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Italian Foreign Policy Towards Israel: The Turning Point of the Berlusconi Government (2001–2006)

ABSTRACT

After having presented a brief overview of the relationship between Italy and Israel since its founding to the 1990s, this article analyses the reasons why the Berlusconi government decided to change the Italian foreign policy towards Israel, moving from a more pro-Palestinian stance to a clearly pro-Israel one. The international situation after 9/11 and the new state of affairs of Italian politics following the birth of the so-called Second Republic might explain such a turning-point. In particular, the post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale (AN) party was looking for legitimization by the Italian Jewish communities in order to present itself as a modern European right-wing party. Thus, AN decided to openly support Israel, thus pushing the entire government towards this position. At the same time, the birth of an Islamophobic milieu made relevant sectors of the civil society back Israel, as part of the wider battle that “the West” is conducting against “the Muslim fundamentalism”.

ITALIAN PM SILVIO BERLUSCONI'S VISIT TO ISRAEL ON 1–3 FEBRUARY 2010 (his third)¹ was, apart from a minor incident,² unanimously considered a huge success. Berlusconi was welcomed warmly; he met President Shimon Peres, participated with eight Italian ministers in a joint cabinet meeting with the Israeli government, and was invited to speak at the Knesset, where he was interrupted twelve times by complimentary applause. Before giving the floor to Berlusconi, PM Benjamin Netanyahu had enthusiastic words for his guest:

You are a courageous leader who stands by Israel at all times. . . . Under your leadership, Italy is spearheading Europe's battle against anti-Semitism and the battle to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. . . . Under your leadership, the relations between our peoples and countries have further developed and deepened. Italy has become one of Israel's closest friends in Europe and the world. . . . Israel knows that it has a great friend in Europe, in the shape of Silvio Berlusconi. . . . In the name of all the people of Israel, I want to say to you: we respect you, we embrace you, and we love you. Welcome to Jerusalem.³

This was not the first time the Italian-Israeli relationship was defined in such a good way. Seven years earlier, between 17 and 19 November 2003, PM Ariel Sharon visited Rome. During an informal meeting with members of Rome's Jewish community, he reportedly stated that "Italy is today the best friend that we have in Europe . . . We have never had a country holding the EU presidency that has been as friendly as Italy today."⁴

If Berlusconi's warm reception in Israel in February 2010 was not surprising, given the excellent relations between Italy and Israel in the last decade, such a path is totally unexpected if we compare the current situation and the previous fifty years of political relationship between the two countries, which were never particularly friendly and close.

Before entering the core of this article—i.e., an analysis of the reasons why Berlusconi radically changed Italian foreign policy towards Israel and, as a consequence, the Arab world—the next pages will briefly present an overview of the relationship between Italy and Israel, in order to prove why the Berlusconi government's stance towards Israel can be interpreted as a major turning-point compared to the traditional Italian pro-Arab foreign policy.

ITALIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS—AN OVERVIEW

Analysis of the relationship between Italy and Israel has been largely neglected by both Italian⁵ and foreign historiography, and it is therefore possible to enlist only a few academic articles that focus on this topic.⁶ Only in recent years has the situation partially changed, and some interesting volumes and articles have been published in Italy, either regarding specific moments of the Italian-Israeli relationship,⁷ or concerning specific topics, mainly the attitude of the Italian left-wing parties towards Israel and the Palestinians.⁸

Despite some relevant exceptions, the most famous of which are certainly the Republican Party, the *Partito Repubblicano Italiano* (PRI), and the Radical Party, the *Partito Radicale*,⁹ it is possible to summarize the first fifty years of diplomatic relations between Israel and Italy as characterized by a formal and cold friendship that neither upgraded to become closer or warmer, nor registered heavy tensions. It was clearly Italy's choice, since it did not want its relationship with Israel to harm relations with the Arab world. A useful and appropriate expression that has been employed by historiography to summarize the Italian position toward Israel depicts the Italian-Israeli relationship as carried out "under the Arab states' shadow".¹⁰ In fact, the Italian government carefully avoided any policy toward Israel that might have created obstacles—even minor ones—to the relationship with the Arab world, both political and economic.

Rome has maintained a low-profile policy towards Israel since 1948. From this point of view, Italy was helped by not being part of the UN (it was accepted as a member only in 1955) during the 29 November 1947 UNGA vote on Resolution 181, which became the legal basis for the birth of Israel the following year. On that occasion, the Italian government did not need to take any stand. Later, it maintained a low-profile position by recognizing Israel cautiously. Similar to the United States—Washington extended *de facto* recognition to Israel on 14 May 1948 and *de jure* recognition on 31 January 1949—Italian *de facto* recognition was accorded on 7 February 1949 following Israel's first general election on January 25. Italy acknowledged Israel's exercising control over the territory it conquered, but waited for the situation to become clearer. *De jure* recognition was granted only the following year, on 19 January 1950.¹¹ Since then, the Italian government remained very careful to not take any step that might have ruined the strong relationship it was building with the Arab world. It was actually Israel's willingness to develop a closer alliance with Italy that led to the visit of FM Moshe Sharett to Rome in March 1952 and an economic agreement between the two countries two years later.¹² Even on this occasion, the Italian government was wary not to endanger its partnership with the Arab world. In particular, Rome made it clear that the oil coming from the Gulf countries would not be sold to Israel; thus the embargo that the Arab League had put on Israel would have not been circumvented.

This trend did not change during the 1950s. On the contrary, it was corroborated by the so-called *neatlantismo*,¹³ the new-Atlantic policy that aimed at confirming the closeness between Italy and the United States, yet allowing Rome to conduct a more autonomous policy in the Mediterranean region. A further strengthening of this attitude took place after the June

1967 war, when Italy started carrying out a more defined pro-Arab policy. Under the direction of Aldo Moro (one of the most relevant politicians of the leading Christian Democratic party, the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), who was FM almost continuously between 1969 and 1974), though theoretically maintaining *equidistanza* (i.e., being equally distant from both sides), Italy increased its pro-Arab orientation.

The government was also backed by the Communist opposition party, the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), in line with the USSR policy in the Middle East. Since the second half of the 1970s, such a strategy was even more evident, mainly due to the economic crisis following the 1973 oil shock. At the same time, Italy started having a marked pro-Palestinian stance, as demonstrated by the 1974 opening of a PLO representative office in Rome, despite it formally being part of the Arab League delegation.¹⁴ A few years later, in June 1980, it was also thanks to the effort of FM Emilio Colombo¹⁵ that the European Council adopted the Venice Declaration on the Middle East, which recognized “the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination” and “the involvement and support of all the parties concerned in the peace settlement” including the PLO, which also had “to be associated with the negotiations”.¹⁶

During the 1980s, the Socialist Party, the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI), briefly led coalition governments. Under Bettino Craxi’s governments (1983–1987), a further strengthening of the Italian-Arab relationship and of the Italian pro-Palestinian attitude took place. Notwithstanding the first visit ever of an Israeli prime minister (Shimon Peres) to Italy in February 1985,¹⁷ several events underlined the increasing relationship between Rome and the PLO. In December 1984,¹⁸ Craxi went to Tunis to meet PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, and the following year Italy harshly denounced the Israeli raid in Tunis. In October 1985 the Italian-Israeli relationship reached its lowest point, with the famous episode of the Achille Lauro affair.¹⁹

Finally, in the 1990s, a revolution in Italian domestic policy took place, the end of the so-called First Republic. The two main government parties, DC and PSI, collapsed due to a nationwide judicial investigation into corruption; a complete change in the Italian political parties’ spectrum took place, and new political forces arose. Due to this internal political transformation and to the Oslo peace process, Italian foreign policy towards Israel started to change, thus reaching a more balanced stance regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, it was only with the Berlusconi government that Italian foreign policy experienced a real shift.

THE BERLUSCONI GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY: CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY?

Even if Berlusconi had already been PM in 1994, it was only when he returned to government five years later that a turning point in Italian foreign policy towards Israel concretely took place. Berlusconi's first government (10 May 1994–17 January 1995) lasted only eight months and barely had any effect in terms of foreign policy. On the contrary, his second (11 June 2001–23 April 2005) and third (23 April 2005–17 May 2006) governments registered the relevant change with which this article deals.

During those five years, there were four FM's, the first was Renato Ruggiero (June 2001–January 2002). When he resigned, Berlusconi became FM temporarily after which Franco Frattini served as FM for two years (November 2002–November 2004). Finally, when Frattini became EU Commissioner, responsible for Justice, Freedom, and Security, it was up to Gianfranco Fini, at that time deputy prime minister, to become FM (November 2004–May 2006).

It is particularly interesting to focus on the reasons why Ruggiero decided to resign. Before entering Italian politics, he had been Director General of the World Trade Organization. Apparently, he had been appointed FM due to the pressure of the President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi and other sectors of the Italian establishment, the most prominent of whom was Gianni Agnelli, FIAT's owner.²⁰ Ruggiero decided to leave the government only a few months after his appointment, because of the skepticism expressed by other ministries—mainly Defense Minister Antonio Martino, Economy Minister Giulio Tremonti, and Reforms Minister Umberto Bossi—towards the EU,²¹ in particular regarding adoption of the new currency, the euro, which became effective on 1 January 2002. As Ruggiero made clear, he resigned because he did not agree with the “discontinuity” in Italian foreign policy, i.e., the much too pronounced pro-Washington stance that, in his opinion, the entire government was pursuing.²² Yet, when Berlusconi became FM and addressed the Italian Parliament on 14 January 2002, he stressed the government's “continuity” with the past, which was evident in his strategy of strengthening Rome's partnership both with the European Union and the United States.²³

Did Berlusconi's foreign policy demonstrate “continuity” or “discontinuity” with previous Italian behavior? Was Ruggiero right in believing that Berlusconi had given more importance to the relationship with the United States, thus marginalizing the one with the EU, or was Berlusconi correct in stating that he had maintained a strong liaison both with Brussels and

Washington? A significant number of studies have been published on this topic,²⁴ and as Elisabetta Brighi states, “The literature is divided between those who argue that Berlusconi has changed Italian foreign policy and those who, on the contrary, tend to see more continuity (typically conceding that the style and rhetoric have perhaps changed, but the substance has not).”²⁵

Pietro Ignazi states the “discontinuity” argument. According to him, despite declaring that the main direction of his policy was to strengthen the relationship with both sides—the United States and the EU—Berlusconi ended by clearly identifying Italian national interests with a stricter loyalty to Washington compared to Brussels.²⁶ Ettore Greco, Director of the Institute for International Affairs of Rome, also agrees with the idea that Berlusconi acted in “discontinuity” with the previous foreign policy. According to him, the EU was perceived by the Italian government “more as a common economic space than a cohesive political entity.”²⁷ Thus, Berlusconi detached its policy from the traditional approach Italy had towards Europe, i.e., aiming at strengthening its political role.²⁸ Former diplomat Sergio Romano notes a “turnover of the traditional priorities” when Rome decided to set its relationship with the United States at the top of its priorities.²⁹

Differing with this view, Osvaldo Croci believes in the “continuity” of Berlusconi’s foreign policy, “If the Berlusconi government has brought changes to Italian foreign policy, they concern its tone and style and not its substance.”³⁰ In particular, the war in Iraq is interpreted by Croci as a proof of “continuity”, rather than of “discontinuity”. In fact, as much as it did other times in the past, Rome tried to mediate between two positions, specifically the one led by the United States, on one side, and the France-Germany axis, on the other. As Croci states, “The position of the Berlusconi government on the Iraqi question . . . [wa]s not something new, but simply the latest manifestation of a well-established policy choice based on what [Leopoldo] Nuti has called ‘an almost structural inclination’ of Italy to look towards Washington with the same intensity with which it looks over the Alps and across the Mediterranean.”³¹

Literature is also divided between those who consider the Berlusconi government’s Mediterranean policy in terms of “continuity” and those who highlight its “discontinuity”.³² According to Valter Coralluzzo, it “was, in essence, not as dissimilar from previous Italian policy”. Since “alignment to the position taken by the United States government [is] . . . one of the main inspirations (if not the principal guide) to Italian Mediterranean policy”, Coralluzzo believes that Berlusconi did not behave in an innovative way,

but his policy followed a consolidated tradition. Yet, an “exception” was represented by the Italian government taking into “careful consideration . . . the interests and concerns of the state of Israel”.³³

Differently, according to Maurizio Carbone, a clear sign of discontinuity was represented by Berlusconi’s choice to agree with “Bush’s theory that security in the Mediterranean depended on the democratic transformation of the regimes in the region”.³⁴ This was quite in contrast with a traditional attitude of the Italian government, based on the idea not to interfere in the Mediterranean countries’ political affairs. Finally, Raffaella Del Sarto and Nathalie Tocci believe that Italian policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East “underwent a visible shift”, specifically regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since the Italian government ended by “siding unreservedly and uncritically with Israel’s Ariel Sharon.”³⁵

Given the different opinions, it is not simple to answer the question whether it is more correct to read Berlusconi’s foreign policy according to a paradigm of “continuity” rather than according to one of “discontinuity”. However, it is possible to identify one specific issue in regard to which Berlusconi certainly radically changed the traditional Italian foreign policy, not only formally, but also substantially: the relationship with Israel.

A slight change in the Italian position towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had already been carried out by the center-left wing governments in 1996–2001. In particular, it was the Left Democratic Party (*Democratici di Sinistra*), the most relevant in the center-left government coalition that played a relevant role in such a change. In April 1999, there was a meeting between PM Massimo D’Alema and FM Ariel Sharon during the latter’s official visit to Rome. D’Alema stated that Italy was interested in conducting a more balanced policy, whose main aim was supporting the on-going peace process.³⁶ Compared to what had happened in the 1970s and 1980s, this center-left government decided to concretely carry out the *equidistanza* towards Israel and the Palestinians that Italy had only theoretically pursued in the previous decades.³⁷

However, when Berlusconi took power in 2001, he completely transformed traditional Italian foreign policy, and adopted a clearly pro-Israeli stance.

THE TURNING POINT IN ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL

It is important to point out some relevant episodes that confirm that Italian foreign policy toward Israel represents a clear sign of “discontinuity” compared to the past.

The first is the proposal of a “Marshall Plan for Palestine”, formalized during a speech Berlusconi delivered on 5 February 2002, soon after his temporary appointment as FM.³⁸ This massive aid plan to the Palestinians³⁹ was driven more by a humanitarian approach than by a political one. The idea that was behind it recalls a long-lasting Israeli assumption, according to which Palestinians’ economic development is the key that leads to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁴⁰ The decision of the Italian government represented a major shift of the traditional policy Rome had towards the conflict, which in previous decades had mainly focused on the political issue of the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.⁴¹

Another episode that confirms the new Italian stance took place a few months later, on 15 April 2002. Italy refused to endorse Resolution E/CN.4/2002/L.16,⁴² proposed by the UN Commission for Human Rights (UNCHR). According to the Italian delegate, it was not possible to approve such a document, since it was condemning the Israeli violations of the Palestinians’ human rights without even mentioning Palestinian terrorist attacks against the Israeli population. Germany and the United Kingdom, traditionally very cautious in criticizing the Israeli policy, voted against the resolution. Austria, Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden voted in favor. Italy and Poland abstained. The Italian government was very clear in stating that, starting from that moment, if future resolutions were not more balanced, Italy would not endorse them.

A few months later, Berlusconi took another step, which confirmed the new Italian attitude towards Israel. On 11 December 2002, during Israeli President Moshe Katzav’s visit to Rome, the Italian PM declared that since April 2002 there had been no direct contact with the Palestinian Authority. According to both the Israeli Embassy in Rome, and the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*, Berlusconi stated that the Italian government’s “doors had been closed to Arafat soon after the Netanyahu massacre.”⁴³ Actually, this was not true because Gianni Letta, the PM Office’s Under Secretary, had met the PA Minister for Cooperation, Nabil Sha’at, a few weeks earlier.⁴⁴ Regardless, this statement was a further demonstration of the Italian government’s intention to strongly back the Israeli position by undermining the Palestinian Authority at an international level.

In June 2003—a few weeks before Rome took over the presidency of the EU—the Italian government made two other decisions that fostered its warmer relationship with Israel. On one hand, a *Memorandum of Understanding* for cooperation in the military and defense sectors was signed on 16 June and approved by the Italian Parliament in February 2005. For the first time in Italian-Israel relations they had agreed to carry out cooperation in relevant and quite sensitive fields, such as defense, security, and scientific research for civilian and military purposes. During his second visit to Israel, Berlusconi refused to schedule a meeting with PA Chairman Yasser Arafat. It was quite unusual behavior for a European leader not to meet any Palestinian representative. For this reason, the Italian decision was highly criticized by other EU members, who had openly expressed their position against the marginalization of Arafat from Palestinian political life that Israel—which had declared him irrelevant—was pursuing.⁴⁵

In September 2003, during the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council held in Riva del Garda, there was another important event. FM Franco Frattini coordinated with the other EU representatives to include Hamas in the list of terrorist groups, as the United States had already done in January 1995. It was exactly the opposite behavior to that of the Italian government in Venice in June 1980, when FM Colombo was active in making the European Community decide to consider the PLO a political organization, and not a terrorist one. Apparently, Frattini had promised Israeli FM Silvan Shalom that he would take advantage of Italy being the host country of the meeting to convince other European states, particularly France, to list Hamas as a terrorist organization.⁴⁶

Nothing changed after Gianfranco Fini's appointment as FM in November 2004. Clearly—as we will see later—it could not have been otherwise, since the political party he was leading, *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), had played a major role in changing Italian foreign policy towards Israel. Moreover, on 11 November 2003, while he was Deputy PM, Fini told *La Stampa* that he understood Israel's decision to build the security barrier,⁴⁷ despite the EU having taken a common position condemning its construction.⁴⁸

A few days before being appointed FM, on 11 November 2004, Fini, interviewed in *La Stampa*, commented on the death of Yasser Arafat, in line with the position of the Israeli establishment, stating “This is a historical day for Israel's security.”⁴⁹ The idea of Arafat's death being a very positive event for Israel was shared by the rest of the Italian government, which was planning to participate in Arafat's funeral with a low-profile delegation. In the end, after President Ciampi pressed Berlusconi to send a more significant

representation, Senate President Marcello Pera, Minister of Agriculture Gianni Alemanno, and Foreign Affairs Under-Secretary Alfredo Mantica attended the funeral ceremony in Cairo. The strong “discontinuity” with the past is evident, since both Bettino Craxi and Giulio Andreotti, who was FM for most of the 1980s, considered Arafat as a head of state and treated him in this way, despite the PLO still being considered by Israel as a terrorist organization.

During his third visit to Israel, in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* on 22 December 2004, Fini attacked the EU’s biased attitude towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and declared that European governments and public opinion should change their stance, by starting to understand Israeli positions, instead of having an ideological and biased approach towards the Jewish state.⁵⁰

Finally, after the *Hamas* victory in the Parliamentary elections in January 2006, Berlusconi completely backed Israel in considering such an event “a very, very, very bad result”⁵¹ and in pushing the EU to abide by its decision not to recognize the Hamas government if it did not accept the three conditions Brussels had imposed: recognition of Israel, acceptance of all past agreements signed by the PLO, and the commitment to end violence.

WHY DID SUCH A CHANGE HAPPEN? AN INTERPRETATION

Among the reasons that explain the turning point in Italian foreign policy towards Israel, the economic relationship does not seem to have played a major role. Certainly, there was a boost in the trade exchange between the two countries: in 2004, Italian exports to Israel increased by 12% to a total of \$1.6 billion, while imports from Israel increased by 8%, to a total of \$831 billion. By 2007, Italy had become Israel’s fourth largest world trading partner in terms of exports, and its fifth largest world partner in terms of imports.⁵² Yet, such a trend can be considered a consequence of the closer political liaison between the two countries, rather than one of its causes.

The reasons for what has been described so far are definitively political and ideological. In particular, there are two aspects that have to be taken into consideration.⁵³ The first has to do with Italian foreign policy: the closeness to the United States that characterized Berlusconi’s policy almost automatically turned into a full pro-Israeli stance. The second and more relevant aspect is related to Italian domestic policy, and specifically to two phenomena: the birth of pro-Israeli political parties after the end

of the so-called First Republic, mainly *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), i.e., the heir of *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), a post-Fascist party; and the creation of an ideological and cultural *milieu*, which is characterized by being Islamophobic and progressively more and more pro-Israeli.

ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY: FROM WASHINGTON TO JERUSALEM

Traditionally, according to the so-called theory of the “three circles”,⁵⁴ Italian foreign policy has been the result of a balance between the “first circle”, i.e., the relationship with Washington, the “second circle”, i.e., the presence in the European institutions (previously the European Community, and later the EU), and the “third circle”, i.e., the orientation towards the Mediterranean region and the Arab world. Since the end of the Second World War, Rome tried—and actually succeeded—to have a close alliance with the United States, while maintaining autonomy in the other two circles.

Berlusconi challenged such a balance and gave precedence to the U.S. circle, which ended up reducing the margins of autonomy in the other two circles.⁵⁵ He decided that the Italian priority in foreign policy should have been represented by a strong alliance with Washington. That meant that the new Bush course of “war on terror” would have been fully supported by the Italian government.

The direct consequence of this pro-U.S. stance was Italy establishing a much closer relationship with Israel. In particular, the most relevant aspect was that the Israeli battle against Palestinian terrorism was interpreted by the Berlusconi government—exactly as both the United States and Israel were doing—as part of the fight that the “Western and democratic world” was conducting after September 11 to defend itself against the Islamist jihadist attack. This was actually one of the main successes of the Israeli government—presenting the Palestinian suicide terrorism during the Second Intifada as a matter of “global jihad”, not different from the September 11 events.

For this reason, when FM Benjamin Netanyahu visited Italy on 18–19 December 2002, Frattini stated that “The terror campaign conducted against Israel by the radical factions through suicide attacks had no moral justification at all, and represented the main danger for any democracy, all over the world.”⁵⁶ Thus, according to the Italian government, backing Israel meant supporting and defending western democracy and its values from Islamist attack.

BEING "MEDIATOR" IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

According to Berlusconi—as he stated in the foreword to the volume by Ehud Gol, Israeli ambassador to Italy between 2001 and 2006⁵⁷—the reason for a change in the traditional Italian policy toward Israel lay in the idea of increasing the EU role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, so that the EU could stop being mainly a “payer” and become also a “player”. In order to do that, the Italian PM believed that the EU had to adjust its policy, by balancing its biased anti-Israel stance. According to the traditional self-perception of Italy as a “diplomatic mediator”, and to the new approach that Berlusconi introduced in Italian diplomacy, that of establishing personal friendship-based relations with other countries’ leaders, Berlusconi thought that Italy could lead Europe to have a more balanced position and, therefore, to take a more active role in mediation.⁵⁸

Regardless of the actual effectiveness of this strategy—totally unrealistic—it is important to stress that given the absolutely pro-U.S. stance of Berlusconi’s foreign policy, the consequence of such a proposal would have been that of leading the EU to take the U.S. position, thus decreasing the role the EU could concretely play in the peace process. Somehow, this is what happened in 2003, with the decision to identify Hamas as a terrorist organization, and in 2006, with the choice to boycott the Hamas-led government. In both cases, the EU passively followed the United States and lost the chance of creating a real alternative to the American policy. Moreover, Berlusconi’s attempt to lead Europe towards a more balanced position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict actually resulted in alienating the EU on at least two occasions—when Berlusconi refused to meet Arafat in June 2003, and when Fini expressed understanding for the Israeli decision to build the separation barrier in November 2003.

ITALIAN DOMESTIC POLICY

In order to understand the reasons why the Italian foreign policy towards Israel changed so radically, it is also important to take into consideration two phenomena that have taken place in the Italian context.

ALLEANZA NAZIONALE’S PRO-ISRAELI STANCE

The first occurrence has to do with the legitimacy that Gianfranco Fini was seeking for his newly created political party, *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), born out of the former post-Fascist party.⁵⁹ In order to demonstrate that AN no longer had anything to do with Fascism, Fini was looking for a sort of “whitewash” that could affirm the new status of AN as a modern

European-style right-wing party. No one could provide him with such a “patent” better than the Italian Jewish community. Starting from the October 1993 Rome municipality elections, Fini aimed at receiving a “seal of legitimacy” from the Italian Jewish community in order to be able to play a governmental role in alliance with Berlusconi’s party, *Forza Italia* (FI). The “privileged tool” that Fini chose in order to get that legitimacy was an almost unconditional support of Israel, its government and its politics, in particular concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is not by chance that during the Fiuggi congress, in January 1995, which officially confirmed the birth of AN, it was declared:

AN condemns explicitly, definitively and without appeal any form of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, even when they are disguised by the propagandistic anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli policy. . . . Any prejudice has also to be condemned, since it was the preparation for anti-Semitic propaganda that led to pogroms and the Shoah. AN totally agrees with the Second Vatican Council declaration *Nostra Aetate*, and with John Paul II’s positions towards Jews, our “older brothers and sisters”.⁶⁰

This was the key that Fini used in the following years: nothing would have facilitated the dialogue with the Italian Jewish communities more than the total backing of the Israeli government and a strong denunciation of the anti-Israeli position of left-wing parties, especially the so-called “radical left”.

It is through this lens that the long journey that Fini made to get the legitimacy he needed to become a full member of Italian politics has to be read. On one hand, Fini totally condemned Fascist anti-Semitism, from the racial laws to the Jews’ deportation, up to the *Shoah*. For this reason, he made a series of highly symbolic gestures: in December 1993 he visited the memorial of the *Fosse Ardeatine*, which commemorates the massacre that the Nazis carried out in Rome in March 1944; in February 1999 he went to Auschwitz, and later to the *Risiera di San Sabba*, the only extermination camp located in Italy, close to Trieste; in October 2002 he met Chief Rabbi of Rome Elio Toaff. On the other hand, starting from 1994, AN totally sided with Israel and backed its politics. In a long interview with *Ha’aretz*, 13 September 2002, in which he asked for forgiveness for the racial laws of 1938 and the tragic events that followed, he also explained his political path from post-Fascism to AN. The following year, on 24 November 2003, Fini went to Israel.

His visit was the fulfillment of a political process started ten years earlier. In Israel, Fini visited Yad Vashem, met the Italian Jewish community in Israel, and had a meeting with PM Sharon. Thus, the two different tracks—bridging the gap with the Italian Jewish communities by denouncing Fascist wickedness, and being perceived by Israel as a close ally—reached their goal, and Fini and AN became a reference point both for Italian Jews and the Israeli government.

The AN pro-Israeli attitude highly influenced the Berlusconi government's foreign policy, not only in the two years Fini was FM, but during the entire half-decade of government. This is particularly true because *Forza Italia* and *Legal Nord*, for different reasons, did not have any specific position towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As to *FI*, it is not far from the truth to say that this party is completely shaped by Berlusconi: it is totally up to him to dictate the party's agenda, specifically concerning foreign policy. Since Berlusconi decided to have a pro-Israeli stance, the entire party followed his position. As to *Legal Nord*, this is mainly a domestic-oriented party, whose positions regarding foreign policy are totally dependent on internal issues. Its EU skepticism was mainly if not totally related to the fact that the euro, being stronger than the Italian lira, was making it more difficult for Northern private enterprises to export; at the same time, its tough position against China is related to the crisis of the textiles in Italy, due to the competition with Chinese cheap products. *Lega Nord* did not have any specific position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until September 11, when it viewed the Middle Eastern reality through the lens of a domestic politics issue—its opposition to the increasing presence of Muslim immigrants in Italy.⁶¹

*AN ISLAMOPHOBIC PRO-ISRAELI MILIEU:
"WE ARE ISRAEL"; "LONG LIVE ISRAEL"*

The second process that explains the change that occurred in Italian foreign policy towards Israel has to do with a slow—yet increasing—cultural and ideological trend: the birth of an Islamic prejudice in large sectors of the Italian public opinion and political spectrum especially among right-wing parties.

Fear of the growing Islamic presence in Italy—due to migration—became a widespread Islamophobic tendency after the events of September 11. At the same time, between 2002 and 2006, Israel became part of the related discourse. During these four years, some journalists and intellectuals succeeded in presenting the existence of a link between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the jihadist attack against the West. In particular,

the Second Intifada (specifically the devastating series of suicide bombing attacks against Israel that reached their peaks in 2002–2003), and the “Defensive Shield” operation⁶² convinced relevant sectors of Italian public opinion of the existence of such a link.

In order to understand how an Islamophobic *milieu* came into existence, different phases and actors have to be identified. According to Stefano Allievi, professor of Sociology at Padua University, the year 2000 has to be considered the turning point in terms of construction of a progressively pervasive Islamophobia,⁶³ due to three main events. First of all, in September 2000, Bologna Cardinal Giacomo Biffi wrote a document related to Islamic migration to Italy defining it as “problematic”. He clearly stated that if Europe was not able to discover its Christian roots, it would become a Muslim region.⁶⁴ Secondly, in 2000 *Lega Nord*, part of Berlusconi’s coalition government and particularly interested in opposing foreign migration, started its campaign against the construction of a new mosque in Lodi.⁶⁵ Finally, Giovanni Sartori, one of the leading political commentators, anticipated in an editorial⁶⁶ published in the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, the content of his book *Pluralism, Multiculturalism and Foreigners* that was to have been published the following year. Sartori challenged multiculturalism by stating that the Islamic migration was highly problematic in terms of integration and therefore Muslim immigrants represented a serious menace to western societies’ stability.⁶⁷

The following year, this idea was strengthened and an Islamophobic discourse became openly acknowledged after the events of September 11. In particular, on 29 September the well-known journalist Oriana Fallaci published in *Il Corriere della Sera* her provocative article “Anger and Pride”. This editorial had a huge impact on Italian public opinion. A few months later, it was published as a book, which sold 500,000 copies abroad and 1,500,000 in Italy, reaching 28 editions.⁶⁸ That article was extremely relevant, because it constructed the theoretical link between the menace represented by Muslim migrants in Europe and the terrorism threat. According to Fallaci, both the United States and Europe—and therefore Italy—were under the same type of attack by Muslim groups. In this sense, Fallaci prepared the road for Bat Ye’or’s book, *Eurabia*, which was published in Italian in 2007.⁶⁹

However, most important, Fallaci paved the way for another link, the connection between the Islamic menace against “the West” and the need to support Israel. On 12 April 2002, she published an article entitled “I, Oriana Fallaci, find it disgusting. . .”,⁷⁰ in which she attacked the left-wing political parties and civil society organizations that were demonstrating all over Europe against Israel and specifically against the “Defensive Shield”

operation. According to her, it was immoral to demonstrate against Israel, which was defending itself from Palestinian terrorism, as “the West” was doing against Islamist organizations, such as Al Qaeda.

In the same year, another Italian journalist, Fiamma Nirenstein—who later became Parliamentarian as a member of Berlusconi’s party—strengthened the link between the Islamic terrorist menace and the defense of Israel. In that year, she published a book, *The Defection. How the West Betrayed the Jews*,⁷¹ which sold 200,000 copies during the first months of publication. The main thesis of the book—later confirmed in another book, *We are Israel*⁷²—was that Palestinian terrorism, which was part of the wider Islamist terror network, not only menaced the existence of Israel, but was also directed against all of Western civilization, whose bulwark was represented by Israel.

In April 2002 the link proposed by Fallaci, and expressed more explicitly by Nirenstein, was shared by numerous and relevant sectors of Italian society, when the so-called *Israel Day* was organized. On 15 April the newspaper *Il Foglio*⁷³ decided to hold a rally in support of Israel. This event—that followed the previously organized *USA Day*, held on 10 November 2001—was attended by around 15,000 individuals. Among them, there were people from the Jewish communities and civil society, private individuals, several members of the government, and representatives of the entire spectrum of the Italian political parties, apart from the so-called “radical left”.

However, the most striking aspect—more than the actual participation, which was not so impressive—was that the plea in *Il Foglio* to support the initiative was signed by large numbers of individuals from a wide spectrum of political and cultural sectors.⁷⁴ The main reason for the success of the initiative was that it was perceived as an “either-or” choice: supporting either “the West” with its democratic, liberal values, or “Islamic terrorism”; being either with Israel or with terrorism. It was a demonstration that both public opinion and the government (for example FM Frattini’s position during Netanyahu’s visit to Italy in December 2002) were adopting an ideological framework according to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was part of the wider war on terror that “the West” was conducting.

A third important actor whose articles and books greatly contributed to the reinforcement of this Islamophobic pro-Israeli *milieu* is the Egyptian-Italian journalist Magdi Allam, who converted to Catholicism in 2008. His book *Long Live Israel - From the Ideology of Death to the Civilization of Life: My Story* was published in May 2007.⁷⁵ The book compares Israeli values and those promoted by the Arab world. According to Allam, while the Arab states had been able to produce only a culture of death and

fundamentalism, Israel was promoting exactly the opposite values, based on freedom, human dignity, and life. Therefore, “the West” had no choice but to defend Israel, because through Israel it was defending itself. Even though it was published only in 2007, the articles he wrote for *Il Corriere della Sera*, starting in 2003, contributed greatly to developing this Islamophobic pro-Israeli *milieu*. Allam’s pro-Israeli stance was the main reason why in 2006 he received the Tel-Aviv University—Dan David Foundation Prize, for “being a journalist and pioneer of democracy and press freedom, . . . and for being an author, prolific journalist and editor consistently speaking out against extremism and in favor of tolerance and coexistence.”⁷⁶

Once such an Islamophobic, pro-Israeli *milieu* was created and shared by the government and numerous sectors of public opinion, press and TV contributed in circulating an Islamophobic, pro-Israeli discourse. In particular, a relevant role was played by four newspapers, all of which are strictly connected to the government. Three of them—*Il Foglio*, *Liberio*, and *Il Giornale*—are under PM Berlusconi’s direct control because either he or one of his relatives owns them, and because the newspaper’s editorial line is fully dictated by Berlusconi himself. The fourth newspaper, *La Padania*, belongs to *Lega Nord*, which was the first to use a clear Islamophobic discourse against the Muslim immigrants.

Therefore, this type of press has confirmed and strengthened the government’s positions by hosting articles written by journalists and intellectuals that belonged to the depicted *milieu*. On the other hand, the press has acted as a sort of “public address system” in disseminating the government’s positions to public opinion. For example, an analysis of these newspapers in December 2008–January 2009 clearly demonstrates how much an Islamophobic pro-Israeli discourse has been used to report the war between Israel and Hamas.⁷⁷ Journalists such as Nirenstein⁷⁸ and politicians such as Antonio Martino,⁷⁹ Minister of Defense in the second and third Berlusconi governments, have clearly embraced such a discourse, confirming the strict link between the Berlusconi government’s backing of Israel and the existence of an Islamophobic pro-Israeli *milieu* in Italy.

CONCLUSION

The most recent events—such as the already mentioned visit of Berlusconi to Israel in February 2010, not to mention a series of episodes that took place in 2009⁸⁰—confirm the decision of the Italian government to fully support Israel and its policies.⁸¹

This proves that Berlusconi's stance in favor of Israel did not rely exclusively on foreign policy reasons, i.e., the closeness to the George W. Bush presidency. In fact, despite the change in U.S. foreign policy after Obama's arrival at the White House, Italy has maintained its position. Domestic politics also played a crucial role in shaping Italian foreign policy towards Israel. Specifically, as this article tried to demonstrate, two elements played a relevant role in the reversal of Italian foreign policy: the pro-Israeli stance by newly born political parties, specifically AN, and the birth of an Islamophobic pro-Israeli *milieu* that is gradually receiving more and more consent.

NOTES

1. The first visit took place in 2000, when Berlusconi was leading the opposition to the Romano Prodi's left-wing coalition government. The second was when Berlusconi was PM, in June 2003, shortly before Italy took up the presidency of the EU. See Maria Grazia Enardu, "Berlusconi in Israel between Scilla and Cariddi." Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1386>.

2. During Berlusconi's meeting in Bethlehem with Chairman of the Palestinian Authority Abu Mazen, the Italian PM said: "As much as it is just crying for the Shoah victims, it is fair being in pain for the Gaza victims."

3. Netanyahu's speech, accessed 2 July 2010, [http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/PM Speaks/speechberlukneseto30210.htm](http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/PM%20Speaks/speechberlukneseto30210.htm).

4. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.dailyalert.org/archive/2003-11/2003-11-21.html>, <http://roma.mfa.gov.il/mfm/web/main/document.asp?DocumentID=42005&MissionID=41>.

5. On the reasons why the history of Israel and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been marginalized by Italian academic scholars, while they have experienced over-expositions by the Italian media, see Antonio Donno, "La storia di Israele in Italia," in *Israele, Mezzo secolo, Numero speciale a cura di Sergio Minerbi, Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, 1998, 169–81. According to him, since 1967, the anti-Israeli position of the Italian Communist Party greatly influenced Italian scholars, whose majority sympathized with it. As a consequence, they mainly aimed at challenging Israel, producing biased publications more than serious analytical studies.

6. To the best of my knowledge, there are only two articles providing the readers with an historical overview of the Italian-Israeli relationship from 1948 to current times: Jacob Abadi, "Constraints and Adjustments in Italy's Policy towards Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 4 (2002) 63–94, and Manlio Graziano, "The Rise and Fall of 'Mediterranean Atlanticism' in Italian Foreign Policy: The Case of the Near East," *Modern Italy*, 3 (2007) 287–308.

7. In chronological order, since the opening of formal diplomatic relations

between the two countries, see Ilaria Tremolada, *All'ombra degli arabi. Le relazioni italo-israeliane 1948–56 dalla fondazione dello stato ebraico alla crisi di Suez* (Milano, 2003); Lorenzo Cremonesi, “Dal rispetto del boicottaggio arabo alle ambizioni di mediazione. Italia e Israele verso la crisi di Suez,” in *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1950–1960)*, ed. Ennio Di Nolfo, Romain Rainero, and Brunello Viguzzi, 103–32 (Milano, 1992); Luca Riccardi, “La politica estera italiana, Israele e il Medio Oriente alla vigilia della crisi di Suez,” *Clio*, 4 (2003) 629–69; Daniele Caviglia and Massimiliano Cricco, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei. La politica mediorientale dell'Italia dalla Guerra dei Sei Giorni al conflitto dello Yom Kippur (1967–1973)* (Soveria Mannelli, 2006); Luca Riccardi, “Sempre più con gli arabi. La politica italiana verso il Medio Oriente dopo la guerra del Kippur (1973–76),” *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, 6 (2006) 57–82; Simonetta Della Seta, “Sessant'anni di rapporti culturali tra Italia e Israele,” *Clio*, 3 (2008) 491–8. For a general overview of the way Italian politics and culture have perceived and depicted Israel, see Marcella Simoni and Arturo Marzano, eds., *Roma e Gerusalemme. Israele nella vita politica e culturale italiana (1949–2009)* (Genova, 2010).

8. A first reflection over the attitude of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) towards Israel was carried out by Giorgio Napolitano, currently president of Italy. See his speech during his visit to Israel in October 1986 at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Janiki Cingoli, ed., *Sinistra e questione ebraica: confronto con le ragioni di Israele* (Roma, 1989) 139–48. On the PCI's policy toward Israel, see Luca Riccardi, *Il “problema Israele”. Diplomazia italiana e PCI di fronte allo Stato ebraico (1948–1973)* (Milano, 2006). On the attitude of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), see Michele Achilli, *I socialisti tra Israele e Palestina (dal 1892 ai nostri giorni)* (Milano, 1989); and Alessandra Tarquini, “Il partito socialista fra guerra fredda e ‘questione ebraica’: sionismo, antisemitismo e conflitto arabo-israeliano nella stampa socialista, dalla nascita della Repubblica alla fine degli anni sessanta,” in *Ebraismo, sionismo e antisemitismo nella stampa socialista italiana. Dalla fine dell'Ottocento agli anni Sessanta*, ed. Mario Toscano, 161–232 (Rome, 2008). On the relationship between the “left” and the Palestinians see Antonio Rubbi, *Con Arafat in Palestina. La sinistra italiana e la questione mediorientale* (Roma, 1996).

9. Berlusconi's suggestion—renewed once again during his visit in February 2010 that Israel should enter the EU was actually formulated for the first time in the 1980s by Marco Pannella, the leader of the Radical Party. See Emma Bonino, “Perché Israele deve entrare nell'Unione Europea,” *Aspenia*. Special issue focused on Israel: *Lo Stato degli Ebrei*, 37 (2007) 236–43.

10. Tremolada, *All'ombra degli arabi*.

11. Alberto Tonini, *Un'equazione a troppe incognite: i paesi occidentali e il conflitto israelo-palestinese (1950–1967)* (Milano, 1999) 65–6.

12. See Tremolada, *All'ombra degli arabi*; Cremonesi, “Dal rispetto del boicottaggio arabo alle ambizioni di mediazione”.

13. On the topic, see Agostino Giovagnoli and Luciano Tosi (eds.), *Un ponte sull'Atlantico. L'alleanza occidentale (1949–1999)* (Milano, 2003).

14. Cfr. Alberto La Volpe, *Diario segreto di Nemer Hammad ambasciatore di Arafat in Italia*, (Roma, 2002) 44–64. This event was part of a broader change in international perception of the PLO. In October 1974, during the Rabat summit, the Arab League recognized the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people”, while the following November the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 3236, the cause of Palestinian self-determination and the status of the PLO as representative of the Palestinians.

15. See the interview released by Colombo in Caviglia—Cricco, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei*, 144. The Italian role is also highlighted by the PLO representative in Italy Nemer Hammad, in La Volpe, *Diario Segreto*, 73.

16. The entire text is available at <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/o/FEF015E8B1A1E5A685256D810059D922>. Accessed 2 July 2010. On the Venice Declaration, see Panayiotis Ifestos, *European Political Cooperation. Towards a Framework of Supranational Diplomacy?* (Aldershot, 1987) 458–70.

17. PM Golda Meir met with Pope Paul VI in January 1973, but had no official meeting with any Italian authorities. See Golda Meir, *My Life* (Jerusalem, 1975) 340–3.

18. Giorgio Battistini, “Contro Craxi un coro di critiche,” *La Repubblica*, 9 December 1984.

19. On 7 October 1985, four terrorists belonging to the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) hijacked the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* in Egyptian territorial waters. After two days of negotiations, the ship was liberated thanks to the role of Abu Abbas, who was later accused of having masterminded the entire operation. When it was discovered that an American Jewish passenger was killed, the U.S. Air Force obliged the Egyptian airlines plane bringing the four people and Abu Abbas to Tunis to land on the NATO base of Sigonella, in Sicily. Italian PM Craxi did not accept the American peremptory request to bring the five men to a trial in the United States. While the four commandos were arrested, prosecuted, and later condemned, Abu Abbas was allowed to fly from Italy to Yugoslavia. See Carlo Maria Santoro, *L'Italia e il Mediterraneo. Questioni di politica estera* (Milano, 1988) 122–5; Giampaolo Calchi Novati, “The Case of the Achille Lauro. Hijacking and Italo-Arab Relations: One Policy, Too Many Policies, No Policy?” *Journal of Arab Affairs*, 2 (1991) 153–79; Matteo Gerlini, “Il caso *Achille Lauro* e le sue conseguenze,” in *La politica estera italiana negli anni Ottanta*, ed. Ennio Di Nolfo (Manduria-Bari-Roma, 2003) 99–125.

20. Roberto Zuccolini, “Ruggiero il migliore ministro degli Esteri,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, 25 May 2001.

21. Ruggiero did not agree with two government decisions: the pulling out of the European Airbus Consortium for the production of the A400M military transport aircraft in October 2001, and the opposition to the introduction of a European arrest warrant to cope with cross-border crimes. This was later changed when the government realized that it would bring isolation.

22. Ettore Greco and Raffaello Matarazzo, "Italy's European Policy and its Role in the European Convention," *The International Spectator*, 3 (2003) 125–35.
23. Roberto Aliboni, "Neo-Nationalism and Neo-Atlanticism in Italian Foreign Policy," *The International Spectator*, 1 (2003) 81–90 (specifically 83).
24. Two interesting summaries of the "continuity-change" debate are presented by Maurizio Carbone, "Italy in the European Union, between Prodi and Berlusconi," *The International Spectator*, 3 (2009) 97–115 (specifically 98–100), and Jason W. Davidson, "Italy-US Relations since the End of the Cold War: Prestige, Peace, and the Transatlantic Balance," *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 2 (2009) 289–308 (specifically 292–3).
25. Elisabetta Brighi, "One Man Alone? A Longue Durée Approach to Italy's Foreign Policy under Berlusconi," *Government and Opposition*, 2 (2006) 278–97.
26. Piero Ignazi, *Italian Foreign Policy since 2001: A Preliminary Assessment*, Newsletter N. 1, June 2005. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.foreignpolicy.it/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=1010>. See also "Al di là dell'Atlantico, al di qua dell'Europa: dove va la politica estera italiana," *Il Mulino*, 2 (2004) 267–76.
27. Ettore Greco, *Italy's European Vocation: The Foreign Policy of the New Prodi Government*, August 2006, US-Europe Analysis Series—The Brookings Institute. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/cuse/analysis/greco20060803.pdf>.
28. Roberto Aliboni and Ettore Greco, "Foreign Policy Re-nationalization and Internationalism in the Italian Debate," *International Affairs*, 1 (1996) 43–51.
29. Sergio Romano, "Berlusconi: il rovesciamento delle priorità tradizionali," *Affari Internazionali*, 7 June 2006. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.affariinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=143>.
30. Osvaldo Croci, "The Second Berlusconi Government and Italian Foreign Policy," *The International Spectator*, 2 (2002) 90.
31. Osvaldo Croci, *The Berlusconi Government and Italian Foreign Policy: Change or Continuity?* Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.it/cgi-bin/news/adon.cgi?act=doc&sid=4&doc=1010>; "Much Ado about Little: The Foreign Policy of the Second Berlusconi Government," *Modern Italy*, 1 (2005) 59–74; "The 'Americanisation' of Italian Foreign Policy?" *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 1 (2005) 10–26.
32. Special issue of *Modern Italy*, "Italy's Foreign Policy and the Mediterranean," 2 (2008).
33. Valter Coralluzzo, "Italy and the Mediterranean: Relations with the Maghreb countries," *Modern Italy*, 2 (2008) 115–33 (especially 118).
34. Maurizio Carbone, "Between Ambition and Ambivalence: Italy and the European Union's Mediterranean Policy," *Modern Italy*, 2 (2008) 155–68 (especially 163).
35. Raffaella Del Sarto and Nathalie Tocci, "Italy's Politics without Policy: Balancing Atlanticism and Europeanism in the Middle East," *Modern Italy*, 2 (2008) 135–53 (especially 139).

36. Maurizio Molinari, *L'interesse nazionale. Dieci storie dell'Italia nel mondo* (Bari-Roma, 2000), specifically the first chapter "Ritorno a Gerusalemme" [Coming Back to Jerusalem], 3–15.

37. FM D'Alema decided to coin a new expression, thus relabeling previous governments' *equidistanza* as *equivicinanza* (i.e., being equally close to both sides), in order to highlight that the new center-left government policy was more balanced than that of Berlusconi. Cfr. Del Sarto and Tocci, "Italy's Politics without Policy," 143.

38. The plan was never implemented but was presented once again by Berlusconi during his February 2010 visit to Israel.

39. The original plan amounted to 6.2 billion euro. Italy would have covered only part of it. Giampaolo Cadalanu, "Piano Marshall per la Palestina ma Israele deve avere pazienza," *La Repubblica*, 20 September 2003.

40. Shlomo Gazit, *Trapped Fools, Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories* (London, 2003).

41. On 23 January 1974, Foreign Minister Aldo Moro declared: "The Palestinians are not looking for assistance, but for a country." Riccardi, "Sempre più con gli arabi," 61.

42. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/o/oooCo76B7CDF4FAF85256B9Coo6AB422>.

43. On 29 March 2002, in the deadliest attack by Palestinians against Israelis during the Second *Intifada*, 30 people celebrating Passover in the Israeli city of Netanya were murdered by a Palestinian suicide bomber.

44. Reported in Rodolfo Ragionieri, "Il conflitto israelo-palestinese," in *L'Italia e la Politica Internazionale*, ed. Alessandro Colombo and Natalino Ronzitti (Bologna, 2003) 228.

45. Romano Dapas, "Mancata visita ad Arafat, la Francia critica Berlusconi," *Il Messaggero*, 17 June 2003; Lapo Pistelli and Fiore Guelfo, *Semestre nero. Berlusconi e la politica estera* (Roma, 2004) 53–4.

46. At least this is *Ma'ariv* correspondent Menachem Gantz's interpretation, "Israele si fida di Roma e spera che si possa superare il veto francese," *Il Foglio*, 28 August 2003.

47. Maurizio Caprara, "Muro di Israele, il governo italiano più morbido della Ue," *Corriere della Sera*, 11 November 2003; Del Sarto and Tocci, "Italy's politics without policy," 141.

48. On 21 October 2003, the EU backed the UNGA Resolution ES-10/13, which stated that the separation barrier was violating international law. Accessed 2 July 2010, http://www.un.int/palestine/docs/res_es10_13.pdf.

49. "Finì: fu troppo ambiguo nei confronti del terrorismo," *La Stampa*, 12 November 2004. See Elisabetta Brighi, "La politica estera dell'Italia," in Colombo and Ronzitti, *L'Italia e la politica internazionale* (Bologna, 2006) 99–110.

50. Herb Keinon, "Europe must understand Israel. Fini tells 'Post' Italy should justify Israel's case to EU," *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 December 2004.

51. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3207248,00.html>.

52. Accessed 2 July 2010, http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Politica_Estera/Aree_Geografiche/Mediterr_MO/Relazioni+bilaterali+Paesi++Vicino+Oriente/Israele.htm.

53. Del Sarto and Tocci, "Italy's Politics without Policy," 139.

54. Ludovico Garruccio, "Le scelte di fondo e il retroterra culturale," *Politica Internazionale*, 2 (1982) 7–14; Santoro, *L'Italia e il Mediterraneo*, 57–78; Massimo De Leonardis, *L'Italia: "alleato privilegiato" degli Stati Uniti nel Mediterraneo?*, in *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, ed. Massimo De Leonardis, 61–93 (Bologna, 2003); Carbone, "Between Ambitions and Ambivalence," 157.

55. See, among others, Coralluzzo, "Italy and the Mediterranean," 117; Del Sarto and Tocci, "Italy's politics without policy," 136–41; Carbone, "Between Ambitions and Ambivalence," 163.

56. Franco Frattini and Carlo Panella, *Cambiamo rotta. La nuova politica estera dell'Italia* (Casale Monferrato, 2004) 6.

57. This volume contains all of Ehud Gol's articles published in Italian newspapers during the five years he was Israeli ambassador in Rome. In all of them, he expressed his approval for the new Italian policy towards Israel, which Jerusalem perceived as more balanced and therefore more effective in terms of helping Israel and Palestine find a peace agreement. Ehud Gol, *Da Gerusalemme a Roma. Il Medio Oriente, l'Italia e il mondo: riflessioni di un ambasciatore 2001–2006* (Milano, 2008).

58. This idea was totally shared by Gol, who presented Italy as "a main actor in the European play, . . . the natural European leader of XXI century due to its economic power and renewed political stability," Gol, "Israele e l'Unione Europea più vicini grazie all'Italia," *Il Giornale*, 24 December 2002.

59. On the relationship between AN and Israel, as well as on the AN political path, see Vincenzo Lavenia, "Tricolore a stelle e strisce: AN tra America, Israele ed Europa," *Il Ponte*, 5 (2005) 211–23.

60. Gianni Scipione Rossi, *La destra e gli ebrei. Una storia italiana* (Soveria Mannelli, 2003) xxiii.

61. Coralluzzo highlights the role of "reiterated anti-Muslim invective of the Northern League" in contributing to the new Italian policy in the Middle East, in "Italy and the Mediterranean," 117.

62. The Palestinian terrorist attacks against the Israeli population vastly increased in February–March 2002; in order to destroy the terrorist infrastructures, the IDF launched a large-scale operation in the West Bank that lasted for three weeks.

63. An interesting definition of Islamophobia is the one proposed by the U.K.-based NGO Runnymede Trust in 1997, as "an outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims", based on stereotyped perceptions that are employed to refer to Islam or Muslims, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All". Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/17/74.html>.

64. Renzo Guolo, "La Chiesa e l'islam," *Il Mulino*, 1 (2001) 93–101.
65. "Lodi. La Lega alla guerra santa. 'Smonteremo quella moschea mattone per mattone'," *La Repubblica*, 15 October 2000.
66. Giovanni Sartori, "Gli islamici e noi italiani," *Corriere della Sera*, 25 October 2000.
67. Stefano Allievi, "Giovanni Sartori. Pluralismo, multiculturalismo e estranei. Saggio sulla società multietnica," *Il Mulino*, 3 (2000) 500–2.
68. Oriana Fallaci, *La rabbia e l'orgoglio* (Milano, 2001). This was followed by two volumes which formed a trilogy. These two books were a massive success, selling up to 2 million copies, Fallaci, *La forza della ragione* (Milano, 2004); *Oriana Fallaci intervista se stessa. L'Apocalisse* (Milano, 2005).
69. Bat Ye'or, *Eurabia. Come l'Europa è diventata anticristiana, antioccidentale, antiamericana, antisemita* (Torino, 2007).
70. Oriana Fallaci, "Io, Oriana, trovo disgustoso. . . .," *Corriere della Sera*, 12 April 2002.
71. Fiamma Nirenstein, *L'abbandono. Come l'occidente ha tradito gli ebrei* (Milano, 2002).
72. Fiamma Nirenstein, *Israele siamo noi* (Milano, 2007).
73. *Il Foglio*, established in January 1996, sells around 20,000 copies. It is owned by Veronica Lario, Berlusconi's ex-wife, and Sergio Zuncheddu.
74. Among the many people who signed the appeal were the liberal anti-Berlusconi intellectual Marco Travaglio, left-wing journalists Corrado Augias and Lucia Annunziata, representatives of left-wing Catholic groups, such as Francuccio Gesualdi (former pupil of Don Milani), and of right-wing Catholic groups, such as *Comunione e Liberazione*, and even political right-wing terrorists Francesca Mambro and Valerio Fioravanti.
75. Magdi Allam, *Viva Israele. Dall'ideologia della morte alla civiltà della vita: la mia storia* (Milano, 2007).
76. Accessed 20 November 2008, <http://www.magdiallam.it/node/1003>.
77. See Arturo Marzano, "Reading the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict through Increasing Islamophobia. The Italian Media and the War on Gaza," paper presented at the 5th CAMMRO (Centre for Arab and Muslim Media Research) Conference, London, June 2009.
78. "This is not an episode of a local conflict, there is nothing in it that recalls the land-for-peace theme that has characterized the Palestinian issue. This is an episode of the attack against the western world, and Iran has a lot to do with it". Fiamma Nirenstein, "Una piazza che non ti aspetti," *Il Giornale*, 19 January 2009. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.fiammanirenstein.com/articoli.asp?Categoria=11&Id=2085>.
79. "We are testimonies of the attack that extremist Islamism is launching against the West and its modernity. Israel is only the first and the closest target, since it represents the outpost, the first line of the West. But Islamism's targets also include the 'Great Satan', the USA, Europe and all moderate Arab states."

Antonio Martino, "Israele è solo una vittima. L'Europa interferisce, ma non capisce la situazione," *Libero*, 2 January 2009.

80. In October 2009, Italy did not participate in the slated NATO exercise in Turkey since Ankara did not accept the presence of the Israeli army; an alternative exercise was organized in Sardinia with the participation of Israel. See Francesco Battistini, "Manovre Israeliane in Sardegna," *Corriere della Sera*, 20 October 2009. In November 2009, Italy voted against the adoption of the UNGA resolution endorsing some recommendations of the Goldstone report, while other European States, like France and the United Kingdom abstained. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/SKEA-7XJE6Q?OpenDocument>.

81. On the Italian position towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after the war in Gaza, see Ruth Hanau Santini, *Italian foreign policy vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian crisis over Gaza: substance or form?* Newsletter N. 11 March 2009. Accessed 2 July 2010, <http://www.foreignpolicy.it/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=4119>.