

**European Domino:
US Foreign Policy Towards Italy During the Vietnam War, 1964-1973**

Nicholas Fallah
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“An extreme decision regarding Viet-Nam... might cause the Italian Government to fall and precipitate a Government crisis in Italy. The United States would be faced not only with its extreme burden in the Pacific but also with confusion in the Mediterranean area.”

- Amintore Fanfani¹

I. Introduction

“You Knock Over the First One...”

On April 7, 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower took questions in a news conference as the war in French Indochina neared its conclusion. A battle was raging at Dien Bien Phu that would see a decisive victory for Ho Chi Minh’s forces, and negotiations in Geneva would soon have Vietnam partitioned between communist north and Western-aligned south. With those events in the near future, a journalist asked Eisenhower what Indochina’s importance was to the free world, to which he responded with “the ‘falling domino’ principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly.”² Eisenhower went on to describe the order of those dominoes: after Indochina it would be Burma, then Thailand, then Indonesia, then there would even be a threat to Japan and Australia.³ Eisenhower’s words went on to form the core of “domino theory” which posited that the fall of one country to communism would endanger its neighbors, and then its neighbors’ neighbors. While Eisenhower’s words applied here to Vietnam, and would pervade the government’s thinking on Southeast Asia for the years to come, there was another domino waiting to fall in the heart of Europe: Italy.

¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 121.

² Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The President's News Conference," April 7, 1954, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10202>.

³ *Ibid.*

During the Cold War, US foreign policy in Italy was focused on containing the rise of the Italian Communist Party (*Partito comunista italiano*, or PCI). The PCI was the largest communist party in Western Europe and the frequent runner-up in Italy's general elections; Washington was determined that it would not move into first place. In the event the PCI came to power in Italy, instead of Thailand or Indonesia it would be France and West Germany positioned as the next dominoes. The PCI would remain in this position throughout the Cold War, from the first republican election in 1948 to the party's dissolution a few months before the Soviet Union's collapse. As a bulwark against the PCI, Washington supported Christian Democracy (*Democrazia cristiana*, or DC), a centrist Catholic party with factions ranging from the right-wing to the left-wing. The DC formed the largest component of every post-war Italian government until its dissolution in 1994. However, the DC's constant presence in government did not mean the Italian political system was stable. Rather, it was quite the opposite, with Italy having 45 governments from 1948 to 1992, meaning Italy averaged one new government for every year during the Cold War.⁴ This meant that with Italy the US could find a NATO ally and a founding member of the European Economic Community, which would eventually become the European Union, but also a highly unstable government in Western Europe where the principal opposition were Communists it believed to be aligned with the Soviet Union. If the PCI gained power, or even just influence, it could erode Italy's commitment to these alliances and to the American side of the Cold War, weakening the American position in Europe against the Kremlin.

⁴ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (England: Penguin Books, 1990), 6-7.

With the Cold War Italian political scene set for democratic contests between forces of capitalism and communism as fragile governments struggled to hang on, it is worth investigating and addressing how an armed contest between those same forces in Vietnam impacted Italy and its relationship with its most important ally, the United States. After conflict in Vietnam bubbled under the surface during the Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy administrations, Lyndon Johnson massively expanded the US commitment to Southeast Asia, sending an influx of ground soldiers and aerial bombardments. Richard Nixon then expanded the war into Laos and Cambodia before eventually reaching a peace agreement in Paris in 1973. Yet the war was not a matter confined to the United States and Vietnam; the controversial military adventure brought with it support, condemnation, and ambivalence from people and governments the world over. Italy initially provided rhetorical support for the war, but later moved towards a position of skepticism and even criticism.

When Lyndon Johnson escalated the Vietnam War in 1964, a firestorm in international and domestic public opinion began to take shape. During the Johnson administration, the Italian government offered a measured form of rhetorical support for America's mission in Vietnam, with reservations about certain actions as the war moved on. The US embraced this limited support from Italy, and rarely pushed for anything more concrete. This was largely because of the domestic political situation there: if the current government's left-leaning coalition partners withdrew, then that would lead to a fall of the government, which could then lead to PCI gains in the resulting vacuum. Even when the administration considered PCI gains to the extent of forming a government unlikely, it continued to mitigate that risk in regards to Vietnam. Further, Vietnam factored into the broader US policy of bolstering the image of Italy's importance and international stature, which also served to shore up the government against internal instability.

Richard Nixon, however, dealt with an Italian that had turned more hostile and openly critical of the war, concerned with Communist exploitation of the issue. However, despite the change in circumstances, the administration mostly maintained an acceptance of Italy's position due to domestic political pressures, especially the potential for the PCI to make gains off the issue.

Throughout the Vietnam War, the US largely acquiesced to the Italian government's position on the conflict, whether limited support or outright criticism, due to the full scope of Italy's domestic politics. Over time, America's prime concern was to maintain political stability in Italy, protecting the incumbent government and limiting the opportunity of the PCI to gain ground. Providing the government assistance in stabilizing in the face of internal tensions was the priority in US foreign policy during the war, often in the form of gestures to show that Italy had an important role to play on the world stage, even if that was not the fact of the matter.

These factors determined US policy towards Italy as Washington waged war in Southeast Asia. I primarily examine this through the administration of Lyndon Johnson, when Vietnam had its most prominent placement in the US-Italy relationship. The Johnson White House established how the war was dealt with in Italy, specifically accommodating the government's position. I will then also analyze the Nixon administration to demonstrate how the Johnson-era policies were continued with different policymakers in power. That indicates that the Johnson administration approach to Italy had significance beyond his five years in the White House.

II. Literature Review

Strengthening the Alliance, Stopping the Communists

The scholarship on the United States' Cold War relationship with Europe and Italy generally suggests that Washington saw its goal as producing a strong, united Western Europe to counterbalance the Soviet Union and its bloc of communist countries in the East. Further, part of that goal was to keep Italy stable and oriented in favor of the West. For Europe, America actively worked to strengthen alliances like the European Economic Community (EC) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Towards Italy specifically, the literature generally argues that the United States' driving objective in its policies towards Rome was to keep the PCI from taking power. While that would suggest that the Communist threat played a large role in the US outlook towards Italy during the Vietnam War, a major study of the Johnson administration's relationship with Rome actually places the Communists in a fairly minimal role. I found that the approach focusing on the PCI was fundamental to understanding US motivations in Italy and suggests Washington took the approach it did on Vietnam because of the party.

In the work on Vietnam-era relations with Europe, there is a general consensus that the US worked to strengthen alliances like NATO and pursued a thaw in relations with the Soviet Union. Studying Johnson's Europe policy, Thomas Alan Schwartz writes that Johnson's efforts at nuclear arms reduction "stand out as creating the essential basis for easing relations."⁵ He further argues that in the face of challenges such as France's withdrawal from its command structure, Johnson reconstituted "NATO as a an even stronger and more cohesive organization,

⁵ Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 226.

now dedicated to both deterrence *and* détente.”⁶ Jonathan Colman, in a broader study of Johnson’s foreign policy, concurs that Johnson was determined to keep NATO afloat, and left the alliance “politically stronger when he left office in 1969 than it had been in 1963.”⁷ Luke Nichter, in his study of Nixon’s approach to Europe, similarly argues that US objectives centered on strengthening European alliances. Nichter writes that Nixon “prioritized the strengthening of the NATO alliance” and wanted a strong, integrated EC, with British membership, that “should play a bigger role in the world, but it should not develop in an anti-American direction.”⁸ Together, Schwartz, Colman, and Nichter argue that the US broadly followed a policy that supported European integration and a strengthening of NATO, oriented towards strengthening détente with the East. However, that perspective leaves little sense of how Vietnam factored into the relationship with Europe, something none of the writers focused their analysis on. Schwartz does argue that Johnson was able to compartmentalize other issues with Europe, like détente, from the Vietnam War. But, aside from one short section, he does not write extensively about how Vietnam was dealt with when it was the central issue at hand.⁹ Therefore, while the approach of a policy focused on integration and alliances does suggest the core of US Europe policy, it also does little to point to how Vietnam factored into that relationship.

More specifically focused on Italy, work on the US-Italy relationship during the Cold War suggests an approach that was focused on keeping the PCI out of power in Rome. Kaeten Mistry writes, regarding Italy’s first republican elections following World War II, “defeating the Italian Marxists in 1948 was central to America’s conceptualization and prosecution of a cold

⁶ Ibid., 230.

⁷ Jonathan Colman, *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson: The United States and the World, 1963-1969* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 110, 4.

⁸ Luke A. Nichter, *Richard Nixon and Europe: The Reshaping of the Postwar Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

⁹ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, 83-91.

war.”¹⁰ This approach continued throughout the Cold War; when the DC and Italian Socialist Party (*Partito socialista italiano*, or PSI) were first entering government together, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations’ approaches towards the arrangement were predicated on the goals of “reduc[ing] the influence of the PCI and consign[ing] it to a marginal role in Italian politics” and “keeping Italy firmly attached to the Western camp,” according to Leopoldo Nuti.¹¹ Nuti’s work shows how the PCI continued to be a dominant factor in American calculations well past the 1948 elections, and they became a greater concern as they appeared to come closer to power in the 1970’s. Olav Njølstad writes that President Jimmy Carter “largely agreed with his predecessors on the need to forestall the entry of the PCI into the Italian government.”¹² These works argue that the US sought to keep the PCI out of power, and sought to do so throughout the Cold War.

However, when writing on the subject of the Vietnam War’s impact on the US-Italy relationship, Nuti does not give the PCI much emphasis. Rather, he focuses far more on the preservation of the center-left coalition as the motivating factor for Washington’s approach to the war in Italy. He argues that the war created tensions between the DC and their PSI coalition partners, and that “the Johnson administration understood its ally’s predicament and did not put much pressure on Rome for more vocal support” than the reserved statements offered by Italian officials.¹³ This suggests an approach focusing on the US attempting to minimize tensions within the DC-PSI partnership. On the one hand, the analysis I undertook mostly corroborated this part

¹⁰ Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War: Waging Political Warfare, 1945-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

¹¹ Leopoldo Nuti, “The United States, Italy, and the Opening to the Left, 1953-1963,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2002): 53. Brackets mine.

¹² Olav Njølstad, “The Carter Administration and Italy: Keeping the Communists Out of Power Without Interfering,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2002): 59.

¹³ Leopoldo Nuti, “The Center-Left Government in Italy and the Escalation of the Vietnam War,” in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington, DC: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 268.

of Nuti's argument. However, he does not in detail explore how the possibility of the PCI gaining influence or power effected the calculation to support the government's stance. Additionally, I found he actually overrated Italy's opposition to the war during the Johnson years. For example, he describes a conversation between Johnson and Italian President Giuseppe Saragat on Vietnam. Highlighting Saragat's citing of public opinion as a reason for the government's reticence on the war, Nuti does not note that in that same conversation the Italian president said he would have made the same decisions as LBJ in his place.¹⁴ By limiting his analysis to the Johnson administration, Nuti also does not incorporate how policies continued or changed under Nixon, who continued the war for another four years. The primary factor explored by Nuti, the relationship of the DC and the PSI, was the most immediate concern facing the US in handling Vietnam, and my own analysis bears out that conclusion. However, by not offering a broader understanding of US motivations and objectives in Italy, Nuti does not offer the fullest possible explanation for the US's position on Vietnam in Italy, especially considering the body of literature that suggests the PCI would be a prime concern.

Furthermore, Nuti's underrating of the PCI does not fit with the more general treatment of the war by the US, as shown by the case of the United Kingdom. In her study of the war's impact on American relations with Britain, Sylvia Ellis reached the conclusion that "Vietnam was a constant and damaging undercurrent in relations between Washington and London."¹⁵ However, she notes, like Nuti, that it was domestic factors that brought pressure on Prime Minister Harold Wilson, mainly the opposition of left-wing backbenchers in his Labour Party and British public opinion. Wilson's June 1966 "disassociation" from American policy

¹⁴ Ibid., 268, and Sep. 18, 1967 Memorandum of Conversation, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹⁵ Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), xx.

“condemned Wilson to the ranks of other critics in LBJ’s mind; Wilson was now a suspicious and unreliable character... this act of independence severely undermined London’s influence in Washington.”¹⁶ Ellis’s argument demonstrates how there were limits to how much room Washington gave its allies regarding domestic concerns. Further, Jonathan Colman analyzed how Britain’s rhetorical support for the war before the disassociation was not enough for the US administration. He determines that in 1965, as Wilson was speaking in favor of the US mission that Johnson “wanted Wilson to understand that US support for the pound would be less likely if the British began to reduce their global responsibilities,” with National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy going so far as to explicitly recommend support for the pound be tied to sending troops to Vietnam.¹⁷ While Johnson rejected a suggestion that explicitly transactional, the overall attitude argued here by Colman demonstrates that with London, the administration was willing to put pressure on the government for material troop commitments despite domestic concerns. Nothing of the sort was considered, including by Bundy, to pressure Italy. While there are other differences between Italy and Britain, including Britain’s historically powerful military position in world politics, a substantial difference stood between the domestic politics described by Nuti and those by Ellis and Colman. In the UK, the pro-US Conservative Party sat on the opposition benches and would have been the victors in the event of a Labour election loss (as happened in 1970), while in Italy that position was occupied by the PCI. Though, as Nuti suggests, keeping DC-PSI cohesion was the immediate concern in contending with Vietnam, it was fending off the PCI that kept the American treatment of the war in Italy within the structure of its overall Italy policy.

¹⁶ Ibid., 274-275.

¹⁷ Jonathan Colman, *A ‘special relationship’?: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Anglo-American relations ‘at the summit’, 1964-1968* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 75.

While the question of Vietnam's impact on the US-Italy relationship has been little addressed, the body of work on the US relationship with Italy suggests that America was primarily motivated by stopping the PCI from gaining power, a motivation I argue was crucial to the US government's attitude towards the Italian position on the war. Additionally, I corroborate Nuti's argument that the US embraced the Italian position of lukewarm rhetorical support in light of the DC's tensions with PSI coalition partners. However I differ on two fundamental points: first that the US more strongly supported the Italian position for a longer duration than Nuti depicts, and that keeping the DC-PSI alliance together mattered to the US specifically to prevent increased support and power for the PCI. Further, as the literature on US policy towards Europe suggests, this mattered in the broader global context due to the threat the PCI posed to NATO and the American position in Europe against the Soviet Union. Altogether, these combined bodies of work suggest that Italy's position as a Cold War battleground determined how the US reacted to its position on the Vietnam War.

III. Background and Context

US Foreign Policy towards Italy and the Communist Party, 1948-1964

When Winston Churchill declared on March 5, 1946 that an Iron Curtain had fallen across Europe he downplayed the threat of Italy's Communists, but still noted that "the future of Italy hangs in the balance."¹⁸ Three months later, Italian voters gave a mixed verdict on Churchill's analysis. On June 2, Italians voted to abolish their monarchy and elected a constituent assembly to craft the republic that would replace it. The system would wind up having two equal houses of parliament, with a government led by the prime minister alongside a ceremonial president as head of state. In voting for the representatives to draft the constitution, 35.2% of the vote went to the Christian Democrats.¹⁹ However, the PCI and PSI, then ideological allies, had achieved a combined vote total of 39.7%, with the PSI winning a percentage point and a half more votes.²⁰ That result was disappointing for the Communists, but also confirmed the anti-capitalist left's strong foothold in Italy. They gave the US further reason to fear as the PCI built momentum through local election successes in 1947, and headed into the 1948 general election with an electoral pact with the PSI, called the Popular Front.

The PCI was uniquely prominent among Western European communist parties because of the legacy of the Second World War. A combination of the significant Communist contribution to partisan resistance against Benito Mussolini and participation in the post-Mussolini governing coalition lent the PCI legitimacy in postwar politics as a key anti-fascist

¹⁸ "The Sinews of Peace (Iron Curtain Speech)," International Churchill Society, 2018, <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/>.

¹⁹ "Archivio storico delle elezioni, Assemblea costituente 02/06/1946," Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=A&dtel=02/06/1946&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>

²⁰ Ibid.

force. Additionally, the party's institutional links with the Soviet Union, especially those of party leader Palmiro Togliatti, brought with it both legitimacy as an ally of the world's major communist power and financial support from Moscow.²¹ However, the Kremlin's support also brought about US retaliation. In the pivotal 1948 election and the years that followed, the US took action to stem the PCI's growth and block it from power. Secretary of State George Marshall threatened to cut off Marshall Plan aid if Italy elected the Popular Front. The Central Intelligence Agency funneled money into propaganda programs to promote the DC and paint the PCI as subservient to Joseph Stalin.²² At the 1948 campaign's end, the DC received the best result they would ever have: they won over 48% of the vote in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, giving them a majority in both houses. The Popular Front suffered a drop of about 9% from the PCI and PSI's combined 1946 share.²³ Washington had won a clear victory: the DC had a mandate to govern, the Communists had been defeated, and the two left-wing parties would not enter into such an electoral pact again. While the DC had the numbers to govern alone, they chose to go into coalition with other centrist parties.

Through the fifties, US policy towards Italy remained focused on keeping the PCI out of power. The funding of CIA operations, including directing money to the DC, continued during this period. William Colby, a future CIA director, was station chief in Rome during the fifties, and said that Italy was "by far the CIA's largest covert political action program undertaken until then."²⁴ Such a commitment demonstrates how the US continued to see the PCI as a key threat in Cold War Europe, and took what it saw as the necessary measures to blunt its progress. The DC, meanwhile, continued to rule with its centrist coalition until the 1958 election saw that

²¹ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 54.

²² Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War*, 133.

²³ Donald Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy: Economy, Society, and Politics since 1945* (London: Longman, 1997), 177.

²⁴ William Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 109.

arrangement lose its majority. The DC was left with few options to form a stable government. As there was no chance of bringing the PCI into government, the only mathematical way to cobble together a majority was to include the PSI. Amintore Fanfani became prime minister by getting the Socialists to abstain in the vote to form a government, allowing the DC's plurality to overcome the PCI opposition. This arrangement continued (with a brief interruption when a right-wing coalition was formed) until 1963, when a general election saw the DC lose over 4% of the vote and the PSI (as well as the PCI) gain seats.²⁵ In the new parliament, DC Secretary Aldo Moro and PSI leader Pietro Nenni reformulated the center-left government so that the PSI was brought into government as a formal coalition partner, with Nenni as deputy prime minister. The center-left was constituted with the blessing John F. Kennedy's administration in hopes it would isolate the Communists.²⁶

In addition to Rome's politics, the US supported the project of integrating both NATO and the EC, in both of which Italy was a founding partner. NATO was founded in 1949 as a military alliance of America's allies against the Soviet threat. The DC brought Italy in at the beginning, and within NATO it followed America's line, becoming known as "America's most faithful ally" in the alliance.²⁷ In 1957, representatives of France, West Germany, Belgium the Netherlands, and Luxembourg came to Italy to sign the Treaty of Rome, establishing the EC between the six countries, creating a common market through which goods and people flowed freely, customs-free. Italy's role in the founding stages of the EC made it the "southern European country most integrated into the economic, political and military structures of the West" and the

²⁵ Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy*, 177.

²⁶ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 258.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158

Common Market helped fuel economic prosperity.²⁸ For America's part, a key tenet of its foreign policy in Europe was to support these efforts at regional integration.²⁹ It would also support Italy's promotion as a prominent member within the bloc and the continent. Overall, as Italy was shifting from government to government, it was also integrating itself with the West both politically and militarily, and in doing so was serving US interests.

When an assassin's bullet brought an end to Kennedy's term in office on November 22, 1963, his successor was left with an Italy led by pro-US centrists working alongside leftists skeptical of America. Though the Socialists were not as readily sympathetic to the US as the DC who had beat back the Communists and brought Italy into NATO, Washington had to account for their presence. After all, if that arrangement was not supported, the opposition led by Communists could be one electoral victory away from bringing Western Europe's first domino crashing down.

²⁸ Ibid., 166, 214.

²⁹ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, 16.

IV. The Johnson Administration

In March 1966, French President Charles de Gaulle dealt a body blow to American objectives in Europe. He announced the withdrawal of French troops from NATO's command structure, which Ambassador to France Charles Bohlen had called in a telegram anticipating the move a "line of policy... [that] might easily lay our entire Europe policy in ruins."³⁰ In the ongoing Cold War with the Soviet Union, the organization which unified Western defense against the threat from Moscow was, in America's eyes, essential to preventing the spread of communism and stopping Soviet aggression. As France took its military force out of NATO, there was another European country that threatened to do the same, and inflict an additional blow to US interests, if the opposition gained power. Italy's Communists made clear at this time their opposition to the military alliance, praising France's defiance of Washington, and criticizing the alliance as a mechanism for the US to force the other members into its political-military goals, including "the bloody Vietnamese adventure."³¹ The PCI was both celebrating a wound to America's Cold War position, and taking the opportunity to make an attack on the war in Southeast Asia. Fortunately for the US, when de Gaulle made his move, there were much more reliably pro-Washington allies empowered in Rome.

Only two weeks after Lyndon Johnson took office aboard Air Force One in Dallas, coalition negotiations in Italy resulted in the appointment of a new prime minister, Aldo Moro. From then until June 1968, Johnson and Moro served simultaneously as US president and Italian prime minister, allowing Johnson to consistently deal with the same head of government in Rome for the vast majority of his administration. In the somewhat unstable post, Moro's 1963-

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 56.

³¹ Maria A. Macciocchi, "Il nostro interesse," *L'Unità*, Mar. 11, 1966, 1.

1968 term marked the second-longest continuous service of a Cold War prime minister. In a 1967 biography used to brief LBJ ahead of a White House meeting with the prime minister, he was described as “an avowed anti-Communist... His foreign program is strongly based on Western solidarity, European integration and close ties with the US.”³² Moro was joined by another two key figures: Giuseppe Saragat, a Social Democrat³³ who was initially foreign minister through most of 1964 until he was elected as President of the Republic, and Amintore Fanfani, a leading Christian Democrat who replaced Saragat as foreign minister and served in the post for most of Moro’s term. Moro and Fanfani led the foreign policy-making of the government during the Johnson years, which created tension between Moro’s straightforwardly pro-American views and Fanfani’s sometimes more equivocal posturing. A briefing for the 1967 meeting notes that Fanfani “has generally been a staunch advocate of close US-Italian ties,” but also noted his “often sudden shifts in political direction” done in the name of his political ambitions.³⁴ While Saragat demonstrated a strongly pro-US bent, his symbolic role left him outside the main decision-making done by Moro and Fanfani. However, in a diplomatic relationship heavily reliant on the politics of imagery, a ceremonial head of state played a key role.

For the Americans, under President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and National Security Advisors McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow, Ambassador to Italy G. Frederick Reinhardt was the main player in US Italy policy. Reinhardt had experience with Vietnam specifically, serving as the US Ambassador to Saigon from 1955 to 1957. He was then appointed

³² Memo from Nicholas Katzenbach to Lyndon Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

³³ The Social Democrats were a small center-left party that were also members of the center-left coalition.

³⁴ Ibid.

to Rome by President Kennedy in 1961, and Johnson kept him in post until 1968, which *The Washington Post* reported made him well overdue for reassignment upon his leaving office in January 1968.³⁵ Johnson also decided against relocating Reinhardt to Vienna, with “keep” written next to Reinhardt’s name in a January 1967 memo to the president proposing the transfer.³⁶ Reinhardt’s long tenure and the rejection of his transfer suggests that the administration saw some value in keeping him in Rome. A similar perspective came from Giulio Andreotti, an eventual prime minister who served as defense minister during Reinhardt’s tenure. Andreotti praised his “great ability in establishing contacts” and noted that “seven years are quite a few years for proper... survival in the capital of Italy.”³⁷ Within the White House, advisor Jack Valenti was also involved in Italy policy, influenced by his own descent from Sicily.³⁸ In remarks deleted from a proposed toast during Moro’s 1965 visit, Johnson was to say of Valenti, “I am now quite sure the distinguished Italian Ambassador is the only envoy in Washington with a vocal assistant in my own office.”³⁹ While this may have been an attempt to inflate Italy’s perceived importance in front of its prime minister, Valenti’s communications do reflect an active interest in his ancestral country.

³⁵ Chalmers M. Roberts, “Ackley Appointment Speeded by Month,” *The Washington Post*, Jan. 4, 1968.

³⁶ January 13, 1967 Memo to Lyndon Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, White House Central File: Confidential File: Name File, Box 150, “RE,” Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

³⁷ Giulio Andreotti, *The U.S.A. Up Close: From the Atlantic Pact to Bush*, trans. Peter C. Farrell (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

³⁸ Valenti’s White House role was of some interest to Italians and the Italian press. Italian media reported on his ancestry (For one, a journal called *L’Ora* published a profile on Valenti calling him “The Sicilian in the White House”) and several Italian letter writers claimed relation to him (often accompanied by some request for money or other assistance). Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, White House Central File: Country File, Box 44, CO 127 11/22/63-3/31/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

³⁹ Text of Lyndon Johnson’s Toast to Aldo Moro, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, White House Central File: Country File, Box 44, CO 127 4/21/65-7/15/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

As the US escalated the conflict in Vietnam, these men were largely responsible for dealing with its effects on the US-Italy relationship. For most of the Johnson administration, Rome followed a policy of *conoscenza*, or understanding, regarding the Vietnam War. Washington embraced this stance, considering the domestic pressures faced by the DC leaders: a Communist opposition ready to make gains, wary PSI coalition partners, and a peace-promoting Vatican. Vietnam also factored into America's strategy of lending Italy the image of being an influential power, which in turn aided in bolstering Italian political stability. Overall, the Johnson administration allowed the Italian government to lend only a limited form of support for the war considering the full range of domestic factors pressuring the DC on the issue.

***Conoscenza* – The Moro Government's Measured Support for the Vietnam War**

Of the issues that defined US-Italian relations during the Johnson-Moro period, Vietnam crept into the top of the agenda following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which led LBJ to escalate the conflict. From that point and for the remainder of his time in office, the Moro government followed a policy of *conoscenza*, which the US government frequently translated as "understanding." Moro would generally express support for the US mission in Vietnam and paint the government of North Vietnam as the aggressive party. However, Rome did not match this support with significant troop deployments or aid; the Italian contribution to the war effort consisted of a ten-person surgical team and science scholarships.⁴⁰ Additionally, the government did not unreservedly praise US tactics in the war, at times avoiding endorsement of the American bombings in North Vietnam. Italian support for the war could then be said to have been both reserved and mostly rhetorical. However, the Johnson administration accepted this degree of

⁴⁰ Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Vietnam, Box 91, Other Country Aid, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

support from Rome, and did not push for a stronger position favoring the war. This was because the US recognized that with the instability of the Italian political scene, the fall of the government could happen over a dispute on Vietnam.

Under the pretense that Viet Cong forces had attacked an American ship in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2, 1964, Johnson sought and gained approval from Congress “to take all necessary measures” in retaliating against the North Vietnamese and “to prevent further aggression.”⁴¹ On August 6, Prime Minister Moro made a statement on Vietnam in the Chamber of Deputies during debate on a confidence motion. As relayed in a telegram to the Secretary of State by Francis Meloy, Reinhardt’s deputy, Moro asserted that the American retaliation was a “simple act of self-defense, with limited aim of hitting bases from which Vietnam attacks came, and avoiding, with high sense of responsibility, dangers to civilian population.”⁴² This statement indicates that the prime minister supported both the rationale for the Americans’ attack as well as the specific actions they took. However, by making a distinction between motives and actions, he made a rhetorical distinction that would repeat itself in statements where the government endorsed one but not the other. Moro went on to state that the US did not intend to widen the conflict in Southeast Asia and that it would heed the “sentiments of allies and friends.”⁴³ By expressing this (ultimately misguided) hope, the prime minister established that he expected the US to take into account the views of its allies, certainly including Italy, when it considered how to proceed, something that foreshadowed Italian attempts to give the appearance of its being consulted on Vietnam. Finally, he affirmed that “the liberty of a conspicuous number of East

⁴¹ “Transcript of Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1964),” Our Documents, accessed Apr. 1, 2018, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=98&page=transcript#top>

⁴² August 6, 1964 Telegram from Francis Meloy to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume II, Cables 7/64-12/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁴³ Ibid.

Asian states depends on the outcome of the conflict and on the firm and responsible position of the United States.”⁴⁴ With this statement, Moro lent his support for the US mission of preventing the spread of Communism, providing an endorsement for the content of “Domino theory,” if not citing it by name.

The White House greeted Moro’s statement with an appreciation of its support for the US. NSC staffer David Klein wrote a memo to McGeorge Bundy recommending he express the administration’s thanks to Italian Ambassador to the US Sergio Fenoaltea (Bundy made a handwritten note on the memo that he did so). Klein additionally noted that “this performance contrasts sharply with Fanfani’s lack of support at the time of the Cuban crisis,” referencing Fanfani’s actions (or rather lack thereof) when he was prime minister during the Cuban Missile Crisis, saying the difference between the two prime ministers was “sharp enough” to justify the call to Fenoaltea.⁴⁵ This comment demonstrates a particular appreciation for Moro’s leadership in the show of support, especially in contrast to his predecessor and future foreign minister. Klein further noted the irony of a “left-of-center government with socialists” giving the US greater support than “a conservative government with the socialists in opposition.”⁴⁶ This comment indicates that the officials involved in Italy policy were well-aware of the ideological factions in Moro’s coalition, and looked at his foreign policy statements through the lens of the government’s partisan make-up. Though here that took the form of pleasant surprise at the strength of Moro’s statement considering the presence of the PSI, it would later be used to contextualize and accept more lukewarm government statements.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ August 7, 1964 Memo from David Klein to McGeorge Bundy, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume II, Memos 7/64-12/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA..

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Moro's next major statement on the war came in February of 1965, shortly following Johnson's inauguration to a full term as president. That month, the US further escalated the war by launching the first airstrikes against the Viet Cong. Following an attack on a US army barracks, the US bombed four barracks in North Vietnam, with Johnson personally approving the targets.⁴⁷ As relayed in a telegram from Reinhardt to the State Department, Moro again affirmed his government's support for the American policy in Vietnam in response to questions posed in debate in the Chamber of Deputies. Moro stated he was pleased that the US had reported its actions to the United Nations, expressed his confidence that a solution could be reached without further bloodshed, and said "[the Italians] completely understand the US position and responsibility."⁴⁸ Here, the prime minister deployed the rhetorical technique he would come to use more and more in discussing the war, as the term "understand" implied a position that appreciated the complexities of US policy without inherently endorsing it. Though this statement to parliament was broadly supportive, it shows that Moro was already giving himself the rhetorical space to give only a measured form of support to the Americans. The prime minister went on to state that the government's aim was "to draw attention to the dangers that derive from situation in Southeast Asia and to necessity of avoiding, as US also has declared its intention to do, acts that could provoke extension of the conflict."⁴⁹ In this statement, underlined by David Klein,⁵⁰ Moro again endorsed the US position. However, by opposing actions provoking

⁴⁷ "Summary Notes of 545th NSC Meeting," in David M. Barrett, *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 104-105.

⁴⁸ February 12, 1965 Telegram from Frederick Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Cables 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ The identification of the underlining as Klein comes from a separate handwritten note signed by him on the telegram. The underlining itself is unsigned. Both the note and the underline were made in pencil.

“extension of the conflict” he left the government open to refraining from support for the US carrying out any such actions.

The US ambassador saw this as unambiguous support, with Reinhardt commenting that Moro “could not prudently have taken a stronger pro-American stand without provoking government crisis.”⁵¹ The reason for this, according to Reinhardt, was the Socialists, who he described as “anti-colonialist, neutralist-minded” with the party’s left wing calling for an “end of use of force,” criticizing Moro’s statement of support.⁵² The ambassador’s writing then marks a clear effort to ground the Italian government’s position in its delicate coalition politics. The White House largely agreed with Reinhardt. In handwritten notes, Klein called Moro’s speech “a good statement” and recommended LBJ call Ambassador Fenoaltea to express his thanks.⁵³ Klein’s recommendation indicates that the White House saw Reinhardt’s judgment as correct, and that they were appreciative enough to feel that a call from the president himself was merited. It could also be a sign that the personal touch from Johnson himself would encourage the government to hold to the pro-American line.

On March 2, the US commenced Operation Rolling Thunder in Vietnam. With this, the US began a bombing campaign that would grow each year, from 25,000 bombing sorties in 1965 to 108,000 in 1967.⁵⁴ With the landing of two marine battalions in Danang that same month beginning an infusion of ground troops, March marked a new phase in America’s commitment to

⁵¹ Feb. 12, 1965 Telegram from Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Cables 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ David L. Anderson, *The Vietnam War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 46.

Southeast Asia, and prompted an array of responses in Europe.⁵⁵ The French government had responded to the February bombing with a statement that called for an end to foreign intervention in Vietnam, implicitly rebuking the United States.⁵⁶ After Rolling Thunder began, Charles de Gaulle's government in France "expressed serious and mounting concern" fearing "the war will spread over 'a large part of Asia'".⁵⁷ Then, on March 8, *The New York Times* reported that NATO allies had responded "coolly" to Secretary of State Dean Rusk's pleas for support, additionally noting the British Labour Party's left wing had rebelled in parliament against Prime Minister Harold Wilson's support for Washington.⁵⁸ The reaction of the NATO countries demonstrated a European response that ranged from ambivalence from most countries to outright hostility from Paris. Britain's support, furthermore, pointed to the danger support for the war posed when dealing with left-wing members of the government, with Wilson's backbench rebels mirroring Moro's PSI coalition partners.

Following the launch of Rolling Thunder, Rusk spoke to Ambassador Fenoaltea on March 5, with the Italian's reaction standing in contrast to that of the French. The secretary first thanked Ambassador Fenoaltea for the government's support. Fenoaltea then reiterated the government's support, with both men emphasizing that Hanoi was at fault for its unwillingness to negotiate.⁵⁹ Coming from Rusk, this showed that Italy's support was appreciated at the highest levels of America's foreign policy apparatus. Additionally, by pushing the line of Hanoi's intransigency, Rusk bolstered this as a line of defense the Italian government could use against

⁵⁵ Letter from Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland to General Wheeler in Barrett, *Vietnam Papers*, 129.

⁵⁶ Drew Middleton, "Paris Again Asks Peace in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1965, 1.

⁵⁷ Drew Middleton, "French Voice Mounting Concern Over U.S. Air Attacks," *The New York Times*, Mar. 4, 1965, 9.

⁵⁸ Drew Middleton, "NATO Allies Cool to Rusk Plea for Aid on Vietnam," *The New York Times*, Mar. 8, 1965, 4.

⁵⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 106

its critics. In the course of the conversation Rusk spoke unfavorably of the French criticizing American air strikes but saying nothing about North Vietnamese aggression.⁶⁰ By criticizing Paris in front of Fenoaltea, Rusk demonstrated what positions the US would find disagreeable from a European government. It could also have made for an implicit comparison: Paris as a criticizing annoyance and Rome as a supportive ally, with Rusk clearly favoring the latter. Fenoaltea certainly walked away understanding what policies on Vietnam Rusk and Johnson appreciated, and what they did not.

The contrast between Rome and Paris continued with statements of support from both the prime minister and foreign minister. On March 12, Moro told the Chamber of Deputies that “Italy, while having no political commitments in South-East Asia, has an *understanding*, in the framework of its alliances, of the position of the United States, whose action is being carried out in a difficult and complex situation.”⁶¹ The word “understanding” is translated from the Italian “*conoscenza*,” which Moro’s biographer Guido Formigioni describes as the government’s policy supporting the US mission, but not expressing complete solidarity and keeping some distance from Washington’s actions.⁶² Indeed, Moro’s statements do reflect Formigioni’s description, but the US interpreted them as clear support, or at least the maximum level of support Moro could give in his political circumstances. Answering questions in the Senate on March 26, Amintore Fanfani, freshly appointed, made his own statements supporting the US in Vietnam. Fanfani repeated Moro’s previous statements and said that Italy would work towards securing peace, hoping that the Americans would “seek at all levels the opportunities and manners best suited to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Moro’s Address at the Confidence Debate Before the Chamber of Deputies, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Memos 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA, emphasis mine

⁶² Guido Formigioni, *Aldo Moro: Lo statista e il suo dramma* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 205.

achieving the objectives of wider freedom, of just progress, of secure peace.”⁶³ Through this vague wording, Fanfani left open what methods he saw as “best suited” to reaching peace, though the preceding discussion of suing for talks means that he saw negotiations as an option. This phrasing left Fanfani room to support or oppose future US measures; that he would not unhesitatingly endorse all US tactics was emphasized by a different point in his remarks. He said he had gone to the US with concerns America had used chemical weapons in Vietnam, and had obtained assurances that lethal chemical weapons had not been used.⁶⁴ By seeking such confirmation and noting it, Fanfani established that there were measures that, if taken by the US, he would not endorse.

However, that same month the PSI took a more hostile stance than their senior coalition partners. On March 24, the party’s directorate had voted unanimously in favor of a resolution that opposed the US policy in Vietnam. Calling the Viet Cong’s campaign a “liberation war,” the directorate expressed hope “Italian government makes full use of its authority in all quarters... to express its disapproval for recourse to action and war methods which... threaten world peace.”⁶⁵ With this statement, the PSI not only expressed opposition to the war but also drew a direct line between its freshly voted-on position and that of their DC coalition partners. This did not escape the notice of Frederick Reinhardt, who wrote, “since new PSI position is not at all in concert with that expounded by Moro in parliament a few weeks ago, existing strains and stresses in

⁶³ Text of the Reply to Foreign Minister On. Fanfani to Questions Submitted to the Senate – March 26, 1965, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Memos 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ March 25, 1965, Telegram from Frederick Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Cables 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

government could be expected to be aggravated.”⁶⁶ With this, Reinhardt made the case to Washington that Vietnam was an issue that could exacerbate the political divisions within the center-left coalition. Additionally, by presenting Moro’s position in contrast to that of the PSI, he highlighted the prime minister’s support under trying circumstances that threatened the unity of his government.

On April 7, 1965, Johnson responded to growing international criticism of the US military action with a speech at Johns Hopkins University. In the speech, Johnson expressed that the US mission was to secure the independence of South Vietnam against aggression from the North and explained that he sought a quick and peaceful resolution of the conflict, saying he favored “unconditional discussions” and that “the only path for peaceful men is the path of peaceful settlement.”⁶⁷ The Italian government responded positively to the speech, as according to Jack Valenti, “it cut the propaganda ground out from under the Communists and strengthened Moro’s hand immeasurably.”⁶⁸ Here, the White House clearly interpreted Johnson’s words on Vietnam as having a beneficial effect in Italian politics. Even if such was not the primary intention, it demonstrates that an awareness of how America’s actions could impact Italy’s politics existed in the administration and factored into their assessment of Italy. Further, it linked the issue of Vietnam not only to the stability of PSI-DC unity, but also something the PCI could exploit to make gains, especially if the coalition fell apart. As Valenti wrote, “The Nenni Socialist Party (PSI) cannot be too accommodating... It is vital to Moro that the Nenni Socialists

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson: "Address at Johns Hopkins University: "Peace Without Conquest.," Apr. 7, 1965, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26877>.

⁶⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 109.

remain allied to him because of the substantial strength of the Communist Party.”⁶⁹ Similar to Reinhardt and Klein, Valenti used the PSI’s position to justify the Italian government’s limits on supporting the war, and further explicitly connected that to the specter of the PCI.

Johnson had the opportunity to speak with the prime minister and foreign minister in person the following month, when they visited Washington on April 20 and 21. In briefing papers Vietnam was listed as a topic that Moro might raise, in which case Johnson was to express his appreciation for Moro and Fanfani’s support.⁷⁰ LBJ was furnished with a paper elaborating on the US position in Southeast Asia, including not only Vietnam, but also Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand; it ended by saying “despite political opposition at home, Prime Minister Moro has strongly supported our Vietnam policy.”⁷¹ On April 20, a meeting was held with Johnson, Rusk, Moro, and Fanfani all participating. Before the heads of government entered the conversation, Rusk briefed Fanfani on the current situation in Vietnam, repeatedly emphasizing Hanoi’s intransigence, saying “the tragedy of the situation is that there could be peace literally in twenty-four hours if North Vietnam would stop sending forces into South Vietnam.”⁷² Rusk placed the onus on Hanoi, which Moro and Fanfani had similarly done and would continue to do in their own public statements. Rusk additionally took the opportunity to again criticize the French position, calling it “peace regardless of the consequence.”⁷³ As in the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Apr. 16, 1965 Memo from Dean Ruks to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Memos 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁷¹ Background Paper on Southeast Asia, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Memos 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁷² April 20, 1965 Memorandum of Conversation, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Memos 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁷³ Ibid.

conversation with Fenoaltea, the Italians were given not only evidence the US was grateful for their support but that such placed them in a greater position than the French.

Moro had the chance to express the Italian government's support when he entered the conversation. Given the opportunity to express his views, Moro pointed to the government's support for the US in South Vietnam, saying "Italy would wish to follow the lead of the United States, which is not acting from selfish motivations or desire for conquest."⁷⁴ Moro's language was unequivocal here, again basing his support in America's overall objective in Vietnam. He went on to say that while Italy wanted peace, such would not be brought by "unilateral abandonment" of the US military campaign.⁷⁵ By making this distinction, Moro separated his support for talks from that of de Gaulle, and aligned his position with that Johnson had expressed at Johns Hopkins. Moro's position recognized Hanoi as the aggressor, and would support talks on the same basis as the United States. In a telegram sent to Rome, the conversation was described as "in discussions Moro was most forthcoming in support US objectives SEA [Southeast Asia] and elsewhere."⁷⁶ This confirms that the White House saw Moro's statements as endorsements of the US position.

As 1965 continued, the Italian government matched its rhetorical endorsement of peace talks by helping to negotiate "Marigold" a failed peace initiative between Washington and Hanoi. Though the main mediators of Marigold were Polish, the Italians, specifically Amintore Fanfani, played a key role. The initiative appears to have been presaged by the visit of Florence Mayor Giorgio La Pira, a leftist DC politician, to Hanoi. While little initially came of La Pira's

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 110.

initiative other than press coverage for the mayor, it emerged that his mission had been supported by Fanfani. Following from La Pira's initial outreach, there eventually grew to be full-blown peace negotiations primarily facilitated by the Poles, but in which Italian Ambassador to Saigon Giovanni D'Orlandi also served as a mediator.⁷⁷ These talks would carry on in 1966 without resolving the conflict, but the controversy surrounding the La Pira affair led Fanfani to submit his resignation as foreign minister. While he was ultimately reappointed after only a couple of months, it showed the internal tensions Vietnam could cause within the government. A memo to Secretary Rusk from Thomas Hughes explains that Fanfani's support of La Pira's outreach to Hanoi and the consternation that caused among conservatives was a principal cause of his resignation, describing the foreign minister as a potential "Vietnam casualty."⁷⁸ Ultimately, Fanfani's resignation was short-lived, and he continued in his post. However, the attempt to resign signals that divisions between Moro and Fanfani on Vietnam were festering, with his support for La Pira undermining a position of supporting the US. From the US perspective, looking at Fanfani's actions as Vietnam-driven demonstrates that Washington viewed the war as an issue that could have a concrete impact on Italian domestic politics.

As the war dragged on, Fanfani's support became weaker as he showed increasing opposition to US tactics in Vietnam, if still supporting the broader mission. In a December 22, 1965 conversation with Dean Rusk along with Ambassador Fenoaltea, Fanfani stressed that Italy provided support to Washington even "in days of difficulty," and Rome's support was stronger

⁷⁷ James G. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), 16-20.

⁷⁸ Intelligence Note from Thomas Hughes to Dean Rusk, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 197, Volume IV, Cables 12/65-12/66, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

than that from Paris and London.⁷⁹ However, Fanfani went on to say that “Italy cherishes the liberty to disagree” with the most powerful country in the world, that the war was unpopular among many Italians, and that the US should beware making an “extreme decision” in Vietnam.⁸⁰ By making such a warning couple with his comparison to France and Britain, Fanfani was both emphasizing his government’s past support and establishing that it was not to be taken for granted; Italy would not endorse any and all US action in Southeast Asia. For his part, Rusk said Fanfani was viewing Vietnam from the wrong angle, saying the foreign minister should ask himself “is it to Italy’s interest that Hanoi succeed in aggression?” and expressed confidence that Italy would reach the same answer as the US. This question followed an earlier remark in the conversation that “it is the integrity of the United States that is in the national interest of each country.”⁸¹ Rusk’s words to Fanfani signal that his comments in this conversation and actions towards negotiating Marigold had brought some strain onto US-Italian relations regarding Vietnam, with Rusk pressing for stronger Italian support. This is anomalous as other government communications tended to acknowledge the government’s “understanding” as sufficient, especially given Italy’s domestic political circumstances. It does signal that moving away from that position, as Fanfani gave hints of doing in this conversation and would do subsequently, could frustrate US appreciation for the broader Italian attitude towards the war.

In that conversation, Fanfani also gave stark warning of the potential consequences for Italy. He explained that after years of the PSI moving away from the PCI, the war was starting to

⁷⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 121

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

“work against this trend.”⁸² Here, the concerns of PSI support for the coalition were raised once more, and again married to the possibility of the PCI making gains in the process. He then said that “the United States should imagine itself in a situation where it might take an extreme decision regarding Viet-Nam which might cause the Italian Government to fall and precipitate a Government crisis in Italy. The United States would be faced not only with its extreme burden in the Pacific but also with confusion in the Mediterranean area.”⁸³ Here, Fanfani not only made the case that mishandling Vietnam could unsettle the Italian government, but that it could cause that instability to spread through the surrounding region. By immediately preceding this comment with talk of the PSI and PCI potentially being drawn closer together, he raised the specter of one consequence of that “confusion” being the Communists with greater influence in Italy and the area. Simply, Fanfani was, in a way, suggesting that Italy was a European domino, and that the wrong action regarding Vietnam could send it tumbling down.

Around the time of Rusk’s Fanfani meeting, Johnson authorized a bombing pause for the Christmas holiday. When debating whether to extend the bombing pause on January 22, UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg cited Italy as a reason to do so: “Italy has crisis. Moro has been loyal friend. Needs pause to shore him (up) domestically.”⁸⁴ While Goldberg mentioned that the UK, France, and Canada all favored a continued pause as well, with none of them did he go out of the way to cite the head of government’s loyalty and domestic concerns. Even though Britain had yet to disassociate from the US policy, meaning Harold Wilson was at this point providing rhetorical support in the same vein as Moro, only the Italian prime minister merited special mention here. The ambassador’s comments then indicate that not only did the government

⁸² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 121.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ “Notes by Jack Valenti on meeting in the cabinet room,” in Barrett, *Vietnam Papers*, 311.

appreciate Moro's support, but they did so in a way that made Italy stand out from other NATO allies, even those who functionally took on a similar position. Additionally, the references to the domestic political crisis demonstrated a continued attitude of looking at Italy's Vietnam positions through the lens of domestic politics. In fact, in this instance a member even argued that Italian government stability could be a reason to affect the conduct of the military campaign itself. However, Johnson ultimately decided to end the pause, and bombing resumed at the end of January.

Indeed, Johnson could continue to look to Moro as a "loyal friend," even as the war progressed. While he became more hesitant in supporting US bombings, Moro kept his criticisms trained on Hanoi. Addressing the Senate on March 3, 1966, he repeated the position of "understanding" and while encouraging peace talks said that such required "goodwill on the part of Hanoi (whose position on the negotiations has been) until now tied to unrealizable conditions."⁸⁵ The document highlighting excerpts from Moro's speech notes that the prime minister expressed "concern" over Vietnam, but that he mainly blamed Hanoi, as well as warning both North Vietnam and China not to believe America divided "because in a free democracy issues are openly discussed."⁸⁶ Through this statement, Moro avoided a full endorsement of the US position, but also heavily criticized America's opponents in the war and made an implicit endorsement of the US mission of supporting liberal democracy over communism with his comment about "a free democracy." Notably, Moro's statement came the same month de Gaulle announced France's NATO command withdrawal, and three months before Britain's disassociation on Vietnam. Moro's positioning on the war was acknowledged by

⁸⁵ Mar. 10, 1966 Memo from Jack Valenti to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, White House Central File: Country File, Box 44, CO 127 7/15/65-11/25/66. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

a briefing paper ahead of an informal visit to the White House on June 22, 1967: “While expressing understanding of our policy, he may mention his concern about eroding public support in Italy for the American position in Viet-Nam. He may urge another pause in the bombing of North Viet-Nam to demonstrate U.S. goodwill as opposed to Hanoi’s intransigence.”⁸⁷ This analysis from the White House indicates that even in areas where Moro was reluctant to support US policy, such as bombings of North Vietnam, he framed it as a way to get the better of Hanoi, and continued to speak of the North Vietnamese as the main obstacle to peace.

In contrast, Fanfani began to take a position that explicitly opposed US bombings of North Vietnam. In a message forwarded by Reinhardt to Secretary Rusk, Fanfani expressed his satisfaction that Johnson decided not to resume bombing of Vietnam.⁸⁸ While nothing in the wording of the message transcends diplomatic boilerplate, it indicates that Fanfani had begun to see bombings of North Vietnam as a tactic he would not endorse. He emphasized this point in a statement in the Senate on April 27. He said “every attentive observer finds that the resumption of bombing does not favor the success of attempts for a peaceful solution” and that “further escalations” could be “tragic for all humanity.”⁸⁹ Fanfani’s statement laid out for all the public his active opposition to the US resuming bombing, without a simultaneous condemnation of Hanoi. Though he refrained from full condemnation, not criticizing the overall US mission or entering into attacks on the Johnson administration, he made clear that further American

⁸⁷ Memo from Nicholas Katzenbach to Lyndon Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁸⁸ Feb. 12, 1967 Telegram from Reinhardt to State Department. Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Cables 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁸⁹Fanfani in “L’Italia segue con ‘apprensione’ i gravi avvenimenti della Grecia,” *La Stampa*, Apr. 28, 1967.

bombings would have a negative – “tragic,” in fact – impact. Fanfani’s statement roiled the Italian foreign policy establishment by bringing about the resignation of Ambassador Fenoaltea, who could not align himself with Fanfani’s position.⁹⁰

Johnson followed up these events by inviting Fenoaltea for a farewell call at the White House on the recommendation of Secretary Rusk, specifically referencing the circumstances leading to his resignation.⁹¹ In an attached note to approve or decline the recommendation, LBJ, in addition to checking the affirmative option, handwrote “I much approve.”⁹² The invitation, under these circumstances, indicates that by meeting with the outgoing ambassador Johnson could show his support for Fenoaltea’s position, and in turn rebuke Fanfani. LBJ’s handwritten note showed a degree of enthusiasm in meeting with the ambassador. In a memo laying out the exact time of the meeting, Deputy National Security Advisor Francis Bator wrote “*You know the circumstances* leading to his resignation and *need no briefing* from me.”⁹³ Bator’s wording here indicates that among the many issues that came before the president during this time, the resignation of the Italian ambassador and the reasons for it were so known to Johnson as to require no refreshing of his memory, and that this was known to members of his staff. In all likelihood, Johnson was displeased with Fanfani’s stance on the war, appreciated Fenoaltea’s stance, and made such known to those around him. Like Rusk’s comments to Fanfani in their December 1965 conversation, Johnson’s behavior here indicates that while the US government

⁹⁰ Memo from Nicholas Katzenbach to Lyndon Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² May 26, 1967 Memo from Francis M. Bator to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁹³ Ibid., emphasis mine

accepted limited support from Italy given domestic politics, it resisted outright criticism from Rome and would attempt to bolster the pro-war actors within the Italian government.

1967 saw America's commitment to Vietnam reach new heights: 485,000 ground troops were stationed there, and the year saw 11,363 US fatalities, up from 6,350 the year before.⁹⁴ Protests against the war had taken off; in April over 100,000 rallied in New York, some chanting "Hey, Hey, L.B.J. How Many Kids Did You Kill Today."⁹⁵ That rage was mirrored abroad, with French President de Gaulle denouncing the war as "unjust" and "detestable" at the year's beginning.⁹⁶ Other allies gave more hedged statements: West German Chancellor Kurt George Kiesinger declined to endorse de Gaulle's position citing America's troop presence in his country; without actually endorsing the war he said "I think we have to leave it at that."⁹⁷ As the conflict intensified, the administration sent Vice President Hubert Humphrey on a tour of Europe, meeting with PSI Deputy Prime Minister Pietro Nenni in Rome. The Socialist leader said that the Americans would have to end the bombing of North Vietnam if Hanoi were to come to the table, and that a "growing part of non-communist Europe 'loathed continuation of the war."⁹⁸ Humphrey reported Nenni's comments back to Washington and felt he made progress in convincing Nenni "progressive leaders should place pressure against Hanoi to come to the conference table."⁹⁹ In addition to being another item of evidence for PSI skepticism of the US position, Humphrey's meeting demonstrated the US actively seeking to provide some form of

⁹⁴ "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics," National Archives, updated January 11, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>.

⁹⁵ Douglas Robinson, "100,000 Rally At U.N. Against Vietnam War," *The New York Times*, Apr. 16, 1967, 1.

⁹⁶ John L. Hess, "De Gaulle Urges U.S. To Quit War," *The New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1967, 1.

⁹⁷ Osgood Carruthers, "Kiesinger, De Gaulle Differences Outlined," *The Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 21, 1967, 8.

⁹⁸ Apr. 1, 1967 Telegram from Frederick Reinhardt to Walt Rostow, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: International Meetings and Travel File, Box 26, Vice President – Visit to Europe, Report to the President, March-April 1967, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

⁹⁹ Apr. 1, 1967 Telegram from Hubert Humphrey to Lyndon Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: International Meetings and Travel File, Box 26, Vice President – Visit to Europe, Report to the President, March-April 1967, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

reassurance to the DC's coalition partners about Vietnam. Therefore, it marked an active effort to not only bolster the DC's support of the war, but encourage those holding the balance of power to at least reduce their opposition.

Italian officials also emphasized who in Italian politics would exploit divisions and weakness from the government. Egidio Ortona, Fenoaltea's replacement as ambassador, told Dean Rusk that the war was a "crystallized element of polemic" exploited by the PCI in Italy, to which the DC had responded by stressing Hanoi's refusal to match a US bombing pause with a similar action.¹⁰⁰ In an October visit to the White House DC Secretary General Mariano Rumor also pointed to the PCI's exploitation of the war in public debate, saying "they had managed to make some disturbing inroads."¹⁰¹ These comments gave the White House a clear picture of who stood to benefit from any Vietnam-induced crisis in Italy. The US responded in each instance by supporting the statements of Italian officials. Ortona pointed to Moro's statement to parliament that Hanoi was culpable. Talking to Rumor, Johnson noted Saragat's speech. The US welcomed these positions from the Italian government and from these conversations saw them as measures to counteract any PCI benefit from Vietnam.

The American position received further significant support from another visiting influential figure in Italian politics: President Giuseppe Saragat. The ceremonial head of state paid a visit to Washington in September 1967, with a briefing paper describing him as supporting the American war effort but knowing that the US position was not widely appreciated by the

¹⁰⁰ Jul. 20, 1967 Memorandum of Conversation, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹⁰¹ Oct. 17, 1967 Memorandum of Conversation, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

Italian public, with the possibility for the next year's general election to further deteriorate Italian opinion towards the war.¹⁰² That analysis demonstrates both a continued practice of the *conoscenza* policy among Italian leadership, but also that the domestic political situation in Italy vis a vis the war was shifting further and further away from the US. In conversation with President Johnson, Saragat said he could not make a moral judgment on the war, but indicated he agreed with the US mission of preventing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, understood America's responsibility, and even said he would have made many of the same decisions in Johnson's place. But, he noted that for Italy Vietnam was mainly an issue of propaganda domestically, public opinion was moving against the war, and that it was in America's interest not to widen the conflict.¹⁰³ Through his comment on the war as propaganda, Saragat emphasized the leftist opposition to the war that the Italian government had to contend with, but did so while continuing to endorse America's mission and even supporting Johnson's decision-making.

On his way back to Washington from the funeral of Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt, Johnson stopped in Rome. Though his main intent was to see Pope Paul VI, he set aside time to meet with Moro, Fanfani, and Saragat. In his meeting with the three, Johnson stressed Hanoi's intransigence, saying that "the Italian government should know that we have intelligence that two North Vietnamese divisions are now moving towards the South. We have stopped bombing five times, and they have responded only by increasing their flow of supplies during the

¹⁰² Suggested Joint Comunique for Visit of President Giuseppe Saragat, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: International Meetings and Travel File, Box 21, CO 127 (1966-1967-1968), Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹⁰³ Sep. 18, 1967 Memorandum of Conversation, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

pause.”¹⁰⁴ With these words, Johnson specifically defended his aversion to bombing pauses, such pauses having been supported most vocally by Fanfani and also by Moro. Johnson also matched the main point of Moro’s own position by pointing to Hanoi as the main obstacle to peace, giving evidence to support that part of the Italian government’s position on the war. The record of the meeting, however, does not contain a response from the Italian officials.¹⁰⁵

The next year, 1968, marked a turning point in the war. The Tet Offensive, a surprise attack by the Viet Cong at the end of January, embarrassed the United States even though it technically won the battle. Protests intensified, and an anti-war candidate came in only 7 points behind LBJ in the New Hampshire Democratic primary, leading Johnson to announce he would not seek another term on March 31. As Vietnam helped fuel a background of unrest in a presidential contest between Republican nominee Richard Nixon and the Democratic Vice President Humphrey, students protested amid Italian voting. In that year’s general election the PSI lost more than 5% of the vote. While DC actually gained votes and seats, the PSI’s losses rendered them hesitant to rejoin the government, causing Moro’s resignation. A caretaker government then took office, led by Giovanni Leone. With the Italians stuck negotiating the formation of a new government, there was little talk of Vietnam even with activism roiling both countries. In an October meeting with Foreign Minister Giuseppe Medici, Johnson gave an update on the war and peace negotiations in Paris, demonstrating that there was still continued interest in keeping the Italians informed.¹⁰⁶ By the time the PSI agreed to reenter a government

¹⁰⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 137.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ October 11, 1968 Memo to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

headed by Mariano Rumor in December, Johnson was a mere month from leaving office, and the future of Vietnam policy was in Nixon's hands.

The Image of an Influential Italy

The overarching pattern of US foreign policy towards Italy during the Johnson administration was largely image-based. In order to keep the Moro government afloat, the US worked to present a picture of an Italy that was consulted on issues of international importance, so that Italy's leaders could show they were internationally respected and were rewarded for their consistent support of the United States. As Moro's coalition faced fracture, he could bolster his government's stability through the reception he received from the US president, and his consultation on issues like the Vietnam War. While reality was in fact different, what mattered was that Italian politicians could go back to their partners in government and their constituents seeming to be key allies of the United States.

Jack Valenti summed up the essence of this goal of US Italy policy in a note to the president on May 21, 1965. Advising Johnson to take a walk in the Rose Garden with Fanfani (he was making a courtesy call to the White House three days later), Valenti gave his assessment of Moro's visit the previous month:

The extra touches given Moro (the Cabinet meeting, the walk to Decatur House) have captured all the attention in the Italian and European press – which proves that what people see and think, is far more important [than] what really happens and is. This is the way myths and legends are born – by the outward appearance, and not by the substance.

Now, in Italy, Moro has gained strength because of the visible show of affection by the American President.¹⁰⁷

Here, Valenti makes clear that the significance of these meetings was not any policy discussed by Johnson and Moro, but rather the administration lending Moro an appearance of having been consulted by the president of the United States and having treated Moro as an important world leader. This image translated into a tangible policy benefit as it strengthened Moro's stature and position within Italy and Europe.

Indeed, that visit's role in boosting Italy's image on the world stage and within Europe was acknowledged in its planning and in the subsequent assessment of its success. In a briefing paper on the Italian objectives of the visit, Moro is said to have "concern that we are losing interest in Europe and seek assurances that we will continue to exercise active leadership in building the Atlantic partnership."¹⁰⁸ This indicates that the US saw bolstering the perceived importance of Europe within US foreign policy as an aim of Italian foreign policy, and one the US should respond to. Valenti realized this had to be accompanied by a show of Italy's importance within Europe, as "the Italians are quite sensitive about their position in the European power structure. It would be most helpful if your talk could underscore the fact that the U.S. considers Italy to be part of a rectangle of London, Paris, Bonn, and Rome."¹⁰⁹ Valenti's comments indicate that addressing Italian insecurities was a key part of the US approach to the country. Referencing the other capitals points to that position having been pursued within the

¹⁰⁷ Memo from Jack Valenti to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, The President's Appointment File [Diary Backup], Box 17, May 24, 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA. emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁸ Apr. 16, 1965 Memo from Dean Rusk to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Europe and USSR: Italy, Box 198, Moro Visit (I) 4/20-21/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹⁰⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 109.

context of NATO and European integration, indicating Valenti saw this as a part of an overall policy of strengthening the alliances and Italy's role within them. which He went on to state that "like any human or nation that once tasted great glory and then settled into a decline, the Italians thirst for recognition as a nation to be reckoned with in the affairs of the world."¹¹⁰ Valenti's use of the word "recognition" makes the point that what matters to Italy is not its actual ability to influence global politics, but that it is perceived as an influential actor by its peers in Europe and the government's constituents at home. To accomplish this end, the US needed to show Italy and attention, and treat Moro and Fanfani with receptions befitting great leaders, and as long as that created the perception they were global power players it mattered little whether they influenced the substance of US policy. Additionally, following the visit, Reinhardt reported on the positive press coverage in Italy, saying that it "greatly increased [Moro's] prestige in Italy," pointing to the effect of Moro's visit being intended for a domestic audience in addition to a European one.¹¹¹

In September 1967, when President Saragat visited, American officials expressed similar aims. In a briefing paper outlining American objectives for the visit they include "demonstrate our recognition of [Italy's] role as a major NATO ally," and to reassure Saragat of the American commitment to defending the continent.¹¹² These aims demonstrate a continued commitment to bolster Italy's image on the world stage and emphasizing its closeness to the United States. Like the Valenti memo, it also indicates that such served the purpose of strengthening the defense

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ May 1, 1965 Telegram Francis Meloy to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Cables 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹¹² Sep. 12, 1967, Scope Paper for Visit of President Saragat, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 198, Visit of President Saragat 9/18-21/67, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

alliance. To accomplish these aims, outward shows of affection were made to Italian leaders, with LBJ approving a suggestion from Francis Bator to hold two, instead of just one, meetings with Saragat. Bator's rationale for this was that "Italian pride and sensitivity are behind this; they are anxious for the same treatment the British and Germans get."¹¹³ Following the cabinet meeting and walk to Decatur House for Moro, this shows a repeat of the strategy of showing special attention to Italian leaders with visible signs that they were being respected and consulted by Johnson. By comparing Italian treatment to that of the British and Germans, it also demonstrates a continuation of placing Italy in the same league as top tier European allies. That would strengthen Italy's position within Europe, in turn bolstering the state of the alliance.

The projection of Italy as important came in to play with Vietnam specifically. As Fanfani said in the Senate in March 1965 that he trusted "that the Italian viewpoint will be treated with the customary attention," regarding Vietnam.¹¹⁴ The public statements by the administration following meetings with Italian leaders reflected Fanfani's expectation, highlighting consultations with the Italians on Vietnam. In the joint statement issued following the Moro visit, it was noted that the leaders had spoken about the conflict in Vietnam, with the first half of the statement mostly devoted to the war and it being the first specific foreign policy issue addressed in the statement.¹¹⁵ The prominence of Vietnam in the official accounting of the meeting, and its primacy within the statement, presents an image of Moro and Fanfani having been substantively consulted on the issue. Similarly, in the communiqué following Saragat's trip

¹¹³ Aug. 9, 1967, Memo from Francis M. Bator to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 198, Visit of President Saragat 9/18-21/67, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹¹⁴ Apr. 6, 1965 Memo from David Klein to Jack Valenti, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Memos 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹¹⁵ Joint Communiqué by President Johnson and Prime Minister Moro, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, The President's Appointment File [Diary Backup], Box 16, Apr. 21, 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

to Washington, it also made sure to make reference to the conflict in Southeast Asia, using boilerplate language.¹¹⁶ Separated by two years (1965 and 1967), this indicates that over Johnson's term representing Italy as consulted on the war was a central facet of the US-Italy relationship. In his farewell statement upon leaving Italy, Johnson noted that he had discussed peace prospects in Vietnam with the Italian leaders, the only issue he cited other than NATO.¹¹⁷ Even once he finally visited Rome, Vietnam preceded issues of more direct importance to Italy and to Europe.

In one instance, Moro was directly able to use seeming influence on Vietnam in a confidence debate. On July 26, 1966, Moro sent a letter to the three members of the International Control Commission, the body that oversaw the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accords in Vietnam. He wrote to the prime ministers of Canada, Poland, and India, asking them to intervene to prevent American prisoners of war from being put on trial by the North Vietnamese.¹¹⁸ By writing to the ICC members, Moro had the opportunity to appear as though he was influencing a facet of the war. Johnson responded with a letter thanking Moro for his efforts, writing "We are most grateful you for this effort and very much hope that it will help dissuade Hanoi from taking such wanton action."¹¹⁹ Here, Johnson's words represent an attempt to make Moro perceive his

¹¹⁶ Joint Statement of President Johnson and President Saragat, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, The President's Appointment File [Diary Backup], Box 76, Sep. 18-19, 1967 Visit of President Saragat, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹¹⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Statement by the President Upon His Departure From Italy," December 23, 1967, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2864>.

¹¹⁸ July 26, 1966 Telegram from Francis Meloy to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Italy, Box 197, Volume IV, Cables 12/65-12/66, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹¹⁹ Aug. 3 1966 Letter from Lyndon B. Johnson to Aldo Moro, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Special Head of State Correspondence File, Box 27, Italy – Presidential Correspondence, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

actions as having had influence on the conduct of the war as well as having been helpful to the United States.

Altogether, a core feature of US Italy policy was projecting an image of Italy as a valued ally that had an important role in world politics. The actual substance of the relationship came second to the propagating of this image. The reason for this was that when faced with domestic crisis after domestic crisis at home, foreign respect could bolster Italian leaders among the public and their unruly coalition partners. Doing so served US interests by strengthening Italy's position within Europe, in turn strengthening the unity of alliances like NATO.

Unstable Governments in Rome: Coalitions of Chaos and Moro's Leadership

Though the Johnson administration had the rare opportunity to deal with an Italian prime minister who lasted in the job for four and half years continuously, it also received frequent reminders of the Italian government's constant instability. Aldo Moro resigned as prime minister three times during this period: in 1964, in 1966, and in 1968. The first two times he succeeded in reconstituting his same governing coalition, and continuing in his post.¹²⁰ The final time, following a general election, he was unable to cobble together a new coalition and was replaced by Giovanni Leone. During the two crises in which Moro was able to ultimately prevail, US policymakers saw how tenuous Moro's position was, but also how he was able to navigate these tumultuous moments. Furthermore, in the event of a government collapse, the resulting vacuum could be filled by Italy's second-largest political party: the Italian Communist Party. As a 1963 CIA national intelligence estimate warned regarding the center-left governing formula "if the

¹²⁰ It should be noted that Moro never left office following his first two resignations. Both times he remained in post in a caretaker capacity until he was reappointed upon resolution of the political crisis. This means his service as prime minister was unbroken despite a technical change in government.

circumstances of the breakup were such as to drive the Socialists back into the arms of the Communists... the consequences would be worse than if the experiment had never been attempted in the first place.”¹²¹ From the American perspective, those consequences could have included a Western European ally for the Soviet Union, or a weakening of NATO, either of which would act against US interests in Europe.

In the summer of 1964, Moro submitted his resignation to President Antonio Segni. Moro had lost a vote on providing government funding to Catholic schools, which he saw as a defeat for the government as it was his center-left coalition partners who voted the bill down.¹²² The following weeks saw a flurry of activity and negotiations that ultimately saw the same governing coalition reconstituted with Moro continuing as head of government. However, the intervening period had brought on US fears of the fall of Italy’s moderate, pro-Washington regime. At the ballot box, in the event of parliament’s dissolution, was that which the US had been contending in Italy since the fall of Mussolini: the PCI. In a telegram assessing the possibility of elections, Ambassador Reinhardt wrote that Palmiro Togliatti “smells opportunity to make great hay in this critical moment” and that he had sent PCI candidates out to their constituencies to campaign.¹²³ In another message, he noted that if the DC and PSI campaign against each other it would be “only the PCI standing to gain.”¹²⁴ Reinhardt’s analysis demonstrates how the US saw a snap general election as a potential threat, and revealed the perceived consequences of Italy’s

¹²¹ National Intelligence Estimate Number 24-63 Implications of The Center-Left Experiment in Italy, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: National Intelligence Estimates, Box 5, Italy, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹²² Jun. 27, 1964 Telegram from Frederick Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Italy, Box 196, Volume I, Cables 11/63-6/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Jun. 26, 1964 Intelligence Information Cable, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Italy, Box 196, Volume I, Cables 11/63-6/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

instability. It also shows why the US would want to prevent a snap election and keep the government intact, as the Communists could benefit. Additionally, this government collapse involved three elements that would influence the Italian position on Vietnam: the Socialists' tenuous relations with the DC, the opposition of the Communists, and the influence of the church over the DC.

In January 1966 Moro again faced a government crisis and again resigned. Initially believing the crisis would be resolved in short order, divisions among the left-leaning parties and within the DC dragged negotiations into February, with Moro “relinquish[ing his] mandate to form new government” with Moro having been “rejected by elements of his own party.”¹²⁵ While Moro was able to resolve the crisis and resume his tenure as prime minister, that the negotiations became so fraught and his position became so precarious made the US aware of how fragile the governing coalition was. Once more, the specter of Communist gain was evoked, with Reinhardt noting in a telegram that the drawn-out negotiations coincided with their party congress, where they could attack the ruling parties for their inability to govern Italy.¹²⁶ Again, this indicates that the US saw the PCI as the main beneficiaries of a government collapse. Through these two crises, the Johnson administration had lived experience of the volatility and fragility of Italy's governments. But, it also learned there was one man who could steer through the troubled waters: Aldo Moro.

¹²⁵ Feb. 6, 1966 Telegram from Frederick Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Italy, Box 197, Volume IV, Cables 12/65-12/66, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹²⁶ Jan. 22, 1966 Telegram from Frederick Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Italy, Box 197, Volume IV, Cables 12/65-12/66, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

The consequences of a PCI-led or influenced government, even if the prospect of such a government was remote, would have been counter to US interests. The party made a point of exploiting the war to stoke anti-US sentiment. The party's official newspaper *l'Unità*, declared on the front page that Operation Rolling Thunder was a "brutal imperialist aggression day by day worsening the danger to peace."¹²⁷ Further, the US perceived the PCI as being loyal to the Soviet Union. In a February 1964 telegram from Reinhardt, he relayed President Saragat's warning that "Italy's leading Communists had been raised at the feet of Stalin," meaning that they were loyal to Moscow and would not pursue democracy in power.¹²⁸ The assessment of US officials aligned with the potential for a PCI government to be Soviet-leaning. In March 1965 telegram, Embassy Counselor William Fraleigh wrote that "the PCI link with Moscow is an excellent reason to exclude the Communists from power," and dismissing the idea that the PCI was becoming fully autonomous, saying "we don't see any convincing evidence that the PCI is changing, and much convincing evidence that it is not."¹²⁹ Both Italian and US officials saw the threat of an Eastern-facing PCI, pointing to the Soviets as the key beneficiaries of PCI gains. Given the possibility considered that the PCI could exploit Italian instability to gain grounds, the assessment of the party's closeness to Moscow indicates why the US would seek to keep the party out of power. The Communists were also explicitly acknowledged as a threat to NATO; Jack Valenti wrote that if they made gains, "the position of the U.S. in the underbelly of NATO

¹²⁷ "Aerei USA bombardano di nuovo il Nord Vietnam," *l'Unità*, Mar. 3, 1965, 1.

¹²⁸ Feb. 29, 1964 Telegram from Reinhardt to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File: Italy, Box 196, Volume I, Cables 11/63-6/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹²⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 107.

becomes precarious.”¹³⁰ For the United States, Communist gains represented a Kremlin ally and NATO opponent in Western Europe. Though the PSI was the reason the Italian government had to limit its support understanding, the PCI was the reason Washington had to accept it.

Lastly, Aldo Moro was recognized by the United States as a figure singularly capable of holding together Italy’s fragile governments. In both crises, he had ultimately emerged once more as prime minister, and the US saw that as a result of his unique ability to lead the disparate elements of the Italian government. As such, many of the efforts to make Italy appear influential were focused on Moro specifically. Reinhardt interpreted the reaction in Italy to the visit as Moro having revealed “hidden qualities” as “a man capable of handling himself with dignity and poise in meeting with leading world statesmen.”¹³¹ This indicates that the US treatment of Moro had elevated him from a provincial politician to global political player in the eyes of his countrymen. The ones who Reinhardt made sure to note were Moro’s partners in government, noting that “the four coalition parties have expressed enthusiasm for what they consider Moro’s ability to win friendship of President Johnson.”¹³² In this statement, the ambassador points to building Moro’s support within the coalition as a key factor in boosting his image, and one that that work was able to have an effect on.

So, by boosting Moro’s image, and lending support to his leadership, the United States was able to strengthen his hand domestically. This helped him to withstand pressure on the Vietnam issue, and to hold his fragile alliance of parties together, the key party within that

¹³⁰ Mar. 10, 1966 Memo from Jack Valenti to Lyndon B. Johnson, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, White House Central File: Country File, Box 44, CO 127 7/15/65-11/25/66. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹³¹ Telegram from Francis Meloy to State Department, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 196, Volume III, Cables 1/65-10/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

¹³² Ibid.

alliance being the Socialists. If that alliance fell apart, the beneficiaries would be the PCI, who had the potential to do so serious harm to America's objectives in Europe and the Cold War if empowered. Italy's Western orientation would be put on the line, with it a potentially serious blow to NATO, especially following de Gaulle's withdrawal. To secure America's interests beyond Italy's borders, the Communists needed to be kept firmly in opposition. To maintain that status, Washington was content with the DC providing only qualified support of the war.

The Vatican: Pope Paul's Follower in the Foreign Ministry

An important actor within Italy's political scene, especially within the Christian Democrats and among their supporters, was the Vatican. The DC maintained close political links with the Holy See, and the US was aware of the role the church played in Italian politics. LBJ's efforts to convince the Vatican of his peaceful intentions were certainly driven by a desire to tamp down an international voice that led moral opposition to the war. However, his actions must also be viewed through the lens of Italy's domestic politics, where the Vatican's position could provide pressure for the DC to follow the church's line. Additionally, there is evidence that Amintore Fanfani specifically was susceptible to the church's influence. While the Vatican does not provide the definitive reason for embracing the "understanding," it demonstrates how Washington was aware of the full breadth of domestic pressures that the Italian government had to face.

Lyndon Johnson devoted repeated personal attention to attempting to influence Pope Paul VI's position on the war. Rather than attempting to justify the war as a morally just, Johnson made the case that the lack of peace was Hanoi's fault, not his administration's. No effort was made to convince the pope of the need to have been in Vietnam in the first place; rather Johnson

made it seem as though given North Vietnam's resistance to peace he had little other choice. In a July 7, 1966 letter to Paul, LBJ argued that he had "explored every avenue, responded to every offer, and followed every lead that held out any hope that this tragic conflict might be settled at the conference table."¹³³ He hoped the pope was "fully aware" he wanted the fastest possible conclusion to the war, and expressed his wish that "leaders in Hanoi are beginning to realize that *their* aggression cannot succeed."¹³⁴ These statements indicate that Johnson was attempting to paint a picture for the pontiff that had the US doing everything in its power to bring peace, and that Hanoi was the aggressor, similar to his public rhetoric and communications with the Italians. However, through his frequent exchanges of letters to the pope, Johnson personalized the effort towards the church as he did not that towards the Italian government. The major reasons for the president's efforts were likely to appeal to the pope as a leading global moral authority, and the substantial Catholic minority in Vietnam that was of concern to the Vatican. These factors were larger considerations than the impact on the Italian government, but there is evidence that Washington was still aware of the impact Vatican City had on its secular neighbor.

The most explicit evidence that the US government was aware of how the Vatican's relationship with the DC could influence the party's position came in a March 1968 memo to Secretary Rusk. The memo, by Thomas L. Hughes, director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research addressed "Italian foreign policy, especially as conceived and practiced by Foreign Minister Amintore Fanfani."¹³⁵ In laying out the factors constituting Fanfani's views, Hughes specifically mentions that a factor "that weighs considerably of Fanfani's conduct of foreign

¹³³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 305.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

¹³⁵ *Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson: President, 1963-1969, National Security File: Country File:: Italy, Box 198, Volume V, Memos 2/67-12/68*, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX, USA.

policy is his notorious sensitivity to the Vatican's objectives or interests... He invariably echoes the Church's appeals for peace and understanding among nations."¹³⁶ Hughes goes on to say that Fanfani's support for the La Pira initiative and his entreaties against bombings in North Vietnam "can all be construed to some extent as Fanfani's responsiveness to the Vatican's presumed or actual preoccupation with the peace of the world."¹³⁷ All of this demonstrates that within the administration's foreign policy-making structure, the Vatican's influence on Italy's chief diplomat was not only acknowledged, but was so within the context of his policy relating to Vietnam specifically, as well as being treated as a core facet of his foreign policy decision-making. Hughes does note that Fanfani is unique within the party for how aggressively he made his obedience to the Vatican line public, as Christian Democrat politicians mostly attempted to publicly distance themselves from the church.¹³⁸ However, this does not mean that other Christian Democrats were not influenced by the Vatican, merely that they did not make as much of public show of it as Fanfani did. The institutional and historical links between party and church indicate that the Vatican could have exercised influence on the DC more broadly as well.

Beyond just Fanfani, the US was aware of the church's role in Italian politics and in the DC. Indeed, rather than appointing a separate envoy, Kennedy and Johnson had Ambassador Reinhardt spearhead diplomatic relations with the Vatican. In a conversation in October 30, 1964, Archbishop Angelo Dell'Acqua, an official in the Secretariat of State, made clear to Reinhardt how close the links between the Vatican and DC were. The party, he said, "was relying on the church to do all its dirty work and doing little or nothing itself."¹³⁹ Dell'Acqua

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 300.

went on to complain about the criticism the church received for its active role in Italian politics and his problems with the DC's left wing. In addition to the general relationship between the DC and the church, the White House actively recognized that the pope's influence over Italian politics could influence policy towards the war. In his 1967 visit to Europe, Vice President Hubert Humphrey met with Paul, their discussion centering on the war. Humphrey pressed the pope to condemn Hanoi's opposition to peace negotiations, and Paul replied that this point should be stressed to civilian leaders. The two in particular who Humphrey cited were PSI Deputy Prime Minister Nenni and President Saragat. Following Humphrey's specific reference to Nenni and Saragat, Paul agreed to emphasize Hanoi's resistance in future talks with world leaders.¹⁴⁰ While Paul's agreement was in broad terms, his agreement to do so following specific reference to Nenni and Saragat indicate that Humphrey was prioritizing the civilian leaders to whom the pope was geographically closest. Additionally, by referencing those two, a social democrat and socialist, Humphrey's request indicates that the US believed the pope's reach into Italian politics went beyond their traditional DC allies to include segments of the governing left.

Indeed, the broad course of the Vatican's response to the war and the policy of *conoscenza* are linked by their main theme. Both acknowledged general support for the US mission of stemming the spread of communism against an aggressive regime in Hanoi, but withheld endorsement of the bombing of North Vietnam. Additionally, both the Moro government and the church strongly supported peace talks at the earliest possible moment. The positions were not identical: the Vatican's criticism of the American bombings was more strident, while Italy's endorsement of the war was more publicly forceful. While likely not as

¹⁴⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 308.

influential as the PSI or PCI in influencing the Italian government position, the Vatican's relationship with the DC means its position on the war could have influenced the government, and almost certainly influenced Fanfani. By recognizing the Vatican's influence, the Johnson administration demonstrated its appreciation for the domestic politics of Italy when considering how to address the Vietnam War there. The more significant and pressing factors were the Socialists and the Communists, but the administration did not ignore the influence of the Vicar of Christ.

Vietnam on the (Italian) Home Front

Aldo Moro's Christian Democrats had any number of factors pushing them to be critical of the Vietnam War. Their Socialist coalition partners, especially from the party's left-wing still held anti-American positions in world politics simultaneous with the votes to bring down the government. The Communists were even more vociferously anti-war as they launched attacks on the war as the principal opposition. The party, and especially its foreign minister, had historical and institutional links to a Catholic Church led by a pope publicly critical of US bombing campaigns. If the rift between DC and PSI were to become too wide or if the PCI was to gain too much ground from its messaging, the results could see even greater instability in Italy than already existed, see the PCI gain influence, or even worse for Washington enter government. In that scenario, the Communists would be able to shift Italy away from Washington and towards Moscow, and potentially exit NATO, all of which would be harmful to America's broader Cold War interests. Considering these factors and the worst case scenario, the Americans embraced an Italian position that gave reserved "understanding" of the US mission as the farthest Rome could go without igniting these domestic tensions. The Johnson administration, then, accepted the

Italian position on Vietnam because of its own “understanding” of Italy’s chaotic domestic politics.

The administration also recognized that shows of support for Italy’s position internationally and within Europe would bolster the government at home, giving Rome an image of being on par with London and Paris, even if the substance did not back it up. By consulting with Italian leaders on Vietnam and supporting measures like Moro’s letters to ICC members, the administration factored one of its foreign policy priorities into the image of Italy as internationally influential. Like embracing the “understanding,” this also went towards shoring up the government’s position. In both the broader policy towards Italy and addressing Vietnam specifically, the Johnson administration was guided by the DC’s domestic needs. The White House pursued a strategy of accommodating Rome on Vietnam in order to minimize war’s utility to the Communists. However, on January 20, 1969, Richard Nixon entered the White House. While the outlook towards Italy remained broadly the same, the Italian government changed its tone on Vietnam as the new president sought a “peace with honor.”

V. The Nixon Administration

On December 12, 1969, a bomb exploded in Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing seventeen people. It marked the beginning of a period in Italian history where the peninsula was besieged by bombings, kidnappings, and protests: *gli anni di piombo*, “the Years of Lead.” When writing a memo to President Nixon describing the event, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger wrote that speculation was centering on the far-left as the culprits, though police were investigating the far-right as well.¹⁴¹ While it would ultimately turn out to be neo-fascists who were behind the Piazza Fontana attack, Kissinger’s comments showed the administration’s focus on and suspicion of the extreme left in Italian politics. It also demonstrated an awareness of the continued instability of the Italian government: while the bombings were unlikely to bring down the current administration their ultimate impact was “unclear” and Prime Minister Mariano Rumor had to cancel his trip to the United States due to domestic politics requiring his full attention at home.¹⁴² Though the exact circumstances and the individuals involved had changed, like its predecessor the Nixon White House was aware that fragile governments prone to collapse colored the Italian political system, and that this was the basis of US policy. Though Rome’s position on Vietnam shifted from that held through most of the Johnson years, Washington continued to see Italy’s stance through the lens of domestic political pressures, especially the potential for exploitation by the Communist Party.

Upon entering office, Richard Nixon was confronted with an Italian government that not only had to contend with increased protest and terrorism, but had turned more hostile towards US policy in Southeast Asia. With Mariano Rumor in the premiership, the days of the

¹⁴¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 186.

¹⁴² Henry Kissinger in *Ibid.*

“understanding” were over. With students taking to the streets protesting the war, and the PCI gaining ground, the government turned a hostile eye to US policy in Vietnam, and escalated its criticism of the war. Rather than push Rome back towards its original position of “understanding,” the administration accepted the Italian position, largely because of the same domestic political pressures that had existed before. The White House was aware of the same political instability that made the previous White House so accommodating in Vietnam, with an increased emphasis on the PCI’s ability to use the conflict for propaganda purposes. Through the continuation of the broad outlines of the Johnson administration’s approach, Nixon demonstrated how seeing the relationship with Italy through its domestic vulnerabilities was one sustained in some form through multiple administrations and presidents, pointing to a general approach to US foreign policy there.

Unlike his predecessor, Richard Nixon would not have the opportunity to deal more or less consistently with one Italian prime minister. For the first year and a half of his first term, his Italian counterpart was Mariano Rumor, who was then succeeded for about a year and a half by Emilio Colombo. In February 1972, Giulio Andreotti took charge of the government, and would lead it until Rumor took charge again in July 1973. However, a familiar face from the Johnson years held the post of foreign minister for over three years during Nixon’s first term. From May 1969 to July 1972, Aldo Moro served as Italy’s top diplomat. Of the new figures, Rumor and his successors turned out to be more hostile regarding Vietnam than Prime Minister Moro had. With the progression of the war and his new post, Moro also found himself taking a line that was more critical of the US in Southeast Asia.

From the American side, the post of ambassador was filled by a career diplomat, Graham Martin. Martin had served at the UN in Geneva and as Ambassador to Thailand under Johnson.

Like Frederick Reinhardt, he also served in South Vietnam, though Martin's time there came after his time in Rome; he was the last US ambassador in Saigon before the city fell to the invading north. However, Martin was not well-attuned to his posting, and came to act with less investment in Italian politics than Reinhardt had, contributing to a feeling of neglect by the government and the PCI. Holding the president's ear on foreign policy, and writing to him on Italy's political situation, was then-National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger. Kissinger's analysis tended to focus on the PCI and the potential for Communist growth. Kissinger espoused a similar understanding to Jack Valenti of the need to enhance Italy's image and seeming influence; that policy continued as well.

Overall, the Nixon administration continued the general policy of seeking to bolster Italy's international image to help shore up weak Christian Democrat governments because of Italy's unstable domestic politics. When analyzing the role of Vietnam, the perspective shifted even more towards PCI propaganda, raising the specter of the party's using it to make gains in Italy. Even as Rome turned away from Washington on the war, under pressure from protest, public opinion, and the PCI, White House continued to accommodate Italy's position in light of the government's fragility and the potential force that could replace it. Rather than matching Italy's shift with a negative response, Nixon continued to accommodate the Italian position so the PCI would not turn propaganda ink into tangible political power.

From "Understanding" to "Concern"

Freshly inaugurated, Richard Nixon sought to show Europe that it was to return to a central place in US foreign policy. In February, just over a month after being sworn in he went

on a tour of countries that included Italy, in contrast to Johnson having only visited in 1967.¹⁴³ In Rome, Prime Minister Rumor, according to Nixon in a later conversation, informed him that “any resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam would, in Italy, be tantamount to a bombing of Italy.”¹⁴⁴ Rumor’s comments made clear that his government took a sharp turn away from the “understanding” under Moro, and further equating an attack on Italy made clear the subject was of internal importance to the government in Rome. Nixon’s subsequent repeating of Rumor’s comment shows that the president was aware of the Italian government’s predicament and position. Nixon followed up by saying he had done nothing to escalate the war in light of Rumor’s comments.¹⁴⁵ Regardless of the truth of Nixon’s statement, it demonstrates a further awareness of Rome’s position on the war, as well as reflecting an effort to make Rumor feel as though he influenced US policy. Rumor replied by thanking the president for his understanding of the government’s stance on Vietnam as well as the strength of the PCI, additionally pointing out that his PSI partners had adopted a “pro-Atlantic stance.”¹⁴⁶ Here, Rumor ties Nixon’s accommodating stance on Italy’s position to the Communists. Additionally, by pointing out the pro-NATO position of the Socialists, he hints at the benefits of keeping the current government in power and the potential consequences of anti-Atlantic forces making gains.

Following Rumor’s and Nixon’s exchange, even the usually pro-American foreign minister soured on the war. Speaking to the Senate on October 28, 1969, Moro declared that the government supported a solution that took count of all the relevant populations and it would not

¹⁴³ “Presidents and Secretaries Travelling Abroad: Presidents: Richard M. Nixon,” Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/nixon-richard-m>.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Nixon in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 181.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

recognize the Hanoi government, as such a step would not be cautious.¹⁴⁷ While not opposing US objectives, the foreign minister refrained from giving any endorsement of the US position, and his comments were oriented towards ending the conflict. At the same time, the refusal to recognize Hanoi demonstrated how the government would not go too far in speaking against US interests. That same month, he also avoided discussing the matter with President Nixon. *La Stampa* reported that the two did not discuss Vietnam during Moro's White House visit.¹⁴⁸ Then, in 1970, Nixon opened a new front in the war that would attack North Vietnamese positions in the neighboring country of Cambodia, with the blessing of a newly installed pro-American government. The April 30 announcement was denounced as an invasion, with protests intensifying in the immediate days after, including one at Kent State University in Ohio, where National Guardsmen shot and killed four protesting students. In a speech to the Senate on May 5, 1970, Foreign Minister Moro expressed "profound concern" over the campaign in Cambodia, and expressed the government's view of worry that the bombing could widen the war and jeopardize chances for a negotiated peace.¹⁴⁹ He went on to say that the conflict was far away and outside the Atlantic alliance but that Rome did not believe "in the possibility and, above all, the validity of merely military solutions," and that the Italians would help facilitate peace however they could.¹⁵⁰ Gone from Moro's discourse was "understanding," replaced instead with "concern," a shift from lukewarm support of the US policy to open doubt and criticism. While not overly hostile towards Washington, and not as extreme as Rumor's warning about bombings, Moro's language and shifted position indicate that even the pro-American former prime minister had trouble continuing to support the war. While this presented Nixon without the support the

¹⁴⁷ Gianfranco Franci, "Intervento di Moro al Senato sulla politica esterna italiana." *La Stampa*. Oct. 29, 1969, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Mario Ciriello, "Moro a colloquio con Nixon," *La Stampa*. Oct. 10, 1969, 13.

¹⁴⁹ Moro in Gianfranco Franci "Moro: L'Italia s'augura 'soluzioni negoziate,'" *La Stampa*, May 6, 1970, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Moro in Ibid.

Johnson administration, he similarly responded by accommodating the Italian position, as evidenced by his later meeting with the prime minister.

Despite the warning coming from Rumor, Nixon is not recorded as having discussed the war with an Italian politician again until the next prime minister, Emilio Colombo, was in office. When Colombo visited Washington in February 1971, the president updated him on the state of hostilities. By this point, Nixon had withdrawn much of the US troop commitment in Vietnam, from over 500,000 in 1968 to 334,600 by the end of 1970, with American fatalities also having declined from a peak of 16,899 in 1968 to 6,173 in 1970; the figure in 1971 would prove to be even lower at 2,414.¹⁵¹ Nixon said that the drawdown program in Southeast Asia was going well, though its details were confidential, and that he believed South Vietnam and Laos would be able to assume control of their own defense by the following year.¹⁵² In this conversation, Nixon provides Colombo with consultation on the war and the administration's recent actions were tied to the government's predicament. The comment to that effect came from Colombo, who "assured the President that his policy of gradual disengagement there has been helpful to the GOI [Government of Italy]."¹⁵³ Like Rumor, Colombo offered Nixon a view that reducing the US presence in Vietnam was helpful to the Italian government, and Nixon tied his recent actions, in this case the troop drawdown, to the Italian prime minister's expressed concern.

There does appear to have been fewer references to the war in communications from the embassy in Rome, with most discussion of it coming in high-level meetings. Vietnam seems to have figured far less into Graham Martin's analysis of the Italian political scene than it did into

¹⁵¹ Anderson, *The Vietnam War*, 95-96.

¹⁵² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 206.

¹⁵³ Emilio Colombo in *Ibid.*

that of Frederick Reinhardt. Martin's messages do not feature Vietnam, rather focusing on the instability of governing coalitions and the need for American funding to combat the PCI. While not referring to Vietnam specifically, there are indications Martin's tenure was not received well in Rome. Giulio Andreotti wrote that he had been told Martin "still hadn't made a courtesy call on the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies despite having been the U.S. ambassador in Rome for over a year."¹⁵⁴ Meeting an Italian business leader at the White House in June 1971, Nixon was told that Martin was "not what we need in Italy," and that he had "no contacts" in the country.¹⁵⁵ It stands to reason that if Martin was inattentive to the Italian government's internal thinking, then he would be impaired in his ability to accurately represent its position on Vietnam and the importance of the war. Meeting with an American businessman in January 1970, Rumor said that "there is a lack of contact with American representatives... and American propaganda is a fizzle. President Saragat reported that the Embassy for a lengthy period has not been close or effective."¹⁵⁶ Such comments show that Rumor's feelings had spread to the traditionally pro-American Saragat, indicating wider discontent within the Italian government than just the prime minister. Further, that Rumor continued to view the US relationship in such terms over a year after Nixon took office indicates that Martin had done little in the intervening time to improve his standing in Rome's eyes. Kissinger relayed these comments in a letter to Martin, making the ambassador aware of the reception his mission was having with the Italians. Further, that these critiques happened over a long period, from 1970 to 1971 to Andreotti writing retrospectively in 1992, indicate that Martin never improved his reputation among the Italians.

¹⁵⁴ Andreotti, *The USA Up Close*, 90.

¹⁵⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 211.

¹⁵⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 188.

Additionally, another area of foreign policy points to a decline in the perceived importance of the PSI in Washington's view. As Kissinger worked in Paris with Vietnamese negotiators to bring an end to the war in Paris, he and Nixon opened up a new front in foreign policy by seeking to thaw relations with China and the Soviet Union, culminating in Nixon's historic trip to China in 1972. However, the US at this point was still opposed to recognizing the Communist People's Republic of China as the Chinese seat on the United Nations Security Council; the US at that point supported the claim of the pro-Western Republic of China, led by nationalists on the island of Taiwan who had fled Communist rule in 1949. Ahead of a vote at the UN on whether to recognize Communist China, the US applied pressure on Rome to vote against recognizing the former. In analyzing the domestic impact ahead of a meeting between Nixon and Moro, Martin wrote that "If Moro again alludes to 'difficulties within the coalition' that it seemed to him that these difficulties had been rather easily surmounted by Moro last year", although Martin did not specify what the previous year's difficulties were.¹⁵⁷ Martin's comment here demonstrates a disregard for the fragility of Italy's coalition governments, and specifically whether broader international issues could negatively impact the governing arrangements. While the China vote marks an area where the Italian position would have a substantive impact, meaning Washington had to place its substantive interests ahead of Italy's, the direct refutation of coalition politics as a pivotal factor points to pressures from the PSI as having had a limited role in America's calculus at this point.¹⁵⁸ The rebuke of the Socialists' importance points to the need to recognize another faction's influence on how the US perceived Italy's Vietnam stance: the PCI.

¹⁵⁷ Graham Martin in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 212.

¹⁵⁸ Italy ultimately voted in favor of recognizing the People's Republic.

Continued Projections of Italian Importance, with Doubts

The Nixon administration's actions in other areas demonstrated a continuation of the Johnson administration policy of bolstering Italy's international image. Though Vietnam took a smaller role in this regard, it demonstrated a continuation of shows of importance, and the consternation from Italian officials when they felt such shows were lacking. During his tenure as prime minister, Rumor frequently complained about the lack of American attention to Italy. In September 1969, following a proposal for the US to decrease troop levels in Europe, including Italy, Rumor "became highly emotional and appealed for a reconsideration... he was particularly disturbed that the reductions would be in his home constituency."¹⁵⁹ This simultaneously indicates that Rumor took poorly to the proposed reductions, and by bringing in Rumor's own voters connects the issue to not only his strength in parliament but his popularity among his direct constituents. Kissinger goes on to note that the reaction was "not foreseen" and that it could become a "political problem" given Rumor's tenuous hold on parliament.¹⁶⁰ This assessment demonstrates how the White House was aware of Italy's political instability and that the American policy could have some sort of exacerbating effect. Nixon appeared to appreciate this analysis, writing a note on the memo for the political cost of the drawdown to be reevaluated.¹⁶¹ The compromise that was reached on troop levels reflected a concern with image over substance. The drawdown would be done "as quietly and as routinely as possible," with the US supporting an Italian bid to host a new training center and emphasizing its use of other Italian facilities; the last measure specifically being to rebut PCI claims of Italy's declining importance

¹⁵⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 185.

¹⁶⁰ Kissinger in *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

in American eyes.¹⁶² Kissinger wrote that this arrangement was acceptable to Rumor, the dismissal of workers in the prime minister's constituency also being delayed.¹⁶³ The crux of the agreement, emphasizing and deemphasizing certain parts of the drawdown, demonstrated an effort to minimize the damage to Italy's image from the loss of troops. Rumor's acceptance further indicates that this was the prime concern of the Italian government in these affairs, and that the US recognized it.

Though the administration continued to see bolstering the image of the Italian government domestically as a major element of US policy, it doubted the utility of the approach. Kissinger's own memoirs hint at how this change could have impacted the presence of Vietnam in the relationship. Writing later, Kissinger described the main purpose of visits to Italy as having been "fulfilled by our arrival at the airport. This symbolized that the United States took Italy seriously; it produced photographic evidence that Italian leaders were being consulted."¹⁶⁴ On the one hand, his words mirror those of Jack Valenti describing how the Italians need the image, not the substance of consultation. On the other, he doubted the actual effectiveness of this aim, writing "I never saw any evidence that Presidential or high-level visits affected Italian politics one way or the other" (although he acknowledges that "it is difficult to prove the negative").¹⁶⁵ Such a statement demonstrates that though Kissinger recognized that the DC leaders wanted the image of importance lent by association with the American president, he doubted it was actually a potent force in Italian domestic politics. This could in part be due to the weakness of Martin as ambassador; the evidence of the government being boosted by the image

¹⁶² Kissinger in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 191.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 101.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 921.

of US consultation was provided by Reinhardt's domestic political assessment in the Johnson administration.

Kissinger's own attitude could also be a reason for this perception of the policy. He determined that "the Italian ministers acted as if they were too worldly-wise to pretend that their views on international affairs could decisively affect events."¹⁶⁶ While Italians may have indeed had little influence on the substance of policy, Kissinger's statement here contradicts both the frequent conversations about Vietnam during the Johnson administration and Nixon's own conversations with Mariano Rumor. This points to him as viewing the Italian government as uninterested in world events, indicating a broader ignorance of Rome's relationship with other areas of foreign policy, even if such was only through the lens of Italian domestic politics. This is further demonstrated by Kissinger's view of Aldo Moro. The national security advisor appears to have taken a dim view of the then-foreign minister, both generally and in his approach to foreign policy. Though describing Moro as "the most formidable" compared to Rumor and Colombo, Kissinger casts doubt on Moro's "reputation for superb intelligence," as the "only evidence for this was the Byzantine complexity of his sentence structure."¹⁶⁷ This assessment demonstrates a mixed view of Moro on Kissinger's part, which was less positive in the specific arena of foreign policy. According to Kissinger, Moro frequently fell asleep in their meetings, as "I had a soporific effect on him... International affairs clearly did not interest Moro."¹⁶⁸ Despite this view of Moro, Kissinger still carried on with consulting him on foreign policy matters, as

¹⁶⁶ Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 101. The national security adviser uses Moro's sleeping as the only evidence to demonstrate his disinterest in global affairs, and does not appear to have weighed the possibility he was simply boring to listen to.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

evidenced by his continued discussion with Moro despite the latter's napping. That, despite Kissinger's doubts, points to the resilience of this policy.

Through the fractious coalition politics during these years, Nixon and Kissinger maintained the general Johnson administration policy of bolstering Italy internationally to secure the government's domestic position. However, in part due to the ineffectiveness of the ambassador, the personal judgments of Henry Kissinger, and giving lesser weight to the coalition's sensitivity to international issues, the administration doubted the effectiveness of this policy. However, as shown by the mollification of Rumor on troop decreases, this policy did satisfy the Italian government, and it did see it as shoring up its own position politically. Moreover, the survival of the policy amidst Kissinger's doubts demonstrated both its resilience in the broad arc of US-Italy relations from Johnson to Nixon, and the desire for shows of importance among Italy's leaders.

The Continuation of the Communist Threat

The Nixon administration, to an even greater extent than the Johnson White House, honed in on the Italian Communists as a key threat to US interests. This was reflected in America's assessment of Vietnam in Italy, where the primary concern was how it could be exploited by the PCI in its partisan propaganda. The PCI then continued in its role as the principal threat to American interests in Italy, where it was primed both to exploit the conflict in Southeast Asia and had the potential to harm America's broader interests in Europe by pivoting Italy away from Washington and towards Moscow.

From his first meeting with President Saragat, Nixon was warned of the PCI as the key threat to Italian democracy, and as a staunch ally of the Soviet Union. During Nixon's Rome

visit in February 1969, Saragat described them as, combined with allies, having “represented roughly a third of the Italian electorate,” emphasizing their role as a major force in the Italian political sphere and a real contender for power.¹⁶⁹ He further played up the party’s links to the USSR, saying “its chief, Luigi Longo, was for all practical purposes a Soviet Officer. The new Secretary General [Enrico Berlinguer, the party’s effective leader following Longo’s 1968 stroke] was completely devoted to the interests of Moscow.”¹⁷⁰ By claiming the party’s leaders were loyal to the Kremlin, Saragat indicated to Nixon that a PCI government would be one that would eventually align with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. In this way, Saragat painted the PCI as a threat to US interests in Italy, Europe, and the broader geopolitical conflict, and US communications reflected the perception that Washington had to blunt the party’s progress in Italian politics. Kissinger confirmed a PCI government as a major concern of the US, writing to Nixon that October “over the next to three years the Italian Communists may work their way into government.”¹⁷¹ That statement reveals a serious US concern that the PCI would take power. While cautioning that “this danger can be overstated,” Kissinger recommended a study on the possibility of the PCI entering government, to which Nixon replied by writing “good” under that line in the memo.¹⁷²

Further emphasizing the strength of the Communists was Graham Martin. The ambassador warned that the PCI was well-financed, with \$30 million in funding from the Soviet

¹⁶⁹ Saragat in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 179.

¹⁷⁰ Saragat in *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Kissinger in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 184.

¹⁷² Kissinger and Nixon in *Ibid.*

Union.¹⁷³ By referencing the Soviet financial figure, Martin both demonstrated the internal strength of the Communists and their perceived external loyalty to the Kremlin. Martin requested some degree of financial backing (the exact number is classified but he asked for a “small percentage” of his Soviet counterpart’s resources) to counteract the Soviet funding and “keep this country safely on our side.”¹⁷⁴ Martin’s comments tied his request directly to the possibility of Italy switching its allegiance to Moscow. By again emphasizing the party’s perceived orientation towards the Kremlin, the specter of the party bringing Italy into Russia’s camp in the Cold War was evoked. Even if such a scenario were remote, the possibility posed a threat to US interests in Europe and the broader Cold War, and demonstrates why the US wanted to keep the party out of power.

Vietnam was tied to the Communists in discussion with Italian officials. During the 1969 visit, President Saragat told Nixon that “as long as this war went on, it gave the Communists the opportunity to attack the U.S. and portray them as aggressors and loving war.”¹⁷⁵ This painted Vietnam primarily as an issue that the PCI could exploit, meaning the party was the main lens through which the war was viewed when assessing its impact in Italy. Saragat went on to say that should bombing “be resumed it would have a very negative effect in Italy.”¹⁷⁶ Immediately following discussion of the Communist exploitation of the war, Saragat was likely referring to the potential for the PCI to use an escalated conflict to make gains, especially as Rumor was still a new prime minister leading a tenuous coalition. The assessment presented here by Saragat was the one that US officials operated under, as reflected by their communications and writings.

¹⁷³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 192.

¹⁷⁴ Martin in *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Saragat in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 179.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In his memoirs, Kissinger makes reference to the Italian government wanting an “end of the war in Vietnam in order to remove a Communist propaganda theme,” indicating that he was aware of the PCI’s frequent criticisms of the conflict and the DC’s desire to remove that as a pressure point.¹⁷⁷ This framed Vietnam as an issue primarily between the DC and PCI for Kissinger. He also describes his and Nixon’s visits being protested by “Communist-sponsored riots,” and to domestic divisions over Vietnam undermining US credibility in Europe.¹⁷⁸ This indicates that the White House was aware of the Communist reaction to the war and the DC’s concern over it, and that there was a degree of public pressure to accompany that of the Communist Party. The ambassador shared Kissinger’s awareness of the PCI’s campaigning against the war. Graham Martin noted that “the current propaganda from the PCI stresses that the U.S. Government and the President, personally, have effectively written Italy off... Madame Binh, chief NVN [North Vietnam] negotiator at the Paris peace talks, on a recent visit to Italy was warmly received at shockingly high levels in and out of the government.”¹⁷⁹ By noting the PCI’s propaganda efforts immediately before the reception at “shockingly high levels” of Hanoi’s envoy, Martin indicated that he perceived the Communist attacks on the war as having a realizable effect in the government’s conduct.

The PCI made a repeated and forceful effort to keep up a critical line against the Americans in Vietnam, and also their opposition to America’s position in Europe, especially through NATO. When Nixon visited in 1969, the Communists featured protests against the war and NATO on the front page of *l’Unità*, the party’s official news organ. The article criticized the “barbarous war” in Vietnam, saying Italy needed to oppose the conflict for which “only the

¹⁷⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 104.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 920.

¹⁷⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XLI, Western Europe; NATO, 1969-1972*, eds. James E. Miller and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 208

United States is responsible.”¹⁸⁰ The article went on to describe NATO as a relic of another time, and said Europe could no longer be “an appendage of the United States” as a member of the alliance.¹⁸¹ By attacking both the war and NATO, the party emphasized its opposition to multiple components of America’s Cold War foreign policy. When Nixon announced military action in Cambodia, the PCI denounced America’s “imperialist aggression,” again on the front page.¹⁸² The editorial said the US wanted to expand the war through the whole peninsula and that it was impossible for Washington “to govern the world through the force of arms, the power of technology, and with the intrigues of the CIA.”¹⁸³ The anti-American content of these articles demonstrates a forceful attack by the Communists on US foreign policy. The front page placement of these polemics against the war and US militarism more generally further indicates that Vietnam was not only a part of PCI rhetoric, but a prominent one.

The Communists kept up Vietnam as a line of attack well into Nixon’s first term. In March 1972, Enrico Berlinguer was formally elected as PCI leader after over three years as *de facto* party head. Towards the beginning of his first speech as leader he denounced “American imperialism” and expressed “solidarity with the people of Vietnam, of Laos, of Cambodia,” further saying “the whole world and America’s own people cannot support what remains a shameful blot on the honor of humanity.”¹⁸⁴ Berlinguer’s words served as a stark and direct criticism of the United States, in contrast to the more reserved “concern” of Aldo Moro, and his remark about Americans’ views on the war separated his critique from simple communist anti-Americanism. Further, his placement of the remarks towards the beginning of his speech

¹⁸⁰ Alberto Jacoviello, “Parole chiare,” *l’Unità*, Feb, 27, 1969, 1.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Romano Ledda, “L’imperialismo a una stretta,” *l’Unità*, May 1, 1970, 1.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Enrico Berlinguer, “Le conclusioni di Berlinguer al XIII Congresso,” *l’Unità*, March 18, 1972, 9.

emphasized this as a key issue for the PCI, rather than being a position buried deep in their platform. Further, his status as the new party leader meant this was the stance not only of a PCI figure, but the Communists' prospective prime minister. Coming from a man the Italian president had identified as a loyalist of Moscow, his comments highlighted how the party sought to exploit one Cold War battleground to strengthen the Communists' chances in what could be another.

When in January 1973 the Paris Peace Accords were concluded, officially bringing an end to hostilities between the Americans and Hanoi, the PCI was jubilant. Upon the publication of the agreement, the headline of *l'Unità*'s front page declared it "a historic victory of the heroic Vietnam and all the people of the world."¹⁸⁵ The Communists celebrated the agreement as a total victory for the North Vietnamese against the United States and the forces of imperialism. The coverage's celebratory treatment of the American defeat points to how, even as peace was reached, the party continued to stand firmly against American foreign policy. However, the war's end also meant that the party's ability to use it in attacks on the US would become limited. While America would still have to be concerned about a party that could threaten the unity of NATO or reorient Rome towards Moscow's orbit, it would no longer have to contend with the regular exploitation of the Vietnam War in party propaganda.

Different Leaders, Similar Policies

As the Johnson administration had encouraged the Italian government's position of "understanding" America's actions in Vietnam, the Nixon administration accommodated an Italian position that had shifted more towards open criticism of the war. The White House

¹⁸⁵ Augusto Pancaldi, "Una storica vittoria dell'eroico Vietnam e di tutti i popoli del mondo," *l'Unità*, Jan. 25, 1973, 1.

continued to view the Italian Communist Party as the principal domestic threat to US interests, which if empowered could see Italy drift away from the US in the Cold War and towards the Soviet Union. And, the US remained committed to projecting an image of an internationally influential and valued Italy. These policies were continued in spite of an ill-received ambassador and a doubtful attitude from Henry Kissinger. While this led to some feeling of neglect from the Italian government, it ultimately meant that the contours of policy were carried over from the previous administration, and that hostility towards the war was a point that did not break down relations between the two countries. Overall, the Johnson administration had accepted Italy's position on Vietnam because of the delicacy of domestic politics, and ultimately the possibility that the chain of events could result in an unfriendly Italian government. Nixon's White House operated under the same set of factors, and ultimately continued the same elements of response: accommodation on Vietnam and a bolstering of Italy's image.

VI. Conclusion

Lessons and Legacy

The Vietnam War's role in Italian political discourse declined with the treaty negotiated in Paris. While fighting would continue until the fall of Saigon to North Vietnamese forces in 1975, this saw the end of the major US commitment to the conflict, with American soldiers withdrawn in March 1973. Vietnam did linger in discourse, and colored how the Italians saw America in the war's immediate aftermath. When Jimmy Carter won the 1976 presidential election against Gerald Ford the PCI celebrated the Republican's loss as a defeat for "the men of Watergate and the disaster in Vietnam."¹⁸⁶ While Vietnam still influenced the party's portrayals of the United States, the utility was now limited; Carter could not be linked to the war like Johnson, Nixon, or even Ford. That same year in June Italy also had a general election, one that saw the Communists win their highest-ever share of the vote and come within four percentage points of defeating the DC.¹⁸⁷ The DC was put in a position where it had to negotiate some sort of governing arrangement with the PCI, leading to a "non-belligerence" agreement where the PCI would abstain in confidence motions.¹⁸⁸ Giulio Andreotti, who led that government, interpreted America's public opposition to PCI involvement in government as an electoral move by President Gerald Ford, wanting to show he was acting against rising communism in Europe after suffering defeat against it in Vietnam.¹⁸⁹ Regardless of the accuracy of Andreotti's assessment, it demonstrated how Vietnam left a lingering effect in how Italy viewed the United

¹⁸⁶ "Carter nuovo presidente Americano: È prevalsa negli USA una volontà di cambiamento, *l'Unità*, November 4, 1976, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy*, 177.

¹⁸⁸ Andreotti, *The U.S.A. Up Close*, 88.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

States. For at least the period of time following the war, America was defined in the eyes of a European ally by a war it had lost on the other side of the world.¹⁹⁰

However, Italy in the long-term remained a supportive ally of the United States, even after the Cold War ended. By the turn of the millennium, Rome was again supporting Washington amid international controversy. On March 18, 2003, *La Stampa* published on its front page a letter from the American president to the Italian prime minister. “Dear Silvio,” George W. Bush wrote, “while we confront a threat without equal, I wish to express the gratitude of the American people for the extraordinary support you have given to the global war on terror. You sided with us and we will not forget it.”¹⁹¹ On the day the US commenced the bombing of Iraq, Silvio Berlusconi had public evidence that he was a valuable ally of President Bush. Though the Cold War was over and the Christian Democrats no longer existed, an Italian prime minister was continuing to seek out shows of his importance in the eyes of the Americans. The circumstances were not identical. Berlusconi led a conservative coalition and did not need to concern himself with the Socialist allies of the Vietnam-era DC as he lent stronger support to an American military adventure in Asia than Aldo Moro ever did. With the PCI having dissolved at the Cold War’s end, Bush did not face the same potential for a European domino to fall if the government collapsed. Yet, the Italian government’s objective to project an image as important in the eyes of the United States remained a key paradigm through which to view the Italy-US relationship. Jack Valenti’s words about what people see being more important than what really was and Moro being strengthened by shows of friendship from an American president were

¹⁹⁰ The DC-PCI quasi-alliance ended due to a national tragedy: Aldo Moro, who had negotiated the rapprochement between the parties, was kidnapped and murdered by communist terrorists in 1978. Although the PCI harshly condemned his assassins, Moro’s death both eliminated the DC’s strongest advocate of working with the PCI and, due to the ideology of his killers, created bad blood between the DC and Communists.

¹⁹¹ George W. Bush in “La Casa Bianca a Berlusconi: grazie,” *La Stampa*, Mar. 18, 2003, 1.

written for the relationship of the 1960's. But, Bush's letter indicates that this presents a lens through which the longer course of America's post-war foreign policy can be viewed, transcending the limits of the Cold War. This suggests that further work could be done under this framework in researching US-Italy relations during the Iraq War, or other key points in US foreign policy.

In addition to a broadly applicable point of view, the handling of Vietnam in Italy sheds light on parts of US foreign policy during the sixties and seventies. The way Vietnam was handled in the US-Italy relationship is instructive in how the US managed delicate issues with delicate political systems, in a place where the potential for a disastrous Cold War defeat was perceived as significant. It is also, amid a focus on how they waged war on their enemies or sought détente, key to analyzing how Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon conducted relationships with their allies. As evidenced by Italian politicians' frequent discussions of the war and the Communists' polemics against it, the conflict was not something the US could pursue in isolation. Rather, it hung over the head of its relationship with its allies, even those who had committed no blood or treasure to the war effort. The case of Italy suggests that while the United States sought support in its foreign policy objectives from allies, it was capable of matching the expected support to the domestic circumstances. Moro's reserved statements in parliament were met with gratitude, not demands for a firmer stance or troop commitments, and contextualized in light of the difficulties presented by his coalition partners, a foreign minister who heeded a peace-promoting pope, and the danger of the anti-American opposition exploiting the crisis. This points to a flexibility in how Vietnam was addressed based on the challenges faced by the individual government at hand. When Nixon confronted a government that wanted an end to the

conflict to end communist propaganda, he emphasized his efforts to bring an end to the conflict and did not resist the government's criticism of the war.

The potential for the Italian Communist Party to expand its influence posed a clear threat to US interests, not only in Italy but in Europe and the broader Cold War. American policy in Europe had centered around strengthening and maintaining alliances like NATO. The PCI was openly hostile to NATO, praising France's partial exit and condemning the organization as a puppet of the United States. Western Europe, Italy included, was to firmly support the US in its rivalry with the Soviet Union. The PCI was funded by Moscow, had historic links to Moscow, and both the US and Italian government officials believed PCI leaders to be in the thrall of Moscow. If the PCI were to make gains off of its opposition to the Vietnam War, exploiting divisions in the government, it would be able to shift a key member of NATO and a founding member of the European Community towards the Kremlin. Regardless of what a PCI government would've actually done, this was the interpretation of potential events held by the US government. Both the administrations of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon made the calculation that criticism of Vietnam and a lack of troop commitments from Italy's leaders were better than these potential dangers of a Communist-influenced Italian government that would endanger NATO's and Europe's unity against the Soviet Union. The US perception of a Communist Italy was not that of one Southern European country changing its political stripes, it was the possibility of a government that could antagonize and destabilize key components of America's post-war European alliances. As Amintore Fanfani said, the fear was not simply that Italy would be lost but that there would be broader "confusion in the Mediterranean area."¹⁹²

¹⁹² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XII, Western Europe*, eds. James E. Miller and David S. Patterson (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 121.

In light of that risk, the policy pursued in Italy was to shore up the Christian Democrat government against threats internal and external. This is why the Johnson administration accommodated the government's hesitant position on Vietnam, and sought to bolster Italy's image as a key American ally. The White House was aware of the key domestic actors that the DC needed support from, and sought to ensure that Vietnam did not jeopardize that support. The Nixon administration shows that even with changed faces in the government and different actions in the war, this general position towards Italy remained the same. Johnson, therefore, provides a detailed case of how the US dealt with a controversial international issue in Italy, and Nixon's follow-up lends confirmation to that approach being generally applicable to the US foreign policy apparatus of the era. That approach in Rome mattered because in a way the US objective in South Vietnam was the same as that in Italy. The goal in both was to prevent the fall of the pro-Western government to communism. In Southeast Asia, the war was waged with bombers and ground troops. In Europe it was fought in bilateral meetings, parliamentary debates, newspaper pages, and coalition negotiations. The US navigated a thorny issue of its own making in Rome by being attuned to how far the government could go in supporting it without losing that battle. By heeding the domestic strains on their Christian Democratic allies they sought to make it harder for their opponents to topple a domino in the heart of Europe. However, that situation came about because of the inescapable contradiction of Vietnam: by trying to prevent the spread of communism in one corner of the world, another place was made more vulnerable to it.

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¹⁹³ American planes bomb North Vietnam again

¹⁹⁴ “Historic elections archive, constituent assembly 02/06/1946.” Department of Internal and Territorial Affairs.

¹⁹⁵ Concluding remarks of Berlinguer at the 13th Congress

¹⁹⁶ New American President Carter: A will to change prevails in the USA

¹⁹⁷ The White House to Berlusconi: thank you

¹⁹⁸ Moro speaks with Nixon

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¹⁹⁹ Moro's speech to the Senate on Italian foreign policy

²⁰⁰ Moro: Italy welcomes "negotiated solutions"

²⁰¹ Italy follows with "apprehension" the grave events in Greece

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