

# Italy-US Relations since the End of the Cold War: Prestige, Peace, and the Transatlantic Balance

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*Abstract: Since the end of the Cold War the US has repeatedly engaged its military abroad and has frequently asked Italy and other allies for military support. Governments of the center-right and center-left have responded favorably to American requests on most occasions because of a bipartisan consensus that Italy should enhance its international prestige, maintain its image as a force for peace, and preserve strong ties to the US and European partners. The article provides a survey of relevant cases from the 1990 Persian Gulf War to the 2003 Iraq War.*

Keywords: Italian foreign policy, Italy-US relations, prestige, continuity, peace, intervention.

## Introduction

In 1995 Sergio Romano wrote that with the end of the Cold War “[t]he moment has begun in which the United States’ path and Italy’s are destined to diverge” (Romano, 1995: xi). While Romano – Italy’s leading commentator on foreign affairs – was justified in his expectation at the time, it turns out that he was quite mistaken. Almost two decades after the end of the Cold War it is clear that Italy’s relationship with the United States is stronger than ever. Italy’s relationship with the United States has flourished because of the overlap between American military activism and a new Italian consensus on foreign policy goals consistent with support for American action.

With the end of the Cold War, the United States has increasingly asked more of its allies: in the Clinton era this meant allowing the use of bases and contributing troops or planes to cases of humanitarian intervention, whereas in the Bush era this meant contributions to military action against threats from terrorism and WMD. Italy has been more willing and able to respond to these requests as a post-Cold War bipartisan consensus has emerged that Italy should engage in action to enhance its

prestige, promote peace (loosely defined), and strengthen its relationship with the US without fundamentally weakening its ties to Europe. Italy's post-First Republic political system has been characterized by increasing bipolarity and polarization. Alternation between centre-left and centre-right governing coalitions has led to a scholarly debate over whether continuity or change best characterizes Italy's foreign policy. This chapter argues that while the rhetoric on Italy's foreign policy has varied from left to right, there has been striking policy continuity since the end of the Cold War because of the consensus on prestige, peace and the transatlantic balance.

I begin the chapter by elaborating on the argument that the US has recently asked much from its allies since the end of the Cold War. Next, I discuss the literature on continuity and consensus in Italian foreign policy and locate this chapter in that debate. That accomplished, I outline the general case that an Italian consensus exists on prestige, peace, and the transatlantic balance, seeking to demonstrate the logic and provide some general evidence to support the claims. The core of the chapter consists of a case-by-case outline of US requests for military support and Italian responses, which I divide into a "humanitarian intervention" era and a "Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)" era.

### **The Argument: Prestige, Peace, and the Transatlantic Balance**

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to significant changes in the United States' use of force. During the Cold War the United States' use of force was structured by competition with the Soviet Union and Soviet military might often led Washington to not act where it otherwise might have. With the collapse of the Soviet Union (officially December 1991) the international system shifted from being bipolar to being unipolar. The United States was suddenly able to engage its military abroad with little or no opposition from rivals of any significance. In 1992 US military spending totalled \$424 billion whereas the second largest spender, the United Kingdom spent only \$58 billion and Russia spent only \$42 billion (figures adjusted to the value of 2005 dollars).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the United States believed that with its position of great power came the responsibility to lead in the provision of international order. Finally, while during the Cold War United Nations Security Council was largely frozen by the adversarial relationship between the US and USSR, the post-Cold War era held the promise of UN Security Council authorization for American-led military intervention. The United States used force frequently during the George H.W. Bush and William (Bill) Clinton administrations: the most high profile cases were a war against Iraq in 1991 and humanitarian interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo.<sup>2</sup> After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and

Washington the United States' position of primacy was combined with a perception of intense threat from Islamic radicalism. During the George W. Bush administration the United States continued to engage its military abroad but in Afghanistan and Iraq it focused on perceived threats to American security (Woodward, 2002; 2004).

As the United States engaged its military abroad, it asked allies – especially its leading European allies – for assistance. American requests for active support for military intervention entailed a significant departure from the past. During the Cold War the United States asked allies mainly to provide bases for the stationing of American troops, planes, ships, and missiles to fulfil their obligations through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>3</sup> Other than that, the US mostly asked for political support in disputes with the Soviets. In the Korean and Vietnam wars the US asked allies for military support, but these cases serve as exceptions that demonstrate the rule. In the post-Cold War world the United States has asked allies for active support for its military intervention. US requests vary from case to case but they include: troops to fight or keep the peace, planes, ships, bases, diplomatic support, and financial contributions. While the US has continued to maintain a position of primacy throughout the post-Cold War period, it asks allies for support to reduce costs that are controversial domestically (especially for the cases of humanitarian intervention) or to enhance domestic support and international legitimacy.

In the post-Cold War era Italy has joined Britain, France, and Germany as one of the leading targets of American requests for military support. Italy's airbases have been of great use to the US in all significant cases of intervention (except for those within the Western Hemisphere) but Washington has also asked Rome for troops, planes, ships, money and diplomatic support. Italy has frequently responded favourably to American requests.<sup>4</sup> In 1990 Gianni De Michelis demanded that Italy be included in German reunification talks and West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher responded "You're not in the game" (Baker, 1995: 195). A decade and a half later Italy has become an active and valued international player. In March 2006 Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was given the distinct honour of addressing a joint session of the US Congress.<sup>5</sup> In February 2007 Italian General Claudio Graziano took command of the 15,000 troop UNIFIL II mission in Lebanon (Marta et al., 2008). In the post-Cold War world Italy is definitely in the game.<sup>6</sup>

Why has Italy been so willing to provide military support in response to American requests? Changes in Italy's domestic political environment that might have provided barriers to Italian contributions have been offset by a bipartisan consensus on Italian foreign policy that has allowed Italian governments to make and maintain difficult commitments in the post-Cold War period. In the mid 1990s the Italian political party system changed

significantly.<sup>7</sup> The end of the Cold War led the Italian Communist Party to transform itself into the centrist Democrats of the Left and a smaller Refounded Communist party. Meanwhile, investigations and trials into corruption in the Christian Democratic and Socialist parties led them to disintegrate. Then, months before the 1994 parliamentary elections media magnate Silvio Berlusconi entered the Italian political game by founding Forza Italia on the centre-right. These changes in the cast of parties concomitant with a change in Italy's electoral system led to the emergence from 1994 of a bipolar political system, with centre-right and centre-left coalitions vying for power and alternating in government. Bipolarity has also meant polarization as the coalition in opposition has engaged in fierce criticism of the governing coalition. Finally, while the average life of government is longer than during the First Republic, Italy has not reached the stability of the British, French, or German systems.<sup>8</sup> At first glance, these internal changes might lead an observer to expect that Italy would have difficulty making and keeping difficult commitments. In a bipolar, alternating political system we might expect one coalition to make a difficult commitment and the opposing coalition to criticize it and, when elected, to reverse it.

The literature on contemporary Italian foreign policy contains an important debate on whether alternation between centre-right and centre-left coalitions has meant basic policy continuity or fundamental change. Osvaldo Croci has marshalled extensive evidence to support the view that the second Berlusconi government's (2001-06) and the second Prodi government's (2006-08) foreign policies are better characterized by continuity than change.<sup>9</sup> Other scholars make the case that alternation in government has meant significant change. Maurizio Carbone argues that the centre-right favours the US and bilateral dealings, whereas the centre-left favours Europe and multilateralism (Carbone, 2007).<sup>10</sup> Filippo Andreatta emphasizes change with regard to Europe, characterizing the Second Berlusconi government's foreign policy as one "in which bilateral relations with the Bush Administration took precedence over multilateral relations in Europe" (Andreatta, 2008). Leopoldo Nuti has argued for a mixed approach – he provides much evidence of a post-WWII pro-American slant in Italy's foreign policy that has continued into the post-Cold War period. Nuti also notes, however, that the Second Berlusconi government's "downgrading of the European pillar of Italian foreign policy represents a more conspicuous shift from times past" (Nuti, 2005: 195). Finally, Elisabetta Brighi has argued that while Berlusconi's personality has added some novel elements, his government's foreign policy was traditional and Romano Prodi's foreign policy (in his second government) entailed far less change than many believed. This summary of the literature – not meant to be exhaustive – demonstrates that there is debate in the

literature on whether continuity or change best characterizes Italy's post-First Republic foreign policy (Brighi, 2006, 2007).

I believe the evidence demonstrates that policy continuity- based on a consensus on prestige, peace, and the transatlantic balance – best characterizes post-Cold War Italy-US relations. To be clear: I am not attempting to offer definitive proof for the continuity school in all aspects of contemporary Italian foreign policy. Scholars arguing in favour of the change view bring important features of contemporary Italian foreign policy to light. What contribution, then, does this chapter attempt to make to the continuity/change debate? First, this chapter provides evidence to support Osvaldo Croci's observation that while the left and right have adopted similar foreign policies they have used different and politicized rhetoric in communicating about foreign policy (Croci, 2008: 301).<sup>11</sup> Second, while I am not the first to point to the importance of prestige and Italy's self-image as a force for peace, I think they have been underrepresented in the continuity/change debate. This chapter suggests that a bipartisan consensus on prestige and peace is at the heart of much of the policy continuity scholars have documented. Having reviewed the literature, we can now consider the chapter's core argument.

Over the past fifteen years Italy's governments have been able to make and keep difficult military commitments because of a bipartisan consensus on the core elements of Italy's foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> First, major figures on the left and right agree on the importance of maintaining and where possible building on Italy's prestige (i.e., the recognition of a country's power by its peers) in the international arena.<sup>13</sup> In recent interviews in Rome, those across the political spectrum agreed that it is important for Italy to preserve and even try to enhance its prestige in the international arena.<sup>14</sup> I heard different reasons why prestige is important – some stressed that with prestige Italy would have its voice heard whereas others were motivated more by nationalism. While the pursuit of prestige has roots in the history of Italian foreign policy, the contemporary consensus is striking.<sup>15</sup> In the post-First Republic political system the consensus on the importance of prestige is so strong that leaders of the left and right compete on which coalition has been responsible for more gains in Italian prestige. Massimo D'Alema has suggested that his government's actions led to a transformation of Italy's international image culminating in Italy's recent command of the UN force in Lebanon (*Il Riformista*, 24 March 2009). In the period preceding the 2006 parliamentary elections Berlusconi said no member of the centre-left opposition was at the level to meet with global leaders, noting "[t]hanks to me Italy is no longer the 'little Italy' (*Italietta*) that it was before" (*Corriere della Sera*, 30 August 2005).

Second, the left and right share the view that Italy is and should be a force for peace in the world.<sup>16</sup> The self-image of Italy as a force for peace

does not entail full-blown pacifism but rather that Italy should use its military in the service of peace. This view dates to the repudiation of the Fascist expansionism and is most clearly manifest in Article 11 of the Italian constitution in which Italy “repudiates war as an instrument to offend the liberty of other peoples and as a means to resolve international conflicts”. In practice, most interpret Art. 11 to mean that Italy may only commit its military abroad when explicitly authorized by the UN Security Council (although some suggest NATO authorization may suffice).<sup>17</sup> The impact of the culture of peace on Italian foreign and security policy is more subtle than it might seem, however. On the one hand, the culture of peace helps us make sense of Italy’s place as a leading contributor to UN peace operations. On the other hand, Italian governments – of left and right – also seem capable of using peace rhetoric to justify many situations that objectively do not seem to fit with the logic.

Third, there is a post-First Republic consensus across the centre-left and centre-right that Italy should maintain a balance between “the two traditional pillars of Italian foreign policy”: excellent relations with the United States and a firm anchor in Europe (Croci 2005; 62).<sup>18</sup> Italy has been a loyal ally of the United States since World War II. During the Cold War the Christian Democrat led governments favoured the best possible relations with Washington (and Europe), whereas the Italian Communist Party was much more critical of the US. Since the end of the Cold War, American primacy has translated into a bipartisan consensus on the importance of Italy’s relationship with Washington. In interviews conducted in Rome from November 2008 through April 2009 I heard from high level officials on the left and right that Italy can get more – even in Europe – from its relationship with the US. At the same time, greater European integration in recent decades and Italy’s involvement in it means that Italy must remain firmly anchored in Europe. To be sure, the right has had a tendency to lean more toward the US and the left has had more of a tendency to lean toward Europe. The consensus means, however, that there are significant limits on how far a coalition can lean *away* from the “pillar” they are more sceptical of. The centre-right coalition is certainly pro-American but it has also completely avoided even the threat of a fundamental break with the EU – for example, Berlusconi’s government unanimously ratified the Lisbon treaty in August 2008 (*Corriere della Sera*, 1 August 2008). While Romano Prodi’s second government was clearly pro-Europe, they took care to preserve relations with the George W. Bush administration, including maintaining Italy’s unpopular contribution to Afghanistan. As one senior diplomat told me, the centre-left/centre-right difference on the US and Europe is only one of “nuance” (*sfumature*).

How has Italy’s bipartisan consensus on prestige, peace, and the transatlantic balance translated into support for American-led military operations? <sup>19</sup> Italian consensus on the importance of increasing or

maintaining prestige has led Italy to contribute troops to American-led missions because in the post-Cold War world, prestige for countries like Italy is measured by whether and how much the country contributes to these high profile missions.<sup>20</sup> Italy's self-image as a force for peace helps us make sense of the country's robust contributions for US-led peace operations even when its national interest was not implicated. Italy's peace image has not always kept it from participating in US-led wars but the peace image provides an explanation for the exact nature of the contributions. Finally, Italian governments have provided support for the US to maintain and strengthen their relationship with Washington but have also almost always tried to avoid rifts with their European counterparts.

A critic might ask why I have not included national interest as an element of the post-Cold War bipartisan consensus. First, many believe prestige and the transatlantic balance are in Italy's fundamental national interest—if so, I indirectly include national interest in the analysis. With more prestige for Italy its voice is more likely to be heard and thus it is more able to pursue its interests. Italy's relationship with the US serves its interest through defence cooperation and influence with the world's only superpower whereas its relationship with Europe is in Italy's supreme economic interest. Second, national interest in the target of intervention does not provide an effective explanation of Italian government decisions to provide military support for the US-led operations since the end of the Cold War. In some cases one would be hard pressed to make a case for Italian interest in the target (e.g., Iraq 2003). In cases where one could make the case that the target was of national interest, Italy could have (consistent with the national interest logic) taken a free-ride off American and allied intervention and obtained the benefit to national interest without contributing. A focus on prestige, peace, and the transatlantic balance allows us to explain Italian contributions where a focus on national interest in the target would lead us to expect free-riding.

#### **Narrative: Era of (mostly) Humanitarian Intervention**

Saddam Hussein chose the chaotic moment of fall 1990 to invade Iraq's small, oil-rich neighbour, Kuwait. The United States government, headed by George H. W. Bush, led an international coalition to forcibly remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait in January 1991. The coalition sought to uphold international norms against aggression, preserve the regional balance of power, and to guarantee supply of an important raw material (Freedman and Karsh, 1993). The end of US/Soviet tensions meant that the US-led coalition could act with the explicit authorization of the UN Security Council and American primacy meant that the US could act without fear that any state could check it. Nonetheless, the Bush administration sought

and achieved support from a broad coalition of nations (Bennett et al. 1997). Italy's government, headed by Christian Democrat Giulio Andreotti, contributed a naval group and Tornado fighter bombers (which engaged in 32 bombing missions) in the face of internal opposition from the Catholic Church and pacifists (Ilari, 1994; Mammarella and Cacace, 2006).<sup>21</sup>

Italy's limited contribution to the Persian Gulf War made perfect sense. On the one hand, Italy's pacifist identity did not mesh well with the fighting of even a legitimate war. The Andreotti government almost certainly chose not to contribute ground troops to the Persian Gulf War because doing so would have been too controversial domestically, given Italy's peace image. Andreotti also continued to support the Soviet peace plan after all other Western leaders had recognized it was inadequate (Guazzone, 1991: 72). The Pope and the Italian communist party opposed the war and Italy's participation in it along with 62% of the general public (Guazzone, 1991: 71, 72-73). Yet, Italy did provide a military contribution to a war, even though the government insisted it was an "international policing operation" consistent with Article 11 (Guazzone, 1991: 73-74). Of course it was obvious at the time that Italy's contribution would not be necessary for the success of the US-led coalition, so the upholding of international law did not require an Italian contribution.<sup>22</sup> Italy could not maintain its prestige and its relationship with the US, however, unless it sent some of its armed forces. Given the domestic resistance to war, however, the Andreotti government had to de-emphasize its pro-American side and emphasize the more domestically popular European coordination efforts in the months prior to the war (Guazzone, 1991: 58). Finally, while Andreotti and Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis almost certainly decided on military contribution because not doing so would have been embarrassing in prestige terms, they had been working to develop greater European coordination on foreign and security policy as a means to the "enhancement of Italy's national profile" (Guazzone, 1991: 72).

In the summer and fall of 1992 Somalia was struck by a famine exacerbated by a violent internal struggle between warring factions. As the escalating violence kept the UN aid mission (UNOSOM) from delivering food and supplies, in early December 1992 the United States led a UN authorized military force (UNITAF) to provide security in Somalia, thus facilitating the UN's aid mission (Hirsch and Oakley, 1995). Italy contributed 3,500 troops to UNITAF, referred to as "Operation Ibis". Because of the violent and chaotic environment, this was one of the first times members of the Italian army were killed in action since the end of the Second World War (Ilari, 1994: 206, 208).

Italy's prestige required that it make a substantial contribution to UNITAF. Non-contribution would have been conspicuous given its historical role and post-colonial ties with Somalia (Loi, 2004: 26; *Corriere della Sera*, 2 December 1992). As Osvaldo Croci has argued, Italy's previous

experience with Somalia provides an explanation for the “need to be there” (*presenzialismo*), which is otherwise reductionist (Croci, 1995: 201-2). Some also argued that in the post Cold War world participation in peace operations would determine who the players were in international politics (*Corriere della Sera*, 7 December 1992). An Italian contribution also fit well with Italy’s image of itself as a force for peace. UNITAF was to provide peace and reduce the human suffering in Somalia that had come to dominate Italian television screens. UNITAF was also the first test case of new UN ideas about peace operations symbolized by Secretary General Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* (Loi, 2004: 25). Moreover, the Secretary General and other respected international officials publicly advocated a military mission to provide stability (*Corriere della Sera*, 1 December 1992). Even Pope John Paul II spoke in favor of a military mission to Somalia (*Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 1992). In fact, as late as September 1993 59% of Italians were in favour of the intervention in Somalia (Ilari, 1994: 212).<sup>23</sup> Finally, Italy’s peace image probably made its government and public more receptive to the criticisms that UNOSOM II (the successor to UNITAF) was overly focused on the use of force and insufficiently focused on dialogue.<sup>24</sup>

Timing seems to indicate that Italy’s relationship with the US was an important factor in this case. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1992 the *Corriere della Sera* reported the previous day’s request from the White House to the Italian government for a contribution and the Amato government’s immediate response that it would provide Italian troops for the mission (*Corriere della Sera*, 29 November 1992). Moreover, when the US’ special envoy to Somalia Robert Oakley expressed the view that Italy’s image in Somalia made it less than ideal for them to contribute to UNITAF, the Italian government made public the Bush administration’s affirmation that it fully favoured Italian participation (*Corriere della Sera*, 10 December 1992). Officials in Rome wanted to confirm that their relationship with Washington would only improve with Italy’s contribution to Somalia.<sup>25</sup>

When Yugoslavia’s disintegration led to ethnic cleansing in and around Bosnia and Herzegovina starting in the early 1990s the initial US response was to let its European allies push the parties toward peace (Herring, 2008: 924, 929-30). By 1995 the violence finally became intolerable, however, and on 29 August the US and its NATO allies began a campaign of air-strikes against the Bosnian Serb military (Operation Deliberate Force), which combined with a successful Muslim-Croat military offensive to force the Bosnian Serbs to agree to a negotiated settlement at the US airbase at Dayton, Ohio in November 1995. The US and its NATO allies then contributed to a UN authorized peace-keeping operation (IFOR). Italy allowed the use of its bases for the air-strikes and its planes made a modest contribution to Operation Deliberate Force, engaging in thirty-five sorties

(Bellucci, 1997: 206).<sup>26</sup> The Italian government contributed a brigade to IFOR as it began its work in December 1995.<sup>27</sup>

Italy's prestige required it to contribute to a peace mission so close to its borders. Specifically, Italy sought to be included in the Contact Group of leading countries on the Balkans (Bellucci, 1997). Italy's contributions to NATO's air operations against the Bosnian Serbs and IFOR can be seen as an attempt to prove to its allies that it deserved to be included in the Contact Group. As an article in the *Corriere della Sera* concluded after citing the financial cost of Italy's contribution to Deliberate Force: "[i]f there are not human costs, it is a reasonable price for Italy's entry into the Contact Group that should have influence over the happenings of our turbulent neighbours on the other side of the Adriatic" (*Corriere della Sera*, 30 August 1995).

Italy's self image as a force of peace seems to explain the government's reluctance to contribute to ODF as it feared public punishment for engaging in actions so close to war (Bellucci, 1997:202). Thus, Italy's planes only began to engage in strikes on 7 September and they only accounted for roughly one percent of all sorties (*Corriere della Sera*, 8 September 1995). In fact, in December 1994 and June 1994 clear majorities of the Italian public supported their military's participation in "a NATO contingent designed to end the conflict in Bosnia".<sup>28</sup> Participation in IFOR also resonated well with Italy's peace image: with 69% support it was the most popular use of the Italian military from 1984-2001 (Battistelli, 2004: 147). Finally, if Rome wanted to preserve its relationship with the Washington it had to share the burden of a mission that was not without controversy in the United States. It seemed, at first, as if Italy's desire for prestige had trumped its desire for the best possible relations with the United States. On 12 September the *Corriere della Sera* reported that Rome had denied an American request to allow its stealth bombers access to Italy's airbase at Aviano (*Corriere della Sera*, 12 September 1995). The paper reported that the Italian government was refusing access to the stealth bombers in an effort to gain admission in the Contact Group (*Corriere della Sera*, 13 September 1995). Within four days, however, it emerged that American stealth bombers had in fact been using Aviano, no doubt with the knowledge and consent of the Italian government (*Corriere della Sera*, 17 September 1995).

On 24 March 1999 NATO initiated the first war in its fifty-year history (Daalder and O'Hanlon, 2000). When Serb president Slobodan Milosevic refused to sign the peace agreement negotiated a month earlier at Rambouillet, France, the alliance's leaders felt that they had no choice but to follow through on their threat to engage in air-strikes to force the Serbs to allow an internationally monitored autonomous polity for the Kosovar Albanians. Italy provided the use of its air bases, which were crucial to the success of Operation Allied Force, and made the third-largest contribution

of aircraft (after the US and France) with forty-nine aircraft (Peters et al., 2001: 19, 21). Massimo D'Alema's centre-left government took the decision to provide Italian planes knowing that they had the bipartisan support of the centre-right opposition, which countered the critical stance of the far left (including parties within the governing coalition). D'Alema knew that in making a significant contribution to Operation Allied Force, he would make the leading NATO countries take notice of what Italy could do. D'Alema referred explicitly to Italy's prestige in statements about the war prior to his decision and after it, arguing that because Kosovo was "*alle porte di casa nostra*" (the figurative equivalent is "in our backyard") Italy had to contribute or its prestige would suffer (*Corriere della Sera*, 7 February 1999; D'Alema, 1999: 21-22).

Contributing to the Kosovo war was also essential for the transatlantic balance as it not only demonstrated Italy's value to Washington but the success of the war was critical to preserving NATO as the central link tying the US to Europe. There was also the specific problem that Massimo D'Alema was Italy's first ex-communist Prime Minister and many expected him to face scepticism as to his loyalty to the US and NATO (Mammarella and Cacace, 2006: 265-66). The transatlantic balance was so important that the D'Alema government made the costly decision to commit its planes despite disputes with the US over the Abdullah Ocalan case, US and UK airstrikes against Iraq in December 1998, and the Cermis ski lift incident (Mammarella and Cacace, 2006: 265; Greco, 2000). Analyst Roberto Menotti said of D'Alema's decision to provide planes to Operation Allied Force: "In sum, Italy's primary interest was encompassed in the goal of cultivating traditional links with the United States" (Menotti, 2000: 357).<sup>29</sup>

Italy's contribution to Operation Allied Force demonstrates the complex impact of its self image as a force for peace. On the one hand, Italy clearly waged war, even electing to engage in strikes (Germany in contrast provided planes but they did not engage in strikes) (Peters et al., 2001: 30). On the other hand, the D'Alema government said that Italy was only engaging in "integrated defence" which meant in practice that its planes were not allowed to bomb Serb cities. D'Alema also pressed repeatedly for a negotiated solution to the crisis and his foreign minister, Lamberto Dini, criticized NATO when its bombs took civilian lives.<sup>30</sup>

### **The GWOT Era**

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the United States continued to use its military abroad but the motive changed. In the era of what U.S. President George W. Bush labelled the "Global War on Terror" US military action was aimed at addressing the intense sense of insecurity

Americans felt subsequent to the terrorist attacks rather than humanitarian crises as had been the case in the previous administration.

As Afghanistan's governing Taliban regime was widely known to have hosted Al-Qaeda's leadership and much of its rank and file, US military action against it would have only been avoided by a rapid and unconditional surrender. On 7 October 2001, shortly after the Taliban leader Mullah Omar refused to capitulate, the United States and United Kingdom launched a combined air and Special Forces attack, coordinated with Afghan opposition elements termed Operation Enduring Freedom (Woodward, 2002; Rashid, 2008). By December 2001, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces had ceded control of much of Afghanistan to the US and its allies and the UN Security Council had endorsed the creation of an International Security and Assistance Force to provide security to Kabul and the surrounding area. On 7 November after a debate in Italy's parliament the Italian military announced that it was ready to deploy ships and planes for Enduring Freedom and that it would provide troops for a post-Taliban stabilization mission (*Corriere della Sera*, 9 November 2001). Italian ships and planes duly participated in OEF and in January 2002 Italy's first contribution to ISAF arrived in Afghanistan (*Corriere della Sera*, 21 January 2001; Bensahel, 2003). Silvio Berlusconi's center-right government made the decision to provide an Italian military contribution to OEF and ISAF with the support of the centre-left (only the far left opposed).<sup>31</sup> The proof of the bipartisan nature of Italy's Afghanistan policy came after Romano Prodi's centre-left coalition was elected to office in 2006. Despite intense criticism from the far-left and a number of very close votes to renew the mission (which many thought would lead to the government's fall), the Prodi government maintained Italy's contribution to ISAF (Davidson, 2006).

A desire to increase Italy's prestige seems to have been a significant factor in the Berlusconi government's decision to provide a military contribution to OEF and ISAF. The international community broadly supported the action against the Taliban and the post-Taliban stabilization efforts, so Italy could only gain by contributing. Moreover, because the US began OEF with only British support, Italy would distinguish itself by joining a small, elite group of countries at the top of the international power hierarchy. As Franco Venturini wrote in mid-October 2001 in advocating an Italian contribution to OEF, "What we need to understand, like it or not, is that armed conflict always establishes new hierarchies of power and influence" (*Corriere della Sera*, 15 October 2001). The Berlusconi government was widely regarded as being particularly pro-American, sharing the Bush administration's post-9/11 worldview (Frattoni, 2004). Moreover, the negative European reaction against Berlusconi and his centre-right government following the 2001 election meant that he would lean more toward the US and away from Europe (Romano, 2003: 112).<sup>32</sup>

Thus, it made sense for Italy to offer its support at such a critical moment for such a critical ally. As Giuseppe Mammarella and Paolo Cacace wrote in a recent survey of Italian foreign policy “For his part, Silvio Berlusconi – victor of the May 2001 elections – did not have any difficulty reinforcing ties of friendship and solidarity with an America struck by the terrorist challenge” (Mammarella and Cacace, 2006: 270-271).

The Berlusconi government clearly was capable of putting Italy’s peace image to the side in contributing to OEF (which was undoubtedly a war). The peace image still provides an important dimension to this story, however. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September Berlusconi told the Chamber of Deputies “Our country has immediately placed itself alongside our American ally and the President of the United States.” In the same speech he went on to say that the US should not be left alone in responding and that Italy was in the lead group of countries responding.<sup>33</sup> Just a month later Berlusconi announced on the eve of a trip to the US that he would offer Italian support for US efforts in Afghanistan but that he “hoped and believed” that the US would not ask Italy for ground troops (*Corriere della Sera*, 12 October 2001). In November Defence Minister Antonio Martino began to specify that Italian ground troops would be introduced to Afghanistan only in a peacekeeping context.<sup>34</sup> Berlusconi and Martino’s reluctance on ground troops clashes with their general pro-US stance and it was not the best way to maximize Italy’s prestige. It seems likely that they were restrained by a concern that the Italian public – steeped in Italy’s peace image – would not support Italian ground troops engaged in war fighting, no matter how just the cause. It seems that subsequent Italian experience in Afghanistan, which involved “making” peace more than “keeping” it, proved their restraint was justified. By summer 2006, 60% of respondents to a *Corriere della Sera* poll favoured the withdrawal of Italians from Afghanistan (*Corriere della Sera*, 18 July 2006).

The Bush administration’s leading stated logic for the 2003 Iraq War was its belief that the Iraqi government possessed weapons of mass destruction that it might use against the US or its allies and interests or that it might share with Islamic terrorist groups who could use the weapons against the US (see Woodward, 2004). Administration officials sought to make the “coalition of the willing” as large as possible, though they made clear that they were capable of fighting the war alone and that they were not willing to compromise on the fundamentals in exchange for allied support (Gordon and Shapiro, 2004). As such, while the US did not publicly request military support from Italy, interviews with policymakers and analysts in Rome confirm that they believed Washington would have appreciated a symbolic contribution of aircraft and ships analogous to the one Italy contributed to the Persian Gulf War. Silvio Berlusconi’s government provided diplomatic support for the US in the period

preceding the war but chose not to provide a military contribution prior to the fall of Baghdad.<sup>35</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2003 the government announced that it would deploy a “peace mission” of several thousand Italians to Iraq, and that its decision would not be contingent on a prior UNSC resolution. In March 2005 Berlusconi announced that his government would begin withdrawing Italy’s contingent in Iraq, which it began to do in November of that year – the centre-left completed the withdrawal in 2006.

Italy’s view of itself as a force for peace played a significant role in this case. First, the peace image tells us why the Italian public was so opposed to the war. As of 13 March 2003 only 22% of Italians supported intervention in Iraq (Croci, 2004: 138). Public opposition to the war – stoked by the Pope’s declarations against the war – seems to have played a significant role in Berlusconi’s decision not to provide even a symbolic contribution to the US-led war effort (Davidson, 2008: 44-5). Second, Berlusconi’s government framed the mission that they announced they would send to Iraq in April 2003 a peace mission to capitalize on Italy’s peace image, gaining the abstention (rather than a vote against) of the centre-left.<sup>36</sup> While public approval for the mission might have grown had Italians seen their soldiers providing stability in a peaceful Iraq, the reality of the violent insurgency underway there – as symbolized by the 12 November 2003 insurgent attack in which nineteen Italian soldiers were killed – translated into continued popular opposition. This opposition led Berlusconi to announce in March ‘05 that his government would begin withdrawing Italian troops from Iraq (Davidson, 2008: 46).

The Berlusconi government’s pro-US stance tells us much about why it provided such firm political support for the US position in the period prior to the Iraq war (Mammarella and Cacace, 2006: 273). Of course, had the Berlusconi government been fully committed to the pro-American stance it would have provided military support during war (Teodori, 2003: 165-66). Also, because many other European governments supported the US-led war, Berlusconi’s political support for the US was not as anti-European as has been suggested.<sup>37</sup> It is not as if the European Union member countries would have united in opposition to the war if the Berlusconi government had opposed the war along with France and Germany. Moreover, by not providing military support for the Iraq War Berlusconi’s government limited the damage to relations between Italy and those European governments opposed to the war.

While the Berlusconi government did not feel politically that it could provide military support during the Iraq War its actions – in addition to the April decision to deploy the “peace mission” – demonstrate its pro-US credentials. In mid-March 2003 the Berlusconi government deployed roughly 1,000 of Italy’s respected *Alpini* to Afghanistan to serve under American command in Operation Enduring Freedom (that is, engaging in counterterrorism) to augment the Italian contingent already in Afghanistan

under ISAF, thus allowing the Americans and British to move some of their forces from Afghanistan to Iraq (*Corriere della Sera*, 16 March 2003). In addition, in April 2003 *La Repubblica* revealed that Italian intelligence officials in Iraq had aided US & UK efforts during the war by helping them to select targets and locate regime dignitaries (*la Repubblica*, 23 April 2003).

The Berlusconi government's desire to enhance Italy's international prestige provides an important additional element in explaining its Iraq policy. In supporting Bush diplomatically Berlusconi found a way to increase Italy's international profile, as he and members of his government publicly made the case for a firm line against Iraq that distinguished Italy from France and Germany. American President George W. Bush so appreciated Italy's contribution to American-led efforts in Iraq after the fall of Baghdad that he arranged for Berlusconi (as noted above) to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress. In short, by providing political and post war military support for the US in Iraq, Berlusconi sought to increase Italy's international prestige through its closeness with the American superpower.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain high profile events in Italy-US relations since the end of the Cold War. In the post-Soviet unipolar world the US has repeatedly engaged its military abroad and has frequently asked Italy and other allies for military support. Italy has responded favourably to American requests on most occasions because of a bipartisan consensus on foreign policy. The centre-right and centre-left agree that Italy should work to enhance its prestige in international relations. Governments have felt that they should contribute to US-led military operations as a way to increase Italy's prestige. The Italian centre-right and centre-left also agree that Italy is and should be a force for peace in the world. Governments in Rome have found it easier to make a robust military contribution when they could make a credible case that Italian troops would serve to further peace. Finally, while the centre-right has tilted toward Washington and the centre-left toward Brussels both agree that Italy benefits from its relationships with the US and Europe. Since the end of the Cold War Italian governments have often engaged their military abroad as a way to cultivate the best possible relationship with the US but they have not gone so far as to fundamentally jeopardize their relationship with the EU.

The narrative shows that it is often quite difficult to pursue policies that enhance prestige, are consistent with the peace image, and preserve the transatlantic balance.<sup>38</sup> In the Persian Gulf War a more robust Italian contribution would have been most likely to enhance Italy's prestige and would have improved its relationship with the US (without hurting its

relationship with Europe) but was not possible given Italy's peace image. In the Kosovo case the humanitarian logic for the air war provided a plausible fit with Italy's peace image that allowed the D'Alema government to make a significant contribution as a means to garner more prestige for Italy and move closer to the US (without creating distance between Italy and Europe). The cases imply that characteristics of the target of the use of force – and US and European reactions – set very significant parameters of what is/is not possible given the consensus.

Finally, what does this framework tell us about the future of Italy-US relations? As long as American hegemony continues we can expect the US to continue to ask allies for military support. We can also expect Italy to be forthcoming with a military contribution when the US asks for one. Italy will be most likely to make a robust contribution when it can frame doing so in terms of its peace mission, when doing so will maximize its prestige, and when its contribution does not force it to choose between the US and Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> See "The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database", <http://milexdata.sipri.org/>. (accessed 15 October 2009)

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive list and analysis, see Haass (1999).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see Lundestad (2003).

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<sup>4</sup> One reason for Sergio Romano's prediction that the US and Italy's paths would diverge in the post-Cold War world was his view that Italy's bases would no longer be of use to the United States (Romano, 1995: x).

<sup>5</sup> See "Joint Meeting of the House and Senate to Hear an Address by the Honorable Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy," *Congressional Record* 152 (March 1, 2006), H454.

<sup>6</sup> A critic might point to the fact that Italy has not been a part of the EU3 (France, Britain, and Germany) initiative to address Iran's nuclear program. Analysts agree, however, that the Italian government did not request to participate so that case should not be seen as evidence that Italy is insignificant. See Croci (2008: 298).

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of these events as related to Italy's foreign policy, see Mammarella and Cacace (2006: 261).

<sup>8</sup> It has also lost the value of the "stable instability" of the First Republic wherein governments changed rapidly but the same small group of elites remained in power thus guaranteeing continuity.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Croci (2005; 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Carbone (2007) also provides evidence that both coalitions have ignored foreign aid.

<sup>11</sup> One possibility is that rhetoric reflects priorities whereas action is the meeting of those priorities with real world constraints. For the view that Berlusconi's priorities were more radical than his actions, see Romano (2006: 101-07).

<sup>12</sup> For an early scholarly work on the post-First Republic center-left/center-right bipartisan consensus on defense policy, see Bellucci (1997: 209-216).

<sup>13</sup> On prestige, see Gilpin (1981: 30-33) and Wohlforth (2009).

<sup>14</sup> I conducted twenty-nine interviews in Rome from November 2008 through April 2009 with politicians (e.g., government ministers and heads of the relevant parliamentary commissions) and their advisers, policymakers, and analysts.

<sup>15</sup> On the historical importance of prestige in Italian foreign policy, see Santoro (1991: 13).

<sup>16</sup> On the consensus on the peace image, see Coticchia and Giacomello (2008). Panebianco (1997: 227) writes that while the US, Britain, and France are "warrior democracies," Italy is not.

<sup>17</sup> A literal reading of Article 11 provides support for neither interpretation as it merely states that Italy should allow limits on its sovereignty to in order to secure peace and justice among nations and that it should promote and favor international organizations with this objective (i.e., it does not explicitly say that Italy can use force when authorized by the UN or another international organization).

<sup>18</sup> For evidence that this is the American view, see Mastrolilli and Molinari (2004).

<sup>19</sup> The consensus spans the center-left and center-right but does not cover the far left and far right parties, which often oppose their centrist ally's policies.

<sup>20</sup> I thank Ambassador Silvio Fagiolo for clarifying this point to me.

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<sup>21</sup> For the details of the contribution, see Ilari (1994: 199). For the internal opposition, see Mammarella and Cacace (2006: 252).

<sup>22</sup> The government publicly stated that the defense of international law was the reason for its policy. See Aliboni (1993: 111).

<sup>23</sup> This is not to claim that support was unanimous. The Refounded Communists and others opposed Italy's participation (*Corriere della Sera*, 2 December 1992).

<sup>24</sup> For the criticisms and the government and public response see Croci (1995: 204-09).

<sup>25</sup> Tensions increased in the summer of 1993 as Italy expressed its concern with what it viewed as the excessive use of force (see above) and sought to obtain representation in the command structure of UNOSOM II and the US and UN resisted change. See Croci (1995: 207-09).

<sup>26</sup> For the number of sorties see "Operation Deliberate Force," [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/deliberate\\_force.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/deliberate_force.htm).

<sup>27</sup> See "IFOR-SFOR Mission-Bosnia," [www.esercito.difesa.it/English/Missions/ifor.asp](http://www.esercito.difesa.it/English/Missions/ifor.asp).

<sup>28</sup> The figure was 70% for December 1994 and 57% for June 1995. See Bellucci (1997: 203).

<sup>29</sup> Menotti (2000) went on to note that the status of each ally "depends directly" on the contribution the ally makes.

<sup>30</sup> On D'Alema's initiatives see *Corriere della Sera*, 26 March 1999; D'Alema (1999: 57-58). On Dini, see *Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 1999 and 5 May 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Stefano Folli of the *Corriere della Sera* said "the political support for the government is clearer than ever before" (*Corriere della Sera*, 8 November 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Berlusconi's initial choice of Renato Ruggiero as foreign minister was seen as an attempt to assuage concerns of his government's European credentials. Ruggiero's resignation—over Italy's decision not to participate in the European A400M aircraft project—renewed concerns that his government was more willing than previous ones to lean away from Europe. See Mammarella and Cacace (2006: 271).

<sup>33</sup> "Resoconto stenografico dell'intervento del Presidente del Consiglio, on. Silvio Berlusconi, tenuto alla Camera nella seduta del 12 settembre 2001", [www.sitiarcheologici.palazzochigi.it/www.governo.it/dicembre%202002/www.governo.it/servizi/interventi/index13b6.html?f=27](http://www.sitiarcheologici.palazzochigi.it/www.governo.it/dicembre%202002/www.governo.it/servizi/interventi/index13b6.html?f=27).

<sup>34</sup> Legislatura 14° - Aula - Resoconto stenografico della seduta n. 063 del 07/11/2001, "Comunicazioni del Governo sull'impiego di contingenti militari italiani all'estero in relazione alla crisi internazionale in atto e conseguente discussione", [www.senato.it](http://www.senato.it). See also *Corriere della Sera*, 19 November 2001.

<sup>35</sup> This section draws on Davidson (2008).

<sup>36</sup> In addition they gained the support of the center-right UDC (which had opposed the war) and President Ciampi. See Davidson (2008: 45-46).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Jose Maria Aznar, Jose-Manuel Durao Barroso, Silvio Berlusconi, Tony Blair, Vaclav Havel, Peter Medgyessy, Leszek Miller and Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "Europe and America Must Stand United," *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 30 January 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Brighi (2004: 294-5) discusses the Berlusconi government's attempts to reconcile its Atlanticist instincts with the Italian public.