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The Servant of Two Masters: Italian Diplomats in World War II. Story of a Diplomatic Civil War and its Implications and Consequences on Post-war Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

Diplomacy has played a key role in conflicts since ancient times. Over time, the role of diplomatic agents has changed, to take on, gradually, greater importance especially in wartime. This article focuses on the activities of the Italian foreign service in World War II and on the role of diplomats during the civil war that followed the fall of Fascism and the subsequent armistice with the Allies. In this dramatic context, some diplomats confirmed their loyalty to the king, while others joined the new-born Italian Social Republic (R.S.I.), a puppet state ruled by Mussolini under the protection of Nazi Germany. Somewhere, two Italian diplomatic representations coexisted shortly. A page in the history of diplomacy, unknown to wide audience, that this contribution aims to bring to light. The article strives to draw conclusions on the implications and consequences of this ‘diplomatic civil war’ on post-war Italian foreign policy.

RIASSUNTO

La diplomazia ha svolto un ruolo chiave nei conflitti fin dall’antichità. Strada facendo, il ruolo dei diplomatici si è trasformato, assumendo progressivamente maggiore importanza, soprattutto in tempo di guerra. Questo studio mette in luce le attività dei diplomatici italiani durante la Seconda guerra mondiale, e il loro ruolo durante la guerra civile che seguì la caduta del fascismo, e il successivo armistizio con gli Alleati. In questo drammatico contesto, alcuni di essi confermarono la loro fedeltà al re, mentre altri aderirono alla neonata Repubblica Sociale Italiana (R.S.I.), stato fantoccio governato da Mussolini sotto la protezione della Germania nazista. A seguito di ciò, per breve tempo, in alcuni paesi coesisterono due rappresentanze diplomatiche italiane. Una pagina della storia della diplomazia, sconosciuta al vasto pubblico, che questo saggio si propone di portare alla luce, evidenziandone le implicazioni e le conseguenze sulla politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra.

KEYWORDS Fascism; Mussolini; Italian Social Republic; international relations; diplomacy; cold war

PAROLE CHIAVE fascismo; Mussolini; Repubblica Sociale Italiana (R.S.I.); relazioni intern; azionali; diplomazia; Guerra Fredda

From the Liberal State to Fascism: the seamless illusion of power

War and politics are deeply interrelated. If 'war is a mere continuation of policy by other means . . . is not merely a political act, but also a truly political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a conducting of the same by other means' (Von Clausewitz 1976), then it should be acknowledged that war is a political act. Foucault (2003, 165) inverts Clausewitz's traditional conception of war and says that politics is the continuation of war by other means. Therefore, the question shifts from the concept of armed conflict to that of political conflict, in which diplomacy becomes a weapon (Marsili 2021).

In his 1939 classic, British diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson commented that 'the aim of Italy's foreign policy is to acquire by negotiation an importance greater than can be supplied by her own physical strength' (1939, 51), therefore concluding that it based its power on diplomacy rather than vice versa. This means Italian foreign policy was based on a 'smart power' strategy which employs a mix of hard and soft power resources (Nye 2004).

After the unification of the nation (1861), Italian leaders were eager to gain colonies in Africa to legitimize the status of new power – diplomatically isolated, Italy, was often called 'the least of the great powers' due to the weakness of its industry and its military (Finaldi 2009).

Although in the first decades of the twenty-first century diplomacy played a significant role in international relations, military strength was still the yardstick by which to measure the power of a nation. Indeed, Italy needed a strong military force to realize the territorial enlargement project implemented with the participation in the First World War (Monzali 2009). The liberal ruling class pursued a policy of territorial acquisitions that had its roots in the Italian unification process, a long series of conquests and annexations that resulted in the foundation of a single nation state, the Kingdom of Italy. This policy is well represented in the Treaty of London of 1915, signed between the Triple Entente¹ and the Kingdom of Italy, that brought the latter into World War I.

Italy and other victorious allies (the British Empire, France, Japan) gained permanent seat in the Executive Council of the new League of Nations, founded after the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920), which resulted in the Treaty of Versailles. Nevertheless, the treaty left unresolved the question of Fiume,¹ which remained disputed territory, thus giving life to the nationalist legend of the 'mutilated victory', the idea that Italy was betrayed by the Allies and refused what had been promised, that will be a cause for the general rise of Fascism (Burgwyn 1993).

To try to establish itself as a great power, Italy swunged between diplomacy and military force. Indeed, diplomatic conferences such as the Washington

Naval Conference on Naval Limitation (1921–1922) had as their goal the establishment of an international political order based on military power.

Monzali (2009) believes that the rise of Fascism marked the end of the dialogue diplomacy that had achieved relevant successes in earlier international conferences. Nevertheless, the fascist regime did not abandon the conference strategy; indeed, it intensified conference diplomacy to increase its international prestige. The Stresa Conference (14 April 1935), that gathered the heads of the governments of Italy, France, Great Britain, with the purpose of limiting the rearmament of Nazi Germany beyond the limits imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, gave Mussolini the opportunity to present himself as a protagonist on the European stage. Eventually, the success of the four-power conference of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, held in Munich on 29 September 1939 to settle the Sudeten dispute between Germany and Czechoslovakia, allowed the Duce to present himself as ‘peacebuilder’.

Fascism continued the blended political-diplomatic and military foreign policy of earlier governments; diplomatic effort to keep peace was counter-balanced by arms race. This strategy aimed to gain international prestige, first for the new Kingdom of Italy and then by the fascist régime. Indeed, when WWII broke out, despite his aggressive behaviour, Mussolini kept Italy out of the conflict for months – the Italian military lacked adequate armaments to conduct a long-term war (Smith 1997, 405).

The fascistisation of Italian diplomacy

Since 1926, the Italian Fascist regime started the ‘politicization’ of the diplomatic corps (Grassi Orsini 1996, 125); established diplomats, who were not convinced Fascists, were dismissed and replaced (Gentile 2003, 150–156). The law of 2 June 1927 opened up the possibility of accessing the diplomatic career without public competition; in this way, the minister was able to include ‘at his own discretion’ about seventy Fascist officials in ministerial roles (Grassi Orsini 1996, 127). With a circular dated 9 April 1927, Mussolini provided compulsory membership to the National Fascist Party (*Partito nazionale fascista* [P.N.F.]) for Italian diplomats. For many of them it was a ‘formal’ association which did not imply a real participation to the regime (131).

The ‘fascistisation’ of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (M.O.F.A.) allowed members of the P.N.F. to join the diplomatic corps. Galeazzo Ciano and Giuseppe Bastianini took this opportunity. Son of Admiral Costanzo Ciano, a founding member of the P.N.F. – father and son both took part in Mussolini’s 1922 March on Rome, which resulted in the seizure of power of the Fascists – Galeazzo Ciano pursued a diplomatic career in 1925, serving as an attaché in Rio de Janeiro. He held various positions in the government of his father-in-law Mussolini, including minister of press and propaganda (1935), foreign minister (9 June 1936–6 February 1943) and ambassador to the Vatican (1 March 1943–31

July 1943). Ciano continued the fascistisation of the M.O.F.A. and placed trusted men in key positions (Grassi Orsini 1996, 129). He overlapped the party with the state and made 'unavoidable' the P.N.F. membership (133). This tie strengthens in 1939, when Bastianini becomes head of the General Direction (133).

Bastianini, who was an early Fascist, entered the diplomatic ranks in 1927, and played an increasingly important role in the Italian foreign service.² Appointed by Mussolini as undersecretary of state, Bastianini effectively replaced Ciano, when the latter was dropped from the cabinet (Morgan 2007, 24) and acted as de facto minister in place of Mussolini, who had assigned the position to himself but was unable to perform his duties due to illness (Blanning and Cannadine 2002, 237). On 24 July 1943, Bastianini became member of the dissident tendency and voted in favour Grandi's motion, effectively removing Mussolini from office. Fascist diplomacy was losing consistency and flaked before the negative outcome of the conflict, but these cracks were from afar.

On the eve of World War II, Dino Grandi, who was one of the founders of fascism and served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1929–1932), opposed the Italian–German alliance. During his placement as ambassador to the United Kingdom (1932–1939) he strove to avoid the deterioration of international relations, especially between Italy and Great Britain (Nello 2002). In 1939, Grandi was recalled to Rome after attempting a pact with Britain to prevent Italy from entering WWII. Under pressure from Hitler, Mussolini removed Grandi and appointed the latter minister of justice (1939–1943). Grandi authored a motion of no confidence (*Ordine del giorno Grandi*) passed on 25 July 1943, by the Grand Council of Fascism (*Gran Consiglio del Fascismo*), a body created by the National Fascist Party in 1923 that became a state body on 9 December 1928. The resolution resumed the full constitutional authority of King Victor Emmanuel III and gave the monarch clearance to remove Mussolini from office.

Italian diplomacy after 8 September

The armistice of Cassibile, signed with the Allies by the new government led by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, and made public on 8 September 1943, divided Italy in two: the so-called 'Kingdom of the South', headquartered in Brindisi, and the Italian Social Republic (Repubblica Sociale Italiana [R.S.I.]), ruled by Mussolini, which lived during the late part of the war (23 September 1943–25 April 1945).

Popularly and historically known as the Republic of Salò (*Repubblica di Salò*), this entity was a German puppet state (Burgwyn 2018) with a de facto limited jurisdiction, exercising nominal sovereignty in northern and central Italy, but largely dependent on German troops to maintain control. A puppet state is a nominal sovereign territorial entity under effective foreign control

which depend upon an outside power and it is subject to its orders (Marek 1954, 178; McNeely 1995, 61).

The Italian Social Republic was recognized only by four Axis powers³ (Germany, Japan, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary) and by their puppet governments or client states⁴ (the Independent State of Croatia, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Nanjing and Manchukuo) and by co-belligerent Thailand (Viganò 1991). Co-belligerent Finland and Vichy France did not recognize the Republic of Salò. Unofficial relations were maintained with Argentina, Portugal, Spain and with Switzerland through the Swiss consul in Milan and the commercial agent of the R.S.I. in Bern (Deakin 1963, 568; Osti Guerrazzi 2019). The Vatican City did not recognize the Italian Social Republic (Riccardi 2008).

As result of the armistice, the Italian Co-Belligerent Army (*Esercito Cobelligerante Italiano*) was created to fight against the R.S.I. and its German allies, while other Italian troops, loyal to Mussolini, continued to fight alongside the Germans. Thus, started a civil war fought by the Italian Resistance and the Italian Co-Belligerent Army – the formation was renamed Italian Liberation Corps (*Corpo Italiano di Liberazione*) on 17 April 1944 – against the Fascists of the Republic of Salò (Pavone 1991). The fall of fascism and the armistice posed to Italian diplomats the dilemma whether to keep the oath to the king or to join the R.S.I. (Varsori 2004, 155–171). Diplomats of the time told in their memoirs doubts and divisions after 8 September (Villari 1948; Taliani 1949, 1958; Mellini Ponce de Léon 1950; De Ferrariis Salzano 2017). Individual and personal choices reflect heterogeneous motivations sometimes political or ideological (Grassi Orsini 1996, 144).

For the Badoglio Government, on the other hand, the participation in the war against Germany it was at most ‘a skillful calculation’ aimed to switch Italy from a conquered state to conqueror power (Spinelli 2015, 2).

Servants of two masters

The tragic farce of Italian diplomacy went on stage during WWII. Is the story of Truffaldino, the main character of the comedy *The Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni (1746). In the Italian *commedia dell'arte* (comedy of the profession) the role of Truffaldino (also known known as Harlequin) is that of a light-hearted, nimble, and astute servant, often acting to thwart the plans of his master, and pursuing his own interest (Rudlin 1994).

The Italian diplomatic corps, even if it was not completely fascistized, no longer enjoyed any autonomy; limited itself to a ‘technical dissent’ (Grassi Orsini 1996, 139). In April 1943, at the eve of the end of the régime, officials serving at the Ministry in Rome, who tried to evade the obligation, were forced to perform party duties (135). Overall, diplomats abroad tried to avoid the P.N.F. framing – which was impossible for the officials serving in the

offices at the Ministry in Rome (134). In general, Italian diplomacy (except in individual cases) strived to keep separate the state from the régime, claiming its autonomy from the Fascist Party (125).

The choice whether to remain loyal to the monarchy or to Mussolini was not easy. Some diplomats close to the *Duce* refused to join the Social Republic, not without human suffering. This is the case of Ambassador Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli (born Giacomo Barone Russo), chief of staff of Mussolini at M.O.F.A. since November 1922.⁵ In 1938, Paulucci, who enjoyed the esteem and trust of Mussolini, was appointed extraordinary ambassador to the emperor of Japan, and led a friendship delegation to Manchukuo (Tassani 2012).

After 25 July, Paulucci committed himself to support abroad the Kingdom of the South, King Victor Emmanuel III and the Badoglio Government. From the first days following the armistice Paulucci, then Italian ambassador to Spain, began talks with the Allies and then got into relations with the king and the Government of Badoglio, making the embassy in Madrid a liaison body with the Italian diplomatic mission in neutral countries (Grassi Orsini 1996, 141; Tassani 2012, 484).

Called on 18 September by Mussolini to fill the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the R.S.I., Paulucci refused the assignment (Bertoldi 1978, 26; Tassani 2012). This meant that the embassy and almost all the consulates in Spain opted to stay close to the Badoglio Government (Domínguez Méndez 2012, §27). On 13 October 1943, Paulucci himself notified the German ambassador in Madrid the Italian declaration of war on Germany on behalf the royal government (Tassani 2012).

For officials serving in northern countries, it was easier to choose the Kingdom of the South. Roberto Ducci, who would later become one of the most important ambassadors of the Italian Republic, then a young official, left Rome with his colleague Antonio Venturini and reached Brindisi and later Salerno to serve the Badoglio Government (Vanzi 2009). The majority of Italian diplomats refused to join the Social Republic and fled or were interned (Grassi Orsini 1996, 141). The dissociation of Italian diplomats from Fascism stemmed from a 'theory of continuity' based on a different analysis of the national interest (140).

The choice of which Italy and whom to serve was even more difficult for Mussolini's comrades, those who had shared his political rise and had held prestigious roles during his government, like Edoardo 'Dino' Alfieri. Despite lacking diplomatic training and experience, in May 1940 Alfieri was appointed ambassador to Berlin, upon recommendation of Hitler himself, to replace Bernardo Attolico, who had worked hard to avoid the war (at least to Italy). Alfieri had begun his diplomatic activity only in November 1939, as ambassador to the Holy See in Rome,⁶ where he was replaced by Attolico,⁷ when the latter was removed from Berlin.

On 25 July, Alfieri voted in favour of the Grandi motion. After the fall of the Fascist régime, he never returned to Berlin: the new Minister of Foreign Affairs Raffaele Guariglia accepted his resignation on 31 July.⁸ Alfieri was discharged on 1 August 1944 (a similar measure had been taken by the Republic of Salò on 5 November 1943). Although he had been a strong advocate of Italian non-intervention in 1939, in a note drafted on 24 February 1946, the Italian Foreign Minister Alcide De Gasperi⁹ writes that, during the war, Alfieri's pro-German sentiments and intentions 'underwent various fluctuations'.

Filippo Anfuso, who had served as secretary of Ciano and chief of his staff in 1938, opted without hesitation for Mussolini.¹⁰ Like Ciano, Anfuso had opposed Italy's entry into the war, but later did not hesitate to work hard for victory (Setta 1988). In 1941, Anfuso had decided to disengage Italy from Germany and had informed Ciano of the Hungarian attempts to contact the Anglo-Americans to achieve a separate peace agreement. In December 1942, Anfuso sent a report to his longtime friend Ciano, in which the former proposed a similar initiative (Setta 1988). The plan, supported by the foreign minister himself, was rejected by Mussolini as 'unbecoming to the Italian honor'.

Following a series of Axis defeats, Ciano began pushing for Italy's exit from war, and he was subsequently dismissed on 9 February 1943 (Santomassimo 1981). Still in April 1943, when Ciano was no longer minister, while accompanying the Hungarian Prime Minister (PM) Kallay to a meeting with Mussolini in Rome, Anfuso sponsored once again the breakup with Germany (Setta 1988). After removal from the cabinet, Ciano served as ambassador to the Holy See and, on 25 July, he voted in favour of Grandi's motion. Ciano and other six who had voted against Mussolini were captured, tried by a Special Court for the Defense of the R.S.I., and all, except one, were sentenced to death and executed by firing squad on 11 January 1944.

Anfuso was not the only diplomat to join the Italian Social Republic: Luigi Bolla, Saverio Mazzolini, Ubaldo Mellini Ponce de Léon pledged alliance to the Mussolini, too, but Anfuso was the only head of mission, the only one who, at that time, held a diplomatic seat (Grassi Orsini 1996, 143; Setta 1988; Scardaccione 2002). The great majority of the Italian diplomatic corps abroad remained loyal to the king and the kingdom and refused to swear allegiance to republican fascism – the R.S.I. had only three ambassadors (Berlin, Paris and Tokyo). The eight Italian legations were entrusted to minor characters, mostly from consular or political ranks; just a very few established diplomats followed Mussolini to Salò. Besides Anfuso, only one established ambassador, Capasso Torre, a pro-Fascist official with a personal connection to Mussolini, adhered to Salò (Grassi Orsini 1996, 143). Obviously, the adherence to the R.S.I. by diplomatic personnel in Berlin and within the consular network in Nazi Germany was greater (141).

Grassi Orsini (1996, 142) summarizes the main events that occurred among Italian diplomats after 8 September. The staff of the embassy in Copenhagen were interned, except the first secretary of legation, Benedetto Capomazza, who fled to Sweden. Ambassador Francesco Mameli and all the staff in Bulgaria sided with Badoglio; as a result the representation of Salò was taken on by Consul Orazio Graziani, later replaced by Consul Carlo Siemen with rank of minister. The head of the Croatian legation, Ministry Petrucci, and all staff swore allegiance to the king. In Romania, Minister Bova Scoppa pledged loyalty to the Brindisi Government, despite the pressure exerted by Anfuso himself; subsequently the legation of the R.S.I. was entrusted to journalist Franco Trandafilo. The officers of the legation in Slovakia were interned and Consul Ludovico Censi was moved from Budapest and installed in Bratislava as minister. Emanuele Grazzi, who assumed the position of head of the legation in Hungary, in place of Anfuso, joined the royal government once he arrived in Budapest. The staff of the embassy in Tokyo remained loyal to the king; the Fascist Government appointed the military attaché Principini as chargé d'affaires. Out of thirty, only five officials accredited to the co-belligerent government of Vichy joined the R.S.I.; others were interned, repatriated and finally confined. To represent Salò in Vichy, Anfuso sent the pro-Fascist Minister Manfredo Chiosti (142).

In Hungary arose an extraordinary and unique situation: from 8 September 1943 to 19 March 1944, in Budapest coexisted two officially recognized Italian legations, one representing the Kingdom of Italy, run by Carlo De Ferrariis Salzano, and the other representing the Republic of Salò (Busonero 2013, 65). The monarchist mission operated in enemy-controlled territory, isolated from its own government; the republican deputation benefited from the support of the German Legation (Busonero 2013, 65).

The coexistence was possible thanks to the ambiguous attitude of the regime of Admiral Horthy, who served as the regent of the Kingdom of Hungary from 1 March 1920 to 15 October 1944. Hungary was allied with the Axis powers, but in 1942 the government of Budapest established contact with the Allies to negotiate conditions under which the country would switch sides against Germany (Borhi 2004). When the Nazi occupied Hungary, and therefore Budapest broke off diplomatic relations with the Italian Royal Government, De Ferrariis Salzano was arrested and sent to a concentration camp, until he succeeded to escape with other inmates. Only the legation of the Social Republic continued to run (Busonero 2013, 65).

The purge of Italian diplomatic representatives abroad motivated the return to Italy of almost all consuls and ambassadors appointed during fascism, even if they had subsequently demonstrated their loyalty to the crown (Domínguez Méndez 2012, §28).

Italian diplomatic relations and puppet states

Italian diplomats under fascism faced several problems with puppet states or with states with limited international recognition. On 29 November 1937, Italy recognized the Manchukuo (*Manzhouguo*), a puppet state set up in northeast China and inner Mongolia under the leadership of the last Chinese Emperor, Puyi (Jowett 2004, 7–36).¹¹

Founded in 1932 as the State of Manchuria, in 1934 the Manchukuo became a constitutional monarchy under the de facto control of Japan. It had limited international recognition. Only 23 out of the 80 nations then existing recognized the existence of the Manchukuo: the major Axis powers, and, after the outbreak of World War II, the governments controlled or influenced by Germany or Japan.

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (7 July 1937–9 September 1945) the Italian influence in China suffered a severe downsizing, although the relations between Rome and the Chiang Kai-shek regime would formally remain standing for a few more years (Samarani 2013, 15). After the Nippon offensive of July 1937–Fall 1938, in which the Japanese Empire conquered many of the great Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and the capital Nanjing, Chiang Kai-shek was forced to move its headquarters to Chungking (Chongqing).

In March 1940, Wang Jingwei – one of the closest aides of Sun Yat-sen (the ‘Father of the Nation’ of 1912) and a rival of Chiang Kai-shek – created the Reorganized National Government of the Republic of China, a Japanese collaborationist government based in Nanjing. The Nanjing regime received little international recognition only by Axis powers: Tokyo in November 1940, Rome and Berlin in July 1941 (Boyle 1972, 301; Bunker 1972, 264–280). Soon after, Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Denmark established relations with the Wang Jingwei regime as the Government of China (Dorn 1974, 243; Cotterell 2009, 217; Brodsgaard 2003, 111). Vichy France, despite being aligned with the Axis, resisted Japanese pressure and also refused to recognize the Wang Jingwei régime, with French diplomats in China remaining accredited to the Government of Chiang Kai-shek (Young 2013, 250–251). Until the surrender of Japan, in August 1945, coexisted two self-proclaimed ‘Republic of China’: the puppet state and the Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Government, which was fighting with the Allies against the Axis powers.

The recognition of Wang Jingwei’s collaborationist regime led to the breakdown of the Italian diplomatic relations with the Government of Chiang Kai-shek. Nevertheless, Ambassador Francesco Maria Taliani de Marchio continued to reside for a few months in Shanghai and not in Nanjing (Samarani 2013, 16). Between 1939 and 1941, Taliani held many meetings with Wang in Shanghai (Brady and Brown 2012), the de facto capital of the Japanese puppet state (Bunker 1972, 252–263). Taliani

presented his credentials to Wang Jingwei in occupied Nanjing when Mussolini recognized the Reorganized National Government of China in 1941.

In August 1941, Renato Prunas, first head of the Directorate General for Transoceanic Affairs and later secretary general for foreign affairs, wrote in a note for Minister Ciano: 'Ambassador Taliani should still and without any good reason, continue to reside in Shanghai in an even more equivocal position than in the past. The Government of Nanjing, which takes for granted his appointment as a sure thing, cannot fail to perceive this prolonged absenteeism as an unfriendly gesture. Therefore, we will end up alienating the whole China, both that of Chongqing and that of Nanjing' (Borzoni 2004, 137). The concern expressed by Prunas sums up well the attitude of the Italian Fascist diplomacy: uncertain and ambiguous.

Between March and July 1943, the Italian Government signed agreements with the Government of Nanjing. After 8 September, Taliani refused to swear allegiance to the R.S.I. Consequently, the Italian embassy in Shanghai was shut down by the Japanese – the former Italian Embassy in Beijing was closed later – and Taliani was dismissed, arrested, and intended in a concentration camp near Shanghai, where he remained until the end of the war (Samarani 2013, 17–18). In February 1944, the Japanese interned all the Italian diplomatic personnel who had remained loyal to the Royal Government and who did not longer enjoy diplomatic status, and some of the officials who had joined Salò but were not considered 'dependable' (Samarani 2013, 18–19).

In July 1944, the Italian Social Republic signed similar agreements to those already signed before 8 September, thus officially recognizing the Wang Jingwei's regime (Samarani 2013, 16). The Italian Embassy (R.S.I.) reopened in November 1944; councilor Spinelli, appointed chargé d'affaires in Nanjing, and three other consular officials joined the Social Republic, like the minister to Manchukuo Luigi Neyrone (Grassi Orsini 1996, 142–143).

Implications and consequences on post-war Italian foreign policy

After 8 September, the anti-Fascist sentiment grew and manifested itself clearly also in the diplomatic corps. Nevertheless, the division among Italian diplomats was not between Fascists and anti-Fascists, but between those who were loyal to the party and the *Duce* and those who considered themselves more simply public servants, regardless of the régime.

With the 'neutral' embassies of Lisbon and Madrid acting as a pivot after the armistice, Italy was preparing to tackle harsh trials before the international community. Discontinuity with the Fascist regime and competence were both necessary.

Italian diplomats and politicians believed international politics would remain the same after the war, as happened after the Great War, and they simply strove to restore Italy as a great power – which it never was, if not in

their imagination (Spinelli 2015, 1–2). Some of them, like M.O.F.A. Secretary General Prunas¹² took, personal initiatives to overcome this ‘uncomfortable’ situation. In the aftermath of the fall of Fascism in 1943, Prunas tried to establish a line with Moscow and obtained the Soviet recognition of the Badoglio Government with the purpose to play on the rivalries between the allies to regain some national prestige (Lenzi 2011, 68; Spinelli 2015, 2).

Until then, the basic decisions of Italian foreign policy substantially conformed with the major trends (Spinelli 2015, 1), without any ‘creativity’ and without the ability to develop an autonomous and innovative vision. Italian diplomacy, bound to a cultural and political heritage funded on the values of independence and national interest, was unable to make any original contribution to the new Italian foreign policy, but limited itself to adapting (6, 20)

. To overcome the deficiencies of Italian foreign policy, affected by ‘improvisation’, Spinelli recommends establishing a long-term foreign policy based on visions and ideas that go beyond selfishness and national interest (9, 20).

This way, the fate of the nation ended up being entrusted to long-standing anti-Fascist politicians and diplomats from the Catholic-Liberal tradition, the most distant from the Communist ideology. Therefore, fell to Prime Minister De Gasperi and Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza to defend Italy at the Paris peace conference and and persuade the Constitutional Assembly to ratify the Peace Treaty on 31 July 1947. Sforza and De Gasperi had to work hard to convince the Provisional Head of State, Enrico De Nicola, to sign the instrument of accession on 4 September 1947 (Sforza 1952, 15–39).

The credibility of a long-time anti-Fascist diplomat and politician, like Sforza, combined with his Liberalism and pro-Atlanticism attitude, was fundamental to shape the foreign politics of post-war Italy. Count Sforza was a long-time established diplomat who had already served as head of the Italian foreign service from 15 June 1920 until 4 July 1921.¹³ He was appointed ambassador to France in February 1922 but resigned from office nine months later, on 31 October, after Mussolini seized power. Afterwards, Sforza led the anti-Fascist opposition in the Senate until being forced into exile in Belgium in 1926.¹⁴

The efforts of Italian Liberal and anti-Fascist diplomats were fundamental in determining the placement of the country at the dawn of the cold war.¹⁵ The choice was between re-establishing Italy funded on the democratic values of the U.S.-led Europe or on basis of the values of Communism under Soviet domination (Spinelli 2015, 3, 10).

As foreign minister (1947–1951) Sforza supported the Marshall Plan;¹⁶ he was a convinced advocate and one of the designers of Italy’s pro-European policy and with De Gasperi he led Italy into the Council of Europe on 5 May 1949 as a founding member. On 18 April 1951, Minister Sforza signed the Treaty of Paris that established the European Coal and Steel Community, making Italy one of the founder members of one of the two organization

which in 1957 will give birth to the European Economic Community, one of two pillars forming the constitutional basis of the E.U.

Since 1945 the nation states started limiting their independence by giving up pieces of sovereignty to supranational organizations (Spinelli 2015, 9–10). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs successfully addressed the ‘critical phase’ from 1944 to 1950 (Pellegrinetti 1950), in which were made the fundamental decisions to place Italy in the Euro-Atlantic context (Spinelli 2015, 4). The year 1950 represented a political–diplomatic turning point for republican Italy: United Nations granted Italy trusteeship of Italian Somaliland as the Trust Territory of Somaliland.¹⁷ This trust territory – it was the only case of a trusteeship being assigned to a defeated WWII power – sanctioned the first international recognition of the newfound maturity and reliability of the Italian Republic.

However, for Italian diplomacy the road was far from downhill. As reported by Leo J. Wollemborg in an article published in *The Reporter* magazine of 14 March 1951, the presence, in political life, of ex-Fascist high-ranking hierarchs, and of journalists who distorted the role of the Allies and minimized the responsibilities of the Axis powers, constituted a heavy ballast for post-war diplomacy.¹⁸

The growth of the neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano [M.S.I.]), which in the second general election of 1953 elections won 5.85 per cent of the votes, growing from four to twenty-nine seats in Parliament, constitutes a further element of concern. The former R.S.I. under-secretary for foreign affairs Anfuso was among the deputies elected in 1953.¹⁹ Like many other ex-Fascists, Anfuso supported Italy’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (N.A.T.O.) in an anti-Communist function. Indeed, the fear of a Soviet invasion or of a domestic revolution that would set up a Communist regime in Italy won support to the neo-Fascist party (Atkins 2004, 151–152).

Funded by former Fascist leaders and veterans of the R.S.I. army, the M.S.I. aimed to revive Mussolini’s regime, undermine Italian democracy and fight communism (Ignazi 1998, 35–36, 57, 158; Davies and Lynch 2002, 328; Atkins 2004, 151–152). Being antagonistic and antithetical to liberal democracy (Ignazi 1998, 158), the M.S.I. suffered internal divisions between conservatives, who sought involvement in N.A.T.O. and political alliances with Monarchists and Christian Democrats, and hardliners who wanted the party to turn into anti-American and anti-establishment platform (Atkins 2004, 151–152).

Political parties, although, except for some personalities they did not fully understand the implications of the new Italian foreign policy, limited themselves to ideological positions and electoral slogans (Spinelli 2015, 7).

The question of joining N.A.T.O. was divisive within Italian politics and society (Spinelli 2015, 5). The Communist Party, that was the second largest

political party in Italy and the biggest Communist Party in western Europe, consistently campaigned against the future Alliance (4; NATO n.d.). At first, the left wing of the Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana* [D.C.]), the Italian ruling party of PM De Gasperi, rejected the membership to a military alliance like N.A.T.O. for political and ideological reasons; it thought that Italy should proclaim its peaceful vocation (Romano 2004, 62). Left-wing Catholics considered the neutralist choice as a third way between American capitalism and Soviet communism, while some exponents of the old Liberal ruling class believed that Italy would have better exploited its role in the affairs of European politics if it had proclaimed itself neutral.

Italian foreign policy decision-makers opted clearly for the Western field (Spinelli 2015, 6) – on 4 April 1949 Sforza signed the Washington Treaty. N. A.T.O. membership was the result of lengthy domestic debates and longstanding dissensions engrained within the population and different political factions, but it was considered to be the most viable option for the country (NATO n.d.). At the end, the members of De Gasperi's party, the D.C., voted compactly in the Parliament to place firmly Italy among the Western democracies in close alliance with the United States. The accession to N.A.T.O. meant the integration of Italy into the international community (Perrone 2002, 38).

The choices of De Gasperi and Sforza proved to be fundamental for the future of post-war Italy and led the integration of the country into the Western European community (Spinelli 2015, 7; NATO n.d.), even if they were reluctant about the European initiative, as well as Italian diplomats (Spinelli 2015, 6). Sforza was succeeded by De Gasperi himself as Minister of Foreign Affairs (26 July 1951–17 August 1953). The PM continued the pro-western and pro-European policy until the end of his mandate. Upon their deaths (respectively on 19 August 1954 and 4 September 1952), De Gasperi and Sforza left Italy firmly anchored to the Western camp, ready to face the long winter of the cold war, and set off towards the realization of the European project.

Fundamental to lead Italy towards N.A.T.O. membership was the work by the Italian Ambassador in the United States, Alberto Tarchiani, a former journalist who was forced to emigrate in France in 1925 because of his opposition to Fascism (Felisini 2019). Tarchiani shared the fate with Sforza after the Nazi occupation of Paris in June 1940: they both fled to London and then moved to the United States (Sforza 1945, 168–169). Tarchiani returned to Italy in 1943, after the landing of the Allies,²⁰ Sforza, then minister without portfolio in the first Bonomi government (June–December 1944), supported the appointment of Tarchiani as ambassador to the United States. In February 1945, during the second Bonomi government (December 1944–June 1945), in which De Gasperi was Foreign Minister, Tarchiani was appointed ambassador to Washington when he remained until January 1955, a decade of great importance for Italian foreign policy in the context of the cold war, and a

crucial period for the resumption of Italian life and presence on the international scene (Felisini 2019). Tarchiani was one of the 'political' ambassadors appointed among anti-Fascist personalities to mark a discontinuity with the former regime (Felisini 2019). He worked with De Gasperi and Sforza on the preparation of the Paris Peace Conference of 1947 and co-signed the North Atlantic Treaty (Felisini 2019). The foreign policy of the Italian republic was thus defined by a trio of anti-Fascists, in discontinuity with the tradition of the cabinet, the ministry and the diplomatic corps.

Altiero Spinelli, an anti-Fascist activist who had strong influence on the post-war European integration and is referred to as one of the founding fathers of the EU (Pistone 1994), argues that the new course of Italian foreign policy imposed by Sforza and De Gasperi broke the traditional monopoly of the Foreign Ministry and of diplomacy in the management of international relations, thereby changing the role of the latter (Spinelli 2015, 8–9).

Lessons learned from WWII: the Atlanticist-Europeanist and cold war approach of Italian diplomats

In August 1943, after the fall of Mussolini, with the war still ongoing, Spinelli and the other authors of the *Ventotene Manifesto* founded the European Federalist Movement and called for a break with Europe's past to form a new political system. The thought behind this proposal lies in acknowledging the crisis of the national state and of the international system which were the main causes of the two world wars and of the rise of Nazi-fascism. Indeed, diplomats had facilitated the rise of Nazi-fascism as they were unable to negotiate solutions to the conflicts and failed to prevent the two world wars.

After WWII, Italy was a 'middle power', a nation lacking the ambitions of a superpower, but committed to pursuing the national interest through dialogue and international cooperation (Tosi 2013; Monzali and Soave 2020). Italy had therefore set aside its ambitions to employ soft power that was most suited to its real possibilities. During the cold war, the post-fascist rulers adopted a different posture in international relations, due also to the new geopolitical position of Italy within the Atlantic Alliance. Italian diplomats committed themselves to support the new course and wove a vast network of relations that allowed the country to play a leading role (Tosi 2013; Monzali and Soave 2020).

De Leonardis (2014) argues that the features of Italian diplomacy re-emerged after the discontinuity that marked the early stage of post-war foreign policy. As after WWI, the national interest was not met and the expectations on the eastern frontier were frustrated by the allies. The attempt to reconcile the Atlantic choice with initiatives in the Mediterranean region of traditional interest in Italian diplomacy gave rise to the 'neo-Atlanticism', a particularly dynamic phase which saw Italian foreign policy swinging

'between alliances and friendships', like in the early twentieth century (De Leonardis 2014).

Italy, placed between the spheres of influence of the two blocs and in a position of weakness, adopted an ambiguous diplomatic policy. Emblematic is the case of Poland, victim of the double Nazi–Soviet aggression in September 1939. Italian diplomats first had to deal with a Polish government in exile in London (until 1946) and then with a Provisional Government of National Unity and a communist regime that dragged the country into the Soviet sphere of influence. Until the re-establishment of formal diplomatic relations, in September 1945, Poland was under the jurisdiction of the Italian ambassador in Moscow, Pietro Quaroni, an established diplomat who was marginalized due to his criticism on Italy's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

To facilitate the relationships with the new Polish government, which was under the strong influence of the U.S.S.R., to gain support on Italy's most important post-war international issues such as the peace treaty, borders and colonies and compensations (Strzałka 2014, 117), the Italian government, which included the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.), appointed communist characters, such as Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Eugenio Reale (1945–1946) and Ambrogio Donini (1946–1948), both members of the Central Committee of the PCI, as 'political' ambassadors. Their evaluations on the Sovietization process of Poland are not surprisingly strongly discordant with the opinions that would have been expressed by the career diplomats who would succeed them (Caccamo 2014).

In 1946, Reale indulged in exaggerated praise of the Secretary of the Polish Workers' Party, Władysław Gomułka, de facto communist leader of post-war Poland after the fraudulent parliamentary elections of 1947. Donini's 'partisanship' became soon out of tune with respect to the Italian political course that led to the exit of the PCI from the coalition government and to the explicitly pro-Western approach adopted by PM De Gasperi and Foreign Minister Sforza after the defeat of the Popular Front in the general elections of April 1948 (Caccamo 2014, 101).²¹

Established diplomats who took over the Warsaw mission criticized openly the Polish authorities (Caccamo 2014, 105). In their reports, the new diplomats (Raffaele Ferretti, Roberto Ducci and Giovanni De Astis) reduced Poland's privileged relationship with the U.S.S.R. to a foreign domination backed by the Red Army – this became clearer after Gomułka's marginalization from the political scene (104–108). The poor quality of Italian diplomats, at the end of their career and poorly prepared on Polish and Central European issues, reflected to a certain extent on bilateral relations which relations reached their lowest point in 1949–1956 (Strzałka 2014, 131).

The remarks of Reale and Donini on the situation in Poland diverge from the assessment of another 'political' ambassador to the Soviet Union, Manlio

Brosio, a liberal anti-fascist diplomat and from the reports of his predecessor Pietro Quaroni.²² Italy's new foreign policy course was more adequately supported by career diplomats, such as Quaroni, or liberals, such as Manlio Brosio. During the period in which he was ambassador to Paris (1946–1958) Quaroni played a leading role as political adviser to Foreign Minister De Gasperi in the negotiation of the peace treaty and the reintegration of Italy into international society.

Brosio served as N.A.T.O.'s fourth Secretary (1964–1971) at the height of the cold war and made a strong contribution to the transatlantic season (Jordan and Bloom 1979). He supported the transatlantic cooperation and the unity of the Alliance through diplomatic mediation in a period in which N. A.T.O. was about to go beyond the simple military organization to also become a diplomatic union with political missions and was therefore about to transform itself to employ different approaches – diplomatic, political and military – to ensure security (Sloan 2002).

After the fall of Fascism, Italian diplomats made different assessments, depending on whether they were 'political' ambassadors, influenced by their ideological orientation or career ambassadors, devoted to the defense of national interests (Caccamo 2014, 110–111). Political ambassadors appointed by post-fascist governments proved biased, perhaps even more so than previous fascist diplomats.

Conclusion

After 1922, when Mussolini seized power, the Italian foreign service entered a process of fascistisation. The Fascists entered the diplomatic corps, while established diplomats adapted to the new course or were sidelined. Until 25 July 1943, and, even more, until 8 September, Italian diplomats had not asked themselves who they were loyal to the king and the monarchy, or fascism and Mussolini. Things changed radically with the signing of the armistice and the creation of the Republic of Salò, which received diplomatic recognition from only Axis powers and their satellite states. The civil war that followed was also a diplomatic conflict, and a conflict between diplomats over the choice to make – with the Nazi German puppet state or with the king, who had fled Rome and had compromised himself with the Fascist régime.

For the majority of the diplomats it was just an administrative matter, a mere 'bureaucratic' choice (remain at the service of the legitimate Government of Badoglio); for some it was a question of honour (join the R. S.I. to redeem Italy from the betrayal of the monarchy); others were fascinated by the figure and charisma of Mussolini; for some others it was a matter of conscience (the acknowledgment of the end of the Fascist regime and the war adventure). Whatever it was, it was not an easy choice for anyone, and everyone paid a price in this 'diplomatic civil war', unknown to most.

The events that followed the armistice and the end of the war left Italian diplomacy generally disoriented and unprepared to face the new foreign policy challenges, which required to overcome old visions and ideas linked to national interest in favour of a supranational approach.

The politics of power and national independence pursued by Liberal and Fascist Italy had drawn a furrow with western liberal democracies that post-war leaders had the foresight to overcome. Decision-makers of Republican Italy were aware of the dangers of dictatorship and therefore firmly anchored Italy to the western system (U.S.–N.A.T.O.–Europe), thus safeguarding the country from the risk of a Soviet-style dictatorship.

The fifties marked the decline of the old Italian diplomacy era and the dawn of a new system of international relations based on cooperation and supranational organizations. More than the action of established diplomats, it was the decision-making of the new political leadership in post-war five years which was decisive for tracing the future of Italian foreign policy.

Notes

- 1 The Triple Entente was an informal understanding between the Russian Empire, the French Third Republic and Great Britain.
- 2 Bastianini served as consul general (1927), Italian envoy to Lisbon (10 August 1928–14 November 1929), ambassador to Poland (1932), ambassador to the United Kingdom (1939), thereby replacing Dino Grandi; undersecretary for foreign affairs (11 June 1936–14 October 1939 and 6 February 1943–25 July 1943).
- 3 Germany, Italy and Japan are typically described as the major Axis powers.
- 4 A client state is a state that is economically, politically, or militarily subordinate to another more powerful state (termed controlling state in this article) in international relations (Fry, Goldstein and Langhorne 2002, 9).
- 5 Mussolini held the Ministry of Foreign Affairs *ad interim* until 12 September 1929, from 20 July 1932–11 June 1936, and finally from 6 February 1943–25 July 1943.
- 6 Alfieri, inter alia, served as Undersecretary for Corporations (1929–1932), Secretariat for Press and Propaganda (1935), later upgraded to the rank of Ministry (27 May 1937–31 October 1939) and finally renamed Ministry of Popular Culture on 27 May 1937.
- 7 Attolico served as ambassador to Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1940 and to the Holy See from 1940 to 1942.
- 8 In mid-1926, Guariglia, who was about to be appointed to a senior official position at the Ministry, refused to join the P.N.F. because he believed that 'officials should not belong to any party' (Grassi Orsini 1996, 131).
- 9 De Gasperi was the last Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy, serving under both Victor Emmanuel III and Umberto II, and the first Prime Minister of the Italian Republic (10 December 1945–17 August 1953). In June 1946 he also briefly served as provisional head of state after the Italian people voted to end the monarchy and establish a republic.

- 10 Anfuso served, inter alia, as head of legation in Budapest (1929–1931) and ambassador in Berlin (1931–1932), Beijing (1932–1934) and Athens (1934–1936). He was appointed by Mussolini as undersecretary of state for foreign affairs at the last stage of WWII, on 19 March 1945. He was elected in the Chamber of Deputies in 1953.
- 11 Manchukuo lived from 1932 to 1945.²Prunas was appointed M.O.F.A. Secretary General under the Badoglio Government.
- 12 Sforza entered the diplomatic service in 1896. He served as consular attaché in Cairo (1896), Paris (1897), then as consular secretary in Constantinople (1901) and Beijing. Sforza was appointed chargé d'affaires in Bucharest (1905) and first secretary of legation in Madrid (1906–1907), before being sent as chargé d'affaires in Constantinople (1908–1909). Afterwards, he served as Counsellor of Embassy at London (1909) and again in Beijing (1911–1915).
- 13 Sforza lived in Belgium and France until the German occupation in June 1940. He then settled in England where he lived until moving on to the United States.
- 14 The cold war was a period of ideological and geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, after WWII, considered to span from 1947 to the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. (26 December 1991).
- 15 The Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program) was a U.S. initiative aimed to support western European economies after the end of WWII.
- 16 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 289 of 21 November 1949.
- 17 ACS, MI, Gab.1950-52, ff. 13142/1-13143/20, MAE t.20/04050/C, Wollemborg, L.J., Neofascismo italiano, *The Reporter*, 14 March 1951.
- 18 Anfuso was re-elected in 1958 and 1963. He died while giving a speech in the Chamber of Deputies on 13 December 1963.
- 19 ° Tarchiani was Minister of Public Works in the second Badoglio Government (April–June 1944).
- 20 After finishing the diplomatic career, Donini was elected Senator in 1953 and 1963 with the P.C.I.
- 21 Brosio was minister without portfolio in the 3rd Bonomi cabinet (1944–1945), Deputy PM in the executive led by Ferruccio Parri (1945) and Minister of War (1945–1946) in the first De Gasperi government, before starting a diplomatic career: ambassador to the Soviet Union (1947–1951), to the U.K. (1952–1954), to the U.S. (1955–1961) and eventually to France (1961–1964). He briefly led the Italian Liberal Party in 1944.

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