



ITALY'S NUCLEAR CHOICES

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Abstract:

Italy's military nuclear policy throughout the Cold War was an attempt to foster the country's aspirations to a position of parity among the other European powers. 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 the new generation of politicians that shaped Italian foreign policy after the Second World War was no less aware of this critical factor than their predecessors. The nuclearization of NATO made it inevitable that only those countries which had access to nuclear weapons would ultimately make the crucial decisions for the future of the alliance. The Italian government reached the conclusion that its only way to a nuclear status of some sorts would be through a close cooperation with NATO and the USA. Between 1955 and 1959, the acceptance of US nuclear weapons on Italian soil eventually evolved into a pattern that formed the basis for Italian nuclear policies for the next 10 years or so. Italy was very reluctant to ratify the NPT and this led to a strong behind the scenes alliance with the other main Western European opponents, the Federal Republic of Germany and a wide ranging series of contacts with all the other possible opponents to the treaty, from Japan to India. In 1979, Italy accepted the new Euromissiles on its territory. Again, Italy considered nuclear weapons as its winning card and the tool has to be used to shorten the gap with the other major European partners. The crucial relationship with the USA goes a long way in explaining the rationale of Italy's nuclear policies. Since the USA had become the key pillar of its international orientation, it was clear that hosting US nuclear devices was also seen as a way of forging a closer partnership. The ultimate goal of Italian foreign policy, equality of status among the Western Europeans, remained a mirage all along. Yet at the same time the fact that Italy was willing to shoulder some of the risks and burdens of the nuclear deployments were regarded by the other West European governments, and above all by the USA, as a sign of growing Italian responsibility.

Keywords: Nuclear Weapons, Armed Forces, NATO, US-Italian Relations.

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**Resumen:**

La política militar y nuclear italiana a lo largo de la Guerra Fría intentó promover las aspiraciones del país de conseguir una posición de paridad con otras potencias europeas. El tema de su propio rango y posición en la jerarquía internacional de potencias fue central en su política exterior desde el nacimiento mismo del país, y la nueva generación de políticos que dieron forma a la política exterior italiana tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial no eran menos conscientes de tan crítico factor que sus predecesores. La nuclearización de la OTAN hizo inevitable que solo aquellos países que tuvieran acceso a las bombas nucleares acabasen tomando las decisiones más cruciales en el futuro de la alianza. El gobierno italiano llegó a la conclusión de que la única manera de alcanzar el estatus nuclear era a través de una estrecha colaboración con la OTAN y los EEUU. Entre 1955 y 1959 la aceptación de bombas nucleares en territorio italiano acabó evolucionando hacia un patrón que formó la base de las políticas nucleares italianas en los 10 años siguientes. Italia era muy reticente a la firma del NPT y ello llevó a establecer una alianza con los principales oponentes europeos, la República Federal Alemana entre ellos, y a establecer una larga serie de contactos con otros posibles opositores al tratado, desde Japón a la India. En 1979 Italia aceptó la presencia de los nuevos Euromisiles en su territorio, considerando de nuevo a los Euromisiles como carta ganadora, un instrumento a usar para reducir las diferencias con otros socios europeos. La relación crucial con los EEUU explica en gran parte las razones de Italia para construir su política nuclear. Desde que los EEUU se convirtiesen en el pilar principal de su orientación internacional, estaba claro que albergar armas nucleares americanas era considerado como un medio para reforzar la asociación. El fin último de la política exterior italiana, la igualdad de estatus con sus socios europeos, no dejó de ser una mera ilusión a lo largo de esos años. Sin embargo, el hecho de que Italia estuviese dispuesta a soportar el peso de los despliegues nucleares fue visto por parte de otros gobiernos de Europa Occidental, y sobre todo por los EEUU, como un signo de responsabilidad italiana.

Palabras clave: Armas nucleares, Fuerzas Armadas, OTAN, relaciones EEUU-Italia.

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1. Introduction

From the mid-fifties to the early 1990s Italy saw the deployment of several hundred US nuclear warheads and delivery systems, ranging from the thermonuclear warheads of the IRBM *Jupiter* and of the Cruise missiles *Gryphon*, to the smaller tactical ones installed on short range missiles such as the *Corporal*, the *Honest John*, the *Sergeant* and the *Lance* (not to mention some of the other devices such as gravitational bombs, land mines or dual-use artillery). Throughout the Cold War, in other words, Italy had an important military nuclear policy and it was one of the most important nuclear bases of Western Europe – together with Great Britain, France and West Germany. And yet, while there is a significant scholarly literature about the historical relevance of the nuclear choices of the other Western European countries, the Italian decisions have not attracted much attention from historians or political scientists – be they scholars of Italian foreign policy, of NATO, or more in general of nuclear proliferation². In my own book on this topic, therefore, I have tried to fill this gap by looking at some of the key nuclear decisions the Italian government made from the mid-fifties up to the early 1980s, stressing the remarkable continuity in the Italian attitude towards nuclear deployments and sketching out a possible interpretative paradigm³. In this essay, I will try to sum up the key findings of this research as well as my main interpretative theses. The key question which the paper addresses is that Italy was clearly a state which had the technical, scientific, and economic potential to go nuclear at the national level, and which clearly attached a lot of importance to all matters related to status and prestige. And yet, after it flirted with the idea of going nuclear and tried out a number of alternative solutions to a national option, it grunted and complained at the perspective of signing the NPT but eventually abode by the rules and decided to accept a permanent non-nuclear status. Why? What were the key variables that explained this outcome? I think that answering these questions might prove a useful exercise not only for the rather limited field of the history of Italian foreign policy, but also for those interested in non-proliferation as a broader topic.

² Kohl, Wilfred L. (1971): *French Nuclear Diplomacy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press; Mongin, Dominique (1997): *La bombe atomique française, 1945-1958*, Bruxelles, Bruylant; Pô, Jean-Damien (2001): *Les moyens de la puissance: les activités militaires du Cea, 1945-2000*, Paris, Ellipses - Fondation pour la recherche stratégique; Pagedas, Constantine A. (2000): *Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem, 1960-1963: A Troubled Partnership*, London and Portland, Frank Cass; Regnault, Jean-Marc (1993): *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: l'implantation, 1957-1964*, Tahiti, Scoop Editions; Vaïsse, Maurice and Barbier, Colette (eds.) (1994): *La France et l'atome: études d'histoire nucléaire*, Bruxelles, Bruylant; Yost, David S. (1985): *France's deterrent posture and security in Europe*, 2 vols., Adelphi Papers Nos. 194-195, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies. On Great Britain, see among many, Baylis, John and Macmillan, Alan (eds.) (1992): *The foundations of British nuclear strategy, 1945-1960*, Aberystwyth, Dept. of International Politics University College of Wales; Beach, Hugh and Gurr, Nadine (1999): *Flattering the Passions, Or, the Bomb and Britain's Bid for a World Role*, London, I.B. Tauris; Clark, Ian (1994): *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship: Britain's Deterrent and America, 1957-1962*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Holdstock, Douglas and Barnaby, Frank (eds.) (2003): *The British nuclear weapons programme, 1952-2002*, London, Frank Cass; Navias, Martin S. (1991): *Nuclear Weapons and British Strategic Planning, 1955-1958*, Oxford and New York, Clarendon Press. On the Federal Republic of Germany, Bald, Detlef (1994): *Die Atombewaffnung der Bundeswehr: Militaer, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Ära Adenauer*, Bremen, Temmen - Schriftenreihe des Wissenschaftlichen Forums für internationale Sicherheit E.V.; Buchholz, Frank (1991): *Strategische und Militaerpolitische Diskussionen in der Gründungsphase der Bundeswehr 1949-1960*, Frankfurt am Main and New York, Peter Lang; McArdle Kelleher, Catherine (1975): *Germany & the politics of nuclear weapons*, New York, Columbia University Press; Kuentzel, Matthias (1995): *Bonn & the Bomb: German Politics and the Nuclear Option*, London, Boulder and Amsterdam, Pluto Press with Transnational Institute (TNI); Tuschhoff, Christian (2003): *Deutschland, Kernwaffen und die NATO 1949-1967: zum Zusammenhalt von und friedlichem Wandel in Bündnissen*, Baden-Baden, Nomos.

³ Nuti, Leopoldo, “‘Me too, please’: Italy and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons, 1945-1975”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1993), pp. 114-148.



2. The Aftermath of the Second World War

For Italy, the early aftermath of the Second World War was clearly dominated by some key priorities, such as avoiding a punitive peace treaty and implementing the economic and political reconstruction of the country. Yet it is interesting to note how even in those early days, at a stage when the country was completely in ruins and shattered by the war, the Italian military were already taking stock of the impact of the new weapons for the future of warfare. In the early months after the end of the Second World War there are already a few, scant traces of the first reflections about the impact of the nuclear explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and both the military and the scientists seem to share the conclusion that the bomb had ushered in a new era in the International system. The most widespread impression was that the new dramatic changes would definitely have a negative implication for Italy's international standing, somehow confirming the disastrous impact of the Second World War and further marginalizing Italy in the International context. The history of the military nuclear policy followed by Italy throughout the Cold War is therefore the history of an attempt to minimize this initial handicap or at least to minimize its consequences for the country's aspirations to a position of parity among the other European powers.

The Italian armed forces, in particular, showed a strong interest for the new weapons and the new technology, which is clearly testified by a relevant number of articles in the military journals of the time and, above all, by the participation of the Ministry of Defence and by the Foreign Ministry in a prolonged debate with the National Research Centre and other public institutions about the creation of a joint commission that would study all possible applications of nuclear energy – civilian and military. The documentary record shows a long, protracted debate about who should control this new body and what exactly its role should be. It is at this time – 1950-1951 – that a fracture became evident between the military and the civilians, a break which eventually led to the creation of two entirely separated research structures, the CNRN (*Comitato Nazionale per le Ricerche Nucleari*, National Commission for Nuclear Research) in 1952 and the CAMEN (*Centro Applicazioni Militari Energia Nucleare*, Center for the Military Applications of Nuclear Energy) in 1955.

The reasons for the fracture must be found in the animosity, resentment and lack of mutual trust between the two groups, and perhaps in the armed forces' attraction for possible bizarre shortcuts to nuclear technology. In 1952, the Italian military went as far as allowing a real crank, an amateurish scientist by the unlikely name of Ubaldo Loschi (*Loschi* in Italian means shady, devious) to use an Army facility on the beach at Nettuno – not far from Rome – and run an experiment on how to produce a thermonuclear explosion by exploiting electromagnetic waves (an alternative route, it was somewhat apologetically explained later on, to the more expensive approach of using a nuclear bomb as a detonator). Fortunately the test failed and the eternal city was spared from its consequences. While the whole episode is quite farcical and rich in amusing details, it had quite an impact on the Italian media and for a while the national press published several articles on the possible implications of an unlikely success.

The search for alternative shortcuts to the new technologies was clearly influenced by the attitude of the scientific community. The story of Italian nuclear physics rotates around the crucial figure of Edoardo Amaldi, one of Enrico Fermi's best students and key collaborators, who had taken over the leadership of Fermi's group after the departure of the mentor and of some of the other key members. Amaldi was such an important personality that at one time during the war the American OSS developed a plan for persuading him to escape from Rome lest he contributed to the Nazi war effort. Yet there was no need to mount such a daredevil



operation: sometime in 1941, for fear of being asked to work at possible military applications of nuclear energy, Amaldi and the rest of Fermi's group decided to switch their research interests in a totally different direction and dropped nuclear research altogether.

The consequences of these decisions were quite significant. The main Italian school of nuclear physics, the one which had produced world-class results in the 1930s, had taken a hostile attitude towards military applications of nuclear research at a very early stage⁴. This attitude will remain consistent for all of the Cold War: from his personal records, it clearly comes out that Amaldi was willing to pledge some minimal collaboration to the defence ministry, but only in terms of assisting the Italian armed forces in studying and developing possible forms of defence against nuclear weapons. In the long run, Amaldi became one of the leading personalities of the Pugwash movement and remained in its Council from 1958 until 1973. In short, this entailed that any possible scientific inquiry in the military applications of nuclear energy would have to be carried out by second rate scientists and against the opposition of the country's leading physicists.

3. The Nuclear Sharing Debate, 1955-1968

What had been an already significant interest for the military applications of nuclear energy was strengthened by the 1951 agreement between Italy and the NATO Allies to cancel the military clauses of the peace treaty and, above all, by the nuclear revolution introduced by the Eisenhower administration in NATO strategy. The former implied that there were no formal restrictions on whatever rearmament Italy now intended to implement and therefore opened up a number of possibilities, but it was the latter event that had a profound consequence on the Italian attitude towards nuclear weapons. By making them the central pillar of NATO's security, the Eisenhower administration clearly enhanced the interest of the Western Europeans in their control – even before the Russian technological breakthroughs of 1957 reinforced the European concern and turned the issue of *nuclear sharing* into the most critical dilemma of Transatlantic relations for the next 8-10 years.

Italy was no exception to the growth of European interest for the political implications of the nuclearization of the Atlantic alliance. One may even argue that Italy was more sensitive to this issue than some of the other European countries: 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 the new generation of politicians that shaped Italian foreign policy after the Second World War was no less aware of this critical factor than their predecessors – if anything, the attention to all matters of status and prestige was reinforced by the consequences of the peace treaty. This was a group of diplomats and politicians which had grown up in a cultural milieu attaching the greatest importance to the attainment of a status of parity in the European context, and to them this goal remained crucial even in the new international environment of the post-war years. As one of the country's leading diplomats, Massimo Magistrati, remarked in 1953, the nuclearization of NATO made it inevitable that only those countries which had access to nuclear weapons would ultimately make the crucial decisions for the future of the alliance⁵. Other ones would also repeatedly argue that parity among the Western Europeans was indispensable to facilitate the development of European

⁴ Amaldi, Edoardo (1997): *Da via Panisperna all'America. I fisici italiani e la seconda guerra mondiale*, a cura di G. Battimelli and M. De Maria, Roma, Editori Riuniti.

⁵ "M. Magistrati a P. Quaroni", 18 December 1953, *ASMAE, Ambasciata di Parigi*, b. 18, fasc. PA.



integration, and that it was important to avoid any discrimination of ranking among the European powers. Hence the importance attached to any factor that could modify the country's status in a direction or the other.

The peculiar feature of the Italian reaction to the nuclear revolution of the 1950s was its reliance on a strategy of cooperation, particularly with the United States: Italy did take some steps at a national level, such as the establishment of the CAMEN, but above all it displayed from very early on a strong interest in developing an Atlantic framework to solve the problem of access to the new technology. This approach would remain consistent for the whole period in which nuclear sharing remained at the centre of the Transatlantic security debate.

The pattern was already established by the end of 1955. In the book I discuss at length the creation of the Southern European Task Force (SETAF), the American unit which was established in Northern Italy by October 1955 and which was later to be equipped with tactical nuclear weapons such as the *Honest Johns* and the *Corporal* rockets. The deployment of SETAF proved to be a formative experience for both sides, and its negotiations offer an important precedent which would be repeated in many of the subsequent cases. From the Italian perspective, it is important to note the emphasis that the agreement be presented as a *multilateral NATO* initiative, rather than an Italian-American one, in order to minimize possible hostile repercussions. It is also interesting to note how Italy tried to drive a hard bargain in the sense of minimizing the economic costs and of reaping some additional military advantage: not only the government tried to eschew the implicit economic costs of the deployment (such as housing of the US troops) by asking that they be taken up by the US; but it also tried to obtain from NATO a package deal which would reward Italy for hosting the new American forces by supporting a plan for strengthening the Italian ones as well. Finally, it's important to note that the Italian government was fully aware that the new SETAF unit might already be (and would certainly be in the future) equipped with tactical nuclear weapons, and that it agreed that the matter should be handled as routine, without any particular emphasis, in order to reduce any possible political backlash:

General Michaelis inferentially inquired whether Ambassador Rossi Longhi perceived any difficulty involved in such routine introduction of weapons possessing atomic capability. Amb. Rossi Longhi responded immediately [...] that this was *of course* [author's emphasis] the way the matter should be handled – without any special announcement or fanfare and treating the introduction of such weapons as the normal procedure that it is, while at the same time underscoring that it is a question of potential capability rather than of a present stockpile in Italy of atomic warheads⁶.

This would become the standard way of handling the issue through most of the subsequent negotiations whenever a new US weapon system had to be introduced. In the case of the negotiations for the *Jupiter* missiles, for instance, prime minister Fanfani used almost the same words: when he met with President Eisenhower to discuss the issue of a possible deployment of the *Jupiters* in Italy, the Italian PM said that the best way to handle the deployment was not to emphasize it at all, and “work it out as routine by the military” an

⁶ “Foreign Service Despatch 499 from Rome to the Dept. of State”, 12 September 1955, *NAW, RG 59, CDF, 740.5 Nato Affairs / US Europe Defense*.



approach that Eisenhower fully shared⁷. Quite similarly, the Fanfani government drove a very hard bargain from an economic point of view, succeeding in having the US paying a large part of the expenses for the *Jupiter* deployment.

By the late Fifties, therefore, the Italian government had become quite active in a range of initiatives related to military applications of nuclear power, all of which were based on a close cooperation with the US, and in late 1960 had followed the example of other NATO countries and concluded an agreement with the US on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defense⁸. The only exception to this pattern was the well-known short-lived experiment of a Franco-Italo-German consortium to produce nuclear weapons, which can be safely assumed to have been conceived – at least as far as Italy was concerned – as just one more way to put pressure on the US to be more forthcoming in its approach to nuclear sharing⁹.

The tip of the iceberg, obviously, was the *Jupiter* deal which led to the deployment of 30 US IRBM missiles in Italy from 1960 to 1963, under a dual key formula. But other contemporary arrangements involved the January 13, 1962, exchange of notes between the two governments, regulating the presence of US nuclear stockpiles in Italy; the deployment of some 90 anti-aircraft nuclear-tipped *Nike-Hercules* missiles in 1960; the probable deployment of an uncertain number of so-called ADMs (Atomic Demolition Munitions), or atomic land mines, along the border with Yugoslavia and Austria; and the arrival in the early 1960s of a number of dual-use weapons, such as the *Starfighter* fighter-bombers or the 8inch self-propelled howitzers. In short, at the time when nuclear sharing was fast becoming the central theme of Atlantic relations, the Italian government reached the conclusion that its only way to a nuclear status of some sorts would be through a close cooperation with NATO and the US – a strategy which was for quite some time fully compatible with the nuclear-sharing schemes put forward by the late Eisenhower administration, as well as with the more general US interest in strengthening the Western military posture. As Marc Trachtenberg has noted, moreover, all these nuclear sharing schemes developed in the late Eisenhower years had a rather ambiguous meaning, since they could “function as a bridge to the acquisition by the Europeans of nuclear capabilities under their own control”¹⁰: such an ambiguity probably explains the Italian interest in a NATO solution for joint control of atomic weapons which in time might give Italy a stronger voice in the decision to use the Alliance's nuclear arsenal.

The rationale of the Italian approach is clearly spelled out in some of the documents of the Italian foreign ministry. Here is an example of the motivation for the Italian decision to accept the *Jupiter*, as stated in a letter to the Foreign Minister by the Italian representative at the NATO Council, ambassador Alessandrini:

⁷ For the talk with Eisenhower, see “State (Dulles) to Paris, tel. 413” 30 July 1958, *NAW*, RG 59, 711.56365/7-3058, b. 2906. See also “State Memorandum on IRBM agreement with Italy”, from “EUR/RA Robert H. McBride to L/SFP Mr. Yingling”, 07 August 1958, *NAW*, RG 59, 765.5611/8-758, b. 3622.

⁸ The Italian Defence Staff was particularly interested in avoiding a wording of the agreement that might prevent any future provision of nuclear weapons and special nuclear materials, and it tried in vain to obtain at least a new definition of the scope of the treaty which would leave the door open to the release of such materials. A final text was therefore postponed until late 1960, and the agreement was signed on December 3, 1960. “Agreement for cooperation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defense purposes”, in Turco, Emanuele (ed.) (1975): *The Bilateral Treaties in Force between the U.S.A. and Italy = I trattati bilaterali in vigore tra l'Italia e gli S.U.A.*, 2 vols., Roma, International Publishing Enterprises, T 82. The position of the Defence Staff in “Attività del 3 Reparto durante il mese di gennaio 1960”, *AUSSME*, DS SMD.

⁹ For an analysis of the attempt at Franco-Italo-German cooperation, see the articles by Barbier, Colette; Conze, Eckart and Nuti, Leopoldo in *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique* no. 1-2 (1990).

¹⁰ Trachtenberg, Marc (1991): *History and Strategy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 188.



At this time the interest of the United States for the Alliance is perhaps at its climax. The alliance does not provide the US with much assistance, but it does offer a primary help ... the use of its bases as launching pads. When the US will have its ICBMs, this interest is bound to decrease and perhaps by then a direct negotiation between Moscow and Washington will develop into a concrete possibility. But for the time being Italy's position in NATO is at its zenith for Washington [...] because of the importance that the intermediate missiles still enjoy, and because we have accepted them in Italy. This clearly marks an increase in the help we offer to the US and it marks an increase in the risks which our country will run into, in case of war. We may even say that for the time being we are closer to the nuclear club than France is, not because we produce the warheads but because we host them on our territory. This I believe is a very strong argument both for thwarting the attempt to build a [tripartite] directorate in NATO and for demanding a more active Italian participation to the shaping of the Alliance's common policy¹¹.

And then Ambassador Pietromarchi, from Russia:

Italy is the only country in continental Europe who has deployed some missile ramps which can directly hit in depth the Soviet Union. England aside, it's the only European country which can respond to the Soviet nuclear threat blow by blow. This clearly strengthens the effectiveness of our armed forces¹².

And again, in a succinct yet remarkably explicit way, ambassador Rossi Longhi, in December 1958: "the missiles are the strongest political card Italy has in its hands today, and our relationship with the United States will be positively influenced by them"¹³. In short, between 1955 and 1959 the acceptance of US nuclear weapons on Italian soil eventually evolved into a pattern that formed the basis for Italian nuclear policies for the next 10 years or so.

4. Changing Course

All this came to a halt as a consequence of the Kennedy administration's gradual implementation of its change of strategy. As the US slowly backed away from Eisenhower's nuclear sharing approaches, Italy found itself fighting a rearguard battle to try to keep alive a number of schemes that would keep open at least the virtual option, if not the material possibility, of a multilateral access to a joint nuclear arsenal. The list is long – from the many efforts to make the MLF work, to the attempts to create an inner control group in NATO which would have the ultimate power to decide the use of the Alliance's nuclear weapons, to

¹¹ "A. Alessandrini al presidente del Consiglio", 24 November 1958, *ASMAE, Amb. Parigi. 1951-1955*, b. 80.

¹² "Appunto dated 8 aprile 1959", in B. Bagnato (ed.) (2002): *I diari di Luca Pietromarchi ambasciatore italiano a Mosca (1958-1961)*, Firenze, Olschki, p. 182.

¹³ "A. Rossi Longhi al presidente del Consiglio", 19 December 1958, *ASMAE, Amb. Parigi 1951-1955*, b. 81, f. R.



the interest in joining the Nuclear Planning Group as a permanent member. But the motivation did not change, as the Vice Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry, Roberto Ducci, made clear to the US ambassador, Frederick Reinhardt, in early 1964: all these initiatives, explained Ducci, were meant to achieve “a first class status” in NATO strategic planning, a status which Italy could acquire only either through a multilateral approach or through a national choice along the French or British pattern¹⁴.

This persistent hope that only through NATO and US help could Italy reach this most cherished goal goes a long way in explaining the anger and frustration that were generated by the revelation that Washington would eventually abandon all the previous nuclear sharing schemes in favour of a non-proliferation agreement with the Soviet Union. This was a shattering blow for Italy’s nuclear policy, as it clearly spelled the end of all its ambitions unless the country was willing to adopt a national option. Some of the most interesting evidence that I have collected for my book is related to the protracted struggle against the non-proliferation treaty. Here we basically have three new sets of sources, namely the German documents on German-Italian relations, a collection of Ministry of foreign affairs documents from its Arms Control and Disarmament office, and the newly declassified Fanfani diaries. The last is perhaps the most interesting, as some of its entries offer an entirely new perspective on the sharpness of the internal debate generated by the US decision to conclude a NPT with the Soviet Union. The evidence is still limited, but revealing: Fanfani’s journal is the first source that explicitly mentions a meeting of the Supreme Defence Council on February 20, 1967, summoned to discuss the joint US-Soviet NPT draft presented to the NATO allies in December 1966. At the meeting, Fanfani noticed a radical and widespread hostility against the NPT among almost all the members of the government, particularly against “the unlimited discrimination between nuclear and non-nuclear states proposed by the draft treaty”. President of the Republic Giuseppe Saragat, in particular, seemed to Fanfani to have adopted a strongly nationalist attitude and to be ready to sponsor a national nuclear option. This was contested by some of the more moderate figures such as the Minister of Interior, Paolo Emilio Taviani, and Finance Minister Emilio Colombo, and eventually a national option was discarded. Yet the Council approved a policy of sharp criticism of the treaty, and it called for a substantial revision of its clauses¹⁵.

This in turn led to a strong behind the scenes alliance with the other main Western European opponent of the NPT, the Federal Republic of Germany. Prime Minister Moro and German Chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger repeatedly shared their criticisms of the NPT and discussed how best to coordinate their countries’ campaign against the treaty without giving the appearance of ganging up – an appearance to be avoided at all costs given the strong resemblance with their unfortunate military alliance of the Second World War. Both favoured enforcing a limited duration of the treaty, resented its discriminations, doubted the motivations of the US in concluding an agreement with the USSR, and agreed that a treaty that would forever freeze the differences among the Western European states by dividing them in nuclear and non-nuclear ones would be a most severe obstacle for the future of European integration – possibly dealing it a fatal blow in terms of an evolution towards a Federal solution¹⁶. Finally, the documents from the Disarmament Bureau of the Foreign

¹⁴ “Tel. 2219 from Embassy Rome (Reinhardt) to secretary of State”, 18 February 1964, *NARA, RG, 59, Lot file assistant secretary for the MLF, b. 7, f. European clause*.

¹⁵ 20 February 1967, *Archivio Storico Senato, Diario Fanfani, Carte Fanfani*.

¹⁶ „Anlage zu Abschluss eines Non-Proliferations-Vertrages“, 12 January 1967, *PAAB, B. 150*; “Appunto, Memorandum tedesco sul Trattato di non proliferazione”, 13 April 1967, *ASMAE, Fondo Bettini, b. 1*; Grewe, Wilhelm (1979): *Ruckblenden*, Berlin, Propyläen, p. 699; Masala, Carlo (1998): *Italia und Germania. Die*



Ministry show a wide ranging series of contacts with all the other possible opponents to the treaty, from Japan to India, and a consistent, protracted effort to introduce into its text a number of revisions which would attenuate its impact on Italy's non-nuclear status and reduce what were perceived as its negative and most discriminating consequences. Altogether, these sources confirm the profound disappointment with a treaty that amounted to a basic denial of the logic that Italy had followed until then and that forced it to reverse its attitude towards nuclear weapons – and even to rethink its relationship with then United States. Here is an excellent example that reveals the depth of the resentment:

The Russians and the Americans behave as if in this negotiation they were debating their own mutual obligations and as if they were protecting their own direct and immediate interests. Actually the negotiation is dealing exclusively with the obligations and the duties of third parties, namely the non-nuclear countries, and with the limitations to the interests of the latter. The behaviour and the expectations of both the Russians and the Americans, therefore [...] are inconceivable: they can be understood only if we were in a situation where the two superpowers had the right, and the power, to impose a “diktat” upon the non-nuclear countries¹⁷.

And yet, after all the resentments had been expressed, and after a long and harsh domestic debate that prevented Italy from ratifying for 6 long years (1969 to 1975), eventually Italy did ratify the treaty and joined the NPT regime. This is a period which deserves further investigation in order to clarify what were the crucial variables that tilted the balance in favour of this choice. As things stand now, since many of the necessary Italian sources are not yet fully available, it is only possible to advance some very tentative hypotheses, which I will do in the second part of the paper.

5. The Last Battle

The hostility towards the NPT clearly affected Italy's attitude during the long Transatlantic debate on the possible deployment of a new generation of American intermediate nuclear forces in Europe (Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces, or LRTNF). It is important to stress that some Italian diplomats expressed their strong interest in the deployment of the new weapons even *before* the Italian government felt the sting of its exclusion from the famous Guadeloupe meeting of January 1979 where the crucial decisions were taken – and which is usually considered as the main catalyst for the enthusiasm displayed by the Italian government towards the Euromissiles in late 1979. During the meetings of the NATO High Level Group, in 1978, the members of the Italian delegation had already expressed their favour for the modernization of NATO's nuclear forces and had already taken up the issue with their government. Surprisingly, it was the Italian military who seemed to have been more sceptical about the possible advantages of a new deployment, as they (correctly, one should say in retrospective) doubted the possibility that the US would allow the Italian armed forces to share in the control of the new weapons by re-introducing a real dual-key system. Then

deutsche-italienische Beziehungen 1963-1969, Köln, SH-Verlag, p. 212. Above all, see „Aufzeichnung“, 28 April 1967, *PAAA*, B. 150; and „Aufzeichnung“, 05 Juni 1967, *PAAA*, B. 150.

¹⁷ “Appunto. Posizione sovietica sul trattato di non-diffusione delle armi nucleari”, 17 May 1967, *ASMAE, Fondo Bettini*, b. 2.



there is no doubt that the Guadeloupe meeting cut this Gordian knot of indecisions and spurred the government to demonstrate its willingness: in an exchange of letters between the ministries of defense and foreign affairs in early 1979, the latter clearly expressed the linkage between Italy's exclusion by the summit and its willingness to play an active role in the rearmament process¹⁸. And the words of the doyen of Italian diplomacy, former Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry Roberto Ducci, clearly reveal how deep was the bruise caused by the exclusion at Guadeloupe: "The photographs of the four big ones in colourful shirts and the glass of Players' Punch in their hands were spread cross the globe", he wrote in 1980, adding with an ill-disguised *schadenfreude*, "even if they didn't bring much luck to them, particularly to Carter and Callaghan"¹⁹.

What is even more interesting is the long-term continuity between the attitude displayed towards the Euromissiles and the previous choices of the 1950s. Here is Ducci again, this time in a confidential letter to the Minister of foreign affairs, written a few weeks before his retirement:

Thanks to its participation to the modernization program of the Atlantic nuclear arsenal, as well as to the *de facto* downgrading of the smaller allies, Italy now has the chance *for the first time since the end of the war* (Author's emphasis) to become a member of the Western negotiating group that will *de facto* conduct the global negotiations with the Soviet Union – a negotiation which will take place in different ways, at different times, and whose existence will often be denied. I do not doubt that this chance, which for the time being is mostly theoretical, may become a concrete one – as long as our government has the political willingness, and our diplomacy succeeds, in what will be their greatest mission in the second half of the century. Namely, to find a place, in a position of parity with the big ones and therefore of full dignity, in the negotiations for a truce first, and for a peace settlement later²⁰.

Even in this case, therefore, the new documentation shows the perception of nuclear weapons as Italy's winning card, the tool to be used to shorten the gap with the other major European partners. The language is almost the same as the one used at the time of the *Jupiters*, more than twenty years before: the obsessive impression of an all-powerful ruling circle of the international system from which Italy is excluded, the need to find a way to reverse this situation and the search for a gambit that would allow Italy to be finally counted in. And the impression of continuity with the previous policies of the 1950s and the 1970s is strengthened by the fact that Italian diplomats emphasized the importance of the new weapons even *before* Italy's powerlessness had been rubbed in by the Guadeloupe meeting. From there to the conclusion that the deployment of the new missiles could offer an opportunity to reopen the debate sealed by the ratification of the NPT, it was a very short step indeed. It should come as no surprise, then, that at the time of the deployment of the new weapons someone among the military and the diplomats actually suggested that Italy should reconsider its status as a non-

¹⁸ Ciarrapico, Antonio: "Rapporti Est-Ovest 1977-79. La vicenda degli Euromissili", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, vol. 69, no. 3(2002), pp. 363-380, esp. pp. 375-376.

¹⁹ Ducci, Roberto: "L'Italia e il direttorio occidentale", *Il Tempo*, 26 December 1980. I am greatly indebted to Amb. Guido Lenzi for sharing with me his collection of Ducci's writings.

²⁰ "TE Ris. dall'Ambasciata di Londra al Ministro degli Esteri, "Il posto dell'Italia nel mondo", 12 December 1979, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri* (n. d.), *Roberto Ducci*, Collana di testi diplomatici, vol. 13, Roma: Servizio Storico e documentazione MAE, p. 225.



nuclear country. Nor should it be much of a surprise the fact that Italy seems to have been the only Western European country to insist with the US that a real dual key arrangement be worked out for control of the missiles.

6. Some Possible Interpretations

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this story. The first one is that the nuclear choices made by Italy during the whole length of the Cold War were the almost exclusive property of a rather small elite of politicians, diplomats and military officers, strictly Atlanticist in their political orientation and professional upbringing, who kept the technical and political debate within some very narrow limits. Only rarely were some of these decisions debated in front of Italian public opinion. This was a very deliberate choice: in almost all the cases, the members of the Italian government openly told their American counterparts that Italy was fully willing to deploy the new delivery systems that the US was presenting to its European allies, but at the same time they almost always stressed that it was important that this be done as quietly as possible, *sottovoce*, in order not to arouse the wrath of the Communist opposition – at least in the early stages of the decision-making process. In a sharply polarized political system such as the Italian one, this approach should not come as a surprise and can clearly be seen as a consequence of the Cold war fractures that split asunder Italian politics and society for almost fifty years.

Given this persistency in sheltering the decision-making process from the possible intrusions of public opinion, one might be tempted to draw the conclusion that the substance of Italian nuclear policy was therefore shaped and conditioned by the presence on the Italian political scene of a strong leftist opposition, pro-Soviet and anti-American, which would have clearly opposed a national choice of the French or British kind and which forced the government to cover its tracks and act behind the scenes – eventually selecting those options which would elicit the weakest possible resistance. Yet I believe that this is just one part of the explanation, and probably not even the most important. The strength of the PCI and of the pro-Soviet left explains *how* Italian nuclear policies were conducted, but does not explain their nature. If one looks at the choices made during almost the whole period from the 1950s to the early 1980s, in other words, the role of the leftist opposition should not be overrated. Anytime the government was asked by the US to accept the deployment of a new nuclear weapon system on Italian territory, the leftist forces never succeeded in mobilizing public opinion to the extent required for seriously hampering the decision making process. Nor were any more effective, from this point of view, those peace movements that in the 1950s blatantly revealed their pro-Soviet orientation. As Lawrence Wittner has suggested, the Communist Party's monopoly on anti-nuclear protest in Italy might have actually inhibited the growth of a genuine, mass movement comparable to the ones that flourished in Northern Europe. True, the development of a national nuclear programme would have been different from the deployment of American missiles and warheads, and it might have elicited a stronger response. And yet it must be stressed that even in the 1980s, at a time when the Left was stronger in its anti-nuclear pronouncements, when masses of Italians stormed the streets of the country in huge demonstrations and vocally called for the total denuclearization of Italian territory, the government could basically do whatever it wanted and have its nuclear choices smoothly implemented. Paradoxically, one could even go as far as arguing that the strident, and not very credible, anti-nuclear protests sponsored by the Italian communists almost compelled the Centrist, western-oriented governments to adopt a nuclear stance even when they were sceptical about its usefulness: even when many among the Christian Democrats



doubted the wisdom of installing yet another nuclear delivery system in Italy, the fact that the Communists opposed it forced the government to stress its pro-Western orientation and support what ultimately came to be regarded as a choice between East and West.

This same consideration applies, in my opinion, to the role of Italian public opinion in general, as I do not think it can be regarded as a crucial variable to explain Italy's final renunciation of a nuclear option. Undoubtedly post-war Italian public opinion was largely hostile to anything even vaguely resembling the virulent militarism of the Fascist era, its bombastic nationalism and the crass ostentation of military might which was typical of its propaganda. Clearly the impact of a disastrous defeat and of a war fought on Italian soil for almost two years left a bitter legacy of resentment against anything that smacked of nationalism and of the previous Fascist rhetoric. Yet even in this case it is necessary to introduce some qualifications. First of all, as we have seen, the public was often left unaware of the major decisions, particularly in the early stages of the Cold War. The influence of public opinion, as a matter of fact, probably became relevant and influenced the policy formulation only by the time when the crucial choices about a possible national nuclear programme had already been made. In other words, the importance of public opinion was much stronger in the 1970s and in the 1980s than in the 1950s, which were a time when the Italian governments enjoyed a remarkable freedom of manoeuvre.

We are left therefore with basically two variables to be assessed. If choices were made inside a rather small elite and neither the leftist opposition nor public opinion in general counted for much in defining their content, it is necessary to look at the mentality of a ruling class which was mostly Catholic, moderate, Atlanticist, Europeanist, and which had shaped its identity against the obsessive nationalism of the Fascist era. This ruling group would have probably been embarrassed by having to select a national nuclear option, which would have clearly featured a strong national overtone and would at the same time had a negative impact on the plans for economic recovery, a priority which enjoyed the highest degree of consensus. That same elite, however, was also critically aware of the international implications of access to nuclear weapons – implications which made it very unlikely, if not impossible, to stake out a clear policy of refusing any nuclear deployment. A non-nuclear choice would inevitably affect the country's ambitions to a peer status in Western Europe, and it would also imply a certain degree of detachment and criticism from the Atlantic Alliance and its decisions – a solution which Italy's delicate domestic political balance made almost intolerable. Only a less ambitious foreign policy, and a more cohesive domestic political scene, would allow Italy to select a clear-cut non-nuclear policy of the kind that Norway or Denmark implemented.

Faced with the challenges created by the spreading of nuclear weapons and by their central importance in Western defense strategy, therefore, the Italian foreign-policy elite reached the conclusion that a multilateral solution was clearly the best available option. It would not appear unduly nationalistic, it would prevent any major diversion of domestic resources from the social and economic sectors to the defense budget, and finally it would probably reinforce the crucial relationship with the United States. This last factor, in particular, goes a long way in explaining the rationale of the Italian nuclear policies. Since the United States had become the critical variable of Italian foreign policy, the key pillar of its international orientation, it was clear that hosting US nuclear devices was also seen as a way of forging a closer partnership. This may indeed have been the crucial factor that tilted the balance in favour of non-proliferation during the long debate between 1969 and 1975: the serious chance of an estrangement with the US because of the Italian perplexities towards the NPT became a dangerous predicament for Italian foreign policy. Eventually, Italy could not afford the luxury of concretely alienating Washington for the sake of a national nuclear option



which might as well have remained only a theoretical possibility. If we carry this interpretation to its logical conclusion, we end up with the implication that the lesser power enjoyed, after all, a rather limited freedom of manoeuvre in the Transatlantic relationship. Italy could try to exploit its nuclear relations with the US to try and bolster its status within the Western alliance; it was even successful in driving some very profitable bargains when negotiating about the deployment of the weapons; but eventually it had to cope with a set of rules which she could not define and which she could only accept: when the US decided to rein in its previous policies of nuclear sharing, Italy had to accept the new reality and was able to influence it only to a very limited extent (basically by suggesting some modification to the NPT clauses and not much more).

Another critical variable to explain the Italian decision might have been the anti-nuclear posture of a large majority of Italian physicists. The main Italian nuclear scientists not only refused to have anything to do with the hypothesis of a possible national nuclear weapon, but they steadfastly opposed it at several critical junctures. From 1967 to 1975 the Italian relationship to the non-proliferation treaty really hang in the balance, as we have seen: at this stage Amaldi was quite influential in shaping the consensus of the scholarly community in favour of ratifying the treaty, exactly at the time when the National Defense council was weighing the pros and cons of a possible national option. Again, in the Fall of 1974, when the debate about the Italian ratification had reached a climax as a consequence of the Indian nuclear explosion in the Rajahstan desert early on during that year, Amaldi, Francesco Calogero and Carlo Schaerf sponsored a letter that was eventually signed by 142 scientists and which asked the Foreign Ministry to support the ratification of the treaty without any further delay. Finally, at the height of the last nuclear debate over the Euromissiles, Amaldi led a delegation of Italian physicists which, on November 27, 1982 handed to the President of the Republic a remarkably well-balanced document which spelled out the risks involved in going ahead with the development of the missiles. Clearly these initiatives weren't always successful – particularly in the last case. Yet they confirm the constant opposition of a critical component of Italian society towards the development of a national option.

A second set of concluding remarks are related to the effectiveness of the nuclear policy Italy followed for most of the Cold war. Did all the efforts of Italian diplomacy achieve any of the results conceived by the diplomats? As far as reaching that ultimate goal of Italian foreign policy, namely equality of status among the Western Europeans, it is safe to conclude that it remained a mirage all along. In spite of all the initiatives, of all the proposals for multilateral solutions, and of all the attempts to modify the nature of the NPT, the protracted Italian commitment to achieve an Atlantic or European solution to the problem of access and control to nuclear weapons always fell short off the mark. The objective limits of Italy's status could not be short-circuited by the formulas devised by Italian diplomacy, no matter how imaginative or clever – unless the other partners, and particularly the US, were willing to play the same game.

A slightly different conclusion can be reached for the attempt to use the nuclear gambits in order to restore some credibility and visibility to Italian foreign policy, as in this case the final judgement should not perhaps be as critical. True, the most ambitious goals were never achieved, yet at the same time the fact that Italy was willing to shoulder some of the risks and of the burdens of the nuclear deployments were regarded by the other West European governments, and above all by the United States, as a sign of growing Italian responsibility.



It is much more difficult to establish whether the readiness to accept the installation of new US delivery systems on its territory eventually allowed the Italian government to gain any access to the ultimate decision of *actually using* them. In other words, were these deployments successful in giving Italy any effective capacity to influence the decision to use or not to use the weapons deployed in its territory? The Italian government repeatedly tried to make sure that whatever nuclear systems were being deployed in the country, they would not be used without Italy's own approval; and at the same time it insisted that the presence of so many weapons in Italy had earned the country the right to be listened to whenever the crucial decision to go nuclear had to be adopted by the alliance. By January 1962, this led to the formal agreement between the US and Italy that clearly stated that the US nuclear weapons deployed in Italy could be used only under the authorization of both countries. Nevertheless, it was NATO policy that in case of nuclear war these arrangements could be implemented only if time permitted it – a rather vague definition given that by the 1960s the warning time for a nuclear attack was reduced to 15 minutes or less. As the scholarly literature on the implementation of these NATO formulas is still rather vague on the specifics of the command and control of the Alliance's nuclear systems²¹, it seems plausible to conclude that there was only one concrete and realistic way in which Italy could affect the use of the American weapons deployed on its own soil: namely, when there was a physical, rather than a virtual, dual key. And that case seems to have been only limited to the Jupiter missiles, as in all the other circumstances the fact that the warheads were *always* already mated to the delivery systems and kept under strict US control. Other than in the case of the *Jupiters*, therefore, the chance for Italy to affect the decision to use the weapons basically depended on the US good will and on its intentions to honour its commitments to consult with the host country – a rather flimsy and not very reassuring perspective.

²¹ Gregory, Shaun R. (1996): *Nuclear command and control in NATO. Nuclear weapons operations and the strategy of flexible response*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.