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MORE THAN ONE?
THE MONROE DOCTRINE, COLD WAR STYLE

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Mondi occidentali. La dottrina Monroe al bicentenario

More than One? The Monroe Doctrine, Cold War Style

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Abstract

[Eng.] During the XX century, the Monroe Doctrine continued to inspire US foreign policy. On the one hand, it was explicitly mentioned as a paradigm of foreign policy; on the other hand, particularly in the Cold War years, it was implicitly expanded in scope, as the US gradually extended its security perimeter. Referring to the Monroe Doctrine through this double perspective, the essay considers two features of US foreign policy during the Cold War: the assessment of US foreign policy in South Asia proposed by Ambassador Chester Bowles in 1954, calling for a "Monroe Doctrine for Asia", and an example of the *de facto* enlargement of the Monroe Doctrine represented by the Nixon and Ford administrations' policy towards the communist question in Italy, aimed at preventing USSR interference in an area that since the beginning of the Cold War had been constantly included in the US security perimeter.

Keywords: United States – India – Italy – Cold War – Monroe Doctrine.

[It.] La Dottrina Monroe ha continuato a ispirare la politica estera statunitense anche nel corso del XX secolo. Se da un lato è stata spesso esplicitamente citata come paradigma di politica estera, dall'altro il graduale ampliamento del perimetro di sicurezza degli Stati Uniti, soprattutto negli anni della Guerra Fredda, è stato interpretato come tacita espansione della sua portata. Considerando la Dottrina Monroe in questa duplice prospettiva, il saggio affronta due differenti momenti della politica estera statunitense in epoca bipolare: la prima parte analizza l'esplicito richiamo alla Dottrina proposto dall'ambasciatore Chester Bowles, che nel 1954 invocò una "Dottrina Monroe per l'Asia"; la seconda si sofferma su un esempio di "allargamento de facto" della Dottrina Monroe, individuabile nella politica delle amministrazioni Nixon e Ford rispetto alla questione comunista in Italia, volta a prevenire l'ingerenza dell'URSS in un'area che dalle origini della Guerra Fredda rientrava pienamente nel perimetro di sicurezza statunitense.

Parole chiave: Stati Uniti – India – Italia – Guerra fredda – Dottrina Monroe.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Monroe Doctrine did not cease to exert its influence at the turn of the XIX century, as it continued to inspire – explicitly or not – US foreign policy during the 1900s.

On the one hand, the Monroe Doctrine was explicitly (and rhetorically) mentioned by US Presidents as a paradigm and a model. For instance, it was invoked by Wilson when the US entered the First World War[1] and by Kennedy in justifying the need to keep the Soviets away from Cuba[2].

On the other hand, particularly in the Cold War years, the progressive extension of the US security perimeter can be seen as a gradual extension of the scope of the Monroe Doctrine, even when the latter was not explicitly referred to[3]. Just as in the early decades of the XIX Century US security interests were cast over Latin America, after the Second World War, and with the confrontation with the Soviet Union in the background, the US security perimeter was constantly expanding. Therefore, in 1947 the Truman Doctrine was to signal that the future of Greece and Turkey was a matter of concern for the US. Thus, ten years later, in a context dominated by a new quest for the Third World, the Eisenhower Doctrine pointed out that the Middle East was the new theatre in which the US was to project its influence. Again in 1980, in the wake of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Carter Doctrine postulated a further extension of the US area of security interests that reached the Persian Gulf region.

Referring to the Monroe Doctrine through this double perspective, this essay considers two features of US foreign policy during the Cold War. The first section refers to a case in which the Monroe Doctrine was explicitly indicated as a foreign policy model: the assessment of US foreign policy in South Asia proposed in a 1954 article in Foreign Affairs magazine by Ambassador Chester Bowles[4], calling for a Monroe Doctrine for Asia to improve US performance in the area. The second part of the essay

[1] H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon and Schuster, 1994, 224.

[2] J.F. Kennedy, *Press Conference*, 29 August 1962, https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-press-conferences/news-conference-42.

[3] For a similar view see T. Smith, *America's Mission. The United States and Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton University Press, 1994. For a more nuanced and comprehensive discussion on the Monroe Doctrine's legacy in the XX Century see M. Mariano, *Isolationism, Internationalism and the Monroe Doctrine*, in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, No. 1, 2011 and M. Mariano, *L'America nell'Occidente: storia della Dottrina Monroe (1823-1963)*, Carocci, 2013.

[4] Chester Bowles was a prominent political figure in Cold War America. A lifelong Democrat, he held important positions in the US Congress as well as in various democratic administrations. He was the third US ambassador to the country since India's independence. He later held the unlikely record of having been twice ambassador to India (the first time appointed by Truman in 1951 and again by Kennedy in 1963). Undersecretary of State during the Kennedy years, he later became US Special representative and Advisor on Asian, African and Latin American Affairs. He was the author of numerous articles in the American press and entertained a rich correspondence with many leading players in the US political life of the time.

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explores instead an example of the *de facto* expansion of the Monroe Doctrine – certainly less well known than the above-mentioned Cold War Doctrines: it analyses how the Nixon and Ford administrations dealt with the problem of communism in Italy. The actions undertaken to contrast the Italian Communist Party (PCI)'s rise to power – thus containing USSR influence – can be conceived as expressions of a revisited Monroe Doctrine, as they aimed at preventing a hostile power's interference in an area of vital interest for the US.

2. A MONROE DOCTRINE FOR SOUTH ASIA

2.1. *Ambassador to India*

When Henry Truman appointed Chester Bowles as US ambassador to India in spring 1951, he was already a prominent figure in the United States. From Springfield Massachusetts, after his studies at Yale, Chester Bowles moved to New York, where he embarked on a career in journalism and principally advertising. With William Benton he founded the marketing company *Benton & Bowles,* which became highly successful during the Thirties. With his gains he could later finance his political activity in democratic party circles. He was OPA (Office of Price Administration) administrator during the second world war and later Director of the Office of Economic Stabilization. In 1948 he became governor of Connecticut but two years later he was defeated by the Republican John Lodge[5].

When Henry Truman chose him for the Embassy in New Delhi, reactions inside the executive and in the press were substantially positive[6]. More complicated was the battle for his confirmation in the Senate, where many members raised the issue of Bowles' lack of diplomatic experience, suggesting that Truman's choice was dictated more by his wish to return a political favour to one of the staunchest supporters of the Democratic Party than to select the most qualified person for the role[7]. Senator Robert Taft, a political adversary of Bowles since the time when the former was OPA administrator, declared, for example, that he did not know of anyone less suitable than Chester Bowles to serve as ambassador to India. His relationship with Congress was complicated by Bowles' admission of his intention to seek an increase in US economic assistance to India, which was met by strong resistance by Congressmen. After lengthy discussion, Bowles' appointment was narrowly approved at the beginning of October 1951[8].

In his memoirs he recounts the moment when he informed Truman of his interest in going to India. «Why in the world would you want to go to India?» [9] – was Truman's initial comment – «I thought India was pretty jammed with poor people and cows wandering around the streets, with doctors and people sitting on hot coals and bathing in the Ganges, and so on, but I did not realize that anybody thought it was important» [10].

[5] For a complete account of Bowles' biography, see H.B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles. New Dealer in the Cold War*, Harvard University Press, 1993.
[6] *Idem*, 39.
[7] R.J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, Pakistan*, Columbia University Press, 1994, 111.
[8] H.B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles. New Dealer in the Cold War*, cit., 39-40; *Bowles Ambassador to India*, in *The New York Times*, 13 September 1951; *Being Sworn in as Ambassador to India*, in *The New York Times*, 12 October 1951.
[9] C. Bowles, *Promises to Keep. My Years in Public Life (1941-1969)*, Harper & Row Publishers, 1971, 247.
[10] H.B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles. New Dealer in the Cold War*, cit., 37.

Then, on appointing him, he gave Bowles highly precise instructions: «The first thing you've got to do is to find out if Nehru is a Communist. He sat right on that chair and he talked just like a Communist»[11].

Truman's reference was to the State visit of Nehru in October 1949, the first of an Indian leader after Independence. On that occasion, the President – as well as Dean Acheson, his Secretary of State – was convinced of the natural and inevitable alignment of India with the US. Nehru, however, did the opposite, informing the US President of his intention to recognize Mao's China and most of all of his conviction that colonialism and neo-colonialism, more than communism, were the greater threats to peace and stability in Asia. «The most difficult person I had ever met» was Acheson's comment about Nehru[12].

Starting from these premises, once in New Delhi Bowles worked hard to change both Indian attitudes to the US as well as American attitudes to India.

In his opinion, the main task of an ambassador was to address the communication gap existing between the two countries, with a view to overcoming the ignorance and prejudice that had developed on both sides[13]. Bowles wrote on that point:

> Partly as a consequence of the steady flow of American movies, many Indians visualized America as a land of cowboys, gangsters, CIA agents, millionaires and movie stars, while many Americans visualized India as a land of too many babies, cows and monkeys, famines, maharajas, polo players and cobras, with economic and political problems so appallingly great that neither we, the Indians nor anyone else could solve them[14].

A telling example of this ignorance and prejudice is an episode recalled by Howard B. Schaffer, Chester Bowles' biographer. Chester Bowles had been ambassador for almost a year when he received in Delhi Admiral Arthur W. Radford, the Commander in Chief of the US Pacific forces, and his wife. Bowles invited Mr and Mrs Radford to a dinner party at his residence. Mrs Radford found herself seated next to the husband of Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi. Catching only the last name of her Indian dinner partner, Feroze Gandhi, Mrs Radford breathlessly exulted to him that never in her life had she thought she would meet the great Mahatma Gandhi. It was 1953 and Mahatma Gandhi had been assassinated more than four years earlier[15]!

We can smile at the American lady's terrible *faux pas*; but it sadly represents the ignorance and the confusion with which the Americans saw India and its history at that time. Prejudices, misunderstandings and communication gaps were therefore the main problems Chester Bowles wished to defeat in his ambassadorship.

With the aim of better understanding India and its people, Bowles inaugurated an informal and direct ambassadorial style. He chose to send his children to a local school and to live in a residential Indian neighbourhood, he navigated the city by bicycle and travelled extensively around the country[16].

[11] *Idem*, 37. On that period see also: H.A. Gould, *US-Indian Relations: The Early Phase*, in H.A, Gould and S. Ganguly (Eds.), *The Hope and Reality. U.S.-Indian Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan*, Westview Press, 1992, 17-43.

[12] D. Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department,* Norton, 1969, 439.

[13] C. Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, cit., 465.

[14] *Ibidem*.

[15] H.B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles. New Dealer in the Cold War*, cit., 69.

[16] Bowles recounts his first experience as US ambassasor in New Delhi in C. Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, Harper and Brothers, 1954.

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At the same time, he made great efforts to "re-educate" the embassy staff in the same direction. Chester Bowles chose to completely reorganize the embassy activities and also those of the ambassador. Dedicated to working at his desk for 10/12 hours a day, Bowles had little interest in the social life enjoyed by western diplomatic delegations in New Delhi, preferring intimate working lunches to large scale social events. Chester Bowles focused his attention on internal relations in the embassy, with equal regard to the organization of the work and the staff morale. He initiated a practice of frequent meetings to monitor progress and setbacks, and he worked tirelessly to make the life of the American personnel more comfortable and as integrated as possible with the local population. He tried to "contaminate" the whole staff with the same sense of purpose that he himself had, and he incentivised travel all around the country to foster a better understanding of the host nation[17].

Among the many new elements Bowles introduced as ambassador, certainly specific mention should be given to the relationship he established with Nehru. Starting from his arrival in New Delhi, in fact, they built a relationship based on close collaboration and mutual respect and made by lengthy, wide-ranging conversations, which became, for Bowles, sources of unique inspiration[18]. «Never have I listened to a more articulate survey of world affairs», commented Bowles in his memoirs on his talks with Nehru. «In a personal conversation Nehru was the most articulate man I have ever met […]. His conversation often consisted of literally thinking aloud, and he explored all sides of a problem until its full complexity was felt»[19].

2.2. *Bowles' Monroe Doctrine*

Starting from 1951, in a long memorandum to Acheson, Bowles explained his ideas about the main priorities of US policy towards India, thus setting out in his communications to the Department of State those elements which would remain constant in his political analysis until the end of his career and form the basis of his Monroe Doctrine for Asia[20]. The first of these was the need for the US to better understand and to accept Indian neutralism, putting forward a «patient and respectful» policy, regardless of India's political stance or economic decisions. Only if US assistance was interpreted by India not as blackmail or as political extortion would it produce the result desired. Otherwise, any attempt to force India would be counter-productive and would alienate the Indians: «We will make much faster progress – he wrote – if we let India know that much as we disagree with her we respect her desire to remain aloof for the present, and that our only wish is to help her to help herself (without strings) and to maintain her independence»[21].

In the same memo to Acheson, Bowles attempted to make an early comparison between Indian neutralism and the neutrality policies adopted by the United States towards Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. He was somewhat tongue-in-cheek in underlining how advanced the Indians were, as their neutralism did not prevent them from acting within the UN framework, while the Unites States had completely closed the door to the League of Nations[22].

[17] C. Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, cit., 461-464.
[18] Their first conversation on October 23, 1951, is reported in: The Chargé in India (Steere) to the Secretary of State, 24 October, 1951, in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* 1951, Asia and the Pacific, vol. VI, part 2, US Government Printing Office, 1977, doc. 486.
[19] C. Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, cit., 488-489.
[20] Memorandum, Bowles to Acheson, 6 December 1951, *FRUS 1951,* Asia and the Pacific, vol. VI, Part 2, cit., doc. 489.
[21] *Ibidem.*
[22] *Ibidem.*

International developments in Asia during the following two years, starting from the Korean war, led the Truman and the Eisenhower administrations to invest in a security system in the area and to the decision to arm Pakistan in the framework of its entry in 1954 into the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

In the same year, after returning to the United States, and in continuity with the convictions expressed during his ambassadorial term, Bowles explained his opinion about the US decision to arm Pakistan and his ideas on Asian regional security, thus presenting his own Monroe Doctrine[23].

Moving from the pessimistic evaluation that «instead of taking the initiative in rolling back Communism in Asia, […] Communism itself has steadily improved its position, while that of the United States has deteriorated», in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* Bowles publicly contested US military assistance to Pakistan, which had seriously weakened US relations with India, without ensuring an anti-Communist strengthening in the area.

«If Soviet army forces moved overtly into the Middle East (a most improbable turn of events) – Bowles later wrote in his memoirs – Pakistan, separated from the URSS itself only by a relatively weak Afghanistan, would almost surely remain aloof no matter how many arms we gave them»[24].

If the US had failed to build an «effective American-directed anti-communist front», the lesson to learn, in Chester Bowles' opinion, was not that the Asians were «ingrates or pro-Communist», but that American leadership of an anti-Communist front was «precisely what those countries would not permit»[25].

To convince the American public that an «American inspired, American managed, American-dominated defence program for Asia [was] a political dead-end», Bowles proposed a comparison between neutralism in Asia during the 1950s and the attitude which had shaped US foreign policy in the XIX century.

After identifying a kind of *fil rouge* between George Washington's policy of steering clear of «permanent alliances» and Nehru's non-alignment, Bowles entered into an explicit comparison between the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and a new Monroe Doctrine for Asia. In his opinion, just as the US had done in Latin America at that time, India could take her share of responsibility in the Middle East and Southeast Asia and, at the head of a group of States such as Burma, Thailand, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia, India could build a new and completely autonomous regional security system, remaining neutral from the Cold War struggle.

In this perspective, criticising those Americans «insistent on all-or-nothing alliances», Bowles underlined that the US must accept the uncommitted stance of India, not forcing Asian countries into a Western security system but encouraging them to forge their own Monroe Doctrine.

Just as for the US in 1823, the power vacuum of 1950s South Asia attracted foreign powers' ambitions and, like the US at that time, India considered itself isolated, oppressed by massive economic problems and suspicious of colonialism. Again, just as for the US in 1823 – Bowles observed – a «fierce independence» would be the best solution in India's view. «Whether we like it or not, – concluded Bowles in his 1954 article – India, for one, is no more willing now to become a cockboat in the wake of

[23] C. Bowles, *A Fresh Look at Free Asia*, in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 1, 1954.
[24] C. Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, cit., 478.
[25] C. Bowles, *A Fresh Look at Free Asian*, cit.

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the American man of war than the United States was willing to adopt that relationship to the British in 1823»[26]. «India – later wrote Chester Bowles in his memoirs, quoting Nehru – will not sell her soul for a bowl of rice»[27].

Chester Bowles's ideas met with little favour at the political level either in South Asia or in the United States. Nehru did not appreciate the leading role Bowles assigned to India in the framework of the containment of communism in Asia. He thought India was not strong enough to maintain that position and he doubted that the United States could play the «discreet» role that Bowles intended[28].

At the same time, his Monroe Doctrine was disliked also by other regional players who distrusted India's possible territorial ambitions. First of all, as expected, it was Pakistan which most contrasted the Bowles Monroe Doctrine's axioms. In the United States, as well, Secretary of State Foster Dulles never considered Bowles' thesis, first of all because in the meantime he was following a different path, strengthening US-Pakistan relations within the framework of a military alliance in the region[29].

In conclusion, Bowles' first stint as US ambassador to India is considered a highly successful experience both by scholars, who credit him with reviving the fortunes of US-Indian relations from the previous state of tension, and by his contemporaries. Upon Bowles departure from India, Nehru wrote to him:

> You have interpreted your great country in a manner which has been greatly appreciated not only by the Government but by large numbers of people of India and as one wishing well to India. For those of us who have come into more intimate contact with you, your departure from India will be a matter for deep regret. We shall all miss you here greatly. But I am sure that the work you have done here will endure[30].

It is unanimously acknowledged how hard Chester Bowles worked during his first experience as ambassador to India, as well as how successful he was in building a relationship with Nehru based on reciprocal respect, in reorganizing the embassy activities and duties, in defining new programs of economic assistance and in raising awareness both in the United States and in India of a need for a better mutual understanding.

When he left India, he had given the Indians a new image of the "American" and of "American diplomacy". As Dennis Kux, former US ambassador and scholar, wrote: «Bowles "sold" America to the Indians in a way that his predecessor, Loy Henderson, a superb professional diplomat but no salesman or image maker, could not do»[31].

If Chester Bowles spent half of his working hours trying to change the image of the US in the Indian view, he spent the other half urging his administration to amend their consideration of India and of its neutralist orientations.

Indian nonalignment was not a sufficient reason – Bowles thought – to deny New Delhi the economic assistance it needed. On the contrary, Bowles urged his government to provide a huge amount

26 *Ibidem*.
27 C. Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, cit., 257.
28 H.B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles. New Dealer in the Cold War*, cit., 85.
29 For the correspondence between Bowles and Dulles see *idem*, 84-88.
30 *Idem*, 108.
31 D. Kux, *Estranged Democracies. India and the United States 1941-1991*, Sage Publication, 1993, 83.

of economic assistance to consolidate the relationship between Washington and New Delhi, despite the latter's nonalignment policy[32].

> If all the communists on the earth disappeared overnight – Bowles wrote in his memoirs – the need for foreign aid to assist new struggling peoples to achieve stable democratic societies would still be there. The challenge is to do what we ought to have done without the communist challenge. But can we do what needs to be done out of fear or negation? We did not build our own country in order to oppose some foreign ideology but because we had a positive faith in our own. Only in that way can Asians build their new countries, and only in that spirit can our presence be of any real assistance[33].

These considerations underlie the framework of Bowles' idea to forge a new security doctrine for the Asian region completely autonomous from any Cold war logic. India should take the lead of this regional security system, staying away from bipolar competition and maintaining a strong neutral stance.

Bowles's Monroe doctrine for Asia, in conclusion, was exactly the contrary of the natural and inevitable alignment of India with the US that the United States government had hoped for after India's independence.

In Chester Bowles' view, the country which should play the role of leader in the area was not the United States but India. On the contrary, the US must accept to stay out of it. Echoing the most basic narration of the Monroe Doctrine, Bowles admonished his government and European governments to leave Asia to the Asian people and in particular to leave Asia to India's leadership.

3. ITALY FOR AMERICANS? THE NIXON AND FORD ADMINISTRATIONS AND THE UNDECLARED MONROE DOCTRINE TOWARD ITALY

In his 1947 seminal article, written under the pseudonym of Mister X for the prestigious Foreign Affairs magazine, George Kennan sharply defined the long-term foreign policy the US should adopt to contrast the Soviet Union in what was becoming known as the Cold War: «the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. […] Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy»[34].

[32] Bowles' appeals were in vain, because the US Congress only approved limited assistance. William Benton, Bowles' friend and his former business partner, proposed a persuasive explanation of Congress behaviour in his correspondence with Bowles, underlying the «admixture of hostility, annoyance, and indifference» of the main sectors of American politicians towards India (R.J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery,* cit., p. 119). «It is hard for you to realize how remote India is to people in Congress – Benton wrote – Chet, it is never mentioned; it is never talked about; it's a remote Antarctica. Thus it seems strange to have "progress reports" coming in from this far off and remote and forgotten land. I know this isn't the way it ought to be. I'm merely reporting to you the way it is» (D. Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot. The United States and India's Economic development 1947-1963,* The University of North Carolina Press, cit., 90).

[33] C. Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, cit., 343.

[34] X (G. Kennan), *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 4, 1947, as quoted in J.M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente. American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War*, Potomac Book, 2013, XVI.

By the mid-Seventies, Southern Europe was among the areas that elicited US awareness and vigilant attention. Just as Détente was reaching its peak in Europe with the ongoing Helsinki Conference, growing instability in the Mediterranean area of the Continent seemed to threaten US and NATO interests there.

In a singular twist of history, though, that instability was not triggered by any direct «manoeuvres of Soviet policy». True, the Soviet Union had been pressing on the Southern flank of the Mediterranean since the mid-Sixties. As stated by a 1976 CIA report, «the Soviet naval presence ha[d] become a permanent feature [of it] since 1964», as a consequence of Gamal Abd al-Nasser's tilt toward Moscow, which prompted Egypt to grant the use of some of its ports and facilities to the USSR[35]. And yet that pressure had been diminishing as Nasser's successor, Anwar al-Sadat, had started loosening ties with the Soviets. Moreover, vis-à-vis Southern Europe, the Soviet Union seemed to abide by the tacit agreement with the United States – on which Détente was based – not to alter the status quo in the Continent.

That same status quo was nevertheless threatened by several events that took place almost simultaneously, in some cases unpredictably: the international stance chosen by the Muammar Qadhafi regime in Libya that forced the US to withdraw from the Wheelus military base; the new course taken by Malta's government under the leadership of the Labour Party's Dom Mintoff, who seemed determined to rescind the country's military cooperation with the United Kingdom, thus jeopardizing NATO's hold in a strategic area; the increasing search for autonomy from the US and the pursuit of a new dialogue with the Soviet Union inaugurated by Turkish governments after the 1973 oil shock; the crisis erupted in Cyprus in 1974 that widened the gulf between Greece and Turkey, both NATO members; the falling of the military Junta in Greece – accelerated by the Cyprus crisis – which followed shortly after the collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship set in motion by the Carnation Revolution and was followed the next year by the death of Francisco Franco, that put an end to his regime in Spain. Occurred in a limited time frame between the spring of 1974 and the autumn of 1975, the overthrow of right-wing regimes created domestically a political vacuum that the left was eager to fill (actually opening the way for the Communist Party to take power in Portugal); internationally, it raised the alarm inside the Atlantic Alliance about the future of its so-called Southern Flank[36].

In this context of uncertainty, Italy was not just another source of concern for the US, but arguably a major one. Going through the "Years of Lead", the country was spiralling into chaos, torn between skyrocketing inflation and political paralysis, terrorist attacks and ideologically-fuelled violence; in the meantime, the local Communist Party, which had been steadily growing in electoral consent since the very first election in post-fascist Italy, was expected to gain enough votes at the next general election to reclaim access to the Italian government.

[35] See E. Di Nolfo, *The Cold War and the Transformation of the Mediterranean, 1960-1975*, in Melvyn P. Leffler, Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. II, *Crises and Détente*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 244-246. The quote is from *Prospects for Soviet naval access to Mediterranean shore facilities*, Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 2 August 1976, in CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000681968.pdf.

[36] See among others: A. Varsori, *Crisis and Stabilization in Southern Europe during the 1970s: Western Strategy, European Instruments*, in *Journal of European Integration History*, No. 1, 2009; E.G.H. Pedaliu, *"A Sea of Confusion": The Mediterranean and Détente, 1969-1974*, in *Diplomatic History*, No. 4, 2009; M. Del Pero, V. Gavín, F. Guirao, A. Varsori (Eds.), *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature*, Le Monnier, 2010; E. Calandri, D. Caviglia, A. Varsori (Eds.), *Détente in Cold War Europe. Politics and Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, 2015.

It is worth considering, if only on a side note, that the US preoccupation with the consequences of Southern Europe's turmoil[37] was widely shared by its main allies, namely the United Kingdom, France, and Western Germany: at the height of the crisis, between 1974 and 1976, those countries' Foreign ministers periodically gathered with the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to discuss the issue[38] in encounters that became a sort of «political directorate», and informal mechanism for consultation among main NATO allies. As N. Piers Ludlow has better argued, the four-powers meeting formula represented the nearest accomplishment of what Henry Kissinger had championed in his (in)famous speech about the "Year of Europe"[39].

Not only did the US participate in the *tours d'horizon* those meetings made possible, but it was more than determined to take action. And this was so, especially regarding the Italian communist question[40].

Neither the US concern about it nor its determination to act were new, both dating back to the early stages of the Cold War. As historians have long shown, on the eve of the Italian general elections held in April 1948 the Truman administration successfully engaged in a campaign to boost the moderate parties' chances of defeating the Democratic Popular Front formed by the Socialist and the Communist Parties[41]. Soon afterwards, it established a covert action program to provide the same moderate parties, other than unions and private organizations, with financial aid. That program, whose major recipient was by far the Christian Democratic Party (DC), continued until the late Sixties[42]. By then, the Socialist Party's "co-optation" into the centre-left alliance with the same moderate parties, fully supported by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, had ensured both political stability (at least by Italian standards) and PCI's isolation[43].

[37] Cf. M. Del Pero, *The United States and the Crises in Southern Europe*, in A. Varsori, G. Migani (Eds.), *Europe in the International Arena during the 1970s. Entering a Different World*, Peter Lang, 2011; R. Sotiris, *The Rise of the Left in Southern Europe. Anglo-American Responses*, Routledge, 2016.

[38] L. Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana degli anni Settanta*, Le Monnier, 2014, 187-196.

[39] N.P. Ludlow, *The Real Years of Europe? U.S.-West European Relations during the Ford Administration*, in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, No. 3, 2013.

[40] Historiography on the US and the Italian communist question during the Seventies is vast and growing. See on the subject: U. Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia sospesa. La crisi degli anni Settanta vista da Washington*, Einaudi, 2009; V. Bosco, *L'amministrazione Nixon e l'Italia. Tra distensione europea e crisi mediterranee (1968-1975)*, Eurilink, 2009; L. Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela*, cit.; F. Heurtebize, *Le péril rouge. Washington face à l'eurocommunisme*, Presses Universitaires de France; L. Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani (1969-1972)*, Mondadori, 2015; A. Ambrogetti, *Aldo Moro e gli americani*, Edizioni Studium, 2016 (which, despite the title which reads *Aldo Moro and the Americans*, dives into the UK's policy as much as into the US's); for a more recent examination of the interplay between Italy's domestic dimension and international ties during the Seventies, see S. Pons, *Cold War Republic. The "External Constraint" in Italy during the 1970s*, in A. Varsori, B. Zaccaria (Eds.), *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War. The Underrated Ally*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

[41] J. E. Miller, *Taking off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948*, in *Diplomatic History*, No. 1, 1985; J. E. Miller, *The United States and Italy, 1945-1950. The Politics and Diplomacy of Stabilization*, University of Carolina Press, 1986; K. Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War. Waging Political Warfare, 1945-1950*, Cambridge University Press, 2014. On the US's policy toward the communist question and Italian domestic policy in more general terms and over a longer period see among others: M. Del Pero, *Containing Containment. Rethinking Italy's Experience During the Cold War*, in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* No. 4, 2003; A. Brogi *Confronting America. The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2011; M. Del Pero, F. Romero, *The United States, Italy and the Cold War: Interpreting and Periodising a Contradictory and Complicated Relationship*, in A. Varsori, B. Zaccaria (Eds.), *Italy and the International System*, cit. The subject is also widely and organically considered in the recent book about the Italian Republic's foreign policy, by Antonio Varsori: A. Varsori, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*, il Mulino, 2022.

[42] On the aid program, that was to be carried on until 1968, see Memorandum for the Record, Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee, 11 March 1969, in *FRUS 1969-1976*, vol. XLI, *Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, US Government Printing Office, 2012, doc. 180, and the previous records from the *FRUS* series mentioned there.

[43] On this topic see U. Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia e la nuova frontiera. Stati Uniti e centro-sinistra (1958-1965)*, il Mulino, 1998 and L. Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra. Importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia*, Laterza, 1999.

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Upon entering the White House, Richard Nixon was adamant in conveying his view on the Italian political situation. When he appointed Graham Martin as a new Ambassador to Italy in 1969, he instructed him to actively pursue a shift to the centre of the Italian political system[44]. By sponsoring such a shift, Nixon was alluding to the need to end the centre-left alliance the DC had sealed with the Socialist Party, and to encourage a return to the centre or centre-right coalitions that had been in power in Italy from the late Forties up until the late Fifties. It is worth recalling in this regard that Italy was (as it still is to this day) a Parliamentary Republic, whereby governments were (and are) formed in Parliament. The DC, still the strongest party, had maintained a pivotal role inside the Italian political system, and a conspicuous margin of choice regarding what alliances to build. According to Nixon, the priority of US policy toward Italy would be a return to the recent past. Martin was thus tasked to encourage the DC leadership to sever ties with the Socialist Party, relinquish the alliance at the core of the centre-left coalitions, and go back to its former coalitions with the so-called lay parties (Social-Democratic, Republican, and Liberal).

The need to revert the centre-left formula was based on the underlying assumption that it would have otherwise become a breach for the Communist Party to slip into the government. Nixon's right-hand, Henry Kissinger, was never shy when elaborating on the reasons why such an event would have been harmful to the US and Western interests. He was usually dismissive of the role the party played in founding the institutions of the Italian democratic Republic, of its commitment to preserving the democratic process, and even of its eagerness to openly criticize the Soviet Union (something that had recently happened, in the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia to crush the Prague Spring). In Kissinger's view, it was indeed the PCI's proclaimed devotion to democracy that made it more insidious, inasmuch more likely to attract votes from Italian electors genuinely attached to democratic values[45].

Italian democracy, though, was not the main concern for Kissinger, when it came to considering the potential repercussions of a communist-participated government. More worrisome from Kissinger's standpoint was the damage the PCI's entry into the Italian government would have caused to NATO's solidity. Besides the risk of military secrets being passed over to the Soviet Union by Italian communists, NATO would have been weakened because of an almost philosophical reason: the blatant contradiction between the alliance's *raison d'être* – to contain communism – and the inclusion of communists at the head of one of its member states[46]. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Counselor of the State Department and one of Kissinger's closest collaborators went even further in assessing the impact that an Italian government with communist ministers would have had. Despite the display of autonomy from the PCUS on the part

[44] L. Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani*, cit., 76-79.

[45] To the Italian President of the Republic, Giovanni Leone, Kissinger explained in 1974: «frankly we are more worried about a responsible than an irresponsible communist party, because if they appear responsible they will be a bigger threat to democracy in the long run». See memorandum of conversation, 25 September 1974, in *FRUS 1969-1976*, vol. E-15, part 2, *Documents on Western Europe, 1973-1976*, Second Revised Edition, US Government Printing Office, 2021, doc. 350. Kissinger expressed a similar conviction during a conversation with the Portuguese leader of the Socialist Party, Mário Soares: «Luckily, the Portuguese communists did not have to a leader like that of the Italian communists, or your position would have been much more difficult». See memorandum of conversation, 26 January 1976, in NARA, RG 59, Office of the Counselor (H. Sonnenfeldt), Country and Subject Files, 1973-1976, box 7.

[46] See what Kissinger told the Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro and Foreign Minister Mariano Rumor in August 1975: «We don't care if [the Italian communists] sign onto NATO in blood. Having the communists in the Government of Italy would be completely incompatible with continued membership in the Alliance». Cfr. memorandum of conversation, 1st August 1975, in NARA, RG 59, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973-1977, box 12.

of the PCI and continuing tensions between the two parties, the communists' presence in a Western government would have per se altered the status quo in Europe and thus threatened Détente[47].

Being the PCI not to be trusted but rather to be contained, Kissinger was firmly convinced that the blessing given by the Kennedy administration to the centre-left coalition had been a capital mistake. As he later explained in his memoirs, the so-called "opening to the left" – intended to encourage the decoupling of the socialists from the communists to weaken the latter – had instead given the PCI the monopoly of the opposition from which the party had greatly benefited in terms of increased votes[48]. Kissinger's view was thus fully consistent with Nixon's urge to stop the shift to the left and to press for a new centre-based balance in the Italian political system.

Another decision made by the Democrats – more specifically by the Johnson administration – that the Nixon administration ended up reversing was the interruption of the clandestine program in support of the Italian anti-communist parties[49]. Ambassador Martin started advocating vigorously for resuming the flow of financial aid at the very beginning of his tenure in Rome. At first, his request was denied by the so-called 40 Committee, newly established to replace the former 303 Committee in (supposedly) supervising CIA activities[50]. Nevertheless, Martin persisted and was finally successful in 1971, on the eve of the Italian local election scheduled for June. Then, the Committee eventually caved in, acceded to a renewed Martin's request for funds, and even put the Ambassador in charge of their distribution[51]. What helped Martin overcome the scepticism still lingering inside the 40 Committee was probably the electoral results of the first Italian regional election, held in June 1970. While the PCI's electoral growth seemed to have come to a halt, the DC scored an unflattering 37.9% (it had obtained 38.8% at the 1968 general election); moreover, the votes for the neo-fascist MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano) spiked up to 5.2% (from the 4.3% the party had reached two years before), mainly to the DC's detriment[52].

Such results were certainly affected by the violence then dominating Italy, which fostered a demand for law and order, which the MSI could easily claim to meet. According to Martin, though, another reason for the decline in DC votes – and the specular MSI's growth – was to be found in its politics. Having been long locked in an alliance with the socialists, the Christian Democrats had lost their appeal to the most conservative sectors of the Italian electorate, which in turn started looking to the right. Therefore, for the DC to regain momentum (votes) it was vital to loosen its ties with the Socialist Party and reestablish itself as a moderately conservative party. Eventually, revitalizing the centrist coalition's scheme would be in order, at least as a goal. Perfectly in tune with Nixon's convictions, Martin aimed to bolster

[47] Letter from H. Sonnenfeldt to H. Kissinger, 12 January 1976, in NARA, RG 59, Office of the Counselor (H. Sonnenfeldt), Country and Subject Files, 1973-1976, box 4.

[48] H. Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little, Brown and Company, 1979, 102-103.

[49] The interruption of the aid program at the time of the Johnson administration had been vociferously sponsored by the National Security Council. See L. Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela*, cit., 40-41, and the sources there quoted. Before Martin was appointed Ambassador to Italy, the Nixon administration had confirmed the Johnson administration's decision to end financial support to Italian anti-communist parties. See: Memorandum for the Record, Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee, 11 March 1969, in *FRUS 1969-1976*, vol. XLI, cit., doc. 180.

[50] L. Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani*, cit., 131-134. On the 303 and 40 Committees' origins see, among others, J. Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars. CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations since World War*, William Morrow and Company, 1986, 322-324; note on US Covert Actions, in *FRUS 1964-1968*, vol. XII, *Western Europe*, US Government Printing Office, 2001; note on US Covert Actions, in *FRUS 1969-1976*, vol. XV, *Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974*, US Government Printing Office, 2011.

[51] Memorandum for the record, minutes of the meeting of the 40 Committee, 10 March 1971, in *FRUS 1969-1976*, vol. XLI, cit., doc. 208. See also L. Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani*, cit., 211.

[52] G. Mammarella, *L'Italia contemporanea 1943-1998*, il Mulino, 1999, 354.

the DC's strength and to encourage it to embrace the prospect of a (relative) shift toward the right[53]. Providing the DC with financial aid was instrumental to both those objectives, as it would certainly strengthen the DC's capability to cope with the challenges coming from the left (and the right) of the Italian political spectrum while increasing the US's influence over the party's leadership.

The covert aid program approved in 1971 was renewed in 1972 after Italian President Giovanni Leone dissolved the Parliament and called a snap general election following the fall of the centre-left government led by Emilio Colombo[54]. Despite its covert nature, it was not destined to remain secret for long. Information about it started leaking in early 1976 due to the inquiry conducted by the US House Select Intelligence Committee chaired by Democratic Representative Otis G. Pike. By the mid-Seventies, the US legislative branch began questioning the Executive activities, particularly the frequent use of covert intelligence actions in pursuing foreign policy goals, largely unbeknownst to Congress. The House Committee (or Pike Committee, as it was to become known) specifically investigated the intelligence's (mis)use of financial resources and unveiled – among others – the secret aid program to Italian anti-communist parties (which, ironically enough, had not been conducted under the CIA's responsibility). The hearings held by the Committee were confidential, and its final report should have remained unpublished. However, extensive parts of it were leaked to the press in early 1976 (the report itself in its entirety was later published in the UK)[55].

Revelations about the unorthodox methods used by the US government caused public attention to grow and put the new administration of Gerald Ford under great scrutiny, just as it was facing a major reassessment crisis. While Congress was enquiring about previous administrations' decisions and checking the Executive powers, the Ford administration was trying to navigate the aftermath of the shocking Watergate scandal, still recovering from the fall of South Vietnam and facing the USSR's new drive for expansion in Africa.

In Europe, in the meantime, while Portugal seemed to step back from the verge of revolution and be bound to a peaceful transition toward democracy guided by the socialist party, the crisis escalated in Italy. The country was being hit by the 1973 oil shock repercussions that caused inflation to rise and by the recrudescence of political violence that erupted in a new wave of terrorist attacks. Politically, the DC shift to the right – so warmly encouraged by the US government (and Ambassador Martin) and embraced by the party at least from the 1971 elections of Giovanni Leone as the Italian President – backfired, leading in the spring of 1974 to the disastrous referendum on divorce, which signalled the party's growing distance from most of the Italian electorate. While the formation later that year of a two-party government only supported externally by the socialists and the republicans certified the irreversible crisis of the centre-left coalition, the PCI's rise seemed relentless. Enrico Berlinguer, its young

[53] U. Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia sospesa*, cit., 35-36; A. Bosco, *L'amministrazione Nixon e l'Italia*, cit., 146-147, 238; L. Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela*, cit., 91; L. Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani*, cit., 76-77, 178-180.

[54] The final word came from President Nixon, who approved Martin's request. See: L. Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela*, cit., 105-107; L. Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani*, cit., 210-212, 262-264. Besides literature, on the debate that occurred within the 40 Committee in 1972 and on the final decisions in favour of the ambassador's demands, see memorandum for the record, minutes of the meeting of the 40 Committee, 7 March 1972, in *FRUS 1969-1976*, vol. XLI, cit., doc. 221 and memorandum from the Chief of the European Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Roosevelt) to Director of Central Intelligence Helms, 13 October 1972, *idem*, doc. 224.

[55] CIA, *The Pike Report*, Spokesman Books, 1977. Large extracts from the Pike Report had been reprinted in the New York magazine *The Village Voice*. See R.D. Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 219-225.

and charismatic leader, dramatically redefined the party's mid-term prospect in response to the Chilean military coup perpetrated in September 1973 against the leftist government of Salvador Allende and proposed the so-called «historic compromise» as the new objective the party would pursue from then on. By that formula, Berlinguer envisaged an alliance with the DC (and the socialists) that he deemed was the only realistic and viable way for the PCI to gain power. Combined with the moderate image Berlinguer himself managed to project, the new strategy was largely successful. At the regional election in June 1975 the PCI, whose personnel had gained a solid reputation as competent and effective administrators, gained a remarkable 33.5% of votes[56].

In February 1976, whilst the Ford administration was dealing with the public outcry caused by the Pike report leaks, the Italian communist question reached its climax. As the already frail centre-left coalition eventually collapsed, due to the Republican Party's decision to revoke its support to the government, and Italian President Leone called an early election for late June, having dissolved Parliament for the second time in a row, the Italian political situation seemed on the verge of a major turn. Had the PCI consolidated its previous electoral successes, it would have been entitled to claim entering government[57].

The Ford administration's response to the precipitating of the Italian communist problem was threefold. Firstly, it provided new funds to help the moderate parties and reduce the electoral outlook for the PCI. The ongoing scandal at home barred the administration from replicating the scheme adopted in similar circumstances in 1972. The new ambassador to Italy – John Volpe, who had replaced Martin at the end of 1973 – was not to receive any financial aid to distribute among Italian party leaders. Rather, the US Secret Service would orchestrate a massive, unprecedented propaganda campaign set to discredit the PCI through the Italian press[58].

While acting for the best, the Ford administration also prepared for the worst. On May 4, President Ford approved the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 242 which «directed a priority review of US policy toward Italy in the near-term»[59]. The ensuing comprehensive reassessment the administration embarked on was focused on the worst-case scenario, evaluating the options available to the US if the PCI had ever gained power. The most radical of them was admittedly the prospect of supporting actions aimed at overthrowing a communist-led government. That option was anyhow openly written off as too dangerous and impractical as, given the support the PCI was enjoying among Italians, it would have likely sparked a civil war[60].

At the same time, the Ford administration intensified consultations with its three major European allies to concert a common stance over Italy, which was finally announced at the G7 summit in Puerto Rico, right

[56] P. Ignazi, E. Risso, S. Wellhofer, *Elezioni e partiti nell'Italia repubblicana*, il Mulino, 2022, 99.

[57] For a recent and updated reconstruction of the Italian international stance as intertwined with the domestic policy in the second half of the Seventies, see A. Varsori, *L'Italia nel sistema internazionale durante la seconda metà degli anni '70: dal "compromesso storico" al riallineamento all'Occidente*, in L. Meli, L. Valent (Eds.), *Anni cruciali. La fine della Guerra fredda e l'inizio del nuovo ordine mondiale 1975-1983*, FrancoAngeli, 2024.

[58] Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft) to President Ford, 22 May 1976, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, *1969-1976*, vol. E-15, part 2, cit., doc. 370. A previous program – more traditional, as it should have been handled by the Embassy in Rome – had been shelved due to the public outcry over the Pike Report. See memorandum prepared for the 40 Committee, 2 February 1976, *idem*, doc. 362.

[59] The document is currently available at the Gerald Ford Presidential Library website, at https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/sites/default/files/pdf_documents/library/document/0310/nssm242.pdf.

[60] NSSM 242 study, June 1976, attached to Hartman (President Ford's Special Assistant) to Scowcroft, letter, 11 June 1976, in Gerald Ford Library (Ann Arbor), National Security Council Institutional Files, box 44.

in the wake of the Italian election. There, the US, France, the UK, and Western Germany made clear that any Italian government including the communists would have been denied financial aid[61].

By the time the Puerto Rico meeting took place, the results of the Italian election, held on June 20, were already clear. The PCI had improved on its previous performance, but not to the extent of surpassing the DC, which remained the main party in Italy. From 1976 until 1979 the party would gradually get closer to government – first by abstaining from voting against it and then by being part of the Parliamentary majority in support thereof – but it never entered it. Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti's ability to have the communists involved in governing responsibilities while keeping them out of the executive was crucial in drastically downsizing the communist question, which had faded by the end of the Seventies[62].

The Italian moderate leadership's capability to eventually neutralize, through politics, the risk of a communist-participated government must not overshadow the decisive role played by the United States. The attention to (and intervention in) the Italian communist question was a constant and consistent feature of US foreign policy during the Cold War. It was dictated by the need to restrain the Soviet Union from gaining influence over the Italian government through the Italian Communist Party and preserve the Italian pro-Western stance. Losing Italy to the Soviet camp – or even having Italy embrace neutrality – would have allowed the Soviet Union to alter the European balance to its favour and endangered US's interests and security. In other words, what happened to Italy and *in* Italy pertained to the US's security. Thus, assuming the conceptual framework by which the Truman, Eisenhower, and Carter Doctrines mirrored a revisited Monroe Doctrine, adapted to the new international context, it is safe to argue that a Monroe Doctrine towards Italy had existed as long as the Cold War – albeit as a sui generis doctrine, as it was undeclared and thus lacked the inherently essential element of every properly intended Doctrine.

The Nixon and Ford administrations carried on such undeclared Doctrine, renewed it, and took it to another level by making it a part of a broader regional policy seeking to maintain a pro-Western (and pro-US) status quo in Southern Europe, at a time when such status quo seemed menaced due to the endogenous forces at work.

[61] A. Varsori, *Puerto Rico (1976): le potenze occidentali e il problema comunista in Italia*, in *Ventunesimo Secolo*, No. 16, 2008.

[62] The irreversible crisis of Détente was instrumental in ending any prospect of a PCI participation in the Italian government. Having already left the parliamentary majority in disagreement over Andreotti's decision to drive Italy into the upcoming European Monetary System, the PCI strongly contested Italian support for NATO's response to the so-called Euromissiles question. In the wake of the decision taken by the NATO summit in December 1979 to deploy the US's Pershing and Cruise missiles, the Italian communists launched a massive campaign against it. The PCI's strong disapproval of the Andreotti government's major foreign policy initiatives brought the party back to the opposition, where it would remain until the end of the Cold War.