

# The Rise and Fall of ‘Mediterranean Atlanticism’ in Italian Foreign Policy: the Case of the Near East

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*The article aims at studying the reasons for the new way of looking at the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by the Italian political world: the mutual recognition of Israel and the Vatican, the visit to Jerusalem by the leader of the formerly fascist party, Mr. Gianfranco Fini, and the beginnings of a movement of interest towards the Jewish State also within the political left. From a historical viewpoint, anti-Semitism in Italy found its origins in the Church's attitude toward the 'deicide people'. Beginning with WWI, to this position was added the worry that the Holy Places might fall under Jewish control. From those times dates the Holy See's evermore manifest liking for the Arab populations of Palestine. Nowadays the line of conduct of the Church has as its basic objective the defense of Christian minorities in the Middle East, and for this reason it maintains dialogues with all actors in the region. The weight of the Church influenced also the attitude of the Italian State, even though from its inception the latter had to make adjustments because of other international requirements. This multiple subordination caused the different republican governments to always keep an official equidistant stance among the conflicting parties in the Near East. Behind this apparent neutrality, however, the feelings of benevolence for the Arab countries and the Palestinians have gradually intensified. Italian leaders have been trying to conduct a Mediterranean policy on the borders of the Western alliance, and their feelings have been oriented in consequence. During the 1970s, the governments went as far as to conclude a secret pact with Palestinian terrorists, to avoid terror acts on the Peninsula in exchange for some freedom of action. And in the mid-eighties the Craxi government did not hesitate to challenge the US in order to guarantee the continuity of that line of conduct. On that occasion Craxi, speaking in Parliament, compared Arafat to Mazzini. The end of the Yalta-established order has modified the traditional data of Italian foreign policy. However, the increased attention paid to Israel has also other causes: the changed attitude of the Church after the civil war and the Syrian occupation in Lebanon, events which both caused difficulties for the consistent Christian minorities; the hope that the Oslo process could reward the Italian 'clear-sightedness'; last, but not least, the quarrelsome internal politics that make the Palestine conflict a mirror of the Roman conflicts. Lastly, the article connects the recent goodwill for Israel with the threats of Islamic terrorism in Italy. A political opinion trend would revisit the Middle Eastern conflict as the upturned perspective of a 'clash of civilizations' already existent nowadays. And a possible act of terrorism in Italy might give to this opinion a mass basis.*

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### **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to evaluate the Italian Republic's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, including its principal phases and general philosophy; a philosophy which has, in purely formal terms, remained unchanged over the last 60 years, but which has often hidden elements of ambiguity, incoherence and dissonance. Italian foreign policy—not only towards the Near and Middle East—seems schizophrenic only to those unaware that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is but one of the actors on the country's diplomatic stage. Alongside it sit economic groups, religious organisations, NGOs, regional authorities and other institutional figures (the President of the Republic and the President of the Senate, for instance); furthermore, even political parties, whether from the majority or the opposition, exercise their own diplomacy. These various bodies are all influenced by the international context, while they try in one way or another to exercise independence in that context. For historical reasons, however, the influence of the international context is stronger in Italy than in most other large countries.

Indeed, the main reason—besides ‘plural diplomacy’—for the incoherence in Italian foreign policy has been the evolution of the international situation. The international context covered by this article will deal with the birth, consolidation and end of the ‘Cold War’. These phases will not be seen as periods in themselves, for obvious reasons, but will be viewed from the perspective of their repercussions on Italy’s attitude towards the conflict in the Middle East. The international context is the axis around which Italy’s entire political history has evolved and from which it is impossible to single out any one particular aspect. Having said this, there are specific factors which make it possible to study the history of Italy as history of the country as such and not as a minor branch of the history of international relations. As regards the country’s attitude towards the Near East, these specific factors reside in the evolution of the interests of the Catholic Church in the region and in the traditional Mediterranean orientation of Italian foreign policy. And it is on these two aspects that this article will focus.

The ‘Middle East question’, in the form we know it today, first appeared on the geopolitical map at the time when Italy was becoming a Republic. This was not a coincidence, since both developments were products of the international transformations brought about by the Second World War. If, however, these seismic shifts completely changed the face of the Near and Middle East, they produced only formal changes in Italy’s attitude towards this region. Within the constraints imposed by the Yalta partition, the Republican governments tried to pursue a traditional line focused on the Near East and the southern Mediterranean region. Since the situation in the Balkans was less fluid and, in addition, was tainted by the consequences of their occupation during the war, Italians focused on the southern shores of the old *mare nostrum*. Because of its passive role in the international balance of the ‘Cold War’, Italy never declared openly this specific foreign policy objective. This reticence was conditioned by another constraint: the interests of the Catholic church in the region.

Thus, during the ‘Cold War’, Republican Italy practised a ‘dual’ foreign policy: formally respectful of international alliances and adopting an ‘equidistant’ position towards the Arab countries and the State of Israel; but, in reality not actually equidistant because of its ever deeper friendship and collaboration with the Arab

governments, 'in continuum' with the fascist pro-Arab policy and with Vatican hostility towards Israel. The changes that came about after the hiatus of 1989–1991 created the illusion of an autonomous Italian foreign policy. In reality, the relaxing of the Atlantic constraint was more than counter-balanced by strong European guardianship of a country riven by a profound crisis. Since the formal structures of the Atlantic Alliance had not, however, been replaced by the formal structures of the European alliance, Italy's foreign policy 'played it by ear' and was most often exploited for reasons of internal politics, used by both coalitions as a sign of political distinctiveness: the more 'Atlanticist' (and often pro-Israeli) on the centre right; the more 'European' (and very often pro-Arab) on the centre left. The Catholic Church, for its part, initiated a change in attitude from the Gulf War of 1991 onwards, when Syria was 'authorised' to enter Lebanon. Its principal interest having always been that of protecting the Catholic communities in the Middle East, it became vital for the Church to have direct contacts with all the regional parties involved, including Israel, around which all hope of a solution to the crisis revolves. Even if, since then, the official attitude of the various Italian governments has remained the same (that of so-called 'equidistance'), the change in the international scene and in the Church's attitude, as well as the disappearance of the traditional political agenda, have given diplomacy an entirely new content.

### **The Church, the Jewish People and Israel**

Italy's international choices have always been influenced by the major powers. Nevertheless, there are other factors which, dating from the period prior to Unification, have exercised a profound influence on the country's political culture and social psychology; in particular, there has been the influence of the Catholic Church. The Church has had a profound influence on the population and on politicians who, whatever their leanings, are conscious of the fact that Italy cannot be governed against the Church's will.

The anaemic character of Italian foreign policy seems particularly salient when viewed in conjunction with the international action of the Vatican. The two foreign policies have often interacted in the sense that the Italian State has sometimes made use of the 'geopolitical capital' of the Church and its organisations to lay claim to a more visible presence on the international scene, and the Church, albeit less often, has used the structures of the Italian State to pursue its own ends. Nevertheless, this has not prevented Italy, because of its subordination to other great powers, from being constrained into taking different, indeed contrary, positions to the interests of the Church (notably in the two Gulf wars). We shall turn later to the insufficiencies of Italian foreign policy and the repercussions on the manner in which the Arab–Israeli conflict has been perceived in Italy. First, however, in order to discover the origins of this perception, a brief outline of the Church's attitude towards the Jews and Zionism is necessary.

#### *The Catholic Church and the Jews*

Between 1555 and 1938, the only institution openly hostile to the Jews was, in Italy, the Catholic Church. On July 14 1555, when only just elected,

Pope Paul IV—ex-Cardinal Pietro Carafa who had instituted the court of the Holy Office in 1542—promulgated the *Bull Cum nimis absurdum*. Amongst other things, this document established the ghetto in Rome, closed all synagogues except one, imposed a distinctive sign for Jews, confiscated their land and property and authorised them to carry on business only as sellers of rags and old clothes, ‘sola arte strazziariæ seu cenciariæ’. The persecutions which followed made such a lasting impression that Sultan Süleyman 1st lodged an official protest and offered Turkish protection to Jews being persecuted in Italy.

The gates of the ghetto were not opened again until three centuries later, in 1848, although this did not really change the fundamental attitude of the Church towards Jews. Indeed, ninety years after the abolition of the ghetto, on the eve of ‘Kristallnacht’ and the fascist racist laws, the Jesuit journal *Civiltà cattolica* warned that ‘numerous Jews have become an ever more serious danger for the society in which they live, and the need to find an efficacious remedy is becoming a matter of urgency’.<sup>1</sup> The curse against the Jews, who ‘through their own fault have been condemned by God to eternal slavery’ (Pontifical Bull, *Cum mimis absurdum*, in Tas 2002), was not lifted until the end of the 2nd Vatican Council, in other words, 410 years after Paul IV’s Bull.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Catholic Church and the Holy Places*

Apart from the theological question of ‘deicide’, the Vatican’s position on the Zionist movement and, more generally, the ‘return’ of the Jews to Palestine is significant for the purposes of this study. This question, compared with the plurimillennial age of the Church, is very recent. It goes back to the middle of the XIXth century, when the revolt of the Viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad ’Alī, put ‘Syria’ (in fact the whole Mediterranean strip of the Near East) back into the geopolitical circuit, and provoked the first major crisis between France and Great Britain after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Following the proclamation of a Protestant diocese [Episcopal see] in Jerusalem and the weakening of France, ‘Protectress’ of the Holy Places, Pius IX re-established, in 1847, with the apostolic letter Nulla celebrior, the Latin Patriarchate which had disappeared at the end of the Crusades. The First World War—with the Balfour declaration and the collapse of what was left of the Ottoman Empire—marked a decisive new stage. Pope Benedict XV welcomed it thus: ‘It would be a matter of great grief, for me and Christianity, if non-believers enjoyed in Palestine rights superior to ours and if the Holy Places, which are sacred for Christianity, were handed back to non-Christians’ (Laurens 2000).<sup>3</sup> On that occasion, wrote Henri Laurens, the Church showed itself to be ‘the most intransigent actor’ against any idea of constituting a ‘national Jewish homeland’ and, on 28th July 1921, the Pope received an Arab delegation from Palestine for the first time. The horrors of the Second World War scarcely modified the Vatican’s attitude as regards the Holy Places. It seems that the Secretary of State, Monsignor Luigi Maglione, knowing that the deportation of the Jews in Poland ‘was the equivalent of sentencing them to death’ (Sarfatti 2003),<sup>4</sup> had sponsored the charitable action of sheltering a number of them and even enabling them to flee. But, at the same time (Spring 1943), Maglione also sent a message to the *apostolic nuncios* affirming that

'Catholics would feel hurt in their religious sentiments, and experience just fears if Palestine were to become the exclusive property of the Jews' (Laurens 2000, p. 315).<sup>5</sup>

### *The Church and Israel*

After the partition of Palestine, which was decided at the United Nations, Pius XII issued three encyclicals on the question in under a year,<sup>6</sup> in which he claimed 'an international regime' for Jerusalem and 'its surrounding areas'. In the last of these encyclicals, the Pope, who had made no public condemnation of the German camps during the War, declared himself to be saddened by the 'concentration camps' or by the fact that 'such a large number of [Palestinian] refugees' were exposed 'to destitution, contagious diseases and perils of every sort (§ 5)' (Pacelli 2006).

Paradoxically, the Vatican's position evolved only after the war of 1967. There had already been some timid signs of making an opening to Israel under John XXIII, with a letter written to the President of the Hebrew State at the time of his election and, naturally, with the abandonment of the accusation of 'deicide' after Vatican II. But the lightening victory of the Israeli army and the conquest of Eastern Jerusalem produced a more realistic attitude which was reflected in a change in form which was almost imperceptible in semantic terms but especially significant with regard to the traditional claims relating to Jerusalem: from June 1967, the Church was no longer asking for a 'regime', but a 'special statute, internationally guaranteed'.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, sympathy, (up until then implicit) towards the Palestinians, became explicit and the Palestinians became '*the people of the Holy Land*' (Laurens 2000).<sup>8</sup> Even when there were terrorist attacks (albeit ritually condemned) the Vatican always seemed 'ready to find reasons for these acts when the Palestinians are involved' (Laurens 2000, p. 326). Amongst the most glaring examples of this 'comprehension' is the message of condolence from Paul VI of September 6 1972, on the day following the attack against the Israeli delegation at the Munich Olympic Games.

### *The Church and the Near East*

In spite of (or, rather, thanks to) the absence of 'divisions' and any real territorial dimension, the Vatican exercises multi-directional geopolitics, like those of a major power. Its principal centres of interest are the European Union, China and India, Latin America, Africa, North America, Slavic-Orthodox Europe and, of course, the Near East. The strategy unifying the various 'pastorals' is that of a 'new evangelisation', conceived and put in place by Ratzinger and Wojtyła during the latter's long pontificate. In the light of this strategy, it is possible to understand the origins of the Catholic Church's focus on the Middle East (beyond, naturally, the symbolic importance of Jerusalem).

The Vatican's interest is concentrated in the region made up of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, which were split between the British and the French immediately after the First World War. The five countries currently occupying this region—Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan and Iraq—constitute an important bridgehead for the Church towards Asia. Indeed, if across the whole of this continent, Catholics represent only 2.9 per cent of the population (Annuario

statistico 2000), in the region mentioned, they were, before the last Iraqi war, around 10 per cent.<sup>9</sup> In Lebanon, this percentage reaches over 30 per cent (Maronites make up two-thirds, the rest being Greek, Chaldean, Latin and Armenian Catholics), which means that ‘in the geopolitics of Christianity, the Lebanon represents the area richest in resources and with the greatest capacity for expansion’ (De Giovannangeli 2005). One can therefore understand why the Church’s Middle Eastern politics—traditionally pro-Arab—were abruptly made more complex by the outbreak of civil war between Muslims and Christians in the Lebanon in 1975.

#### *Israel in the Vatican’s New Middle Eastern Equation*

If the Vatican supported the Arabs against the Jews in Israel, the Christians and (indirectly) the Israelis against the Muslims in the Lebanon, and the Arabs against ‘Westerners’ in Iraq, one should not read into this any signs of indecision but, on the contrary, signs of strategic coherence. Indeed, ‘the first objective of the Holy See’s Middle Eastern policy has been and is that of maintaining and consolidating the presence of the Christian, particularly Catholic, communities in the places where Christianity was born’ (Ferrari 2004). Managing such a complex game requires good relations with all (or most of) the regional players, and since Israel represents an unavoidable element in the balance of the region, it is impossible not to have a direct relationship with the Jerusalem authorities.

Although these processes are graven into time, it is difficult to resist the temptation of seeing significance in the temporal proximity between the Gulf War of 1991—when Syria was ‘rewarded’ for its presence in the anti-Saddam coalition by the protectorate in the Lebanon—and the Fundamental Agreement of 1993 which established diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel, an agreement about which the Vatican had begun to think in October 1991.<sup>10</sup> It was from that moment onwards that the attitude of Catholics to the Middle East question as a whole began, with tactical prudence but strategic determination, to change direction.

#### *Between the Church and the Mediterranean*

If one considers the influence for so long exercised by the Church over Italy, before and after Unification, and particularly during the period when the Christian Democrats were in power (1948–1994), one would not be mistaken in thinking that the attitudes of the Italians and their authorities towards the Jews and towards the Near and Middle East have been influenced by the interests of the Vatican. Nevertheless, things are not as simple as they first appear.

Anti-semitism, for example, has almost never been rife in Italy, at least not in the way it has in other countries such as Germany, France or Poland. The policy of discrimination inaugurated by Pope Carafa has, of course, had its imitators in the States of the Peninsula, but its sentiments were never shared by the population. Despite the race laws of 1938, during the Second World War the German authorities lodged numerous official protests against Italian soldiers who were said to have been ‘guilty’ of protecting Jews not only in France but also in Yugoslavia and even

Italy itself. The fact is that even a large number of Fascists had remained foreign to the spirit and reasons which had dictated the legislative measures 'for the protection of the race'. The 'just' Giorgio Perlasca, for example, the man who, in 1944, managed to save 5,218 Hungarian Jews by passing himself off as the Spanish Ambassador, had been an enthusiastic Fascist from the late 1910s.

As regards the Italian authorities, they followed and supported the aims of the Vatican long before the Christian Democratic Party was born and even before conciliation with the Church in 1929.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, in spite of the reluctance of the Church, the Italian government was one of the first officially to recognise the State of Israel when it was proclaimed in May 1948 less than a month after the legislative elections won by the Christian Democratic Party with nearly 50 per cent of the votes. Furthermore, during the last two Gulf Wars, in 1991 and 2003, the Italian governments took up partially or totally different positions from those defended by the Vatican.

While the absence of popular anti-semitic sentiment may be due to the small size of the Jewish community in Italy, these contradictions between Church and State in matters of international policy can be explained by the difficulty Italy has always had in putting in place a single, autonomous foreign policy. From Unification onwards, Italy saw that the eastern and southern coastlines of the Mediterranean formed its natural *Lebensraum*; however, never having had sufficient forces of its own to reach its goals, Italy let itself be guided by its international political 'sponsors', at the same time exploiting any opportunity to try and create a degree of autonomous influence for itself. Amongst the external forces it used for support was the Church and its structures, doing so even—and especially—in the period when there was a clear *de facto* separation between Church and State.

The first colonial adventure of the new country was preceded by the mission sent to evangelise the Oromo Eritrean population and by the creation of their vicariate (1846), entrusted to the Piedmontese missionary-explorer Guglielmo Massaia. Another missionary, the Lazarist Giuseppe Sapeto, then bought (in 1869) the Bay of Assab, in the same region, to turn it into an Italian commercial base, with a view to opening up the isthmus of Suez. Some years later (1911), there was a colonial expedition to Libya, which was said to have been 'sponsored' by Catholic finance, particularly the Banco di Roma, whose director was Ernesto Pacelli, uncle of Eugenio, the future Pope Pius XII.<sup>12</sup> It goes without saying that these dealings between the Vatican and Italy, at the time without any formal relationship, could succeed only insofar as the interests of Church and State converged. But the Italian initiative was destined to follow the Church's initiative, almost never the contrary, for the simple reason that the Church had a strategy and Italy had none. The government's foreign policy, as usual, took advantage of opportunities as they arose; in Catholic activism towards the southern Mediterranean, for example it saw 'an excellent means of counterbalancing French influence in the Near East', (Aubert 1975, p. 94). Such an opportunistic approach, however, has two drawbacks: sometimes the current is not strong enough to carry the boat along and, in times of great crisis, ambiguities are often no longer tolerated and a choice has to be made.

*The Mediterranean, from Fascism to the Republic*

Among the instruments Fascism used to ‘invent’ an autonomous Italian foreign policy was Islam. With a view to expansionist action in the Mediterranean region, the Mussolini regime adopted an openly pro-Islamic and pro-Arab stance in an obviously anti-British and anti-French perspective. Movements sensitive to Fascist propaganda rose more or less everywhere across the territories governed by the two old colonial powers,<sup>13</sup> and Mussolini, in March 1937, was awarded the gold ‘Sword of Islam’ by the heads of some Libyan Arab tribes. This did not, even in this case, involve genuine autonomy; it was more of a ‘gap’ that the strategic continental confrontation left open for Italy to penetrate. Indeed, in the various scenarios of ‘new world order’ which had been expounded by the Germans, they had let it be understood that their aims did not directly concern the southern Mediterranean; and even during the most favourable phase of the conflict, their interest in the Near East was dictated mainly by the circumstances at the time.<sup>14</sup>

Mussolini’s dreams of glory, having no reliable structural base beyond the problematic alliance with Germany, quickly turned to nightmares, but the temptation which the eastern and southern coasts of the Mediterranean presented to Italy survived the military debacle almost unscathed. In the period after the Second World War, the *de facto* position of the country towards the Middle East question was, in substance, the same as it had been before the War, with, however, a 180 degree turn in the ideological stamp accompanying it: in place of Mussolini’s bellicose sabre rattlings, the Republic used the sign of peace in all its initiatives in the region. This continuity caused a French observer to say that ‘the Mediterranean area and the Arab world indeed make up the only area towards which the Italians over several years have built up true diplomacy’ (Teissier 1996, p. 105).

Italy’s Mediterranean policy was gradually released from the constraints imposed by defeat. In 1948, when Ben Gurion proclaimed the birth of the State of Israel, the scope for autonomous initiative was heavily restricted. Since Washington and Moscow had supported the birth of Israel to accelerate the break-up of the British and French colonial empires, Rome found itself obliged to follow suit. There was one curious feature, however: the ‘reluctants’ were nearly all members of the Christian Democratic party within which a significant fundamentalist and social current—the most eminent representative of which was the Mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pira—reinforced its instinctive aversion towards the ‘American way of life’ and hostility towards Zionism (involving a concern about the latter’s ‘socialist’ character). The warm support of the Soviet Union for the new State, carried into Italy by the Communist and Socialist parties,<sup>15</sup> fuelled the fear that Israel could become the ‘Trojan Horse’ of Russian penetration into a region where Catholics and Italians still had a great deal of support. In short, at the time of its creation, Israel attracted the sympathy of the left in Italy, coolness from many Catholics and the right and the passive acquiescence of the pro-Atlantic members of the government who knew they had no choice. It was at this point that Italy inaugurated its official policy, characterised—as announced in an official communiqué from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the spring of 1948—by ‘impartiality towards both the Arabs and the Jews’ (Cossiga 2003).<sup>16</sup>

### *Mediterranean Atlanticism' and Enrico Mattei*

Although, as noted, the government's line always remained formally identical to the contents of that communiqué, an appreciable evolution in its content began to take shape during the 1950s, as soon as the international constraints imposed on Italy after the war began to ease. Other factors also contributed to this evolution: the 'tolerance' of the United States towards Italian 'infidelities'; the rebirth of the German economy; the rise, in Italy, of political figures linked to the fundamentalist left of the Christian Democrats; the 'parallel diplomacy' of Enrico Mattei, President of the Italian oil holding company, ENI; and above all, the Anglo-French defeat in Suez in 1956. All of these factors were closely interwoven.

The Christian Democrat partisan, Enrico Mattei, would usher in Italian 'oil diplomacy' in 1957 when he signed an agreement with Iran leaving 75 per cent of the product to the producing country, thus breaking the 50-50 ratio laid down after the overthrow of Mohammed Mosaddeq in 1953. But the initiative of the Italian entrepreneur was facilitated by a large loan from Adenauer to the Shah. Furthermore, it was not blocked by the Americans who, for their part, had already begun to replace the British in the Middle East oil market at the time of the counter-Mosaddeq operation, and who were, after Suez, in the process of stepping up their penetration of the region. Not being able directly to take initiatives that might appear hostile to the English (formally their allies) the Americans looked the other way when the Mattei contract was signed. Even Mattei's agreements with the USSR and Egypt and his support for the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria were contextualised by, one might say, a common Italo-American strategy, where the forerunners of détente were not strangers to the idea of hounding the Anglo-French from the Mediterranean once and for all.<sup>17</sup>

To this must be added the fact that, in Rome, some of the representatives of the Catholic left had secured top positions of responsibility: in particular Amintore Fanfani, party leader in 1954 and Prime Minister in 1958, and Giovanni Gronchi, who became President of the Republic in 1955 against the DC's official candidate and with the votes of the Communists, Socialists, Fascists and the Christian Democrat left (in other words, all those who had been more or less hostile to the country's pro-Atlantic foreign policy). According to Sergio Romano (1993, p. 86), these 'populist-nationals'—as Romano calls them—had also been propelled along a road which was later to be described as one of 'neo-Atlanticism' or, better, 'Mediterranean Atlanticism', by 'the unscrupulous diplomacy of Enrico Mattei'.

### *The 1956 War and the Birth of 'Third Worldism'*

At the time of the 1956 War, writes Romano (1993, p. 115), 'a large part of Italian public opinion had sympathised with the Israelis'. But it has to be understood that this sympathy was due to the slowness with which, in periods of 'peace', social psychology assimilates changes already in train. Indeed, the positions of the political forces and the opinion makers were in the process of evolving, as can be seen at the time of the new regional crisis, eleven years later. Since the United States had prevaricated in the financing of the building of the Aswan Dam, only to end up in renouncing the idea in the spring of 1956, the Soviet Union saw the possibility of

securing a foothold in the rich Middle Eastern region and offered it financial aid, which in effect materialised two years later. At the time of the Suez crisis, even when they were crushing the revolution in Budapest, the Soviets voted with the United States for the immediate withdrawal of the Anglo-French, Israeli-backed expedition. For the Italian Communist Party (PCI), no more proof was needed that imperialism had changed sides and become ‘pro-Israeli’. A part of Italian public opinion, influenced by the PCI (about 22 per cent of the electorate in the 1958 elections), was thus beginning a long apprenticeship which would inexorably bring it to pro-Arab and anti-Israeli positions.

Yet, the PCI was not the only actor to negotiate positions favourable to the ‘Arab cause’. For the Catholic sectors linked to Enrico Mattei, it was relatively easy to carve out a large chunk among these same faithful who, on Good Friday, always prayed for the conversion of the ‘perfidious Jews’.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the ENI had a newspaper—*Il Giorno*—which, while being the unofficial publication of Mattei’s ideas within the Christian Democratic Party, lost no time in steering the minds of its readers to positions favourable to the anti-colonial struggles for independence throughout the world, one of the ideological battle cries of Enrico Mattei himself. In this newspaper—which was to Italian politics of the time more or less what *La Repubblica* is to Italian politics today<sup>19</sup>—one witnessed the birth of Italian ‘Third Worldism’. It goes without saying that the encyclical *Populorum progressio*—which was nothing less than a manifesto of ‘Third Worldism’—published only a very few weeks before the Six Day War, also played no small part in the new orientation of the Italian masses.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, Italian economic interests in the region had grown and been consolidated with the active presence of several Italian industrial State giants, such as IRI, Fiat, Olivetti and, obviously, ENI. These interests were not without influence in the world of politics: ‘The positions of Italian governments’, writes Cossiga (2003) to explain the rise in pro-Arab sentiment at the heart of the executive, ‘albeit always characterised by a low profile on the subject, were to a large extent motivated by economics, particularly those connected with ENI which made it necessary for there to be a strengthening of relations with the Arab States’.

#### *The Six Day War and the Growth of Pro-Arab Sentiment*

Thus, on the eve of the Six Day War, Israel no longer aroused sympathy, except among a tiny band of faithful friends (among whom were some top journalists and, among the political parties, the Liberals, Republicans, those Socialists who still saw in the Hebrew state and its kibbutzim a model for democratic socialism, and those Christian Democrats who were pro-American). However, when the war broke out, ‘anti-imperialist demonstrations’ were so vocal that the Socialists and many Catholics were reluctant to voice support for Israel for fear of being passed off as ‘accomplices’ to the ‘American imperial design’ denounced by Soviet Prime Minister Aleksej Kosygin at the United Nations. All the more so since the pro-Arab demonstrators were those very people who, for some time, had already been marching in the streets against the war in Vietnam and who, some weeks earlier, had come together to raise their voices against the *coup d'état* of the colonels in Greece. Sergio Romano (2005,

pp. 106–107) reminds us that there were nonetheless ‘some demonstrations of sympathy for Israel’, but at the meeting which took place in the old ghetto in Rome in the presence of the legal scholar and Catholic historian Arturo Carlo Jemolo, and at which Romano was personally present, ‘the square was half-empty’.

In Parliament, a paper was voted through by the same majority which, 12 years earlier, had carried Gronchi to the office of President of the Republic. Foreign Minister Fanfani, no less, gave a masterly lesson in ‘Mediterranean Atlanticism’ by maintaining—as de Gaulle was doing on the other side of the Alps—that it was necessary to strengthen links with the Arab world to prevent the latter throwing itself into the arms of Moscow. Unlike de Gaulle, Fanfani’s wish did not go beyond a fairly indecisive manifestation of intentions because, as already noted, one of the conditions for making, in Italy, a ‘Mediterranean Atlanticist’ policy effective was the ‘interested tolerance’ of the Americans, a tolerance which, this time, was lacking. The President of the Republic, Giuseppe Saragat, a tried and tested Atlanticist, undertook to find a better balance in the country’s official position, by restoring its traditional ‘equidistance’. But, on this occasion, the ‘equidistance’ ended up provoking the displeasure of both the Israelis and the Arabs, in other words causing an effect contrary to the one intended when the principle had first been created in 1948.

In 1967, in the ideological laboratories of the extreme left, a peculiar phraseology was created which was to survive the ephemeral nature of its authors to be transformed, over the following years, into what became almost common parlance. According to the Maoist weekly, *Nuova Unità*, ‘the struggle which the Arab peoples are waging against the Anglo-American imperialists is a class struggle’.<sup>21</sup> The terminology, which was the reflection of an analysis in which the ‘peoples’ took on the consistency of a homogeneous social group, betrayed the ideological patchwork with which a large part of the friends of the ‘Arab cause’ nourished themselves: it contained elements drawn from the social doctrine of the Church (and particularly the *Populorum Progressio*<sup>22</sup>), the Maoist directives on the contradiction between ‘oppressed nations and imperialism’,<sup>23</sup> and reminiscences of Italian nationalism (for which the theoretician, Enrico Corradini, had created as early as 1910 the formula of the ‘proletarian nations’).<sup>24</sup>

Only a small internationalist minority challenged ‘the interventionism of the left alongside the Arab bourgeoisie’ pointing out that ‘Arab and Israeli workers have no conflicts of interest and [that] on the contrary, they share the common lot of being exploited by the bourgeoisie of Cairo and the bourgeoisie of Tel Aviv’ (Cervetto 1980, pp. 956–967). This voice is worthy of note, if only because it would remain the only one across the entire Italian political panorama which, whilst recommending the alliance between Arab and Israeli workers, analysed the on-going nature of the Middle East crisis as a product of the weakness and fragmentation of the Arab bourgeoisie.

#### *The ‘Mediterranean Atlanticism’ of Giulio Andreotti*

Sergio Romano (1993, p. 119)—a direct witness of foreign policy in that period—argued that, despite the putative ‘equidistance’, in the years immediately following the Six Year War ‘Italy ended up more and more openly siding with the Arabs’. At the

beginning of the 1970s, Giulio Andreotti became Prime Minister, who was considered to be the least Atlanticist amongst Atlanticists and the most Mediterranean amongst Mediterraneans of Prime Ministers in the history of the Republic.<sup>25</sup> Given that he was Prime Minister seven times between 1972 and 1992<sup>26</sup> and Foreign Minister without a break between 1983 and 1989, Andreotti brought his weight to bear on the principal trends in Italian politics for 20 years. While remaining ‘faithful to the great choices made by Italian diplomacy after the end of the War’, argues Romano (2003), Andreotti ‘maintained relations with all those who might be considered as the enemies of the United States’, to the east as well as to the south of Italy. As far as the south was concerned, Romano (2003) notes that Andreotti ‘never ceased forming and reforming relations with Colonel al-Qaddafi after the 1969 *coup d'état* in Libya. He organised trips for Arafat, maintained good relations with the countries of North Africa and cultivated links with the Baathist regimes of Syria and Iraq, as well as avoiding the adoption of too rigid a stance towards the Khomeini regime in Tehran’. Well known for his outspokenness (fairly unusual in Christian Democratic circles), Andreotti recently even went so far as to state that had he been born in a refugee camp in the Lebanon, ‘perhaps he, too, might have become a terrorist’.<sup>27</sup>

Andreotti’s Mediterranean policy incorporated the ‘energetic diplomacy’ of Mattei, but at the same time exceeded it by broadening its horizons.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the two main elements in the ‘Mediterranean atlanticism’ of Andreotti seem to have been his close links with the Vatican and Sicily, an island where he long maintained significant political contacts. Bruno Teissier, in the text quoted above, is right to emphasise this regional link (even going as far as to give Andreotti the nickname of ‘Giulio the African’, Teissier 1996, p. 105) because it is often forgotten that the ambiguous character of Italian foreign policy does not prevent (or, to put it better, is closely linked to) the development of *several* foreign policies which are the expression of the various regional interests involved.

Nevertheless, the principal reason for Giulio Andreotti’s policy was probably his wish to support Vatican interests in regions where the structure of the Church on its own was insufficient to prop up its initiatives. This was confirmed by Andreotti himself when, asked about the reasons for Italy’s keen interest in the Arab world, he replied that the aim was not that of ‘restoring balance to the Atlantic Alliance’, as the journalist was suggesting to him, but rather of ‘putting some substance into the line adopted by La Pira’ (Andreotti 2003).<sup>29</sup> Yet Andreotti like Gronchi in the 1950s and Fanfani in 1967, had to submit to the unavoidable constraints of the major powers when, as Prime Minister in office, he was obliged, against the wishes of the Vatican, to support the international coalition in the war against Saddam in 1991.

### *In the Arms of Arafat*

During the 1970s and 1980s, three major factors characterised Italy’s policy in the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the secret and tacit agreement with Palestinian terrorists, the Venice Declaration and the ‘Sigonella affair’. It goes without saying that there was no formal document sanctioning an agreement with the terrorists. Former President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga spoke of this recently, with the candour which is his wont (Cossiga 2005). According to Cossiga,

the agreement originated in an event of 5 September 1973, when, thanks to a signal from the Israeli secret services, five Palestinians, armed with rocket-launchers, were arrested near Rome's Fiumicino airport. Two months later, they were tried, sentenced to five years in prison, freed and accompanied back to Libya by a captain of the *Carabinieri*. There was 'a pact', affirmed Cossiga, 'the finishing touches to which were put by Aldo Moro', thanks to which Italy managed to avoid being implicated in the Palestinian conspiracies. As regards the massacre of 27 December 1985, again at Fiumicino Airport, when a commando shot into the line of passengers checking in at the desks of the Israeli airline El-Al, Cossiga commented that this attack—which caused the death of thirteen people—did not contravene the 'pact' insofar as 'there had been no Italian but only Israeli targets'.

In advance of Cossiga's revelations, the assistant editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, Magdi Allam (2003), described the probable nature of this 'gentlemen's agreement', by which Italy 'would tolerate a certain type of logistics activity in exchange for its security': passage of arms and money across Italian territory, *de facto* protection of wanted terrorists, etc. This agreement proved effective in the Lebanon too, added Allam, where American, French and Italian troops were sent in the summer of 1982. 'I wish to remind you', he affirmed with reference to the massacres of 23 October 1983 when 241 marines and over 70 French soldiers died, 'that all countries which intervened in the region militarily suffered heavy losses, except Italy'. This was no simple stroke of fortune, concluded Allam, but 'the fruit of an Italian policy sensitive towards the Palestinian question'.<sup>30</sup>

For evidence of this sensitivity, Allam, Cossiga and Andreotti cite the Venice Declaration of 13 June 1980, passed at the end of a meeting of the Council of Europe chaired by Francesco Cossiga himself. Drafted by Foreign Minister, Emilio Colombo, this Declaration recognised for the first time the 'right to self-determination' for the Palestinian people and indicated the PLO as the interlocutor in any peace process. Seen in the light of subsequent events, this text may seem (and is often described as) 'prophetic'; but, at the time, it provoked the wrath of Israel and the profound displeasure of the United States, because the PLO had still not formally renounced terrorism (it was not to do so until 1988) and its charter still promised to 'annihilate' the Hebrew State and 'eliminate all Zionist and imperialist presence' in Palestine. Moreover, all the recommendations in this Declaration were addressed to Israel and none—not even the renunciation of terrorism or the amendment of its statutes—to the PLO.

Two years later, Yasser Arafat was officially invited for the first time to Rome, where he met Andreotti (who was not at that point a Minister), the President of the Republic (Sandro Pertini), the President of the Chamber of Deputies (Nilde Jotti), the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Emilio Colombo), but not the Prime Minister (Giovanni Spadolini), who was one of the rare representatives of Italian political circles openly favourable to the State of Israel. On that occasion, Arafat also had a long meeting with John-Paul II (they were to see each other ten times subsequently). A Catholic press agency recently noted that, 'a current of sympathy and reciprocal respect established itself between the Pope who came from the East and his guest.... Since his first historic handshake in 1982 with Yasser Arafat, Pope John-Paul II was an ally of the Palestinian President... apostle of the natural right of the Palestinians to a homeland' (Agence FlashPress Infocatho 2004).

On 4 June 1986, the Chamber of Deputies approved, with only 13 votes against, a resolution proposed by the extreme left committing the government to recognising the PLO as the ‘sole representative of the Palestinian people’ and ‘establishing relations for dialogue and clarification with all countries in the Mediterranean region’. In short, in the period between 1967 and 1986 the Palestinian cause considerably widened its base amongst Italian parliamentarians.

### *The ‘Sacred Union’ of Bettino Craxi*

A year earlier, Prime Minister Bettino Craxi had not hesitated in threatening the United States with a major conflict rather than compromise Italy’s relations with the Palestinian leaders. According to the then head of *L’Unità*, Peppino Calderola (2003), in the years when Craxi was its leader the Socialist party completed its ‘pro-Arab watershed’, even to the point of exercising a sort of ‘protectorate in relation to Arafat, Palestinian organisations and other Arab regimes, including that of Qaddafi’. Although, according to Calderola, the genesis for the ‘watershed’ lay with Willy Brandt,<sup>31</sup> and although a pro-Israeli current persisted in Italian socialist circles,<sup>32</sup> it was nonetheless the simultaneous presence in the executive of Bettino Craxi as Prime Minister and Giulio Andreotti as Foreign Minister which is essential to understanding the circumstances in which the ‘Sigonella affair’ came about.

It began with a commando attack by the Palestine Liberation Front against an Italian cruise liner in Egyptian territorial waters on 7 October 1985; a paraplegic Jewish American passenger was killed and thrown overboard. The Italian and Egyptian governments pretended not to notice this crime in order not to compromise negotiations. Eventually, the 544 hostages were freed and the commando unit obtained from the Cairo government safe conduct back into Tunis, where the Palestinian organisation had its headquarters. But the Americans managed to intercept the plane carrying them, forcing it to land at the NATO base at Sigonella, in Sicily, where the Americans tried to take the terrorists. Craxi gave the order for the *Carabinieri* to circle the American soldiers and demand the handover of members of the commando unit. To avoid exacerbating the conflict, the Americans withdrew. The head of the commando unit and his four accomplices were freed less than a week later, on 16 October, and taken to Yugoslavia. At the trial held a few months later, the leader was tried in absentia and sentenced to life imprisonment.

According to Andreotti (2003), at Sigonella all the government did was ‘block the road to an act of American arrogance’. Be that as it may, the gesture was applauded by the opposition on the left which saw it as an outburst of ‘national dignity’, even more so since Craxi had, in the parliamentary debate, compared Arafat with Mazzini. The Republican party of Spadolini, pro-American, friend of Israel and heir presumptive to Mazzini, withdrew its support from the executive and provoked a ministerial crisis. Craxi stood firm and head of State Cossiga confirmed his mandate after a meeting between the Italian Prime Minister and the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan.

This was not the only occasion where Italian leadership showed itself more Mediterranean than Atlanticist. When the Reagan administration decided to bomb Libya, on 15 April 1986, in answer to an attack from Tripoli against American

naval units on manoeuvres in the Gulf of Syrte, the Rome government refused the US Army authorisation to use the Italian bases (although two Libyan missiles had been launched against telecommunications installations situated on the island of Lampedusa). ‘The bombing of Libya was an error and an injustice’, Andreotti (2003) still affirms; the Americans ‘surely couldn’t expect the Italians to back them up’.

### **Italian Foreign Policy Today: Feeling its Way in the Dark**

During the 1990s, Italian public opinion began to express more nuanced sentiments where, alongside the sympathy long maintained for the ‘Palestinian cause’, hopes were aroused by the peace process begun in Madrid in October 1991. For the first time in decades, these sentiments seemed to chime with the official position of ‘equidistance’, by progressively toning down the pro-Arab unilateralism which had been dominant until the end of the previous decade.

The causes of this evolution can, unsurprisingly, be found in the radical shift in the balance of power which came about after the events of 1989. The collapse of the Soviet empire and German reunification triggered the relaxing of traditional alliances and an acceleration of the process of European integration; indirectly, these events were also at the origin of the 1991 war against Saddam Hussein (with, amongst its consequences, the Madrid Conference and the ‘pax syriana’ in the Lebanon) as well as, in Italy, the most significant political, institutional and moral crisis in the history of the Republic. In the early 1990s, the political class associated with ‘Mediterranean Atlanticism’ and its established reference points disappeared within the space of a few months. While a new ruling class was going through birth pains, and ideological allegiances were becoming bereft of sense, political splits were often shaded by animosities that were more personal than political. Among those observers analysing this transitional phase, which the elections in April 2006 showed to be still in progress, some went as far so as to coin the term *divisività*,<sup>33</sup> to highlight an anomaly in Italian democracy where nascent adversaries anxiously seeking sources of legitimacy are systematically branded as illegitimate.

Italy lost significance on the international scene partly because its role as strategic outpost of the Atlantic Alliance had disappeared, and partly because its key industries—from chemicals to information technology to iron and steel—had been weakened, sometimes to the point of disappearing, while other fundamental economic structures (from distribution to the provision of credit) had fallen prey to foreign giants. Some of the new players on the political stage interpreted this decline in significance as an opportunity to increase the margins of Italy’s autonomy, which meant that some major choices of international policy were little more than dice thrown on the electoral carpet.

Faced with this sudden impoverishment in the panoply of the political battle, the determination with which the Catholic Church put in place its line of ‘new evangelisation’ was clear-cut. The influence which the political class was losing over public opinion was thus more than made up for by an increasing level of influence of the Catholic Church, incorporating its new attitude towards Israel.

### *The Near East, Hostage of Internal Politics*

During the 1990s, Italy's fundamental preoccupation was to stay abreast of the processes of European integration, and, especially, the creation of the single currency. Certain observers and politicians believed that, to achieve this goal, Italy could draw on its powers of negotiation with Brussels and Frankfurt. Berlusconi, Prime Minister in 1994, thought he could use, as 'added value', a privileged relationship with the United States. Prodi, Prime Minister in 1996, thought he could draw on support from other European countries, notably Spain. The premature end of the first Berlusconi government, in December 1994, and the unwillingness of Spanish Prime Minister Aznar, openly stated in September 1996, to connive with Prodi's manœuvres, showed that Italy, had in fact, little choice but to submit to the policies laid down by Brussels without discussion.

Thus, the card of 'National Europeanism', played by Berlusconi in 1994, remained the opposition's polemical trump-card in the four successive centre-left governments (1996–2001), and through which Italy did its best to meet the Maastricht conditions, to the point of being allowed entry to the Euro. Whereas the centre-left presented the constraint of Europe as the fruit of free choice, the centre-right exploited foreign policy to show the antithetical character of its coalition compared with the majority. In this context, even the current conflict in the Near East has become hostage to the conflictual nature of Italy's domestic politics. As the left is basically identified with supporting the Arab cause, the right has thrown in its hand with Israel. Stated sympathies (for Israel or the Palestinians) have become radicalised, to the point where the exacerbation of this conflict since the failure of Camp David—the second Intifadah, the accession to power of Ariel Sharon, the building of the 'wall of security', the attacks aimed against the terrorist leaders, the suicide bombing operations on Israeli territory—has often served as a background to the political scene in Italy, a symbolic evocation of its 'Manicheanisation'.

### *A Wave of Sympathy for Israel*

It would, however, be wrong to consider electoral calculations as the only cause of the re-emergence of pro-Israeli (or, in any case, less unilaterally pro-Arab) sentiments in Italian political circles; just as it would be wrong to locate all these changes purely within the confines of the centre-right. In reality, other factors have also contributed to a trend over which certain groups of the left have not remained insensitive.

Having been the first conflict in which they had been engaged since 1945, the Italians were profoundly affected by the Gulf War in 1991. The fear, unfounded but nonetheless real, of being directly involved fed a wave of sympathy for the Israelis who had been victims of Saddam Hussein's scud missiles. After the war, two other events influenced public opinion: the Madrid Conference and the *rapprochement* between the Vatican and Israel, culminating in the agreement of 30 December 1993. Finally, the threat from Islam played a large part in cooling certain pro-Arab sentiments and encouraging sympathies for the Hebrew State, ultimately seen as the only democratic and 'western' country in the region. These new sentiments also had repercussions among the political class of all persuasions, with however some peculiarities which are worth mentioning briefly here.

The most spectacular *volte-face* was without doubt that of Gianfranco Fini, head of the National Alliance—the old Fascist party, transformed in 1995 into a force putatively drawing its inspiration from Gaullist thinking—and Foreign Minister in the Berlusconi government after November 2004. A little under ten years since describing Mussolini, in April 1994, as ‘the greatest statesman of the 20th century’,<sup>34</sup> Fini characterised Fascism as an ‘absolute evil’ when he visited the Shoah Memorial in Jerusalem on 23 November 2003. It was the end of a long journey of change aimed not only at making the party respectable (during which many militant members did not always manage to conceal their nostalgia for the Mussolini period), but also at conveying an image of himself as a moderate and trustworthy statesman. On this journey, paying homage to victims of the Holocaust was much less controversial than the renunciation of Fascism (over which the Duce’s grand-daughter left the National Alliance); however, the lasting external image was of a former Fascist paying his respects to the victims of Fascism.

Among those who, on the left, have expressed these new sentiments towards Israel, three main groups should be identified: first, those who, over the past decade, have tried to interpretate the Church’s new line, aimed at occupying part of the political void left by the disappearance of the Christian Democrats; second, those who have felt deceived by their previous unconditional support for the ‘Arab cause’; and, finally, those who having until recently paid little attention to their Jewish roots, now tend to use them as a means of constructing their identity, particularly after the disappearance of the other features signifying allegiance to the left. From February 2005, the Italian left began openly to discuss ‘rehabilitating Israel’ following Ariel Sharon’s decision to evacuate the settlers in the Gaza strip. Piero Fassino, leader of the Democrats of the Left (successor to the PCI) asked the party to ‘have the courage to admit’ that the measure taken by the Israeli government re-opened the route towards peace.<sup>35</sup> This reversal is worth mentioning, even if the party is a long way from being united over an issue where personal friends of Hezbollah are militants and where, according to Fassino himself, ‘there have been delays in comprehending the horrors of the suicide missions’.

#### *Italian Exports and the Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome*

While the general contours of this development were becoming more clear-cut, the official position of the various governments of the centre-right and centre-left remained that of ‘impartiality’. In Spring 2006, Silvio Berlusconi, taking part with Romano Prodi in the celebrations marking the 58th anniversary of the birth of Israel and the day after drawing up his resignation as Prime Minister, declared that Italy’s Middle East policy would not undergo any changes under his successor. Yet, this was only a few days after Berlusconi had accused Prodi of being hostage to those left-wingers who, during a protest march, had burned the Israeli flag and shouted slogans in support of the terrorists.

The exploitation of international politics for national purposes means that, as soon as the leader of the party becomes a ‘statesman’, he risks being dragged into a sort of Jekyll and Hyde syndrome. In addition to the international ambitions he might cherish, the statesman, in effect, is not unaware that economic relations with the

countries of the Mediterranean are particularly prosperous: Italy, which ranks 7th among world exporting countries, is, however, the main exporter to Libya, the Lebanon and Syria, second to Turkey and Tunisia, third to Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. It is true that it is only sixth exporter to Israel, but the volume of its exports to the Hebrew state is the second highest in the Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup> Italy has a particularly advantageous position in the Mediterranean—out of proportion to the global role of its external trade—which an ‘imprudent’ policy might risk compromising. If ‘equidistance’ has made it possible to achieve these results—which is probably what large sectors of the political class think—then there seems little option but to continue with this policy, all the more so in a confused phase of changing international alliances and the redefinition of the country’s geopolitical axes.

### **Conclusion: a Reverse Clash of Civilisations**

The policy of ‘equidistance’ runs the serious risk, today, of creating a gap between the ‘legal country’ (*paese legale*) and the ‘real country’ (*paese reale*). Since ‘September 11’ and the Madrid and London bombings, Italian public opinion has had the impression—even if often confused with vague approximations of reality<sup>37</sup>—that disputes perceived until then as distant and theoretical have abruptly entered their daily lives. This is not the first time that the effects of this regional conflict have had direct repercussions on the lives of Italian citizens. In December 1973, after the first oil shock, Italians discovered what became known as ‘Sundays on foot’ and the end of television broadcasts at 11 pm because of a ‘curfew’ on energy consumption. In January 1991, Italians rushed to shops to buy whatever was available in preparation for the prolonged siege which, according to the collective psychosis, would be caused by the war against Saddam Hussein. Yet, if the current threat is a reflection of the collective psychology it is largely because it is imponderable. The attacks of September 11 showed that terrorists stop at nothing, and the bombs in Madrid and London showed that the United States is not their only target. The enemy can hide anywhere and strike at any time. Various specialists have emphasised the collective disarray that this can create.

In Italy, however, the situation is unusual or distinctive because the country has only recently become one of immigration: the presence of the ‘other’ is still a matter for consideration, where one finds, in ever-changing proportions, curiosity, mistrust, commiseration, fear and solidarity. If these various sentiments were elements in a chemical process, we would say that we are in the presence of an unstable compound. Any terrorist act in Italy would doubtless risk unleashing a strong wave of Arabophobia or Islamophobia which an intellectual avant-garde is already feeling. These intellectuals are the protagonists in a campaign which has far wider implications than the debate within the left wing faction in Israeli politics. According to that faction, the west has abdicated in the face of an aggressive and conquering Islam, thus becoming an easy prey to terrorism. The illusion of multiculturalism, they affirm, sustained a mortal blow with the death of Dutch theatre director Theo van Gogh, and it was definitively buried with the London bombings. The shock to civilisation is spreading and, to face up to it, forces have to be joined under the banners of the Church, even if one is not a believer.

It is true that this trend puts the finger, perhaps involuntarily, on real problems to which 'lay' ideologies—liberal or social-democrat—have been unable to supply the answers: demographic decline, the rise in religions and particularly the double-sided character of 'progress' (that great creator of wealth and opportunity but an even greater destroyer). The Catholic Church has been working on these same problems far longer than have others. Since the Church shares a great many of the intellectuals' misgivings, the ecclesiastical hierarchies are disposed to listen to them, and, if necessary, defend them. However, the Church hierarchies are too realist not to reject resolutely the hypothesis of a conflict between Christian Europe and the Muslims living on its soil, if only to avoid retaliations against minority groups of Christians living in Islamic countries.

In any case, this intellectual trend relies on a strong media presence<sup>38</sup> and on political organisations which make no mystery of their positions regarding the idea of a clash of civilisations. A network is being woven which aspires to bring together those who wish to build a strong European identity of which Christianity would simultaneously be the civil and spiritual religion. While waiting for this long-term objective to be achieved, such a network can, in the shorter term draw together and give voice to all those who see a danger in Islam and are disposed to read the history of the Middle East in reverse, as a long precursor of an inevitable conflict between Judeo-Christian tradition and Muslim aggression.

## Notes

- [1] *Civiltà cattolica*, 19th June 1937. For the Catholic historian Arturo Carlo Jemolo, the organ of the Italian Jesuits 'has always interpreted the opinions of the Holy See, the Pope's desires'. Another historian, Giorgio Candeloro, counted, between 1936 and 1938, 'at the time when anti-semitic persecution was in full swing in Germany', five articles against the Jews appearing in *Civiltà cattolica*.
- [2] This change was ratified by the Declaration *Nostra Aetate. On the Church and non-Christian religions*, of 28th October 1965, in these terms: 'True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; (13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostraetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostraetate_en.html).
- [3] Declaration of 10th March 1919, cited in Laurens (2000, p. 311).
- [4] Letter from Amleto Cicognani, representative of the Holy See in Washington, 6th March 1943, cited by Sarfatti (2003).
- [5] Laurens also mentions a part of the letter from the Apostolic Nuncio in Istanbul, Mgr Angelo Roncalli (the future Jean XXIII) who, on 4th September 1943, showed his misgivings regarding the possibility that Jewish survivors might 'somehow work towards the reconstruction of the Kingdom of Israel'.
- [6] The *Auspicia quedam*, of 1st May 1948, the *In Multiplicibus Curis*, of 24th October and the *Redemptoris Nostri Cruciatus*, of 15th April 1949.
- [7] Declaration of Paul VI, 26 June 1967, cited by Laurens (2000, p. 325).
- [8] 'The action of the mission for Palestine was one of the clearest signs of the preoccupation of the Holy See for the well-being of the Palestinians, who are particularly dear to us because they are the people of the Holy Land, because they comprise the partisans of Christ and they have been and still are tragically put to the test' (declaration of Paul VI, 16th June 1967).
- [9] Our reworking of data from the European Institute for Research on Mediterranean and Euro-Arab Cooperation, Brussels, February 1999.

- [10] Cardinal Achille Silvestrini said that the cardinals expressed themselves in favour of a ‘prudent, moderate and progressive normalisation of bilateral relation’ with Israel as early as October 1991 (Conference on ‘La Chiesa cattolica e il popolo giudaico dal Vaticano II a oggi’, Gregorian University of Rome).
- [11] For example, at the San Remo Conference, in April 1920, ‘lay’ Italy’s government supported, along with Great Britain, the old claim of the Vatican aimed at abolishing the French protectorate on the Holy Places.
- [12] The American Ambassador in Rome reported to his government that ‘well-informed sources maintain that the Vatican is financing the press campaign for the war, given the major interests of the Banco di Roma in this affair’ (cited by G. Candeloro 1972, p. 345). Similar statements were also made by the Russian Chargé d’Affaires at the Vatican, Prince Pëtr Michajlovič Volkonskij, the correspondent of the *Chronique sociale de France* and the Italian Foreign Minister himself, di San Giuliano, according to whom the Banco di Roma was trying to ‘hasten the occupation of Libya by the Italians’ by ‘money and intrigue’ (letter to Prime Minister Giolitti of 28th July 1911, cited by Webster 1974, p. 216). Whatever else, the Bank’s capital was 40 million lire when the Tripoli branch first opened (1907) and 200 million in 1912.
- [13] Among these organisations mention should be made of the Party of Young Egypt (Hizb Misr al-Fatâ), the Falangists in the Lebanon (al-Katâ’ib al-Lubnâniyya), the Green Shirts (al-Qumsân al-Khadrà) and the Blue Shirts (al-Qumsân az-Zarqâ) also in Egypt, the Syrian National Socialist Party (al-Hizb al-Qawmî as-Sûrî al-Ijtimâ’i), the Syrian Iron Shirts (al-Qumsân al-Hadîyya) and the Iraqi organisation al-Futuwwa (see Galoppini 2001).
- [14] General Kurt Student, commandant-in-chief to the airborne troops of the Wehrmacht, confided to British historian Liddel Hart that ‘the large-scale pincer movement against the Middle East was not the product of a real plan. It involved vague discussions between the generals close to Hitler, but our general headquarters staff never approved it or even considered it workable’ (Liddell Hart 1998, p. 280). Even the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hâjj Amîn al-Husaynî, theoretician of the extermination of the Jews, collaborator with the Germans and author of *Freies Arabien* (the Arab Legion of the Wehrmacht), complained that Berlin had never put support for a possible Muslim insurrection in the Near East on the agenda.
- [15] According to ex-President of the Republic, Francesco Cossiga, the Secretary of the Italian Communist Party at the time, Palmiro Togliatti, had greeted the birth of Israel as ‘a great anti-imperialist victory’ and a defeat for ‘English pro-Arab imperialism’ (Cossiga 2003).
- [16] According to Ilaria Tremolada, this ‘impartiality’ was due to the fact that, for Italian diplomacy, Israel was at one and the same time an obstacle to the resumption of good relations with the Arab world and an ‘element capable of protecting these same interests which, moreover, it threatened’ (Tremolada 2003).
- [17] According to historian Silvio Lanaro (1992, pp. 163–164), the Americans did more than close an eye to Mattei’s activities. Sergio Romano (1993, p. 100) sums it up thus: ‘In the relations between East and West, Italy [played] the role of ‘honest broker’; in the Mediterranean, it [presented] itself to the Arabs, with the consent of the United States, as a sort of Procurator of the West’.
- [18] The prayer ‘pro perfidos judæos’ was abolished by John XXIII from Easter 1959.
- [19] Some of the most important and renowned journalists who had worked on *Il Giorno* in fact left for *La Repubblica*. These included Giorgio Bocca, Guglielmo Zucconi, Enzo Forcella, Gianni Brera, Corrado Stajano and Giampaolo Pansa.
- [20] The encyclical appeared on 26 March 1967.
- [21] *Nuova Unità*, 24 June 1967. This weekly was the organ of the so-called Italian Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), one of the countless groups in the Maoist galaxy. The terminology used was, however, the same, give or take a few commas, for all the groups in what was known at the time as the ‘extra-parliamentarian left-wing’ and, partially, for the official Italian Communist Party itself.
- [22] An exhaustive study on the Catholic origins of numerous leaders of Italy’s far left at the time is still to be done. Among the best-known leaders, mention should be made of Mario Capanna, head of the Milan student Movement, Renato Curcio, founder of the Red Brigades and, Aldo Brandirali, ‘grand helmsman’ of the (Marxist-Leninist) Communist Party of Italy (not to be confused with the previously mentioned Maoist Party), one-time seminarian who, after all the revolutionary pomp

- faded away, returned to the fold, first as a simple militant of the fundamentalist group *Comunione e Liberazione* and then as assistant Sports officer at Milan's City Hall for the united Christian Democrats (CDU, coalition of the centre-right).
- [23] According to the document from the Central committee of the Chinese Communist Party of 17 June 1963, this was the third of the 'four fundamental contradictions of the world'. It was to become the first in the report submitted by Lin Bião to the IXth Party Congress on 1 April 1969.
  - [24] The theory of the 'proletarian nations' was expounded for the first time by Corradini in his speech to the 1st Nationalist Congress which took place in Florence on 3 December 1910. This Conference can today be found in *Scritti e discorsi* (1901–1914), under the editorship of Strappini (1980, pp. 163–175).
  - [25] Even if, at the beginning of the 1970s, it was Aldo Moro who, according to Sergio Romano (1993, p. 155), was 'probably the most significant representative of pro-Arab tendencies in Italian foreign policy'. In Aldo Moro's political vision, writes Romano (1993, p. 138) in another page of his 'guide', 'the problems of the world were often distant and indistinct, whereas those of the Christian Democrats and Italian Catholicism were distinct and close to hand'.
  - [26] To be precise, between 1972 and 1973 (twice), between 1976 and 1979 (three times) and between 1989 and 1992 (twice). In the course of these same years, Andreotti was again Minister between 1973 and 1976.
  - [27] Intervention at the World Political Forum of Turin (in *La Stampa*, 7 March 2005).
  - [28] During the Andreotti period, a gas pipeline was opened linking Algeria with the valley of the Po which provides around 41 per cent of Italy's consumption (<http://www.enel.it>, 30 August 2005) and the laying of a gas pipeline from Siberia was finished, providing 35.9 per cent of Italy's gas imports, according to data for 2003 (Autorità garante della concorrenza e del mercato, Autorità per l'energia elettrica e il gas, *Indagine conoscitiva sullo stato della liberalizzazione del settore del gas naturale*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato 2004, p. 9). In the early 1980s, the construction of the Siberian gas pipeline had provoked a very real state of tension between Europe and the United States.
  - [29] The Church, for its part, showed that it was grateful and made this known: on 2 May 1999, two days after the Procurator General of the Court of Perugia had sought a sentence of life imprisonment against him as the person presumed to have ordered the murder of a journalist, Andreotti was conspicuously blessed by the Pope in a grand public religious ceremony. Andreotti was definitively acquitted of this charge on 30 October 2003, and he was a candidate for the office of President of the Senate in April 2006.
  - [30] A quite different source, the far left-wing newspaper *Manifesto*, also gave an account of the attitude of 'Italy Christian Democrat first and socialist second in the Seventies and Eighties ... which will spare us from international terrorism thanks to precise political directives given to the secret services' (Paternò 2003).
  - [31] Calderola cites the argument of Finkielkraut (1983), according to whom it was the opening of the Socialist International to 'Third World' countries, wished for by Willy Brandt, which turned the Israeli socialists into a minority and contributed to the progressive displacement of the socialists to pro-Arab positions.
  - [32] The most important representative of which was without doubt Gianni de Michelis, a Venetian, Foreign Minister after the fall of the Berlin Wall, who represented that trend of Italian foreign policy most geared towards Central Europe and the area of the Danube.
  - [33] Used for the first time by Gian Enrico Rusconi, this term formed the subject of an essay by Cafagna (2003) and thereafter entered everyday political language in the country.
  - [34] Conversation with Alberto Statera, *La Stampa*, 1 April 1994.
  - [35] *Corriere della Sera*, 17 August 2005.
  - [36] Data for 2001. Sources: Italian Foreign Trade Ministry; WTO International Trade Statistics; International Monetary Fund; *Pocket World in Figures*, The Economist, 2004.
  - [37] Even if I do not have the material proof, I can attest that I heard a RAI TG1 journalist define the Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, as 'one of the leaders of the Arab (sic) world'.
  - [38] For example, daily newspapers such as *Il Foglio*, *Libero quotidiano*, *La Padania* and, in more measured tones, *Il Giornale* and *Il Secolo d'Italia*.

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