



INTRODUCTION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Massimo de Leonardis¹
Catholic University of the Sacred Heart

Abstract:

The years 1943-45 marked the fundamental turning point in the history of Italian foreign policy. The breakdown of the traditional foreign policy of the Italian state made necessary to rebuild it on new foundations in the new international context. The real rehabilitation came in 1949, when Italy was admitted to the Atlantic Alliance as a founding member, changing in a little more than two years her status from that of a defeated enemy to that of a full fledged ally. Since unification, Italian governing elites had two basic doctrines of foreign policy. During the monarchist period (both Liberal and Fascist), Italian elites fully shared the traditional concepts and practices of traditional diplomacy: power politics, the games of the alliances, defence of national interest, gunboat diplomacy, colonialism and so on. Italy seemed to be particularly cynical (boasting her «sacred egoism»), for the reason that she was a newcomer looking for room. During the Cold War there was a sometimes uneasy compromise between the requirements of Realpolitik and the culture of a political class, which, also as a reaction to Fascism's excesses, aimed to replace the old tradition with an internationalist outlook. Therefore Italian foreign policy between 1947 and 1950 has been described as the anxious transition from the status of «Great Power» to that of «democratic power», whatever that could mean. After the defeat, the “new” Italy seemed to reject power politics as the essence of international relations, giving importance to multilateral diplomacy and rejected nationalism, replaced by three types of internationalism: Atlanticism, Europeanism and Third Worldism. However we must remark that some traditional features of Italian diplomacy remained: the issue of the rank and collocation in the international hierarchy of powers which had been central in the foreign policy since the birth of the country, the attitude to compromise and even the reliance on Armed Forces to enhance her status.

Keywords: Italian Foreign Policy, Second World War, National Interest, Internationalism.

¹ Massimo de Leonardis is Professor of History of International Relations and Institutions and of History of Treaties and International Politics at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, where he is Director of the Department of Political Science. Coordinator of the History Department at the Master in Diplomacy of the Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milan. Vice President of The International Commission of Military History and Secretary General of the Italian Commission of Military History of the Ministry of Defence; Member of the Board of the Italian Society of International History. He was in 1979 Wolfson Fellow of the British Academy, in 1985 Visiting Fellow of the United Kingdom Program of the University of Southern California, in 1993-94 NATO Individual Research Fellow. He has published 14 books and more than 140 other scholarly essays.

**Resumen:**

Los años 1943-45 marcaron un punto de inflexión fundamental en la historia de la política exterior italiana. El derrumbe de la política exterior tradicional italiana hizo necesaria su reconstrucción sobre nuevas bases en un contexto internacional diferente. La verdadera rehabilitación llegó en 1949 con la admisión de Italia en la Alianza Atlántica como miembro fundador, modificando en poco más de dos años su estatus: desde enemigo derrotado a miembro fundador de pleno derecho. Desde la unificación, las élites gobernantes italianas mantuvieron dos doctrinas básicas en su política exterior: durante el periodo monárquico (tanto liberal como fascista), las élites italianas compartían plenamente los conceptos tradicionales las prácticas de la diplomacia tradicional: políticas de poder, juegos de alianza, defensa del interés nacional, diplomacia militar, colonialismo, etc. Italia parecía ser particularmente cinica (hacienda alarde de su "sagrado egoísmo"), por la razón de que era una nación recién llegada en busca de un espacio propio. Durante la Guerra Fría, existía un difícil equilibrio entre los imperativos de la Realpolitik y la cultura de una clase política, que por reacción a los excesos del fascismo, buscaba sustituir la antigua tradición con una postura internacionalista. Por tanto la política exterior italiana entre 1947 y 1950 ha sido descrita como la difícil transición desde un estatus de "gran poder" hacia el de un "poder democrático", fuese cual fuese el significado exacto de ello. Tras la derrota, la "nueva" Italia parecía rechazar políticas de poder como esencia de las relaciones internacionales, dando importancia a la diplomacia multilateral, rechazó el nacionalismo, sustituido por tres tipos de internacionalismo: Atlantismo, Europeísmo y Tercermundismo. Sin embargo, hemos de destacar que ciertas características de la diplomacia tradicional italiana permanecieron: el asunto del rango y su posición en la jerarquía internacional que fue central en la política exterior desde el nacimiento del país, la disposición favorable al compromiso e incluso el apoyo en las fuerzas armadas para reforzar su estatus.

Palabras clave: *Política exterior de Italia, Segunda Guerra Mundial, interés nacional, Internacionalismo.*

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1. Introduction

Since the unification of Italy in 1861 the years 1943-45, not the First World War or the advent of Fascism, marked the fundamental turning point in the history of foreign policy². Two of the most important Italian diplomats of the period after the Second World War have stressed the importance of 1943 as a watershed. In 1967 Pietro Quaroni wrote: «The armistice of 1943 marked not only the breakdown of Fascist foreign policy, but also ... of the entire foreign policy that ... had been pursued by the Kingdom of Italy since the beginning»³. In 1993 Sergio Romano wrote that the events of 1943 demonstrated that «Italy could neither take care alone of her security nor give a primary contribution to the defence of her territory»⁴. It was the end of Italy as a Great Power, a rank that had instead been confirmed by the victory in the First World War. Actually the end of Italy as a Great Power had already taken place with the end of Mussolini's project of a «parallel war» and the reduction of Italy to a satellite of Germany, after the failure of the campaigns against Greece and in Northern Africa.

In any case, the Second World War gave birth to an international system at the same time bipolar and not homogeneous, in which the concept of Great Power was replaced by that of Superpower, while the Cold War confrontation of the two blocs made almost impossible for Italy to perform her traditional role of index, renamed by Fascist foreign minister Dino Grandi «policy of the determinant weight», and prevented to «have a waltz» with the adversaries, according to the expression of the German chancellor Bernhard von Bülow at the beginning of the XIX century, when Italy was at the same time allied with the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires but also had friendly relation with the United Kingdom, France and Russia, whose side she finally joined in the First World War.

The breakdown of the traditional foreign policy of the Italian state made necessary to rebuild it on new foundations in the new international context. The first leg of this rebuilding was the period of «co-belligerency» with the former enemies (1943-45), during which Italy «had a little waltz» resuming full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, provoking the annoyance of the Anglo-Americans. From the formal and legal point of view the terminal point of this reconstruction was the signature of the Peace Treaty in February 1947 (but the last negative consequences of the defeat were eliminated only in 1955); however from a much more relevant political perspective the real rehabilitation came on 4th April 1949, when Italy was admitted to the Atlantic Alliance as a founding member, changing in a little more than two years her status from that of a defeated enemy to that of a full fledged ally.

² So it's justified a work on the period from 1870 to 1940 as Lowe, Cedric James and Marzari, Frank (1975): *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul. On the entire period since unification to the recent years see Mammarella, Giuseppe and Cacace, Paolo (2006): *La politica estera dell'Italia. Dallo Stato unitario ai giorni nostri*, Bari, Laterza and Saiu, Liliana (1999): *La politica estera italiana dall'Unità a oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza. On the different periods, general books are: Cacace, Paolo (1986): *Venti anni di politica estera italiana (1943-1963)*, Roma, Bonacci; Decleva, Enrico (1974): *L'Italia e la politica internazionale dal 1870 al 1914*, Milano, Mursia; de Leonardis, Massimo (ed.) (2003): *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino; Ferraris, Luigi Vittorio (1996): *Manuale della politica estera italiana (1947-1993)*, Roma-Bari, Laterza; Pastorelli, Pietro (1987): *La politica estera italiana del dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino; Pastorelli, Pietro (1997): *Dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale. Momenti e problemi della politica estera italiana 1914-1943*, Milano, Edizioni Universitarie di Economia Lettere Diritto; Torre, Augusto (1960): *La politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1914*, Bologna, Zanichelli; Tosi Luciano (ed.) (1999): *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali*, Padova, Cedam; Varsori, Antonio (1999): *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

³ Quaroni, Pietro, «Chi è che fa la politica estera in Italia», in Bonanni, Mario (ed.) (1967): *La politica estera della Repubblica Italiana*, Milano, Comunità, vol. III, p. 810.

⁴ Romano, Sergio (1993): *Guida alla politica estera italiana*, Milano, Rizzoli, pp. 5-6.



Since unification, Italian governing élites had two basic doctrines of foreign policy. During the monarchist period (both Liberal and Fascist), Italian élites fully shared the traditional concepts and practices of traditional diplomacy: power politics, the game of the alliances, defence of national interest, gunboat diplomacy, colonialism and so on. Italy seemed to be particularly cynical (boasting her «sacred egoism»), for the reason that she was a newcomer looking for room. As remarked by Morgenthau, sometimes Italian foreign policy «earned only the moral condemnation, but not the respect, which similar policies had brought Great Britain»⁵, just because her power was inferior to that of the United Kingdom.

During the Cold War there was a sometimes uneasy compromise between the requirements of *Realpolitik* and the culture of a political class, which, also as a reaction to Fascism's excesses, aimed to replace the old tradition with an internationalist outlook. Therefore Italian foreign policy between 1947 and 1950 as been described as the anxious transition from the status of «Great Power» to that of «democratic power», whatever that could mean⁶. After the defeat the “new” Italy seemed to reject power politics as the essence of international relations. «We neither have the instruments to pursue power politics – declared foreign minister Carlo Sforza in Parliament announcing Italy's membership of the Atlantic Pact⁷ – nor do we want to have them». The same way of thinking was expressed in the statement of an Italian defence minister (probably Paolo Emilio Taviani) to Field-Marshal Montgomery, NATO Deputy SACEUR: Italy «is a great nation, not a great power»⁸.

This new foreign policy vision was reflected in the new republican constitution which expressed the «need of the complete openness of the state to the international community; pacifism; the aspiration to promote also internationally the values of freedom and democracy ...; international solidarity; ... the necessity to assure that specific issues of foreign policy ... were “controlled” by Parliament»⁹. This vision was shared by parties (Christian Democrats, Communists and Socialists) occupying almost 80% of the seats in the Constituent Assembly.

They were divided on internal not on foreign politics. As a consequence the Italian republican constitution has many articles dealing with foreign policy. Art. 11 echoed the Briand-Kellogg pact of 1928: «Italy rejects war as an instrument of aggression against the freedoms of others peoples and as a means for settling international controversies». The formulation was criticized by some constituents, not only conservative ones¹⁰. In any case this article must not be interpreted as an expression of absolute pacifism, but only as a repudiation of aggressive wars. This interpretation is supported by the fact that art. 52 gave constitutional strength to compulsory military service, stating that «the defence of the Fatherland is a sacred

⁵ Morgenthau, Hans J. (1950): *Politics among Nations. The struggle for power and peace*, New York, Alfred Knopf, p. 144.

⁶ Vigezzi, Brunello: “De Gasperi, Sforza, la diplomazia italiana e la politica di potenza dal trattato di pace al patto atlantico”, in Di Nolfo, Ennio; Rainero, Romain H. and Vigezzi, Brunello (eds.) (1988), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1945-50)*, Milano, Marzorati, p. 5.

⁷ Speech of 15th March 1949 in Sforza, Carlo (1952): *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi. La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*, Roma, Atlante, pp. 189, 234.

⁸ Quoted in Rumi, Giorgio: “Opportunismo e profezia. Cultura cattolica e politica estera italiana 1946-63”, *Storia Contemporanea*, vol. XII, no. 4-5 (October 1981), p. 811.

⁹ Cassese, Antonio in Branca, Giuseppe (ed.) (1975): *Commentario della Costituzione*, vol. I, *Principi fondamentali*, Bologna-Roma, Società editrice del Foro Italiano, p. 465.

¹⁰ The populist (*Partito dell'Uomo Qualunque*) Russo-Perez labelled the formulation as «ridiculous», because Italy was by then a «disarmed nation» and declared difficult to discriminate between just and unjust wars, because the former were those won and the latter those lost. The former centre-left Prime Minister Francesco Saverio Nitti stated that no constitution of a «serious country» included such statement and that abroad people would laugh at the idea that «being as a matter of fact under the domination of other nations and weak and unarmed, we afford the luxury of being the first to take this kind of moral obligation».



duty for every citizen» (the only instance employing this adjective¹¹) and considering that the new national anthem recalls «Scipio's helmet» and the «victory ... slave of Rome». Actually, as remarked by most of the articles in this issue, Republican Italy has largely used her Armed Forces as a major instrument to enhance her status in the International arena.

Also the second part of art. 11 is important and significant: the Republic «agrees, on conditions of equality with other states, to the limitations of sovereignty necessary for an order that ensures peace and justice among Nations; it promotes and encourages international organizations having such ends in view». This formulation expressed the belief that contemporary wars largely arose from the States' absolute sovereignty. Curiously, various efforts to amend the text talking of «European and international organizations» were rejected with the strange motivations that it was superfluous and that it was necessary to look «also beyond the borders of Europe». The Constituents clearly looked at UNO as their ideal.

More in general, after the war for many reasons Italy gave importance to multilateral diplomacy, as can be seen particularly in Tosi's article. First of all, inside international organizations middle Powers have more opportunities to press their points of view. In the specific case of Italy many factors of her political and diplomatic situation favoured this approach: the loss of power after the defeat, the geopolitical location at the crossroads of East and West and North and South, the effort to find room to manoeuvre in the strict bipolar system, the presence of a strong Communist party, the internationalist culture of the ruling Catholic party, the influence of the Holy See and of the Church.

Even without sharing some authors' opinion about the «death of the Motherland»¹² after the events of September 1943, certainly after the Second World War and the fall of the Monarchy «nationalism is officially buried under the ruin of Fascism and defeat in the war», reappearing only in 1952-54 on the issue of Trieste. However, as it was clear in the phase of *neo-Atlanticism*, «nationalism camouflaged under internationalist clothes»: Atlanticism, Europeanism and Third Worldism¹³.

Going back to the text of the Constitution, also art. 80 («The houses authorize through laws the ratification of international treaties which are of a political nature, or which call for arbitration or legal settlements, or which entail changes to national territory or financial burdens or changes in the laws») marked a strong discontinuity with the past, which is evident comparing the two fundamental alliances of the Liberal Monarchy and of the Italian Republic. The text of the Triple Alliance of 1882 not only was never submitted to ratification but also was known only to a very restricted number of people (essentially the King, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister); moreover its signature was not disclosed for one year. It is also known that in May 1915 the Parliament was faced by *a fait accompli* and had to approve reluctantly the declaration of war. On the contrary the signature of the Atlantic Pact was discussed in advance at all levels.

A corollary of the repudiation of nationalism, indeed of the same concept of «national interest», was the «the tendency to deal with issues of international politics in juridical terms and not in the light of *Realpolitik*», because «it is obvious that a rather weak state tries to

¹¹ The objections raised to the use of the word «sacred» were silenced when the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti informed that the Soviet Constitution of 1936 had the same formulation.

¹² Galli della Loggia, Ernesto (1996): *La morte della patria. La crisi dell'idea di nazione tra Resistenza, antifascismo e Repubblica*, Bari-Roma, Laterza.

¹³ Panebianco, Angelo (1997): *Guerrieri democratici*, Bologna, Il Mulino, pp. 245-51.



found its external action more on juridical argument than on power»¹⁴. The cultural approach of the ruling Christian Democrat party to international affairs was based on the concept of natural law and DC had to learn how adapt her cultural tradition to the realities of the government. It is interesting to note that in the period in which Italy joined the Western Alliance, the offices of Foreign and Defence Ministers were occupied by lay politicians linked to the tradition of the *Risorgimento*: Carlo Sforza (1947-51) and Randolfo Pacciardi (1949-53).

2. Continuity and Change

Having stressed the prevailing different culture of Republican Italy in respect to previous periods in the field of foreign policy, we should however note that some traditional features of Italian diplomacy remained. First of all, as remarked here by Nuti, for Italy «the issue of its own rank and collocation in the international hierarchy of powers had been central in its foreign policy since the birth of the country» and this didn't change after the war. The aspiration to be again considered a Great Powers became particularly evident after 1955, when on one hand Italy had liquidated the negative heritage of the defeat on the other the international situation (the first *détente*) seemed to allow room for manoeuvring.

In NATO, in the EEC-EU, at the UNO Italy always struggled to be in the “inner circle” of the key actors, giving the cue to her description as a “lunching power” (for the desire of being invited to restricted lunches before the meetings of the Atlantic Council) or to the definition of “policy of the chair” (the aspiration of having one at the important table). The susceptibility about the rank not always was matched by the capacity to advance concrete proposals and even less by the availability of means to carry out them.

Actually in various phases, particularly the late 60s-late 70s, Italy's international action was particularly handicapped by her internal situation, as appears in most of the articles. But also in the whole post-war period Italy's foreign policy was always hindered by the instability of her political system, by the inefficiency of several sectors of public administration, by the economic and civilian gaps between North and South. During the Cold War Italy had to cope with the presence of the strongest Communist party in the West (which arrived to poll more than one third of the votes).

Here we find a continuity with the past, since Italian politicians and diplomats tried to transform weaknesses into a leverage, many times asking concessions to avoid a breakdown of the government or of political system. Instead of boasting power, sometimes Italian governments displayed, or feigned, their impotence. In this respect a general remark made by Harold Nicolson in 1938 was still valid: «The aim of Italy's foreign policy is to acquire by negotiation an importance greater than can be supplied by her own physical strength»¹⁵.

Another important continuity is the Italy's attitude to compromise, of being loyal to her alliances, but at the same time looking for her own “dialogue” with the “enemy” and pursuing an autonomous policy in the “grey zones”. *Neo-Atlanticism*, described in some of the articles, is a typical example of this, by no means the only one or the most important. At

¹⁴ Gaja, Roberto, (1995): *L'Italia nel mondo bipolare. Per una storia della politica estera italiana (1943-1991)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 28.

¹⁵ Nicolson, Harold George (1963): *Diplomacy*, London, Oxford University Press, 3rd ed., p. 152 (the first edition was published in 1939).



least until the beginning of the XXIst century, Italy didn't seem to notice that a strain could exist between Atlanticism and Europeanism. While the United Kingdom always chose Washington and France on the contrary tried to contrast American hegemony, Italy, like Federal Germany, kept her balance between Washington and Brussels/Paris (i. e. EEC/EU), even if certainly the relationship with the White House was paramount, as argued in my own article.

Last but not least, in the Republic the Armed Forces didn't enjoy the privileged position occupied in the Kingdom of Italy, but, as Labanca's articles shows, their situation was not so bad and the Italian governments, in spite of their almost total lack of strategic and military culture, relied on them as a key instrument to enhance the Italian international position.

We may conclude that the political class of Republican Italy facing the realities of the international situation had to moderate its initial idealism and come to terms with *Realpolitik*. A degree of continuity with the past was thus maintained even in a completely different international and internal situation.

The reader will verify if these general introductory remarks, not necessarily shared by the authors, as I do not necessarily agree with all their considerations, find confirmation in the articles of this issue.