

## **The DC and the PCI in the Seventies: A Complex Relationship Supervised by the United States**

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*Abstract: Relations between the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Communists (PCI) constituted the single most important political issue throughout the period of the Italian 'first Republic'. A large number of studies have been devoted to the post-1968 years, in particular – years when the Communists, by projecting a new, reformist image of themselves under Enrico Berlinguer's leadership, tried to reach an 'historic compromise' with the DC, which responded with Aldo Moro's 'strategy of attention'. What is less well known is the American view during these crucial years, the reaction of the Republican (Nixon and Ford) and Democratic (Carter) Administrations in Washington to the PCI's overtures to the DC. This article, exploiting Italian, American and British archives, challenges the assumption that, in the late 1970s, the United States, with the change of Administration from Republicans to Democrats, moved from a position of absolute opposition to a benevolent indifference towards Communism in Italy. What emerges from the documents is that the US authorities consistently supported conservative Christian Democrats – like Mariano Rumor and Giulio Andreotti – and that Carter's election promise to soften US attitudes towards the PCI was not kept. Washington's official policy remained the one that had been modelled during the Kissinger era*

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### **Introduction**

Richard Gardner, America's Ambassador to Italy during the Carter Administration once claimed that Enrico Berlinguer and other PCI leaders had, during his mission, 'consistently affirmed their fidelity to Marxism-Leninism, praised the achievement of the Soviet Revolution of 1917, and advocated foreign policies favouring Soviet aims and threatening Western interests' (Gardner, 2006). Gardner clearly believed that the US government had not changed its attitude towards the PCI when compared with the

preceding Nixon and Ford Administrations. His view is supported by the State Department statement of 12 January 1978, that Washington would not favour the PCI's participation in an Italian executive, which confirmed Washington's apparent intransigence on the question. But, can we accept Gardner's judgement, or should we instead lean to the consensus historiographical interpretation that sees a shift in US attitudes towards the Italian Communists with the passage from the Republican to the Democratic Administration? In other words, is it not rather the case that Washington's attitude towards the PCI moved from one of 'hate to indifference' (Gentiloni Silveri, 2009)? The purpose of this article is to clarify this question, on the basis of recently-released American, Italian and British archival sources, while also shedding new light on the details of American policy towards Italian Communism in the decade 1969-79.

### **The PCI's reformist façade**

Throughout the Cold War, the most important issue that US diplomats – and especially those attached to the 'Italian Desk' within the State Department – highlighted in analysing Italian politics was the fact that Italy hosted the largest and best organised Communist party in the Western hemisphere, a Communist party whose political and social influence continued to grow during the post-war decades.

At the general election of May 1968, held in a climate of general social unrest, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) won 26.9 percent of the vote. The US Ambassador, Gardner Ackley, when reporting to Washington, tried to minimise the significance of these apparently 'appalling' numbers, arguing that the Communists of 1968 were no longer the 'radicals' of twenty years before. Ackley argued that their revolutionary ideas and subversive attitudes had been softened since they had entered into the administration of many cities and provinces, where they supported democratic local executives (Favretto, 2003: 113).<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the PCI had to be kept under careful observation, because its entrance into a national government would, the US assumed, lead to such a shift in Italian foreign policy that it would alienate the country from the rest of the Western alliance (Galli, 1993: 250-60).<sup>2</sup> After 1968, with almost a third of the seats in Parliament, the PCI remained extremely dangerous in the eyes of most US analysts, not only because of Italian governments' weakness and internal struggles within the ruling Christian Democrats (DC), but above all because the Communists were now projecting the image of a reformist party. The concern grew that the PCI would prove attractive to those Italians left disaffected by the lack of social reform: as the only political opposition in the 'immobile' Italian political system, it might erode the electoral base of the DC. The *Washington Post's* correspondent, the long-serving L. Wollemborg, commenting on reactions to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which had scarred the

Eastern bloc and damaged the image of Communism elsewhere, argued that Italian Communists hoped 'to project an image of their party as quite moderate internally and, above all, independent and "national minded" in foreign affairs' (Wollemborg, 1968).

In January 1969, the Republican Richard Nixon became US President, appointing Henry Kissinger as National Security Adviser and Graham Martin as Ambassador to Italy. Martin was a close friend of the President and proved one of his ablest diplomats (Margiocco, 1981: 135). In September 1969, Flaminio Piccoli, the Christian Democrats' general secretary and a tough conservative, sought to convince an officer of the US Embassy, that the PCI's principal leaders were completely committed to the pursuit of a 'Soviet-oriented international policy', despite the positive comments being made in several quarters about the PCI's progress towards democracy. According to Piccoli, the DC must remain the pivot of Italy's democratic system. Otherwise, the country risked falling into the hands of the Communists or a 'regime of the colonels' (that is, an authoritarian government of the military and the far right, as had seized power in Greece in 1967).<sup>3</sup> The US Embassy in Rome accepted this view of Italian politics. Its telegrams to Washington often expressed the fear that the Communists, depicting themselves as a moderate force, would eventually convince Italian voters and enter government.<sup>4</sup> These American interpretations were shared by British diplomats who, in similarly colourful terms, described the PCI as a 'Moscow-oriented party', incapable of becoming a proper democratic party.<sup>5</sup> American and British sources agreed on several points: a) the so-called 'Brezhnev doctrine' (issued after the invasion of Czechoslovakia), with its insistence that Moscow must direct the policies of its European satellites, had left many moderate-minded Italian Communists baffled and disconcerted; b) any dialogue at local level between Christian Democrats and Communists might have unpredictable and serious consequences at the national level; c) the Church, even in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, continued to represent a fundamental barrier against the spread of Communist doctrines, a bulwark 'strictly against any cooperation with the Communist institutions';<sup>6</sup> d) the main area where the PCI and DC might cooperate was in the 'red belt' of Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Marche, rather than in southern regions, where any ideological point of contact between the two parties was missing, the Church was well rooted (Foot, 2003: 59) and 'a generally apathetic electorate' still acted as a reservoir of votes for local notables (Chubb, 1981: 93-96; Caciagli, 1982: 276).

A minor episode is worth citing as illustrative of the atmosphere of the time. In September 1969, an Italian lawyer, Paolo Pisano, complained to the US Secretary of State, William Rogers, about the danger that a 'Popular Front' might gain power in Italy. His view was shared by such high-profile conservatives as the industrialist Vittorio Vaccari (chair of the Union of

Christian Entrepreneurs and Managers from 1975 to 1988). There were also fears of collaboration between the DC's left-wing, represented by Aldo Moro, and the most radical Socialists, represented by Francesco De Martino and Riccardo Lombardi.<sup>7</sup> The majority of Christian Democrats continued to express coldness and caution towards the Communists and, in November 1969, at a meeting of the DC's national Council, Arnaldo Forlani, just elected General Secretary, declared that it was impossible to know for certain whether the PCI's apparent independence of Moscow was genuine or only a tactical move (*Il Popolo*, 1969).<sup>8</sup> Kissinger, however, suggested that the possibility of a PCI entry into government had to be taken seriously.<sup>9</sup> Given its ability to exploit social discontent, it might present itself as 'the official vehicle of protest', as a 'respectable, non-violent and responsible' party, an interlocutor with whom political dialogue was possible.<sup>10</sup>

### **The divisions within the DC**

The problem faced by Washington was twofold: not only was the PCI gaining in support, but simultaneously the DC seemed to be losing its grip on the country, because it had degenerated into 'a complex, ill-disciplined body, with many different local bases and bosses, some of them of dubious origins and talents' (Clark, 1984: 329; Kertzer, 1980). Italian governments 'often fell, not because of differences with the DC's coalition partners, but because of differences between the factions of the DC itself' (Young, 1996: 157; Hine, 1993: 134). By the late 1960s, the DC had become such a variegated organisation that its factions sported ideologies ranging 'from just short of Fascism to just shy of Communism', and were united only to fight and win elections. It has been written, with a touch of malice, that the DC factions were united under a vague Catholicism 'that puts a crucifix in every office while letting the left-wing court the Communists, the right the military, and the organization in Sicily to be beholden to the Mafia'.<sup>11</sup>

The largest faction was the one dubbed the '*dorotei*', which included Mariano Rumor, Flaminio Piccoli and Emilio Colombo (Rumor, 2011: 191-7; Giovagnoli: 1996). Rumor, the DC General Secretary between 1964 and 1968, then five times Prime Minister, was one of the staunchest opponents of collaboration with the PCI, something he described as 'impossible'.<sup>12</sup> By contrast Aldo Moro, the other main DC leader, several times Prime Minister, who had left the '*dorotei*' in 1968 and adopted an independent position, advocated a 'strategy of attention' towards the Communists. Moro hoped to encourage the PCI's acceptance of the principles of liberal democracy, but his arguments were anathematised by Rumor, who argued that the PCI's basic ideology was essentially anti-democratic.<sup>13</sup> In January 1971, Ambassador Martin reported that the DC's variegated left-wing continued to favour an alliance with the Italian Socialists (PSI). Martin asked whether this might be the prelude to a real 'opening to the left'

involving the DC, the PSI *and the PCI*.<sup>14</sup> Shortly before, in December 1970, General Alexander Haig, a member of Kissinger's National Security Council (NSC) staff, had met an influential Italian-American, Pier Talenti, to be briefed on the Italian situation. According to Talenti, Italy was on the verge of a sudden change of regime because the DC appeared 'totally corrupt and subject to bribes', even though it was led by Rumor, 'probably the only Italian politician relatively honest'.<sup>15</sup> Talenti emphasised the large and composite nature of the DC family, which included a wide variety of political views, held together only by a vague appeal to the Church's teachings, including a left wing of so-called 'dissident' Catholics.

International politics were changing. Nixon, who visited Italy in January 1969 and September 1970, developed a policy of '*détente*' with the leading Communist states, which would lead him to make historic trips to Moscow and Beijing in the first half of 1972. But this did not make Washington any more open to ideas of Communists sharing power in NATO governments like that in Rome. In March 1971, Robert D. Murphy, a former US ambassador, sent – through Helmut Sonnenfeld, a Counselor in the State Department – a document about Italy to Kissinger. This document, which Murphy admitted having received from an 'Italian friend' – actually Luca Dainelli, a former Italian Ambassador – was completely negative in its view of Moro, depicting him as 'a wily fellow looking for the "Finlandization" of Italy', a 'pawn' of the Italian Left.<sup>16</sup> Such reports could only increase US suspicion of Moro's political manoeuvrings. Almost a year later, Martin linked Moro with the young extreme leftist Carlo Donat-Cattin.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Moro continued to express his desire to move towards a less intransigent confrontational relationship with the PCI.<sup>18</sup> By 1972, many Christian Democrats appeared no longer totally against the Communists' exclusion from national institutions, and the launch of a neo-centrist government led by Andreotti was considered a step in the right direction by Washington.<sup>19</sup> Andreotti, unlike Italian cabinets of the previous decade, did not want an alliance with the Socialists, but instead favoured a deal with the Liberal party, which Washington saw as a well-established, politically conservative organisation. Indeed, the Liberals had dominated the Italian scene until the First World War and represented the class of industrial men and entrepreneurs.<sup>20</sup>

Divisions within the DC, and especially the growing rift between Moro and Rumor, remained a source of political instability throughout the 1970s, but did not prevent them from sitting together in numerous governments, from which the PCI remained excluded (Malgeri, 2003: 37-58). Towards the end of the Nixon presidency, in July 1974, the US Ambassador, John Volpe, talking with Amintore Fanfani, another long-standing DC leader, was reassured that no 'historic compromise' – a sharing of power with the Italian Communist party – was possible (Agosti,

1999: 103-8; Flores and Gallerano, 1992: chap. 2).<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the US Embassy in Rome remained on the alert. Two months earlier, Volpe had cabled to Washington about speculation that even Rumor and his Interior Minister, Paolo Emilio Taviani, were considering a 'government of national safety', which would include any party represented in Parliament, except for the neo-Fascist MSI. The Ambassador wondered how parties with such dissimilar ideologies, including Liberals and Communists, could possibly live together.<sup>22</sup> But no attempt was made to create such a 'government of national safety' and the Americans were reassured that the *dorotei* would never voluntarily share their slice of political power because, given Italy's well-oiled system of political patronage, it offered them such vast benefits (Allum, 1973; Di Palma, 1977; Donovan, 1994: 71-86; Foot, 2003: 102-3).

### **US firmness**

August 1974 saw Nixon's resignation due to the Watergate scandal and his replacement by the former Vice-President, Gerald Ford. US foreign policy did not change, however: while pursuing *détente* with Moscow, Washington continued to oppose any 'opening' to the PCI, and was happy to deal with conservative Christian Democrats – Rumor, Colombo and Andreotti – as Prime Ministers in Rome, however corrupt the system over which they presided. The basic US assumption was still that, if the PCI entered government, Italian foreign-policy would be reoriented, throwing the country's relationship with the Atlantic Alliance, and the use of US military bases on Italian soil, into doubt. It was even conjectured that 'we should expect the beginning of expropriation and nationalization of American-owned factories in Italy'. Against these alarming assumptions, US diplomats preferred full support for the DC, and particularly for its conservative currents, as 'the heart of the anti-Communist policies'.<sup>23</sup>

Kissinger, as is clear from his diplomatic correspondence, considered the PCI an enemy to destroy, not a legitimate partner with democratic credentials. According to the DC leftist Giovanni Galloni, in September 1974, when Moro and Giovanni Leone – the President of the Republic – were in the United States, Moro was approached by Kissinger during a *soirée* at the Italian Consulate in New York, and told: 'I am not a Catholic and I do not believe in dogmas, but I cannot understand your approach to politics and consider it a very negative element' (Galloni, 2008: 182). During the visit, the Communist menace was at the centre of discussion, with Ford insisting that, 'if NATO is to be strong, we can't have the Communists participating in the political life of any member', while Kissinger was concerned that the PCI's attempts to appear a democratic force might bewitch moderate voters.<sup>24</sup>

There was an interesting discussion in 1975 regarding a possible visit to the United States by two high-ranking Communists, Giorgio Napolitano

and Sergio Segre. The Americans denied them entry visas, partly in order to avoid giving them any opportunity to stir up anti-Administration polemics.<sup>25</sup> Napolitano, who had been invited 'by a group of prestigious American Universities', in particular by Stanley Hoffmann, director of the Centre for European Studies at Harvard, was described by US sources as an attractive character, well able to project the image of the PCI as a moderate and responsible force (Napolitano, 2006: 158). A decisive role in denying the visas was played by Volpe, who argued that, in pursuing the visit, the PCI was only interested in the benefits for itself in terms of Italian domestic politics. But, in denying the visas, the US authorities felt themselves in an uncomfortable position, between the needs, on the one hand, to keep the PCI isolated, and, on the other, to avoid seeming 'to turn the clock back a quarter century to make Italy a kind of new client-State' of Washington.<sup>26</sup>

In June 1975, President Ford, visiting Italy, explained that the Atlantic Alliance had been created with the main aim of dealing with a Communist threat, and that it would be contradictory 'to belong to the Alliance of a country in which the Communists are in power'.<sup>27</sup> President Leone assured him that all the Italian parties, from the DC to the far right, were opposed to the 'historic compromise' promoted by Berlinguer, and forecast that 'the greatest danger of a Communist participation in the government is that it would bring about economic chaos, and even the possibility of a civil war'.<sup>28</sup> Two months later, at the gathering to sign the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in Helsinki, Moro and Rumor again met Ford and Kissinger and, among other things, discussed the Communist problem in Italy:

They are trying - said our representatives - to be moderate [...] and many people are starting to believe that the Communists are Social Democrats; even businessmen think so. The Communists appeal to all classes [...]. People listen to their speeches and perceive them as part of an ongoing process, in line with détente: the barriers against Communists are no longer seen as great and resilient as in the past [...]. What you should remember, Mr President, is that not everyone who votes Communist is Communist. Many of them are in favour of freedom, of all the freedoms (Crainz, 2003: 531).

This statement reflected more Moro's than Rumor's position, but Ford replied that, if the PCI entered government, it would be very difficult to explain how Italy could remain a member of the Atlantic Alliance. Ambassador Volpe, in an interview with the Italian weekly, *Epoca*, on 20 September, expressed the same thought: 'the participation of the Communists in the Italian Government would be in fundamental contradiction with the purposes of the NATO Alliance; and the United States cannot be in favour of a system of government in Italy which would be contrary to Western democratic traditions' (Gismondi, 1986: 78). Volpe's

remarks provoked a wave of protests. Among others, Riccardo Lombardi, a leading member of the PSI left-wing, commented that Volpe's statement was a 'threat' to Italian sovereignty and 'an act of intimidation'.<sup>29</sup> However, from the Ambassador's personal papers it seems he had wanted to make clear the American position that '*détente*' did not mean Washington had grown indifferent to the potential erosion of its alliances and to ties with its closest allies. In this sense, Volpe always proclaimed that his actions were not 'too anti-Communist', nor 'out of touch' with the State Department, but simply aimed at holding Italy as a member of the Western world.<sup>30</sup>

### **Is it time for a historic compromise?**

In the early 1970s the PCI had spread its influence into numerous local administrations, and it sought to build on this by waging a campaign for direct involvement in the national government (Duggan, 1994: 283-4). According to Berlinguer, it was time to reach a compromise, a *modus vivendi* with the DC, so as to be accepted as 'a legitimised organisation, qualified eventually to take a place in a coalition government' (Giovagnoli, 2007: 77-104). This would become possible, not only thanks to a changed domestic situation, but also because of the international climate of *détente* and the consequent declining fear of Communism. The PCI, since its thirteenth Congress, held in Milan in March 1972, had embraced – in Berlinguer words – a 'reformist' policy and renounced its revolutionary methods, showing a 'bourgeois' image (Berlinguer, 1975: 415; Sterling, 1972). A year later, after the *golpe* in Chile, when General Augusto Pinochet and the army had overthrown Salvador Allende's elected, Marxist government, Berlinguer had published three articles in the Communist journal *Rinascita*, arguing that the DC could be pushed and transformed in a progressive direction, towards a new 'historic compromise' (Lange and Vannicelli, 1981: 43-6).<sup>31</sup> Here was the core problem as far as US diplomats were concerned: in its strategy for achieving power, the PCI would cunningly show its best face and conduct a moderate form of opposition, in order to demonstrate that it was impossible to save the country from chaos without its help.

After the regional elections of 1975, which seemed to dissolve the residual fears of the Italian electorate about Communism and brought the PCI within a few percentage points of the DC, US diplomats were faced with the real prospect of an agreement between the two parties. At the DC national Council, held in July, Moro argued that the belief that the PCI was a 'different party', alien to the Italian democratic system, had been dissipated; now it was a force with which to deal on a basis of honesty (Calandra, 1996: 309; Scoppola, 1997: 394-9). But soon after this, Rumor – following an appearance at the UN in New York in his capacity as Foreign Minister – met President Ford and reassured him that 'no Communists



should be in the government. The Communists must be seen as the opposition and the minority, even though they represent 33 percent [of the electorate]. They are the opposition - we are the majority'.<sup>32</sup> It was a position clearly in contrast with that of Moro, who at that time was Rumor's Prime Minister. While Moro was open to a deal with the PCI, Rumor continued to claim there was a deep ambiguity in the PCI's position, as a 'synthesis of oppositions', on the one hand a Marxist-Leninist party tied to Moscow, on the other a force open to dialogue.

1976 was a year of elections in both Italy and the United States. In February, in his campaign for the Presidential nomination, Ford publicly raised the 'Italian problem' in the New Hampshire primary election, when he stated that he vigorously opposed 'any Communist participation in an Italian government' (Fiori, 1989: 283; Gismondi, 1986: 78-9). A month later, the new and fragile Moro government was described by US sources as 'a bridge to the unknown', because the PCI, now a 'respectable' party and the only one with 'clean hands' in the eyes of public opinion, risked overtaking the DC in the next general election (Gentiloni Silveri, 2003: 89-122).<sup>33</sup> That crucial Spring, the State Department feared it was very likely that early elections would bring the Communists into the government, even if resistance might come from 'the fear factor' among Italian voters of seeing the PCI as *the* cardinal point of any future coalition.<sup>34</sup> As Luciano Barca, a Communist leader, remembers, in those months US interference in Italian affairs increased 'in a shameless way', so that Ambassador Volpe risked 'outperforming [former US] Ambassador Luce' in anti-Communist vehemence (Barca, 2005: 638).<sup>35</sup>

Italy had now entered its worst post-war recession so far, with rising unemployment, rampant inflation and declining production (Ginsborg, 1990: 351-4), so that the DC's 'sacrosanct' dominance was under severe test.<sup>36</sup> The most recent DC Congress, in March, had confirmed the party's deep internal divisions. Like Moro, Benigno Zaccagnini, re-elected General Secretary with the support of a leftist coalition, thought it deleterious to pursue a constant confrontation with the Communists and proposed a frank dialogue on 'bread-and-butter issues', putting aside ideological differences.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the Italian Bishops' Conference, as in the 1940s, declared that 'one cannot be at the same time a Christian and a Marxist'; it was impossible to go to mass in the morning and vote 'for the PCI in the afternoon'.<sup>38</sup> But, even if the Holy See 'made its views on Marxist and atheist Communism very clear, and denounced as unacceptable the candidature of Catholics on Communist lists', the PCI strengthened its position at the local elections in June, by gaining the city of Rome, 'which for many millions is synonymous with the headquarters of the Catholic Church'.<sup>39</sup> As George H.W. Bush, then Director of Central Intelligence, noted in a memorandum for Ford, both the Communists and the Christian Democrats boasted victory in the elections (Chiaromonte, 1986: 29-41).

### **A firm “*niet*” from Washington**

Meanwhile, a sort of *cordon sanitaire* was being arranged abroad to deal with a possible Communist-led government in Rome. Immediately after the Italian elections, during the G-7 summit in Puerto Rico, the US, British, French and West German governments agreed to make economic aid for Italy conditional on the exclusion of the Communists from national government (Varsori, 2010: 296). Italy had been invited to the previous meeting, at Rambouillet in November 1975, partly to reinforce the Government's credibility and to confirm that it was an integral part of the Western world. In Puerto Rico, as the US representatives, Alan Greenspan and Brent Scowcroft, reported, Moro 'was the weakest of all participants at the Summit' and played a low-key and cautious role, protecting Italian interests, but taking no initiative (Basosi and Bernardini, 2009: 256-67).<sup>40</sup> Andreotti remembers that Helmut Schmidt, the German Chancellor, during a background press briefing, issued a warning that 'they [the Italians] should not open the government door to the Communists, threatening the isolation of our nation' (Andreotti, 1988: 123). Andreotti interpreted this 'clamorous act, contrary to diplomatic practise', as a sort of public lecture, 'as neighbours do to a mother of a family with very limited resources, who knows how to make more for her children if only she had more means'. According to him, Schmidt's warning had been inspired by officials within the Ford Administration, who wanted to influence the US elections (Andreotti, 1989: 104-5). British diplomats, commenting on the episode, reported Italian disappointment at a reprimand from a 'lecturing schoolmaster' to his boys. Leftists, predictably, did not waste the opportunity to criticise the Government for allowing Italy to be treated as a 'satellite State', but, more generally, many Italian politicians deplored such a 'blackmailing declaration'.<sup>41</sup>

Whilst Italy was engaged with its political problems and Ford was immersed in the presidential campaign, US foreign policy was dominated by Kissinger, who believed that all the Western European Communist parties were soaked in 'Leninist dogmas and principles'.<sup>42</sup> At a meeting with US ambassadors to Western Europe, he labelled as 'unacceptable' a possible rise to power by Communists in the region, and declared it 'inconceivable' for Washington to keep ground forces in countries where Communists took power.<sup>43</sup> Such concerns also affected British diplomats, who hypothesised that if the PCI took control of strategic Ministries – Defence and Foreign Affairs – 'Italian membership of NATO would subject the Alliance to intolerable strains', because of 'the impossibility of including a totally Communist Government in an Alliance directed against a Communist threat'.<sup>44</sup> In a document drafted by Britain's Ministry of Defence all possible future options were weighed, from a democratic Italy to a dictatorship scenario. At worst, it was feared that a 'NATO without Italy' would necessitate a reshaping of the Alliance's southern flank,

moving bases to nearby Malta.<sup>45</sup> This international mobilisation of opposition to a Communist share of power may have been the reason Berlinguer gave a celebrated interview to the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, in which he acknowledged 'the positive role played by international alliances for the security and sovereignty of the Western European countries' (Pons, 2001: 36; Sassoon, 1981: 211-12) and stated that the Atlantic Alliance 'constituted a shield for the construction of Italian socialism in conditions of freedom'.<sup>46</sup> Such statements suggested that the PCI was now ready to accept Italian membership of NATO.

Ford and Kissinger, then, were harsh in their declarations against the PCI but theirs was a policy that the leading Democratic candidate, Jimmy Carter, did not fail to criticise. On 3 May, in an interview with *Newsweek International*, he stated that 'the United States should not raise in advance a wall around Italy. [...] I think we should vigorously support democratic forces in Italy, but at the same time we should not close the doors that lead to a possible friendship of the Italian Communist leaders toward us' (Olivi, 1978: chap. 1). A month later, he declared that:

Democratic processes in some countries can bring to power parties or leaders whose ideologies are not shared by most Americans. We may not welcome these changes; certainly we will not encourage them! But we have to respect the results of democratic elections and the right of nations to make their free choice if we want to remain loyal to our ideals (Gardner, 2006: 28).

Here was announced, embryonically, the principle Carter adopted as the new official US line towards Italy, that of 'non-interference and non-indifference'. Carter seemed to trust and rely on the DC's ability to contain the PCI's growing strength and co-opt it in the ruling process, albeit in a subsidiary role. This line was confirmed in his famous interview with *Playboy*, where he affirmed that he did not want stubborn opposition to Italian Communist leaders, because such an attitude would automatically push them towards the Soviets (Scheer, 1976).

### **Towards a different course, both in Rome and in Washington**

The Italian political stalemate following the June 1976 elections was overcome by Andreotti's 'Cabinet of abstentions', so-called because it survived numerous abstentions by different parties, including the Communists. In September, Arnaldo Forlani, the new Foreign Minister, visited Ford and repeated that the 'minority government' he represented would continue to draw a line between Christian Democrats and Communists.<sup>47</sup> Three months later, it was time for Andreotti to visit Washington and assure the outgoing President that 'the Communist party

for the first time had said that both of these institutions [NATO and the EEC] constituted objective reality for Italy'.<sup>48</sup>

In November, meanwhile, Carter's election replaced 'the Realpolitik cynicism' of the previous Republican Administrations.<sup>49</sup> The Democratic candidate, although considered an outsider early in the campaign, had defeated Ford, partly by promising a foreign policy based on the respect of moral values and human rights. Carter would only take office in January and Kissinger's influence was still evident in a memorandum of December 1976, which emphasised that further cooperation between the DC and the PCI would raise 'serious doubts' about Italy's military role within the Atlantic Alliance and would create a 'climate unfavourable to the maintenance of the US military presence' in Italy.<sup>50</sup> Discontinuity with Kissinger's approach seemed to be signalled when the Carter Administration granted entry visas to a PCI member, C.M. Santoro (who reported a climate of 'cordial indifference' from American audiences) and to the journalist, A. Jacoviello (who wrote dozens of articles after his visit in the Communist newspaper *L'Unità*).<sup>51</sup> However, despite Carter's moderate declarations during the election campaign, there was no significant change in US government dealing with the PCI as a whole. The new National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, remembers in his memoirs that he considered the drift to the left in Italy 'potentially the gravest problem we now have in Europe' (Brzezinski, 1985: 311). On 14 March, the State Department released a long memorandum, reaffirming that:

We prefer that our friends and allies be governed by political parties with strong democratic traditions, values, and practices. Naturally, we are concerned about the willingness and ability of Communist parties which do not share these traditions, values, and practices, to cooperate with us and other members of Western community on fundamental political, economic and security issues (Gardner, 2004: 423-30).

Carter, on 25 April, echoed this line, saying that he would prefer that all the governments in Europe continued 'to be democratic' and that no 'totalitarian element' became influential or dominant. Andreotti, now leading a government that was helped by the PCI's benevolent abstention (rather than outright opposition) in parliamentary votes, visited Washington and told Carter that the PCI had 'changed: there is not any more manifestation against NATO, and the Army is backed by the party' (Gardner, 2004: 139). But the US government was unconvinced. Before Andreotti's visit, Brzezinski suggested that the President publicly state that, while the United States would not interfere in Italian domestic policies, they could *not* be 'indifferent to the outcome' of political changes.<sup>53</sup> In autumn, the US analysed the Italian political alternatives: the DC was trying any means to avoid its growing dependence on Communist cooperation, but it would continue to depend on the *decisive* PCI abstention

for the duration of the legislative term. The American fear was that time and increased cooperation between the two parties would eventually make acceptable – psychologically, then institutionally – a Communist presence in Italian government.<sup>54</sup>

These fears about the Andreotti government were shared by British diplomats: a memorandum admitted that the PCI had done much work ‘to change its foreign policy line from the strident anti-NATO and anti-American one’ of a few years before, but there was ‘still a wide gulf between the world view of the PCI and that of most Western democratic parties, at least in areas where Soviet interests’ were concerned.<sup>55</sup> When, around the same time, the British Labour Party issued a paper depicting Berlinguer’s party as peaceful and independent of any external (that is, Soviet) ‘political control’, British diplomats in Rome felt the urgent necessity to rectify such a view: the PCI – they declared – was not at all ‘fully committed’ to democracy and had not yet rejected Marxism-Leninism. Segre and Napolitano were only PCI ambassadors, ‘charged with cultivating the party’s image in the West’.<sup>56</sup>

### **The watershed of 12 January 1978**

The façade of respectability showed by the PCI and Berlinguer’s request to enter ‘a broadly-based “national emergency” coalition’ achieved some results in Washington. In 1978, in fact, Napolitano finally obtained the visa that he had been refused in 1975, and could visit the ‘home of capitalism’, speak in universities like Harvard, Princeton and Yale, and lecture on political and economic issues both in public conferences and discussions (Napolitano, 2006: 160).<sup>57</sup> But the basic US policy remained unchanged. On 10 January 1978, a US document commented Andreotti’s options, in the light of a PCI threat to end its policy of abstention on crucial votes. The DC could only either dissolve Parliament and ask for fresh elections, or try to arrange an accommodation, a ‘compromise’, with the PCI which could have apocalyptic consequences, including ‘further impetus to terrorism as the only effective vehicle for protest against the government’.<sup>58</sup> A day later, at a meeting between Ambassador Gardner and members of the State Department, the CIA, the White House and the NSC, the view prevailed that the PCI had not yet evolved completely towards democracy and was still based on Leninist and Stalinist principles. For these reasons, the group considered it vital to reaffirm *open* US opposition to any government that included Communist elements.<sup>59</sup> Less than 24 hours later, the official declaration came. John Trattner, the spokesman of the State Department, was categorical in stating that Washington would not view with favour the PCI’s participation in government. The declaration echoed one Kissinger had delivered in April 1976, at a press conference in Washington: the

United States would not be indifferent to the growth of Communist parties in allied countries, and had the duty to state its political preferences.<sup>60</sup>

Remembering this blatant and intrusive statement, Andreotti described it in his memoirs as 'useless and interfering', especially in such a difficult political-parliamentary situation (Andreotti, 1989: 118; Brogi, 2011: 344-5; Clementi, 2006: 141-2). In contrast, Attilio Ruffini, the Defence Minister, viewed the statement as 'timely, helpful and a clear point-of-reference for those Christian Democratic Party leaders' who wished to resist further concessions to the PCI.<sup>61</sup> Moro, in an article written for *Il Giorno* but never published, replied by insisting that the PCI had accepted the Atlantic Alliance and that it was possible 'to reach a positive agreement on programmes' with them (Moro, 1980: 372). Actually, the previous December, the Italian Communists had signed a resolution that defined the Atlantic Alliance as 'a fundamental datum-point' of Italian foreign policy.<sup>62</sup> For Moro, an alliance between Christian Democrats and Communists appeared *inevitable*, even if it depended on their eventual transformation 'into a mildly reforming machine' (Sassoon, 1981: 229; Amyot, 1981). All things considered, the State Department declaration had a mixed effect. On the credit side, it removed any ambiguities about the US attitude, particularly the notion that the Carter Administration was softer towards Italian Communism than its predecessor had been. On the debit side, by being expressed at a critical time in Italian politics, it 'served to encourage the polarisation of opinion' at a delicate moment.<sup>63</sup> Ambassador Gardner, meeting Moro on 2 February, felt assured by the fact that the DC wanted to keep the PCI *in* the parliamentary majority, but *out* of the executive. Some time later, interviewed by *Il Tempo*, Gardner insisted that Washington had not set out its own 'Brezhnev Doctrine' on 12 January, in the sense that it did not mean to interfere in Italian domestic politics, but he added that 'we are also a sovereign country and have the right to have a preference with regard to the type of Ally we choose'.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

In that same January 1978, Andreotti tried to form a new Cabinet, in a climate dominated by the crucial question of whether or not to involve the PCI. The political impasse was dramatically overcome, in the wake of the Moro kidnapping by the Red Brigades, when Andreotti formed a DC single-party government, a Cabinet of 'national solidarity', supported by all the Italian parties, the PCI included, which experimented with a legislative coalition between Christian Democrats and Communists on a limited but essential programme, the defence of democratic institutions and the fight against terrorism (Malgeri, 2010: 145-205). With Moro's murder, an event that shocked the country (Giovagnoli, 2003), the Italian Republic rallied in its own defence, without abrogating the civil rights of its citizens and

proved to be more stable than many detractors had assumed. The 1970s, a turbulent decade, closed in 1979, when the new President of the Republic, the old Socialist leader Sandro Pertini, was forced to announce new early elections, confirming once again Italy's domestic instability.<sup>65</sup> At the polls, the PCI faced a sharp setback, by four percentage points,<sup>66</sup> so that its leadership had to reconsider its docility *vis-à-vis* the DC-led government and implement new, more confrontational policies. In 1980, Gardner remembered that, when Carter had taken office, the PCI seemed ready to seize power, making Italy an unstable and unreliable ally at best, or a non-aligned country at worse. But the Italian people did not choose that course and, by the time Carter stepped down, the threat from the PCI was past its peak.<sup>67</sup> The decade ended without the realisation of the gloomy predictions of British and American diplomats about the fatal consequences of a government led by the PCI. The Christian Democrats, notwithstanding their strong left wing, experimented with different political alliances to ferry the country to the 1980s without yielding to the temptations of a Communist alliance. They subsequently found a precious domestic ally in Bettino Craxi, a vehement anti-Communist Socialist (Di Scala, 1991; Sassoon, 1997: 258).

At the end of this analysis, it is possible to draw a number of conclusions. First, Rumor's policy, often considered the epitome of narrow-minded conservatism, eventually prevailed over Moro's vision and contributed to keeping Italy among the Western powers (Fornasier, 2012: 221-9). Second, Washington, marrying the views of the Italian *dorotei* and the hawkish Ambassadors Martin and Volpe, never trusted itself to the allures of PCI reformism or Berlinguer's 'historic compromise'. Third, Washington's attitude towards the Italian Communists did not substantially change over the years. The raucous anti-Communism of the past had been superseded by a policy of *détente*, but the US official position was little altered in the passage of Administration from Republicans to Democrats, despite Carter's softer public declarations during the election campaign and readiness to grant visas to visiting Communists. Washington's moves continued to be driven by the basic aim of keeping the Italian Communists out of government (Leonardi and Platt, 1977: 546-73). The passage from Ford to Carter did not imply a shift from 'hate to indifference'. On the contrary, it showed consistency in its basic approach because strategic choices were elaborated by the National Security Adviser and the State Department - with the help of the US Embassy in Rome - and both Gardner and Brzezinski turned out to be as anti-Communist as their predecessors, Volpe and Kissinger.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> NARA [National Archives and Records Administration, USA], Rg 59, CFPF 1967-1969, box 2235, Airgram A-1216, June 13, 1968; box 2234, Intelligence Note 385, May 23, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, box 2233, Airgram A-578, January 17, 1967 and Airgram A-647, February 3, 1967; box 2232, Intelligence Note 101, February 18, 1969; box 2234, Airgram A-163, March 14, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, box 2232, tel. 5763, September 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, box 2232, tel. 5717, September 1969.

<sup>5</sup> An example is: NA [National Archives, UK], FCO 33/635, *The PCI and the Italian government*, December 12, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> NARA, Rg 59, CFPF 1967-1969, box 2234, Airgram A-1049, April 22, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> NPL [Nixon Presidential Library], NSCF, Country Files-Europe, box 694, D. Lesh to H. Kissinger, September 4, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> NARA, Rg 59, CFPF 1967-1969, box 2235, Airgram A-883, November 26, 1969.

<sup>9</sup> NPL, NSCF, Country Files-Europe, box 694, H. Kissinger to R. Nixon, October 1, 1969.

<sup>10</sup> NARA, Rg 59, Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973, Political and Defence, box 2396, Airgram A-100, February 12, 1971.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi.

<sup>12</sup> NARA, Rg 59, CFPF 1967-1969, box 2233, Memorandum of Conversation, August 18, 1969.

<sup>13</sup> NARA, Rg 59, Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973, Political and Defence, box 2393, Airgram A-347, May 15, 1970.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, box 2393, Airgram A-31, January 20, 1971.

<sup>15</sup> NPL, NSCF, Country Files-Europe, box 695, Memorandum of A.T. Downey, December 22, 1970.

<sup>16</sup> NPL, WHCF, Subject Files, CO 72, Italy, box 42, H. Sonnenfeldt to H. Kissinger, February 11, and March 9, 1971; R. Murphy to H. Kissinger, January 27, 1971; response of Kissinger, February 12.

<sup>17</sup> NARA, Rg 59, Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973, Political and Defence, box 2394, Airgram A-200, April 4, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> ACS [Central Archives of State, Italy], A. Moro Personal Papers, b. 26, f. 576, speech of December 1, 1972.

<sup>19</sup> NPL, WHCF, Subject Files, CO 72, Italy, b. 41, J. Marchi to R. Nixon, August 8, 1972, and reply, September 13.

<sup>20</sup> NPL, NSCF, Country Files-Europe, box 694, T.L. Eliot to H. Kissinger, October 30, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> D.G.D.U.S. [United States Declassified Government Documents], tel. 9848, July 1974, vol. 31, doc. 1996. SEN [Historic Archive of the Italian Senate], A. Fanfani Personal Papers, b. 176, f. 1.25.

<sup>22</sup> NPL, NSCF, Country Files-Europe, box 696, tel. 5924 of Volpe, May 31, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> NARA, Airgram A-100, cit.

<sup>24</sup> FPL [Ford Presidential Library], Memoranda of Conversations, b. 6, September 25, 1974.



<sup>25</sup> NARA, Rg 59, Office of the Secretary of State. Transcripts of Secretary of State H. Kissinger's staff meetings, 1973-1977, box 7 (April 18 - July 7, 1975), meeting of April 23, 1975.

<sup>26</sup> FPL, N.S.A., Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, b. 9, tel. 5067, August 19, 1975. APCI [Italian Communist Party Archive], mf. 206, p. 328, *L'Unità*, May 16, 1975.

<sup>27</sup> ACS, A. Moro, b. 123, Visit in Italy of the President G. Ford, June 3, 1975.

<sup>28</sup> FPL, Memoranda of Conversations, b. 12, June 3, 1975.

<sup>29</sup> ASOC [Italian Socialist Party Archive], R. Lombardi Personal Papers, "Writings, speeches, interviews", b. 3, f. year 1975, d. 10: Interview with Lombardi for *Panorama*, September 21, 1975.

<sup>30</sup> J. Volpe Personal Papers, Northeastern University, b. 67, f. 48.

<sup>31</sup> APCI, mf. 064, p. 691-on.

<sup>32</sup> FPL, Memoranda of Conversations, b. 15, September 23, 1975.

<sup>33</sup> FPL, L.W. Seidman Files, b. 134, Annex dated March 18, 1976.

<sup>34</sup> D.G.D.U.S., *Italy: The Electoral Outlook*, May 9, 1976, in vol. 29, doc. 21. NARA, Rg 273, Records of the National Security Council, NSSM [National Security Study Memorandum], box 16, f. 242, *US Policy Toward Italy*, May 4, 1976.

<sup>35</sup> Ambassadors Clare Boothe Luce, in the early 1950s, had become the epitome of US intransigency against Italian Communism: see, for instance, a letter sent to General A.M. Gruentrop, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Europe, dated December 11, 1953, in EPL [Eisenhower Presidential Library], White House Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series-Briefing Notes Subseries, b. 11.

<sup>36</sup> D.G.D.U.S., *Intelligence Memorandum. Italy: The Political-Economic Scene in Early 1976*, in vol. 16, doc. 2469.

<sup>37</sup> NA, FCO 33/3342, *The Holy See and Italian politics*, March 30, 1976; *The Vatican and the Italian elections*, June 9, 1976.

<sup>38</sup> NA, FCO 33/3342, *The Holy See and Italian politics*, January 29, and May 28, 1976; FCO 33/2942, *The Italian general election*, 1976, July 9, 1976.

<sup>39</sup> D.G.D.U.S., Memorandum for the President, June 24, 1976, in vol. 29, doc. 22. NA, FCO 33/3341, *Holy See: Annual Review for 1975*, January 5, 1976, p. 2; FCO 33/3331, *Holy See: Annual Review for 1976*, January 31, 1977, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> FPL, Council of Economic Advisers - A. Greenspan Files, b. 39, *Puerto Rico Summit Overview*, June 25, 1976.

<sup>41</sup> NA, PREM 16/978, tel. GPS 560, July 20, 1976; tel. GPS 850, *Chancellor Schmidt's Statements on Italy*, July 19, 1976. The British Foreign Office issued a softer statement, to calm the situation, writing that 'if there were a request for help from the Italian Government, it could be a complicating factor if there were Communist participation in the Government': NA, PREM 16/978, *Italy*, Secret Dispatch from the Private Secretary (P.R.H. Wright), July 19, 1976.

<sup>42</sup> APCI, mf. 281, p. 486-on, Documents-USIS, March 12, 1976: Kissinger's Conference at the World Affairs Council, Boston.

<sup>43</sup> APCI, mf. 281, p. 500-on, Documents-USIS, April 14, 1976, Meeting of the US Ambassadors to Western Europe, London, December 1975.

<sup>44</sup> NA, FCO 33/2945, *Italy, the Communists and NATO*, February 26, 1976; FCO 33/2949, *Statements on Italy*, June 7, 1976; FCO 33/2947, *Secretary of State's meeting with dr. Kissinger*, April 24, 1976.

<sup>45</sup> NA, FCO 33/2946, *Italy, the Communists, and NATO*, Ministry of Defence, March 25, 1976.

<sup>46</sup> NA, PREM 16/978, *Italian General Elections*, June 18, 1976.

<sup>47</sup> FPL, Memoranda of Conversations, b. 21, September 29, 1976.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, b. 21, December 6, 1976.

<sup>49</sup> APCI, mf. 228, p. 476-on, C.M. Santoro to E. Berlinguer, December 9, 1976; 310, 1182, *L'Unità*, November 15, 1977.

<sup>50</sup> FPL, N.S.A., Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, b. 8, *Implications of the Communist/Christian Democratic Accommodation in Italy*, December 2, 1976.

<sup>51</sup> APCI, mf. 310, p. 1183, *L'Unità*, November 19, 1977.

<sup>52</sup> Carter Presidential Library [CPL], RAC [Remote Archives Capture] project number NCL-133-121-5-24-8, Tel. January 27, 1977.

<sup>53</sup> CPL, RAC project number NCL-5-7-7-9-3, Memorandum from Z. Brzezinski to J. Carter, July 23, 1977, p. 3. Brzezinski was well informed on Italian affairs: that same summer, Robert Hunt, a US official, after a visit to Italy and France to study the Communists' outlook, had reported to him that the PCI was already, generally speaking, 'a part of the government': CPL, RAC project number NCL-6-38-7-1-6, Memorandum from R. Hunt to Z. Brzezinski, July 5, 1977, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> A confirmation of this US attitude comes from numerous British dispatches sent to the UK Foreign Office during the same period: see, among others, NA, FCO 33/3563, disp. PO/Y 20615, October 11, 1978.

<sup>55</sup> NA, FCO 33/2951, *PCI foreign policy*, September 21, 1976.

<sup>56</sup> NA, FCO 33/3205, dispatches of February 11, April 7 and May 31, 1977.

<sup>57</sup> APCI, mf. 322, p. 2145-on, G. Napolitano to the PCI Secretariat, March 18, 1978; *L'Unità*, April 5 and 12, 1978.

<sup>58</sup> CPL, RAC project number NCL-SAFE 17-17B-7-35-4-5, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Analysis dated January 10, 1978.

<sup>59</sup> CPL, RAC project number NCL-15-23-1-3-6, Presidential Review Committee Meeting, January 11, 1978.

<sup>60</sup> APCI, mf. 281, p. 505-on, Documents-USIS, April 15, 1976.

<sup>61</sup> CPL, RAC project number NCL-23-24-3-36-8.

<sup>62</sup> NA, FCO 33/3565, *Italy: Annual Review for 1977*, Dipl. Rep. 13/78, January 3, 1978.

<sup>63</sup> NA, FCO 33/3568, *The Italian Political Crisis*, Dipl. Rep. 145/78, March 23, 1978.

<sup>64</sup> R. Gardner interviewed by *Il Tempo*, May 5, 1979, reported in NA, FCO 33/4045. He expressed similar views in a telegram dated March 2, 1978: CPL, RAC project number NCL-16-23-3-4-2.

<sup>65</sup> On Pertini, CPL, RAC project number 16-123-7-4-7, Tel. from R. Gardner to J. Carter, June 16, 1980; 128-13-10-5-9, Memorandum from C. Vance to J. Carter, July 8, 1978; CPL, Staff Offices - Press Office, b. 33, "biography of S. Pertini".

<sup>66</sup> NA, FCO 33/4047, Dispatch April 9, 1979.

<sup>67</sup> CPL, RAC project number NCL-16-123-7-4-7, Tel. from R. Gardner to J. Carter, June 16, 1980.

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