1947, 865.01/5-847, RG 59, NARS. The text of Marshall’s 2 June 1947 statement welcoming the formation of the fourth De Gasperi government is in U.S., Department of State *Bulletin* 16 (15 June 1947): 1160.

¹⁵“Il piano Marshall,” *Rinascita*, June 1947.

¹⁶*New York Times*, 8 September 1947; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 18 June 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 3:923–24; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 10 July 1947, “800 Italy Parties,” Confidential File, Records of the U.S. Embassy, Rome, Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, RG 84, NARS.

on the USSR. Over the next six months Communist miscalculations played a major role in securing congressional passage of both emergency interim aid for Italy and the European Recovery Program and prompted a growing American intervention in Italy.

Analyzing Togliatti's Parma speech, the influential *New York Times* columnist Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote: "The alarm bell is ringing in Italy." Tarchiani pressed the same point on Acting Secretary of State Robert A. Lovett.¹⁷ Tarchiani predicted that, if the Communists could not force themselves back into the government with threats, they would probably set up a secessionist state in the industrial north. Lovett was so impressed with Tarchiani's reasoning that he asked the newly created Policy Planning Staff of the State Department for recommendations on the proper U.S. response to an attempted Communist takeover in Italy. Lovett also discussed possible military action with Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal.¹⁸

Although some of its members doubted that the Communists planned revolutionary action, on 24 September the Policy Planning Staff provided Lovett and Forrestal with a scenario for an Italian civil war and with policy recommendations for further intervention in Italian affairs. Arguing that a successful Communist insurrection in Italy would endanger U.S. security in Western Europe and in the eastern Mediterranean, the group recommended that if a civil war began the United States should use every means short of military action to aid the Italian government and protect its own interests.¹⁹ Armed with the Policy Planning Staff's recommendations, Lovett and Forrestal brought before the inaugural meeting of the National Security Council the question of possible intervention in a civil war. Both men warned that the establishment of Soviet power in Italy would have disruptive effects on the U.S. position throughout the Mediterranean. The National Security Council was instructed to draft a study of the Italian situation.²⁰

Responding to the council's request for recommendations, the State and Army departments, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the interagency SWNCC activated planning groups. The assumptions of the Policy Planning Staff memorandum were adopted for SWNCC's study, which also specifically cited Togliatti's threat of early September. The Joint Chiefs of Staff began studying possible military responses to the Communist threat.²¹ On the basis of that

¹⁷*New York Times*, 10 September 1947. Memorandum of a conversation between Tarchiani and Lovett, Washington, 16 September 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 3:969–70. See also Eugenio Reale, *Nascita del Cominform* (Milan, 1958), esp. pp. 52–53.

¹⁸Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York, 1951), p. 318. Minutes of an informal meeting of the members of the Policy Planning Staff with Dowling, Washington, 18 September 1947, "1947 Minutes," Policy Planning Staff Records, RG 59, NARS.

¹⁹Minutes of the 66th meeting of the Policy Planning Staff, Washington, 25 September 1947, "1947 Minutes," Policy Planning Staff Records, RG 59, NARS; memorandum by the Policy Planning Staff, Washington, *FRUS, 1947*, 3:976–81.

²⁰Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 320–21.

²¹SWNCC 383, "Proposed Emergency Assistance to Italy and Other Countries," 30 September 1947, "ABC 400/336 Italy," Records of the Plans and Operations Division, RG 319,

memorandum and the other studies, the National Security Council staff presented NSC 1/1, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Italy," approved by the council itself on 11 November 1947. NSC 1/1 called upon the U.S. government to provide full support to the De Gasperi ministry, or an "equally satisfactory successor," through economic aid. This help included maintaining the bread ration, providing additional credits and loans for reconstruction, improving the capabilities of the internal security forces, and supporting major foreign policy objectives of the Italian government, especially peace treaty revisions, membership in the United Nations, and border claims against Yugoslavia. However, it ruled out the use of U.S. armed forces in the event of a civil war.²²

Economic aid was critical to the survival of the De Gasperi government. Without this additional aid, the Italian economy would collapse before Marshall Plan funds arrived. Elections would have to be held soon, and if the country's economic position deteriorated further, the Left would sweep De Gasperi from power and Italy out of the U.S. sphere of influence. American planners feared that such a loss would set off a chain reaction leading to Communist regimes in France and other parts of Western Europe. State Department officials urged the United States to act quickly and forcefully to prevent a Communist-Socialist government from taking power in Italy.²³ Interim aid, however, faced serious political difficulties at home. In spite of the mounting evidence of Italy's precarious position, Truman was not inclined at first to request further stopgap aid. The Republican Congress already was being asked to swallow the massive costs of the European Recovery Program.

State Department officials insistently lobbied the president's top advisers. They found a receptive listener in Truman's special counsel, Clark Clifford, who won over the president by warning him that without the interim aid program "the peace and security of the whole world" was jeopardized. On 29 September, Truman and Marshall met privately with the congressional leadership and informed them that, unless special funding were available by 1 January 1948, Italy and France would go Communist and the Marshall Plan would collapse. Congressional leaders were not convinced, and Truman hesitated for almost a month before calling a special session when further evidence of the precarious position of Italy and France and a worsening domestic economic crisis forced his hand. Finally on 24 October the president summoned Congress back to Washington. In a nationwide radio broadcast and in an 11 November address to Congress, Truman warned that, unless Italy and France received immediate aid, the privations of the coming winter

NARS. Compare a Department of the Army study entitled, "Italy," 3 October 1947, "ABC 371.2 Italy," *ibid.* See also Kenneth Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1947-1949* (Washington, 1976), p. 67.

²²*FRUS, 1947*, 3:724-26; NSC Action No. 9, 14 November 1947, Reference Collection, Modern Military Branch, National Archives and Records Service, Washington.

²³Marshall to Lewis Douglas, Washington, 10 July 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 3:323; memorandum, "Immediate Need for Emergency Aid to Europe," 29 September 1947, *ibid.*, pp. 472-77.

would destroy any hope for European recovery and could lead to a new worldwide depression, together with the destruction of democracy in Europe.²⁴

During the fall of 1947 congressional support for foreign aid increased dramatically. A series of trips to Europe by a number of influential conservative Republicans convinced them to support the Truman foreign aid program. The congressmen who visited Italy and France saw firsthand not only the suffering of large segments of the population but also the campaign of violence which the Communists were directing against pro-American governments and the Marshall Plan. The reports that these members filed encouraged action on the interim aid program, which Truman signed on 17 December.²⁵

Meanwhile, Italy ratified the peace treaty, and the date for final withdrawal of American troops rapidly approached. Their numbers were small, and the great majority of them were support troops rather than combat soldiers. Nevertheless, the event looked ominous when viewed in conjunction with a possible Communist coup. This concern was heightened when De Gasperi requested that the withdrawal be put off to the last legally possible date—14 December. Truman agreed to the Italian prime minister's request.²⁶

As the final date approached, the Communists continued their political muscle-flexing with strikes, mass rallies, assaults on police stations, and occupations of factories.²⁷ The United States responded by planning its own shows of military force to coincide with the final withdrawal. Policymakers also considered and ruled out the possibility of strengthening American forces on Italy's periphery. Finally, they drew up an extremely tough statement, for release by Truman, threatening U.S. military intervention in the event of a Communist coup. Although the final message was toned down at the suggestion of Secretary Marshall, it had the desired effect of putting the PCI on notice that the United States would react firmly to any use of force.²⁸

In toning down the original draft of the Truman statement, Marshall noted that the United States lacked the power to back up threats of military intervention. American policymakers moved to compensate for that weakness by strengthening the Italian government and its allies. In November, Army Chief of Staff Dwight D. Eisenhower recommended that a list of potential Italian agents be prepared and passed on to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for possible use in covert operations in Italy. The following month, after De Gasperi warned that a Communist coup was imminent, efforts were

²⁴Diary entry, 29 September 1947, William D. Leahy Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Landa, "Italian National Elections," p. 13; Truman, *Public Papers, 1947*, pp. 445–46, 476–79.

²⁵U.S., Congress, House, Subcommittee on Italy, *Report on the Italian Crisis and Interim Aid: Preliminary Report, Greece and Trieste*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947.

²⁶Lovett to Royal, Washington, 28 November 1947, *FRUS, 1948*, 3:729.

²⁷Claire Neikind, "The Communist Show of Strength," *New Republic* 117 (1 December 1947): 8.

²⁸Lovett to Dunn, Washington, 9 December 1947; Lovett to Marshall, Washington, 11 December 1947; Marshall to Lovett, London, 12 December 1947; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 16 December 1947, all in *FRUS, 1948*, 3:740, 746–52.

initiated to improve the capabilities of Italian internal security forces through an increased supply program. Army planners also discussed the employment of anti-Communist Polish troops in Italy in the event of insurrection.²⁹ At the same time, the United States pressed De Gasperi to broaden his government by including the Republican and Social Democratic (PSLI) parties. This would eliminate the major pretext for a Communist coup, end his embarrassing reliance on neo-Fascist votes in Parliament, and demonstrate a desire for reform and cooperation with other democratic parties. In mid-December, De Gasperi brought both the Republicans and PSLI into his government.³⁰

The Vatican shared American apprehensions about a Communist coup, and with the encouragement of U.S. diplomats, the Church edged toward full participation in the anti-Communist coalition. In spite of Christian Democratic ties to the Church, Pope Pius XII and many of his advisers were ambivalent about Italy's nascent democracy. They recalled past clashes with democratic movements in Italy and shared U.S. doubts about the capability of DC leadership. Nevertheless, by the fall of 1947 Catholic leaders concluded that the Communist threat was so great that the Church must cast its lot with De Gasperi, the DC, and democracy. In October the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster, officially condemned communism, directly refuting Togliatti's repeated claim that Catholicism and communism could coexist in Italy. During the heightened tensions of December, the pope ordered Catholic Action, the powerful secular arm of the Italian Church, to break any Communist-inspired general strike. The Vatican also informed U.S. officials that it would welcome American intervention to defeat a Communist attempt to seize power.³¹

De Gasperi satisfied both the reformist aspirations of the American allies and the anti-Communist extremism of the Vatican. Stringent anti-inflation measures stabilized the lira and laid the groundwork for the successful utilization of Marshall Plan aid.³² The creation of a center-left government appeared to commit the Italian government to the policy of promoting economic recovery through the expansion of the consumer sector. Defending his alliance with the United States, De Gasperi accused the PCI of utilizing threats,

²⁹Samuel Reber to Lovett, Washington, 28 November 1947, *FRUS, 1948, 3:727–29, 736–39*; Louis Galambos, ed., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 9 vols. (Baltimore, 1970–78), 9:2077; General Albert Wedemeyer to General Schuyler, Washington, 21 December 1947, “ABC 370.5 Greece-Italy,” Records of the Plans and Operations Division, RG 319, NARS.

³⁰Lovett to Dunn, Washington, 4 September 1947, “800 Italy-Parties,” RG 84, NARS; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 17 December 1947, *FRUS, 1948, 3:753*.

³¹Memorandum of conversation between Graham Parsons and Monsignor G. B. Montini, Vatican City, 1 October 1947, “124 AmVat, RG 84, NARS; Parsons to State Department, Vatican City, 24 October 1947, “800 Political Affairs,” Myron Taylor Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York; *FRUS, 1948, 3:753*.

³²The stabilization measures were carried out at the expense of the working class and created further resentment against the De Gasperi government. See Ugo Ruffolo, “La linea Einaudi,” *Storia contemporanea* 5 (December 1974): 637–70; and Harper, “The United States and the Italian Economy,” chap. 8.

violence, and mass disruption to frustrate Italy's economic recovery and of waging war on both his government and the concept of democracy.³³

Despite these measures, a peaceful Communist takeover remained a strong possibility. American troop withdrawals, accompanied by a massive naval and air show of force, took place without incident on the intended date of 14 December 1947. By Christmas the tension that had gripped Italy during the fall was abating. The Italian factions were preoccupied with party congresses and other preparations for national elections in the spring. On 21 and 29 January 1948, Dunn warned Washington that all signs pointed to a massive victory for the Left. At the end of January the PSI and PCI formed a single electoral bloc, the Popular Democratic Front. Although the Left was preoccupied with organizing for the elections, Dunn cautioned Washington that it continued to retain the option of insurrection if, at a later point in the campaign, its defeat seemed likely.³⁴ Dunn's cable underlined the American dilemma: how to defeat the Left without provoking an insurrection.

Despite American military weakness and a desire to avoid any direct involvement of U.S. combat forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established a unified command in Norfolk, Virginia, to plan and coordinate a military support operation and possible intervention in case of civil war. A U.S. Marine regimental combat team was sent to reinforce American naval forces in the Mediterranean. This move took the De Gasperi government by surprise and provided the Communists with a propaganda bonanza. The State Department's claims that the maneuver was a routine navy matter fooled few people. The *New York Times* military expert, Hanson Baldwin, dismissed the State Department response as a pure fabrication.³⁵ The Italian government skillfully rescued its embarrassed ally. When the Soviet Union protested the military buildup, De Gasperi declared the complaint should be directed to Rome, since visits of American ships to Italian waters always were made with the prior consent of his government.³⁶ Washington learned an important lesson about measuring its acts of intervention against potential public response.

The National Security Council reconsidered the Italian situation and issued on 10 February 1948 NSC 1/2, which defined Italy as a key element in U.S. national security. The United States had to be ready to employ all available economic, political, and, if necessary, military power to ensure that Italy remained a friendly, independent, democratic, and anti-Communist state. Concluding that a coup was unlikely until after the April elections, NSC 1/2 stressed that the United States must strengthen the De Gasperi government through increased economic aid, by expediting the shipment of surplus military equipment to Italy, and through a vigorous propaganda campaign designed to show U.S. support for and interest in Italy and its future. The council

³³Alcide De Gasperi, *Discorsi politici* (Rome, 1969), pp. 145–76.

³⁴Dunn to State Department, Rome, 21, 29 January 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 3:819–22, 824.

³⁵*New York Times*, 5, 7 January 1948; Dunn to Marshall, Rome, 5 January 1948, "Italy 830," RG 84, NARS.

³⁶Landa, "Italian National Elections," p. 16.

further noted that the passage of European Recovery Program legislation prior to the April elections could determine its outcome.³⁷

The State Department implemented NSC 1/2 with a coordinated campaign of economic aid and press releases designed to show Italians that the United States was deeply concerned with their fate and to demonstrate Italy's economic reliance on the United States.³⁸ In addition, the department studied ways to encourage private groups and individuals to involve themselves in the Italian election campaign, while the CIA was authorized to begin planning covert operations in Italy to support anti-Communist groups.³⁹ Ambassador Dunn, meanwhile, was trying to find legal means to funnel U.S. aid money secretly into the campaign chests of the DC and PSLI. The United States also helped the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats to raise funds secretly from business and organized-labor groups in the United States.⁴⁰

The Vatican stepped up its activities as well. At the end of January 1948 a pessimistic Pius XII told a U.S. official that he saw little chance for a democratic victory in Italy but remained committed to a head-to-head confrontation between the Church and communism. By late February the pope was satisfied with the American commitment to a crusade against communism and brought the immense power of the Church fully into the election struggle. In an address on 22 February he defined the issue of the election as Communist atheism against Catholicism and called on Catholic Action to mobilize the faithful to defeat the PCI. Two days later Roman Catholic clergy were ordered to vote in the elections.⁴¹

The 25 February seizure of power by the Czech Communist party in Prague on the eve of national elections sent shock waves through the United States. American public and congressional opinion now mobilized behind the Marshall Plan. Throughout this country and Europe attention was riveted on Italy, the next nation scheduled for free elections. By early March the apprehension was so intense in France that Parisians, except for the Communists, even stopped calling Italians "macaronis."⁴² In the United States the Communist

³⁷FRUS, 1948, 3:756–59. See also Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, p. 371.

³⁸Staples to Mann, Washington, 8 March 1948, "National Elections," Records of the Office of Western European Affairs relating to Italy, RG 59, NARS (hereafter cited as Italy Desk Files, RG 59, NARS).

³⁹JCS 1808/6: "The Position of the United States with Respect to Italy," 26 January 1948, Combined Chiefs of Staff central files, RG 218, NARS; Matthews to Dowling, 28 January 1948, "Cabinet and Activities," Italy Desk Files, RG 59, NARS; Marshall to Parsons, Washington, 6 February 1948, 865.00/1-2848, RG 59, NARS; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1975, vol. 1, p. 144.

⁴⁰Dunn to State Department, Rome, 16 January 1948, 865.00/1-648; 30 January 1948, 865.00/1-3048; 19 February 1948, 865.00/2-1948; 24 February 1948, 865.00/2-2448, all in RG 59, NARS.

⁴¹Parsons to Marshall, Vatican City, 28 January 1948, 865.00/1-2848; and Parsons to Marshall, Vatican City, 21 February 1948, 865.00/2-2148, both in RG 59, NARS; *New York Times*, 23, 25 February 1948.

⁴²Cited in Landa, "Italian National Elections," p. 2.

takeover in Czechoslovakia reinforced the position of anti-Communist hard-liners like Forrestal. "Damn it," he snapped at one cabinet member critical of intervention in Italy, "don't be so theoretical."⁴³ While the Marshall Plan remained the major element in long-term plans for stabilizing Italy, administration leaders increasingly were searching for a more dramatic and immediate weapon to use against the Communists.

Events within Italy drove the United States toward more drastic action. At almost the same time as the Communists seized control in Prague, the Popular Front won local elections in Pescara. The Left's victory seemed to confirm polls predicting a sweep in the April national elections. This news followed a report from the State Department that its efforts to raise money for the financially strapped Social Democrats were failing. Organized labor was short of money following a series of fall and winter strikes, and the department had no funds that could be employed to aid the party. Officials in both Italy and Washington were convinced that the election hung in the balance, and that U.S. actions could decide its outcome.⁴⁴

The National Security Council again took up the Italian situation on 8 March 1948 and approved NSC 1/3, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Communist Participation in the Government of Italy by Legal Means." NSC 1/3 declared that U.S. interests in the Mediterranean were "imminently and gravely" threatened by the possibility of a Popular Front victory in Italy's elections. According to the document, the Communists temporarily had abandoned armed insurrection in favor of a total effort to win free elections. Exploiting Italian economic grievances, the fear caused by the Czech coup, timely gestures by the Soviet Union, and ample financial support, their election campaign was proving effective. The United States had just six weeks to reverse the trends favoring a Popular Front victory. Immediate aid to democratic parties was essential.⁴⁵ To provide that aid, NSC 1/3 authorized covert funding of the PSLI and DC by the CIA's Office of Special Projects under the supervision of the secretaries of state and defense. Secretary of Defense Forrestal took charge of the covert funds operation.⁴⁶

NSC 1/3 also recommended that the United States support the return to Italy of the Free Territory of Trieste. It authorized a campaign of statements from government officials and letters from private citizens to awaken Italians to the critical nature of the elections. In the event of a Communist victory, NSC 1/3 recommended that the United States support any Italian elements prepared to make a last stand against Communist domination, even at the risk

⁴³Clinton Anderson, *Outsider in the Senate* (New York, 1970), p. 71.

⁴⁴Marshall to U.S. embassy in Great Britain, Washington, 2 March 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 3:837-39.

⁴⁵*FRUS*, 1948, 3:775-79. Two paragraphs of the document NSC 1/3, which deal with covert operations, were deleted from the version published in *FRUS*.

⁴⁶Cline, *Secrets, Spies, and Scholars*, pp. 100-2; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1975, vol. 1, pp. 22-23; Braden, "Birth of the CIA," p. 13; Anderson, *Outsider in the Senate*, pp. 70-71.

of civil war. A number of other specific recommendations were made, all designed to woo potential Communist voters away from the PCI. NSC 1/3 also outlined plans for graduated American responses to Communist participation in a coalition government.⁴⁷

Spurred by the urgent, almost desperate, tone of NSC 1/3, Truman authorized the covert shipment of arms to Italy, despite the fact that such action violated provisions of U.S. law on minimal reimbursement for such aid. He also overrode objections to covert operations presented by the CIA's legal counsel and ordered the agency to proceed in Italy.⁴⁸ Further efforts were made to get U.S. corporations with major investments in Italy as well as labor unions to contribute secretly to the Social Democrats. Common Cause of New York City, a group interested in the problems of immigrants and minorities in the United States and which possessed tax-exempt status, was asked to serve as a conduit for the transfer of these funds. Another \$55,000 was funneled to the DC through a Swiss bank by the U.S. government.⁴⁹

On 11 March the White House released a letter from the president to House Speaker Joseph Martin requesting an additional \$55 million in interim aid to tide over Italy and France until the Marshall Plan began. Truman also pleaded with Congress to pass the European Recovery Program quickly, warning that failure to act could lead to a Communist victory in Italy.⁵⁰ Influenced by Truman's warnings and by more menacing events in Europe, including the mysterious death of Czech Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, the Senate approved the European Recovery Program Act on 14 March. The House followed ten days later and on 2 April 1948 Truman signed the bill at a special ceremony designed for maximum impact on Europeans.⁵¹

On 15 March, meanwhile, at the urging of Vatican and U.S. officials in Italy, a State Department spokesman threatened to cut off all American aid to Italy in the event of a Communist victory. When the U.S. embassy reported that this statement was being discounted, Marshall repeated the threat.⁵² On 16 March the Department of Justice announced its intention to apply a little-used 1919 act to refuse immigration visas to anyone who belonged to the Communist party and to expel any party members living in the United States. This threat carried special weight in southern Italy, which depended

⁴⁷*FRUS, 1948, 3:775-79.*

⁴⁸Truman to Forrestal, Washington, 10 March 1948, *FRUS, 1948, 3:781*; Braden, "Birth of the CIA," p. 13. Clifford outlined Truman's rationale for these actions in U.S., Congress, Senate, *Hearings of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1975, vol. 7, p. 66.

⁴⁹Dunn to State Department, Rome, 12 March 1948, 865.00/3-1248; John Hickerson to Lovett, Washington, 3 March 1948, 865.00/3-348, and 10 March 1948, 865.00/3-1048, all in RG 59, NARS; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 6 April 1948, "800 Italy Elections," RG 84, NARS.

⁵⁰*New York Times*, 12 March 1948.

⁵¹Landa, "Italian National Elections," p. 23.

⁵²Parsons to State Department, Vatican City, 2 March 1948, 865.00/3-248, RG 59, NARS; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 16 March 1948, *FRUS, 1948, 3:853-54.*

on emigration and on remittances sent from relatives abroad to maintain its precarious economic balance.⁵³

The United States transferred twenty-nine merchant ships to the Italian government at a special White House ceremony on the same day. An Italian film crew was brought to Washington to record the elaborately choreographed ceremony in which Truman signed the transfer agreement in the presence of Marshall, Tarchiani, Attorney General Tom Clark, and other Italian and American dignitaries. The president's brief statement praised Italy's contribution to the war effort and its own liberation, stressed America's desire to help it regain economic prosperity, and expressed admiration for its new democracy. The ceremony was designed by the State Department to produce the maximum effect on Italy's electorate.⁵⁴ It was only one of a number of such media events staged by the United States in the closing weeks of the election campaign.

At the same time, American propaganda in Italy intensified. Marshall warned that the United States had to show deep concern for the outcome of the elections without providing the Left with evidence to support its charges of U.S. interference. It was to stress that for the United States the only important issue in April was whether Italy chose a free government or a Communist dictatorship. To develop this contrast, U.S. propaganda underlined the importance of Marshall Plan aid to Italian economic recovery and the fact that no Communist nation was participating in the European Recovery Program. To dramatize the amount of aid Italy was receiving, Ambassador Dunn for some time had been at dockside to greet every hundredth ship carrying U.S. supplies. The recent coup in Prague provided American propagandists with a telling example of Communist duplicity; U.S. support for Italian national objectives was contrasted with Soviet efforts to exploit Italy at the Paris peace conference and Soviet support of Yugoslav demands on Italy. The Press and Publications Division of the State Department flooded Italy with newsreels demonstrating the benefits of U.S. aid. Leading American film distributors pooled their resources and sent documentaries and government films free of charge. An estimated 5 million Italians per week were viewing these films by early April. Hollywood also printed extra copies of *Ninotchka*, Greta Garbo's 1939 satire on Soviet life, and made special arrangements to show the movie in Italian theaters.

Voice of America broadcasts to Italy also increased. Prominent Italian-Americans such as labor leader Luigi Antonini, New York City Mayor Vincent Impelliteri, and former middleweight champion Rocky Graziano joined Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Stimson, William Donovan, Massachusetts Congressman John Lodge, and labor leaders Dave Beck and James Carey in a series of

⁵³*New York Times*, 17 March 1948.

⁵⁴Charles E. Bohlen to Marshall Carter, Washington, 11 March 1948, "Memos 1948," Charles E. Bohlen Papers, RG 59, NARS; A. A. Miccoci to Eben Ayers, 15 March 1948, Official File (OF) 233, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Missouri (hereafter cited as Truman Papers); statement by Truman, 16 March 1948, *Public Papers, 1948*, p. 182.

radio appeals to Italian voters to reject communism. Appeals to reason were mixed with warnings of the dire consequences for Italy if the Left should gain power. Two days before the elections a special broadcast featuring such internationally known entertainers as Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, and Walter Pidgeon attempted to show Italians the concern that all Americans felt for a democratic Italy.⁵⁵

On 20 March the British, French, and U.S. governments issued a declaration on the status of the Free Territory of Trieste, which called for the return of the entire disputed area to Italian jurisdiction and criticized Yugoslavia, and by implication its patron the USSR, for breaking the treaty by virtually annexing its zone of occupation.⁵⁶ The three-power declaration was a masterstroke of propaganda and diplomacy in that the Soviet Union was forced either to side with its increasingly restive Communist ally, Yugoslavia, which claimed the entire area, or support a Western initiative to aid the PCI's chances. Stalin chose to denounce the Western move and let the PCI suffer the consequences. His action was the clearest indication that the Soviet dictator placed strict limits on the aid he was willing to furnish a Communist party within the American sphere of influence. In a calmer atmosphere, it might have led some policymakers to question the prevailing analysis of Soviet objectives.⁵⁷

As a boost to the prestige of the PSLI, the British Foreign Office arranged to have Social Democratic trade unionists invited to London for a British trade union conference on labor participation within the European Recovery Program. The British also secured a Labour party condemnation of the PSI for its collaboration with the PCI.⁵⁸ Finally, the French and British, at American urging, agreed to entertain an Italian application for membership in the newly created European Union.⁵⁹

The U.S. government was not alone in its interest in the fate of Italy. Italian-Americans and the Roman Catholic Church in the United States also attempted to sway the Italian electorate. Probably the most effective private effort was the "letters to Italy" campaign initiated in Toledo, Ohio. The idea spread in late January 1948 when Generoso Pope, the influential publisher of the New York daily, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, began to boost it in

⁵⁵Marshall to Dunn, Washington, 25 March 1948, 865.00/3-2548; Jesse McKnight to Allen, Washington, 27 March 1948, 865.00/4-2748, RG 59, NARS. See also Morris Janowitz and Elizabeth Maurick, "U.S. Propaganda Efforts and the 1948 Italian Elections," in W. Dougherty and M. Janowitz, eds., *A Psychological Warfare Casebook* (Baltimore, 1958), pp. 320-25; *New York Times*, 24 March 1948; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 15 March 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 3:875-76; Landa, "Italian National Elections," pp. 26-27.

⁵⁶The text of the statement is in U.S., Department of State, *A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941-49* (Washington, 1950), pp. 479-81.

⁵⁷See Antonio Varsori, "La grande Bretagne e le elezioni politiche del 18 Aprile 1948," for a detailed account of these negotiations; and Landa, "Italian National Elections," pp. 21-22.

⁵⁸Douglas to State Department, London, 3 March 1948, 865.00/3-248, RG 59, NARS. See Varsori, "La grande Bretagne," for details of British involvement with the Italian Socialists.

⁵⁹*New York Times*, 18 March 1948.

his newspaper. Pope was a self-made millionaire with a Fascist past, a penchant for self-publicity, and a flair for organization. By late 1945 he also was a dedicated anti-Communist, blaming the USSR for most of Italy's ills. Pope had met De Gasperi during the prime minister's January 1947 visit, and he offered the services of both his paper and radio station to De Gasperi and his policies. In January 1948, Pope initiated a media campaign urging Italian-Americans to write their friends and relatives in the old country to inform them of the benefits of life in America and to warn them that Italy must choose democracy over communism. Sample form letters were provided. In April, Pope intensified this effort with a "telegrams to Italy" campaign. Other Italian-American newspapers picked up the idea, as did many dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church. By early March the campaign was working very well, especially in the South. The Italian Foreign Office urged that the volume of mail be increased and be given a more positive tone through specific endorsements of the anti-Communist parties.⁶⁰

By April public interest and involvement in the elections was intense; in some cases it proved too intense. The State Department feared that the Communists would exploit charges of U.S. meddling and produce an anti-American backlash among voters. Bernard Baruch's offer to form a "big name" private citizens' committee was politely turned down as too obvious. Charles Bohlen, the department's counselor, took steps to prevent an overeager Lodge from introducing a resolution committing the United States to intervene if the elections were not free and orderly. Suggestions by Frank Sinatra and other prominent Italian-Americans for a tour to influence the vote also were turned down as too heavy-handed.⁶¹

Some American officials had to be restrained as preelection tensions heightened. George F. Kennan, chief of the Policy Planning Staff and author of the containment policy, suddenly proposed that the De Gasperi government outlaw the PCI and take action against it, a virtual prescription for civil war. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. John D. Hickerson, chief of the Office of European Affairs, remarked that the democratic parties had a good chance of success in the elections and that civil war was not the objective of American policy.⁶² Similarly, the air force dismissed the commanding officer of a B-29 squadron who had told reporters that his planes would overfly Rome on election day and later denied the statement.⁶³ The closest call came in early April when a rider extending aid to Francisco Franco's Spain was attached to the European Recovery Program's appropriations bill. A horrified moderate Socialist, Ivan Matteo Lombardo, warned that if the rider passed, U.S. efforts

⁶⁰Tarchiani, *America-Italia*, p. 98; *New York Times*, 24 January 1948; R. Robbins, "Letters to Italy—A Reconsideration," *Common Ground* (Autumn 1949): 40–47.

⁶¹Oscar Cox to Marshall Carter, Washington, 5 March 1948, 865.00/3-948; Bohlen to Lovett, Washington, 11 March 1948, 865.00/3-1148; Marshall to Dunn, Washington, 22 March 1948, 865.00/3-2048, all in RG 59, NARS.

⁶²Kennan to State Department, Manila, 15 March 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 3:848–49.

⁶³Jefferson Caffery to the Department of State, Paris, 14 April 1948, "842.8" CF, Rome Post, RG 84, NA.

in Italy would be undone.⁶⁴ Intense lobbying by the administration defeated the amendment.

While the United States mounted its electoral campaign, its Italian partners proved equally resolute and resourceful. The De Gasperi government banned paramilitary organizations on 2 February and enforced the ban. The Republican party's leader, Randolfo Pacciardi, a no-nonsense veteran of the Spanish Civil War, took control of the police and other internal security forces. By early March, De Gasperi and other anti-Communist politicians had gone over to the offensive against the Popular Front bloc. Communism became the main issue, and the Czech coup was cited as the chief example of the fate of free nations that voted for this system of government.⁶⁵

Above all, the De Gasperi campaign enjoyed the full support of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church used its pulpits and schoolrooms to combat apathy, ensure the faithful understood that communism was the issue, and emphasize its commitment to social justice. All Catholic religious, even cloistered nuns, were mobilized to vote. Catholic Action conducted an equally vigorous voter education program and provided the DC with its precinct workers.⁶⁶

On 18 April the combination of De Gasperi, the Vatican, and the United States proved too much for the Popular Front. The Christian Democrats, who had polled 36 percent in the June 1946 elections, won a stunning 48.5 percent of the total vote and an absolute majority in Parliament. The PSI took a beating, as did the PSLI and the other small parties of the Left. The parties to the right of the DC also lost. However, the PCI improved its vote and parliamentary representation, emerging as the largest party on the Left, a position it continues to hold today.

Americans reacted to the DC's triumph with an orgy of self-congratulation. On 22 April, Truman read a statement at his press conference, claiming that the results of the Italian elections would encourage free peoples in their struggle against communism. Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* praised U.S. intervention and singled out Ambassador Dunn for "a fine job of roughhouse diplomacy." John Foster Dulles concluded that the victory in Italy showed that hard-line anticommunism could succeed and called for further American intervention abroad.⁶⁷ The National Security Council apparently agreed with Dulles's analysis and granted the CIA a blanket authorization for covert operations.⁶⁸ Clearly, the United States achieved its major geopolitical

⁶⁴Lovett to Douglas, Washington, 6 April 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 3:411.

⁶⁵Dunn to State Department, Rome, 5 March 1948, "800 Italy Parties," RG 84, NARS; Dunn to State Department, Rome, 1 March 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 3:835–36.

⁶⁶Parsons to State Department, Vatican City, 2 March 1948, Records of the President's Personal Representative to Pope Pius XII, RG 59, NARS; William Knight, memorandum, 17 May 1948, 865.00/5-1748, RG 59, NARS.

⁶⁷*Public Papers, 1948*, pp. 227–29; *New York Times*, 23 April and 7 May 1948.

⁶⁸U.S., Congress, Senate, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence*, 1975, vol. 1, pp. 494, 539.

objective: to block a Communist triumph in Italy and stabilize its Western European sphere of influence. The triumph of the Christian Democrats accelerated the division of Europe along lines that have remained virtually intact for a third of a century.

Intervention in Italy paid domestic dividends to a politically beleaguered Truman in a U.S. election year. Both the Democratic National Committee and presidential adviser Clifford encouraged the president to exploit the Italian issue to rally Catholic voters. Indeed, Truman's standing among Italian-Americans increased rapidly as the administration deepened its intervention in Italy and enlisted Italian-American participation in its crusade against communism.⁶⁹ Intervention also provided a psychological boost to other anti-Communist European governments. "America took off the gloves for the first time," *The Economist* approvingly commented.⁷⁰ The Italian elections, like the Marshall Plan and the Berlin airlift, proved that the United States had both the determination and the means to protect its interests.

In retrospect, however, American intervention in Italy appears less successful. Covert assistance to the Italian political parties and government was only a partial success. The Christian Democrats certainly made effective use of the funds they received, but American funding was not a critical element in the DC's triumph. Three other factors were critical to the victory of 18 April: U.S. economic aid, backed by the psychological effects of the Marshall Plan; the massive assistance that the Catholic Church provided the DC; and De Gasperi's skillful exploitation of the Communist issue. Without these factors, U.S. aid would have been ineffective, as was the case of the Social Democrats who were badly beaten in spite of massive infusions of covert funds. Covert arms shipments did not weigh at all in the outcome, although they would have had disastrous effects on the government's chances of victory if discovered.⁷¹ The net result of covert aid was to commit the United States to a conservative majority party and thus to kill the very reforms that American policymakers believed essential for a stable democratic system.⁷²

Two months before the elections an article in *Harpers* noted that "daily life in Italy is one vast wearying orgy of law breaking." Responsibility for the breakdown in civil order, it added, rested above all with the Christian Democrats, whose failure to cope with the basic needs of the Italian people forced them to flout the law to survive.⁷³ Dunn implicitly agreed with this judgment. In an optimistic May 1948 telegram, the ambassador assured the State Department that the new De Gasperi government would emphasize

⁶⁹Irwin Ross, *The Loneliest Campaign* (New York, 1968), pp. 21–27.

⁷⁰Cited in Platt and Leonardi, "American Foreign Policy and the Postwar Italian Left," p. 200.

⁷¹Dunn to State Department, Rome, 12 March 1948, 865.24/3-1248, RG 59, NARS; U.S. military attaché, Rome, to Department of the Army, 12 March 1948, CCS 400 Italy, Geographic File, Records of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, NARS.

⁷²CIA, ORE 2-49: "The Major Problems of Italian Government Policy," 5 April 1949, "CIA-Ore-1949," Truman Papers.

⁷³Nina Standen, "Italian Backdrop," *Harpers* 196 (February 1948): 151.

economic recovery.⁷⁴ The CIA, however, cautioned that immediate economic and agrarian reforms were critical to the development of a democratic party system in Italy. Without such reforms, the PCI would maintain its hold on the working classes, and the creation of a democratic political alternative of the Left would become impossible.⁷⁵

By polarizing the voters around the DC and PCI, the election campaign of 1948 undercut the emergence of a democratic alternative to Christian Democratic rule. Both the Left and the American-backed anti-Communist coalition shared responsibility for fostering the "climate of terror" in which Italy voted.⁷⁶ The stable democracy that the United States wanted was the primary victim of American actions and policies. Although De Gasperi held an absolute parliamentary majority, including the presence within his government of the reform-minded Social Democrats and Republicans, and received subsequent massive infusions of Marshall Plan aid, he failed to launch an effective and coordinated reform program. While his Social Democratic and Republican coalition partners fought with the Christian Democrats over policy objectives, DC party bosses busily divided jobs and American aid among the factions of their own party. These activities of the DC leadership undermined every effort to strengthen left-wing democratic parties that represented a potential alternative to Christian Democratic rule.⁷⁷ The Communists, meanwhile, recovered from the effects of the 1948 defeat and solidified their hold on a large segment of Italy's population.

In an effort to undo the damage caused by its initial intervention, the United States soon engaged in even more intervention, designed to win the Socialist rank and file away from its leaders and the labor movement away from Communist domination. The PSI was splintered further but without any advance toward the American goal of a trustworthy Social Democratic mass party. Instead, a weakened PSI was pulled into closer collaboration with the Communists. The labor movement also was fragmented with U.S. support, but the majority of workers remained in Communist-dominated trade unions.

Meanwhile, the United States expanded its covert operations into other areas of Europe and the Third World with limited success. Rulers who relied on such American aid rarely produced the reforms that achieved the U.S. objective of political stability. Information about covert operations inevitably slipped out, damaging American prestige and undermining the legitimacy of

⁷⁴Dunn to State Department, Rome, 24 May 1948, "800.2 Italy," RG 84, NARS.

⁷⁵Central Intelligence Agency, "Review of the World Situation as it Affects the Security of the United States," 17 June 1948, Reference Collection, Modern Military Branch, National Archives and Records Service, Washington. See also the comments of C. L. Sulzberger, *New York Times*, 24 April 1948.

⁷⁶Piero Calamandrei, "Preludio al 18 Aprile," *Il Ponte* (May 1948). See also the comments of Dunn, telegram to Marshall, Rome, 26 April 1948, 865.00/4-2648, RG 59, NARS.

⁷⁷Paul Hoffman to Rosen, 10 October 1950, "Italy General," Accession 53A441, Records of the Economic Cooperation Administration, RG 286, NARS.

U.S.-supported governments. Moreover, the techniques of political intervention and the habit of justifying actions of questionable legality with the claim that they protected U.S. national security returned to haunt this country during the 1970s. By taking off the gloves in Italy, the United States had embarked on a perilous new policy.