American Foreign Policy and the Postwar Italian Left

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United States policy toward Italy in the post-World War II period has been influenced and in many cases determined by the nature of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The superpower confrontation in Europe has had a profound effect on the establishment of the boundaries within which Italian domestic political choices have been (and are still being) made. The United States has not determined policies in Italy but it has exercised substantial influence on Italian domestic politics through its political, economic, and military linkages with Italy. Given Italy's strategic position in the Mediterranean, U.S. policy has been oriented toward three aspects of Italian politics: strengthening the control of centrist forces; maintaining a market-oriented socioeconomic system; and having Italy's foreign policy objectives and military posture shaped within the organizational framework of NATO. For much of the postwar period, the accomplishment of all three of these objectives has been consistent with keeping the Left—the Socialist (PSI) and Communist (PCI) parties—from playing a role in government.

The precise nature of U.S. policy toward the Italian Left can usefully be analyzed by focusing on the three most critical periods in postwar American-Italian relations, periods when basic choices were made in one or more of the sensitive areas cited. The first period covers the years between 1945 and 1948 when Italy's international position and postfascist socioeconomic model for reconstruction were shaped. The second period, from 1960 to 1963, was characterized by the attempt in Italy to create the international and domestic groundwork for permitting the entrance of the Socialist party into a government coalition. Finally, in the years from 1970 to 1976 the center-left experiment

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collapsed and Communist participation in government ceased to be an absurd hypothesis but became instead an ever closer reality.

U.S. Policy in the Era of Superpower Confrontation, 1945–1948

In the immediate postwar years, when U.S. policy makers turned their attention to Italian politics, they often did not think of Italian political developments solely on their own terms but consciously considered America's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Indeed, several key American officials were explicitly concerned with halting what "they considered 'the Red flood' before it could trickle and flow into Italy (and) Western Europe."[1]

In terms of Italian domestic politics, this concern—reinforcing earlier leanings—manifested itself in early U.S. support for the anticommunist, postwar coalition of conservative and moderate political forces led by the Christian Democrats. In late 1945 and throughout 1946, such support was limited, though observable.

Moreover, by the beginning of 1947 U.S. policy reflected unreserved alarm at the strength of the Left in Italy and elsewhere. In Italy the Left (particularly the PCI) had made substantial gains in the municipal elections of November 1946, in comparison with their showings in the Constituent Assembly elections of June 1946. One of the major problems faced by the Christian Democrats (DC) was that the Communists and Socialists coordinated their actions and policies through a Unity of Action Pact. The DC had no similar understanding with the smaller parties to its right like the Liberals, or with the Republicans to its left. In essence it stood alone as the major representative of moderation in the system. Accordingly, in early January 1947 the United States invited the leader of the DC, Prime Minister DeGasperi, to Washington to receive first-hand information about economic progress in Italy and the seriousness of the Left. From the Italian point of view these talks promised to be of both real and symbolic value: real in that they would likely lead to increased U.S. economic assistance; symbolic in that the talks signified acceptance of postfascist Italy by the major Western power.

In the course of his meetings with President Truman and Secretary of State Byrnes, DeGasperi stressed two themes: Italy's desperate economic plight as a result of the war, and his determination to combat the increase of Communist influence in his government and in the country as a whole. DeGasperi emphasized that to thwart the Communists, Italy needed strong economic and financial support from the United States.

It has been argued that during the January trip no definite agreements were made between the Truman administration and the Italian prime minister.[2] Nevertheless, the ground was set for an attempt by DeGasperi to create a new

[1] John Lukacs, *A History of the Cold War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 80. See also Roberto Faenza and Marco Fini, *Gli americani in Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).

[2] Simon Serfaty, "An International Anomaly: The United States and the Communist Parties

government coalition that would attempt to reduce Communist and Socialist influence in the policy-making process, especially in relation to economic affairs. In the new coalition of Communists, Socialists, and Christian Democrats that was put together on February 2, 1947, the Left was allocated fewer ministries than in the previous government. Of particular significance was the combination of the portfolios of Treasury and Finance (previously headed by a Communist) under Christian Democrat control. Notwithstanding, it was clear that in February 1947 DeGasperi was not yet looking for a full test of strength with the Left.

In subsequent months, U.S. policy toward Italy was explicitly designed to bolster the strength and legitimacy of the new DeGasperi government by extending to Italy substantial economic aid and food relief while at the same time suggesting that the United States would look even more favorably upon a government without the participation of Leftist parties. Thus a process of bargaining was set in motion between Washington and DeGasperi that was soon to bring an end to the tripartite coalition and heavily commit the United States to both the regeneration of the Italian economy and the shaping of domestic politics in Italy.

On May 7, 1947, U.S. Ambassador to Italy James Dunn sent Secretary of State Marshall an analysis of the current Italian situation. The ambassador advanced the thought that "if it is true that the economic position could be substantially improved through political measures, then aid to Italy perhaps should be based upon a *quid pro quo* of necessary changes in political orientation and policies."[3] Six days later DeGasperi dissolved his cabinet, initiating a political crisis that was finally to be resolved with the creation of a government coalition that excluded both the Communist and Socialist parties. However, before undertaking to create a center-right government composed of Christian Democrats, Liberals, and "technicians,"[4] DeGasperi made sure that the United States would back him up with new and substantial economic concessions. Soon thereafter the United States came forward with a number of economic programs in favor of Italy that foreshadowed the Marshall Plan.[5] While these initiatives of 1947 clearly reflected active U.S. concern for Italian domestic affairs and helped to effect change in the DeGasperi government, they were but a prelude to U.S. involvement and, indeed, intervention in the 1948 elections. These elections became the focal point for an almost apocalyptic struggle between "the forces of revolution" and "the forces of restoration."

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in France and Italy, 1945–1947," *Studies in Comparative Communism* (Spring-Summer 1975): 123–146.

[3] "Current Economic and Financial Policies of the Italian Government," May 7, 1947, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1947, III (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 901.

[4] Gianni Baget-Bozzo refers to the "technicians" as notabili (notables). See *Il partito cristiano al potere*, I (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974), p. 153–160.

[5] See "Cable from The Ambassador in Italy (Dunn) to the Secretary of State," May 28, 1947, *Foreign Relations*, p. 911.

In January 1947, while Prime Minister DeGasperi was in the United States, the Socialists split into two factions. At the Socialists' National Congress, revisionist members of the party—under the guidance of Giuseppe Saragat—broke with the dominant leadership in protest against the party's Unity of Action Pact with the Communists; and with the financial backing of the United States they created what eventually became known as the Social Democratic Party (PSDI).[6] The large majority of Socialist members, however, remained with the parent party and, led by Pietro Nenni and labor chief Oreste Lizzadri, these elements formed the Italian Socialist Party (PSI).

Following Saragat's secession, the Social Democrats, along with the moderately progressive Republican Party (PRI), moved toward the right and by December 1947 had joined the DeGasperi coalition. The PSI, on the other hand, came under the domination of its left wing and in January 1948 agreed to the formation of a national "Democratic Popular Front," "an electoral alliance between the Communist and Socialist parties who were to present themselves to the electorate as a single party with a single list of candidates."[7]

The creation of the "Front" further polarized Italian domestic politics and the ensuing campaign was an unequivocal struggle between the Left and the forces of anticommunism. Arrayed in opposition to the "Front" was an alignment of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Republicans, although no formal electoral or postelectoral alliance had been concluded among them. In light of the fervently pro-Western stance of the Christian Democrats and their allies, the outspokenly anti-American position of the Front, and the Communist coup in Prague in February 1948, the United States officially undertook a direct anti-Left role in the 1948 elections in Italy. Indeed, during the 1948 parliamentary campaign "America took the gloves off for the first time."[8]

Unlike the situation in 1947 when American involvement in Italian affairs was largely economic and diplomatic in nature, in the 1948 election campaign the United States massively intervened politically in Italian internal affairs. Viewing Italy as a crucial battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union, American officials—with virtual unanimity in both the executive and legislative branches—thought and acted as if the importance of these elections far transcended national boundaries, believing that it was essential to U.S. interests, not to say ultimate survival, for the Christian Democrats and their allies to emerge victorious in the electoral campaign. Testifying before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee in the spring of 1948, Secretary of State George Marshall summarized prevailing official views:

> In the world in which we live our national security can no longer be effectively weighed and dealt with in terms of the Western Hemisphere. . . . I wish to express . . .

[6] Confidential Interview; Faenza and Fini, pp. 208–222.

[7] Giuseppe Mammarella, *Italy After Fascism: A Political History, 1943–1963* (Montreal: Mario Casalini Ltd., 1964), p. 189. See Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Postwar Italy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 47–53.

[8] *The Economist* (London), April 24, 1948, p. 658.

> concern over the accelerated trend in Europe. In the short years since the end of hostilities, this trend has grown from a trickle into a torrent. One by one, the Balkan States, except Greece, lost all semblance of national independence. Then two friendly nations—first Hungary and last week Czechoslovakia—have been forced into complete submission to Communist control. Within one month, the people of Italy, whose Government we had a large part in reconstituting, will hold a national election. . . . The outcome of that election has an importance far beyond local Italian affairs. It will decide not only whether Italy will continue with its restoration into a true democracy. It will foretell whether the disintegration to which I have referred may reach the shores of the Atlantic.[9]

For the U.S. government, the 1948 elections placed into question U.S. national security vis-à-vis communism in the Mediterranean and in all of Europe. In a recently declassified February 10, 1948 report on the U.S. position with respect to Italy, the National Security Council stated U.S. interests and objectives in Italy:

> The basic objective of the United States in Italy is to establish and maintain in that key country conditions favorable to our national security. Current U.S. policies toward Italy include measures intended to preserve Italy as an independent, democratic state, freiendly to the United States, and capable of effective participation in the resistance to Communist expansion.[10]

Consequently, before the election the United States utilized virtually every conceivable political and economic link that it had with Italy in an attempt to stop the Democratic Popular Front. First, and most important, the United States continued its large assistance program to Italy but made it clear that all economic aid, including Marshall Plan funds, would be terminated if the Left was successful in the upcoming election.[11] In addition, the United States instituted a number of political measures to aid the DeGasperi government which included intensified pro-DC propaganda activities and encouragement of Americans of Italian extraction to write to their relatives urging them to vote for the Christian Democratic party.[12]

Parallel to these moves designed to bolster the electoral strength of the anti-communist forces in Italy, U.S. policy makers also considered what the American response should be if the Leftist parties rose to power. Three different scenarios were considered: the Left would win only a plurality of the votes and thus enter a government coalition along with some of the moderate parties; the Front would win an absolute majority in the election; or the Left in defeat would stage an armed insurrection to gain control of the government. In the first eventuality,

[9] *U.S. Department of State Bulletin*, XVIII (March 28, 1948), p. 428.

[10] "The Position of the United States with Respect to Italy (NSC 1/2)" March 5, 1948, *Foreign Relations*, 1948, III, p. 766.

[11] See C.L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles: Memoirs and Diaries (1934-1953)* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 381. *L'Unita*, March 6, 1948, p. 4.

[12] Kogan, p. 51. See Ernest Rossi, *The United States and the 1948 Italian Elections* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1964), pp. 240-369.

U.S. policy was to be oriented toward reinforcing moderate elements in Italy by minimizing the effects of Communist participation, continuing efforts to detach the Socialists from the Communists, and strengthening the military position of the United States in the Mediterranean.[13] Italy would still remain within the political, economic, and military boundaries of the Western camp, but it would be carefully supervised by U.S. forces.

If an absolute majority voted for the Leftist slate, U.S. policy foresaw the need for a much more severe stance. On March 9, 1948, the NSC noted that "in the event the Communists obtained domination of the Italian government by legal means, the United States should:

a. Immediately undertake a limited military mobilization and announce this action as a clear indication of determination to oppose Communist aggression in Italy and elsewhere.
b. Further strengthen its military position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean.
c. Initiate combined military staff planning with other European selected nations.
d. Provide the anti-Communist Italian underground with financial and military assistance.
e. Oppose Italian membership in the United Nations."[14]

The maneuvers suggested were designed to quarantine Italy from the rest of the countries in the Mediterranean area and Europe. Only if the Left were to attempt an armed insurrection was U.S. policy clearly oriented toward immediate military intervention by U.S. troops to secure the island of Sicily and Sardinia and to "stabilize" the Italian peninsula at the request of the government.[15]

When the 1948 electoral campaign was over and the returns were in, the Christian Democratic Party emerged as the dominant party in Italy with 48.5 percent of the vote and an absolute majority in Parliament. The Front fell almost one million votes short of its combined Communist-Socialist vote for the 1946 Constituent Assembly elections due in large part to the surprising show of strength on the part of the Saragat Socialists who polled 7.1 percent of the vote. The election results, moreover, represented a triumph for the United States which had played such an active role in the course of the election campaign. With a firmly pro-Western Christian Democratic party in power, the United States looked forward to an era of stability in Italian politics, and from 1948 into the '60s, U.S. policy was firmly oriented toward the encouragement

[13] "Position of the United States With Respect to Italy in the Light of the Possibility of Communist Participation in the Government by Legal Means (NSC 1/3)," March 8, 1948, *Foreign Relations*, p. 779.

[14] Ibid.

[15] "NSC 1/2," *Foreign Relations*, p. 769.

and support of the DC centrist coalition which included the Republicans, Social Democrats, and Liberals.

Moreover, the U.S. experience during the 1948 Italian election led to the development of fixed principles that were to guide the formulation and conduct of U.S. policy in Italy till the early 1960s: The United States would not passively accept direct Leftist participation in an Italian government coalition as a subordinate or dominant partner because in either case this would be the prelude to a gradual shift of Italy out of the Western bloc and imposition of Soviet influence over a key Mediterranean country; the United States was ready to use a range of political, military, economic, and psychological measures to prevent such an eventuality; the United States would provide various kinds of support to anticommunist forces in Italy to enable them to keep free from Communist domination or influence; the DC was the central focus for the U.S. anticommunist strategy; the U.S. government encouraged anticommunist private individuals to establish contacts with their Italian counterparts; and the Socialists remained beyond the pale and were deemed unacceptable as coalition partners given their ties with the Communists, their pro-Soviet stance, and their opposition to NATO.

The Kennedy Administration and the Opening to the Left, 1960–1963

The need to find an alternative to this policy became an increasingly important political problem after the 1953 parliamentary elections. What followed between 1953 and 1960 was a period of relative government instability, fueled to a great extent by debate within the DC about which alternative (leftist or rightist) to follow. The Social Democrats, Republicans, and leftwing factions of the DC came out in support of a suggestion put forward by PSI leader Nenni in 1953 of an opening of the government to the Socialists, that is, a DC-PSI coalition. Earlier in 1953 the PSI had begun to withdraw from the Communist orbit. This process was accelerated by the events of 1956 in Hungary which altered the Socialists' views of the Soviet Union and the Western Alliance. Nevertheless, Nenni's initial suggestion that the DC-centrist coalition be replaced by an "opening to the left" (*apertura a sinistra*) was strongly opposed by a majority of the Christian Democratic party, the Liberals, business groups, the Church, and the U.S. government. These forces feared that the Socialists would serve as a Trojan horse within the government for the Communists and doubted very seriously the sincerity of the PSI's change of heart on international issues. Despite these misgivings, in the late 1950s and early '60s, momentum slowly built up inside Italy behind the *apertura*. Leaders like Fanfani and LaPira began to turn opinion around within the DC, the Liberals became increasingly estranged from the other centrist parties, the Church under the new leadership of Pope John XXIII gradually softened its anti-PSI stance, and some parts of the business community increased their dealings

with the Socialists.[16] However, before 1961 there was no public sign of change in the anti-Socialist position of the United States.

The first impetus for a change in the U.S. government's total opposition to the Socialists came during the early months of the new Kennedy administration as part of a general re-evaluation of U.S. foreign policy. In early March 1961, President Kennedy sent the New Frontier's Ambassador-at-Large, W. Averell Harriman, to Rome on a goodwill and fact-finding mission. During his three days in Rome Harriman met with a number of Italian public and private figures who explained to him the need for a new kind of government coalition, namely, the *apertura a sinistra*, that could effectively meet the pressing problems of the country. For his part, Harriman continually stressed the Kennedy administration's willingness to rethink past policies and its strong commitment to economic and social change around the world. Harriman came away from his visit to Rome convinced that effective economic and social reforms in Italy were impossible without bringing the Socialists into the government coalition. He also concluded that U.S. support for the Socialists would likely take the PSI out of the PCI's orbit, hence weakening—and perhaps isolating—the Communists. Harriman has subsequently noted that "a change in American policy was not a liberal question (in 1961), it was the sensible thing to do."[17]

Upon his return to Washington, Harriman argued for an openly sympathetic U.S. policy toward the center-left prospect in Italy and on March 30, 1961 he briefed President Kennedy and his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, on the need for a change in American policy. Harriman's suggestions were in line with the views of Kennedy's special assistant, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Both Harriman and Schlesinger advised the president in the spring of 1961 to offer a formal invitation to Premier Amintore Fanfani to visit Washington.

For Arthur Schlesinger and other members of the administration, the Fanfani visit (scheduled for June 12–14) provided an obvious opportunity to signal a new departure in American policy toward Italy. Schlesinger knew that in preparation for these talks various senior officials in Washington would have to review the whole gamut of issues of common concern to Fanfani and President Kennedy. Schlesinger envisaged this review—and the subsequent Fanfani-Kennedy talks themselves—as the vehicles for bringing about a change in U.S. policy.

Consequently, in late May 1961 Schlesinger actively mobilized allies who would help to allay possible opposition to a change in U.S. policy toward the Socialists. In contrast to the late 1940s, few congressmen or domestic interest groups in early 1961 were actively concerned about Italian domestic politics or the *apertura* issue.[18] Thus Schlesinger's lobbying in favor of the

[16] See Giuseppe Tamburrano, *Storia e cronaca del centro sinistra* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971), pp. 27–113.

[17] Interview with W. Averell Harriman, March 4, 1971.

[18] Interview with Murray Frank, July 12, 1972. Interview with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., October 22, 1970.

center-left was concentrated on the political and administrative organs involved in the formulation of U.S. policy toward Italy. Within the White House Schlesinger was successful in convincing Robert Komer, Mediterranean specialist of the National Security Council Staff, and his chief, McGeorge Bundy, of the wisdom of his efforts to change U.S. policy toward Italy.

At the various agencies Schlesinger got in touch with Under Secretary Chester Bowles at the State Department; William Bundy of the Office of International Security Affairs at the Defense Department; Deputy Director for Intelligence, Robert Amory, Jr., and European Analyst, Dana Durand, at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); Secretary Arthur Goldberg at the Labor Department; and Edward R. Murrow, Director of the United States Information Agency.

In addition to consulting these potential supporters, Schlesinger got in touch with the known opponents of change in the U.S. position on the *apertura* question—the Bureau of European Affairs (EUR) at the State Department—in hopes of persuading EUR to change U.S. policy toward Italy. In late May he invited Foreign Service officer William Blue, Director of the Office of Western European Affairs, and William Knight, the Italian Desk Officer, to the White House for a meeting.

Both Blue and Knight had had some previous experience in Italian affairs. Blue had served in Naples during and immediately after the war and Knight had been posted to the U.S. Embassy in Rome from 1947 to 1951 and had then served as the Italian Desk Officer from 1951 to 1955. Both men argued that the formation of a center-left coalition in Italy in 1961 would be premature and dangerous. Echoing the views of Deputy Chief of Mission Outerbridge Horsey, and clearly reflecting the Embassy's reporting from Rome, Blue and Knight said that allowing the Socialists in the government would pose great risks for the United States, given that the Socialists might cause the Italian government to withdraw from NATO and the European Community and to nationalize a host of Italian industries, including perhaps some U.S. subsidiaries.[19] Both men felt that if the Socialists were to enter the governing majority, their entry should be gradual and should result solely from Italian political maneuvering and not from any U.S. encouragement.[20]

In response Schlesinger attempted to convince Blue and Knight that they were mistaken in their judgments about the positions the Socialists favored and the effect of Socialist participation in the government on Italian policy. Schlesinger argued that Socialist participation in the government would isolate the PCI on the extreme left of the political spectrum and would bring to the Italian government the progressive leadership it needed to meet long-neglected economic and social problems. Schlesinger observed that if the United States continued to pursue past policy, it would dangerously polarize Italian politics by driving the PSI into the PCI's orbit and would forestall any

[19] Interview with William Blue, April 12, 1971.
[20] Ibid. Interview with William Knight, October 22, 1971.

meaningful reform in Italy. Finally, Schlesinger noted that the formation of a center-left government would not bring Italy to a neutralist position but, on the contrary, would likely make Italy a "more effective supporter of the foreign policy of the Kennedy Administration in Europe and elsewhere (e.g., in Latin America)."[21] In the end, neither side was able to convince the other. Blue and Knight left the White House certain that Schlesinger was naive, inexperienced, and badly informed about Italian politics. Schlesinger, on the other hand, was convinced that the Italian Desk in 1961 was manned by "typical" Foreign Service officers—bureaucrats who were inextricably committed to defending the status quo and for whom "risks always outweighed opportunities."[22]

On June 11, 1961 Prime Minister Fanfani arrived in Washington accompanied by Foreign Minister Antonio Segni and several of Segni's top aides. Among the officials they conferred with were: President Kennedy; Secretary Rusk, Under Secretary Ball, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Tyler of the State Department; Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon; Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze; and presidential aides McGeorge Bundy and Arthur Schlesinger. In these talks, many salient international issues were canvassed.

Although "the opening to the left" was not on the formal agenda, President Kennedy raised the issue in private with Prime Minister Fanfani and "formulated a position of sympathy toward the Italian Socialists."[23] In addition, he told Fanfani that "if the Italian Prime Minister thought it a good idea, we (the United States) would watch developments with sympathy."[24]

In light of President Kennedy's personal expression of sympathy for the *apertura* during the Fanfani visit, Arthur Schlesinger assumed that subsequent American policy—as formulated and implemented by the State Department—would be sympathetic to the formation of a center-left coalition in Italy. However, he was mistaken. When the Bureau of European Affairs at the State Department and the Embassy in Rome learned of President Kennedy's private comments to Fanfani, they were convinced that Kennedy's sympathy—if such sympathy had actually been expressed—represented the private talk of one politician to another and nothing more. They did not believe that "President Kennedy had any particular views on the question one way or the other" or that "he had made a decision to change U.S. policy toward Italy."[25] In the absence of a directive from Secretary Rusk, neither EUR nor the Embassy was inclined to act as if there had been an official change in U.S. policy.[26]

Unable to convince the "working levels" of the State Department of the

[21] Interview with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., October 22, 1970.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid. Interview with McGeorge Bundy, May 18, 1971.
[24] Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days* (Boston; Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 878.
[25] Confidential Interview.
[26] Interviews with Outerbridge Horsey, March 2, 1971 and Foy Kohler, February 2, 1971.

importance of President Kennedy's private comments to Prime Minister Fanfani, Schlesinger then tried to persuade the President to communicate directly with Secretary Rusk. Fearing that there might be high political costs in a direct confrontation with the State Department, Kennedy was unwilling to take the risk over what he considered to be a relatively minor issue. Hence the president refused to take Schlesinger's advice to intervene with Secretary Rusk or, for that matter, to concern himself actively with the *apertura* issue.[27]

What Schlesinger wanted to do was to change the tone and substance of U.S. policy in such a way as to indicate to the top-ranking Italian leaders that the U.S. government was sympathetic to the formation of a center-left coalition, provided the Italians themselves decided upon such a development. For Schlesinger believed, rightly or wrongly, that:

> Italian officials were so deeply persuaded about U.S. opposition to the *apertura* by a dozen years of conditioning . . . that it was necessary to take steps to convey the impression that the United States would not interpose any obstacle or veto if the Italians wanted it ('the opening') . . .[28]

In an effort to change that policy, Schlesinger decided to go around, rather than through, EUR and the Embassy. With the tacit consent of President Kennedy and McGeorge Bundy, he tried to convey to Italian leaders in the fall of 1961 a changed U.S. policy toward the center-left. He began by traveling to Rome in September where, without the knowledge of the Embassy, he met with Pietro Nenni, head of the Socialists, Ugo LaMalfa, chief of the Republicans, and Giusseppe Saragat, leader of the Social Democrats. In subsequent talks with Italian leaders traveling in the United States, Schlesinger made the same points, frequently expressing fervent sympathy for the *apertura* movement. He also attempted to convey to Italian officials a changed American policy toward the "opening to the left" through correspondence on White House stationery.[29] Finally, Schlesinger used such personal friends as Senator Hubert Humphrey, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizational Affairs Richard Gardner (currently U.S. Ambassador to Italy), and CIA senior analyst Dana Durand to convey word of a new U.S. policy.

Neither the Italian Desk nor the Embassy was pleased by the efforts of Schlesinger and his allies to win acceptance for the *apertura* movement. Both the Desk and the Embassy felt that Italy was not Schlesinger's legitimate field of responsibility, particularly since he was unable to obtain a mandate from the president to encourage "the opening to the left." They also felt he and his friends were acting in "an unauthorized, unprincipled, and amateurish"

[27] Interview with McGeorge Bundy, May 18, 1971.

[28] Interview with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., November 17, 1971.

[29] See Mauro Lucentini, "Le carte di Kennedy," *Il Mondo*, September 6, 1970, pp. 4–5. It should be noted that Schlesinger has since denied writing letters to Italian politicians on White House stationery regarding the *apertura*. Interview October 22, 1970.

manner in Italy and that their activities had a "disruptive" effect on the operations of the Embassy and on U.S. policy.[30]

In the State Department it was reasoned that it would be counterproductive in the long run and damaging to America's interest if "we became associated (with), or in fact, really pushed for the development of the center-left."[31] As former Ambassador Reinhardt has explained:

> It was anybody's guess as to whether a coalition of this character could hold together, and if the United States had become committed, in one way, and the subsequent developments had pulled this thing apart, it's quite apparent . . . that the U.S. would have lost considerably. Furthermore, there was another element in this development . . . And that was this: that a coalition of this kind would only be put together as a result of very intense bargaining on the part of the two parties. If we had actually pushed one way or the other we would have assumed a direct responsibility, (a) for the success or failure of the establishment of such a coalition, and (b) for the nature of the policies that would subsequently follow.[32]

In an attempt to stop Schlesinger's pro-*apertura* activities, several members of the State Department and the Embassy in Rome undertook a vigorous campaign to reach the top decision makers in the White House. For example, between September and December 1961, Deputy Chief of Mission Horsey personally went to Washington and tried to: convince senior State Department officials of the dangers in allowing the Socialists to enter the government coalition; get the 1961 National Intelligence Estimate for Italy rewritten; and "educate" Schlesinger in depth about Italy. All of these efforts failed to change Schlesinger's views.

In late November 1961, as change in the Italian governing coalition became increasingly likely, a meeting was held at the Embassy in Rome to discuss the *apertura* movement and its consequences for American foreign policy. At the meeting Military Attaché Vernon Walters forcefully advocated the use of U.S. troops to prevent the PSI from entering the government coalition. Walters's argument was supported by key members of the CIA station in Rome. However, it should be noted that the CIA was not unanimous in support of a hard line toward the PSI. The agency was, in fact, split on the issue as was much of the U.S. government. Though several CIA operatives in Rome advocated military action, the key European analysts in Washington were favorable to the center-left. Conflicting attitudes between Washington and Rome and within single agencies permitted moderates to prevail at the November meeting, and a consensus emerged according to which the Embassy would assume a "hands-off" policy if the PSI entered the govern-

[30] G. Frederick Reinhardt, Recorded Interview by Richard O'Connor, November 1966, John F. Kennedy Library, 6. Interviews with William Blue, April 12, 1971 and Outerbridge Horsey, March 2, 1971.

[31] Reinhardt, p. 7.

[32] Ibid., p. 4.

ment.[33] Thereafter, the possibility of U.S. intervention just before or after the consummation of an "opening to the left" was excluded from serious consideration.

In short, by the end of 1961 the various bureaucratic elements within the U.S. government had acquiesced in the prospect of Socialists entering an Italian government coalition. Undeniably, it was the initiative taken by Italian political leaders which brought the center-left experiment to fruition, but it seems that the efforts of some U.S. officials helped to accelerate the entry of the Socialists into the government and, at a minimum, differences within the U.S. government over the Socialists dissuaded the United States from trying to exercise a veto power against the *apertura.* Although the U.S. government adopted a somewhat changed policy toward the PSI during the Kennedy administration, it did not alter its view of the Communists. On the contrary, the acceptance of the Socialists was seen by many U.S. officials as an integral part, and even a refinement, of an American anticommunist strategy in Italy. Thus the center-left experiment was to be subsequently judged by many in relation to its effectiveness in reducing the strength of the Communist party in Italian affairs.

U.S. Policy and the PCI, 1970–1976

With the creation of the first Aldo Moro government on December 4, 1963, the center-left alternative achieved full take-off and acceptance among a wide variety of political circles in the United States and Italy. A virtually unanimous consensus had been reached within the U.S. government on the positive nature of the center-left. The anti-PSI forces in the Embassy in Rome and in the State Department were neutralized or shifted to other areas of concern. Symptomatic of these changes was the official establishment of ties between the U.S. government and the PSI. In 1962–63 four top-ranking Socialists visited the United States as guests of the government; PSI leader Nenni was received by Ambassador Reinhardt; and John Kennedy, during his visit to Italy between June 30 and July 2, 1963, unequivocally conveyed U.S. backing for the *apertura* experiment in his conversations with leading government officials.

Though the tragic events of November 22, 1963 unexpectedly elevated Lyndon B. Johnson to the presidency, U.S. policy toward Italy remained unchanged. The position established by John Kennedy and his advisers on the "opening to the left" was carried forward through the Johnson years. Indeed, it could be argued that until 1968 U.S. policy toward Italy did not change as it did toward other countries, such as Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and Greece where the main problem was the collapse of the moderate forces on which U.S. postwar policies had been based. Italy, by contrast,

[33] Confidential Interview.

seemed rather reassuring. The DC had not collapsed in the 1963 parliamentary elections as a result of the *apertura*; the PSI maintained its acceptance of NATO and its relations with the PCI remained strained;[34] and by October 1966 moves toward the creation of a unified Socialist party (PSU) had been consummated.[35]

It was not until 1969 that enthusiasm for the center-left really began to wane in parts of the U.S. government. The reasons for disenchantment are easy to find. The Italian parliamentary elections in 1968 showed that the PSU was incapable of transforming itself into an alternative bloc for leftist votes. Running on separate tickets in 1963, the two components of the Italian Socialist movement gained 19.9 percent of the vote. Five years later, after unification, the PSU was able to maintain only 14.5 percent of its previous electoral base from which it was supposed to challenge the Communists. A good portion of that loss went to the PSIUP (Italian Socialist Party for Proletarian Unity) which broke off from the PSI in 1964 in opposition to the center-left. In contrast to the PSU, the PCI continued to make steady gains. In 1963 the PCI received 25.3 percent of the vote, and in 1968, 26.9 percent. Even more disconcerting was the amount of bickering that continued to lacerate the internal workings of the PSU. Not unexpectedly, the Unified Socialists split again into two parties in July 1969. Persistent divisions within the PSU had rendered it less effective than anticipated in its dealings with the DC and in pushing for socioeconomic reforms. The response to this failure took the form of a wave of student and worker protest strikes and demonstrations that culminated in the "hot autumn" of 1969.

In many ways 1969 represents a watershed in the evolution of Italian politics. It was in that year that possible Communist participation in the government began to assume an explicit form and name—Ciriaco De Mita's "constitutional pact" (working out common agreements on policy) with the PCI. It was also a year when events taking place abroad would soon have an effect on the development of Italian affairs and on the position taken by the United States in response to those developments. Most important, it was the year that Richard M. Nixon became president; Graham Martin was soon thereafter appointed Ambassador to Italy.

Before arriving in Italy, Martin had served as U.S. Ambassador to Thailand (from 1963 to 1967) during the militarization of the country as part of the Vietnam build-up. The Italian assignment came as the result of a shrewdly cultivated friendship with Richard Nixon who, during Martin's ambassadorship, made several trips to Thailand. Robert Anson writes that Martin treated private citizen Nixon with "a deference normally reserved for a Chief of State," and when Nixon became president he saw to it that the State Department did "something for Graham Martin."[36] Martin's tour in Italy lasted

[34] The PSI, however, maintained its working relationship with the PCI in many cities and provinces in the Red Belt regions.

[35] Tamburrano argues that the PSU was an example of a "unification at the top," p. 321.

[36] Robert S. Anson, "The Last of the American Caesars," *New Times*, July 10, 1975, p. 22.

until April 1973 when President Nixon personally picked him to head the Embassy in Saigon. He was the last U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam.

During Martin's years in Italy, there was little in the Italian or American press that distinguished his tour from those of his predecessors. Little attention was given in the media to the role played by the ambassador or other officials in the formulation of U.S. policy toward Italy, and it was only hinted sporadically that the U.S. government had a continuing program of involvement in internal Italian affairs. For example, in 1971 rumors appeared in the American press that the U.S. government had undertaken to finance the Christian Democrats and other anticommunist parties in preparation for the parliamentary elections expected in 1973. However, the Italian government denied any such interference. The official position was that the United States was solely interested in the continuity of Italy's foreign policy as formulated by the center-left coalition.[37] And it was not until publication in 1976 of the report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, "The Pike Report," that the extent of U.S. efforts under Martin to aid the noncommunist parties became fully known. The Pike Report revealed that the U.S. government had allocated approximately $10 million to the 1972 parliamentary elections. The request cited the need to reduce interparty conflict and to demonstrate U.S. solidarity with the goals championed by the Italian anticommunist parties.[38]

This kind of aid program was not, in fact, an innovation instituted by Graham Martin. In the previous two decades, approximately $65 million had been allocated to various Italian political parties, organizations, and individuals by the U.S. government. However, what did change under Ambassador Martin was the choice of recipients and the way the money was allocated. In previous years the primary, if not exclusive, foci of U.S. financial assistance were the democratic centrist parties, especially the DC, and the financial arrangements between the Embassy and the recipients were handled by the CIA station in Rome. Martin undertook personally to control decisions of who was to receive money and how it was to be distributed. More important, Martin extended financial support to Italian political groups and individuals on the far right of the political spectrum (that is, to forces close to the neofascist Italian Social Movement, MSI).[39]

The basic motive for Martin's innovative dispersal program was an anticommunist fear. As one observer has noted, "he [Martin] went to Italy with a great anxiety, if not fear, of the worldwide Communist conspiracy."[40] This fear of communism inevitably colored Martin's evaluation of Italian political developments and specific policy recommendations. An example of his bias appears in the February 12, 1971 Annual Report of the Rome Embassy to the State Department, which was drafted by Deputy Chief of Mission Wells

[37] See *The New York Times*, February 27, 1971.

[38] See "The CIA Report the President Doesn't Want You to Read," *The Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, pp. 36–38.

[39] Ibid. Confidential Interview.

[40] Anson, p. 21.

Stabler and approved and signed by the Ambassador. In the Report Martin declared that the United States had a crucial stake in the upcoming parliamentary elections. He asserted that the United States had a vast, and sometimes overlooked, reservoir of goodwill and influence at its command, and to use this influence to the fullest, it had to show its solidarity with "certain domestic political forces." One of the justifications offered for this policy was the fear of a broad leftist coalition that could win a resounding victory. Martin felt that "there was too much at stake in preparation for the election campaign for the U.S. to remain detached." He saw the priorities for U.S. intervention in aid of the anticommunist parties in the following order: provision of political encouragement, financial support, and then active help. The latter contingency policy was formulated in such a way that even a military intervention in Italian politics, including a coup d'état, would be conceivable if all other efforts to block the PCI from coming to power failed.[41]

Taken in this perspective, the revelation in the Pike Report of Martin's transfer of $800,000 to a rightist "local intelligence official" (namely, Vito Miceli, head of Italy's Defense Intelligence Service, SID) to conduct a "propaganda effort" fits with the ambassador's overall view of communism and Italian affairs. This new departure in funding, however, disturbed the CIA station chief in Rome and many bureaucrats in Washington concerned with U.S. policy toward Italy. For it constituted a deviation from normal American policy: the ambassador was personally in charge of the operation (which meant that covert funding, if discovered, could tarnish all other operations connected with the Embassy); the U.S. government was undertaking to finance a noted right-wing sympathizer with close ties to the neofascists, a development which would inevitably identify the United States with the far right of the Italian political spectrum; and the U.S. government might be drawn into domestic events in Italy from which there would be no easy exit.[42]

Not surprisingly, considerable tension arose between Martin and bureaucratic elements in both the State Department and CIA over the new U.S. covert funding policy. The following exchange of views reported in a cable from the Rome CIA chief of station to Washington illustrates that Martin had his own ideas about proper U.S. policy toward Italy and wanted to run his own show. Unlike many officials in Washington and Rome, he was more interested in the long run than in the short-term benefits of the project to finance Miceli:

> Chief of Station: Do you really care if his (Miceli's) efforts are successful or not?
>
> Graham Martin: Yes, I do, but not a helluva lot. The important thing is to demonstrate solidarity for the long pull.[43]

And Martin cared enough about demonstrating this "solidarity" that at one

[41] Confidential Interview.
[42] Confidential Interview.
[43] *The Village Voice*, p. 39.

point he threatened to have the Embassy Marine guards carry off the CIA station chief over the disposition of the black money.[44]

To Martin and to his successor, John Volpe (1973–76), demonstrating "solidarity for the long pull" meant, in essence, the establishment of a series of contacts and policy measures that would serve as the building blocks for a closer relationship between the United States and staunchly anticommunist, rightist elements within Italy. Both Martin and Volpe believed that only these elements were vigorous enough to prevent the entry of the communists into a governing coalition. Accordingly, both ambassadors endeavored to test alternatives to U.S. policy in support of Christian Democracy in an effort to stem the increase of Communist electoral strength and to shore up the Right. Both failed, in part because bureaucratic elements in the State Department and CIA opposed their ideas and helped to ensure the futility of their efforts.[45]

Major causes of this failure were the ephemeral nature of right-wing support in Italy and the lack of qualified individuals and institutions upon which to build a rightist alternative. In addition, foreign multinational corporations, which had complemented U.S. support for the Christian Democrats in the past, were not inclined to engage in any substantial funding of the Right. In short, the Right in Italy, although the focus of much of Martin's and Volpe's anticommunist attention, lacked both political and economic clout from 1969 to 1976 and proved incapable of halting the gains of the Communists.[46]

Conclusion

The key question for U.S. policy makers in 1978 is not whether the Communists will enter the Italian government, for in March of this year they joined the governing parliamentary coalition. The issue is what should U.S. policy be toward a full consummation of the *compromesso storico* (historic compromise between the DC and PCI), through which the PCI would gain control of key cabinet posts and ministries. It is clear that the U.S. government, for both internal and external reasons, no longer has the margin of maneuver to prevent such a governing coalition in Italy, or elsewhere in Europe, by using force. As Victor Zorza perceptively noted in 1974, "The Soviet Union can afford to invade its allies. The U.S. cannot, and will not, and must therefore find other ways of dealing with the problem of the growth of Communist forces within the western democracies."[47] If Zorza's observation continues to pertain to the Italian situation—and we believe that

[44] See Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 277.

[45] Confidential Interview.

[46] For a discussion of the MSI's electoral fortunes in the 1970s, see Robert Leonardi, "The Smaller Parties in the 1976 Italian Elections" in Howard Penniman (ed.), *Italy at the Polls* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), forthcoming.

[47] *The New York Times*, November 5, 1974.

it does—than the U.S. government must re-examine past policy toward Italy to see what lessons can be learned from U.S. attitudes toward the Italian Left during the postwar period.

The analysis presented in this paper leads to at least three major conclusions. U.S. policy toward the Left in Italy—in the current instance toward the PCI—will likely be framed in the overall context of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. Many on the Right in both Italy and the United States argue that the recent gains of the PCI are a direct consequence of the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger and now Carter policy of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. The influence of détente on Italian electoral politics is undoubtedly more complicated than the Right would suggest. But it is likely that future U.S.-Soviet relations will affect U.S. policies toward Italian politics. If, for example, the relationship between the two superpowers should cool, one can expect the United States to adopt a harder line toward the PCI. However, if détente with the Soviet Union continues, at a minimum pressures will build on American policy makers to treat the PCI much as it treats the other major parties in Italy.[48]

A few people within the U.S. government will play determinative roles in shaping future policy toward the Left in Italy, a policy which will most likely have considerable effect on the course of Italian domestic political developments. As we have shown in the preceding analysis, during certain critical periods in Italian postwar history political leaders in Italy have been highly sensitive to official U.S. views about Italian politics. Indeed, for most of the postwar period the United States has influenced the composition of the Italian governing coalition. Whether the United States will be able to exercise such a high degree of influence over the possible consummation of the *compromesso storico* is questionable. But it is likely, given the continuing dependence of the Italian economy on outside economic assistance,[49] that Italian officials will remain extremely sensitive to the attitudes, words, and actions of the U.S. president, the secretary of state, the ambassador in Rome, and the White House staff on the matter of direct Communist entry into the Italian government.

If the president of the United States decides to change U.S. policy toward the Left in Italy, he will likely encounter stubborn resistance from those parts of the government bureaucracy most concerned with Italy. Postwar policy toward Italian politics is a history of bureaucratic resistance to policy changes, particularly in the absence of overt presidential involvement. In the early 1960s presidential assistant Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. tried to shift U.S. policy to a more sympathetic stance toward the PSI only to be resisted by the State Department and the Embassy in Rome.

Again in the early 1970s Ambassador Graham Martin met with similar resistance when he attempted to institute innovative covert funding practices

[48] Confidential Interview.

[49] See Suzanne Berger, "Italy On the Threshold or the Brink?" in David Landes (ed.), *Western Europe: The Trials of Partnership* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1977), pp. 209–236.

in Rome. Only in 1947–48 when the Truman administration shifted to a policy of massive, overt opposition to the Communists did a new policy toward Italy have virtually unanimous support within the U.S. government. And it should be emphasized that in this instance President Truman personally played an active role in enunciating and carrying out the new policy, while neither Kennedy nor Nixon opted to involve himself directly in bureaucratic squabbling or to support new policy initiatives.

At present the Carter administration appears to favor a two-pronged policy toward the PCI: no encouragement whatsoever of the impression that the United States is indifferent to the growth of Italian Communist forces or favorably disposed to the prospect of Communist entry into the government;[50] no overt interference in Italy's internal affairs either through CIA payments to anticommunist elements or through threats to punish the Italian people should they choose to bring the Communists directly into the government.[51] The second part of this policy represents a noteworthy departure from past American practice in Italy. And if President Carter is seriously committed to renouncing U.S. interference in Italian politics, he would be well advised to explain this policy in the most unambiguous terms to the U.S. government bureaucracy and the American people. For only by doing so will he be able to avoid the kind of bureaucratic "drag" and intra-Executive sniping that have characterized U.S. policy initiatives toward Italian politics during earlier eras of the postwar period.*

[50] See "U.S. Statement on Italy, January 12, 1978," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1978.

[51] See "Interview with the President" by David Dimbly et. al., May 2, 1977 (The White House: Office of the White House Press Secretary), pp. 10–11. "Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski," *Congressional Record*, October 26, 1977, pp. E. 6592–6594; and Interview with U.S. Ambassador Richard Gardner, *Corriere della Sera*, November 15, 1977.

* The views expressed in this paper are the authors' and do not represent the views of any organization or institution.