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Alessandro Brogi. *L'Italia e l'egemonia americana nel Mediterraneo.* Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1996. xxiv + 425 pp. IT Lire 40.000 (cloth), ISBN 978-88-221-1752-6.

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The first is to reconstruct the 1953-1959 development of Italy's "Mediterranean" policy of cooperative dialogue with Arab nationalism. It was a recurrent effort, culminated with the Fanfani government in 1958, to acquire visibility and influence in an area of crucial relevance for Italy, the U.S. and the Western alliance, where decolonization and bipolar rivalry intersected in what then appeared–to the U.S. no less than to Europeans–as an unpredictable mix of dangers and opportunities.

Brogi's second goal is to explore, test and discuss the "empire by invitation" framework once the invitation had been, so to speak, accepted and carried out. That is, when European recovery was well under way, the Atlantic alliance was solidly in place, patterns of trans-Atlantic dependence and inter-dependence had been institutionalized, and US hegemony was being tested on new grounds and issues. I find the book quite thorough and effective on the first point, less sharp and persuasive on the second.

Italy pursued her own obvious, immediate national interest, in the Near East, in her search for reliable oil supplies and export markets. But she also thought, again and again, that what was at stake in that area offered her the opportunity for a postwar comeback in the realm of "high" international policy. Rome thus acted as proponent, and hoped to become a protagonist, of multilateral schemes of economic cooperation meant to lure Arab nationalism into a Western-leaning type of neutralism, and away from radical economic nationalism or Soviet influence.

It might nowadays sound bizarre that such activism in the Eastern Mediterranean was considered the centerpiece of a foreign policy program dubbed as "Neo-atlantismo." But–geographic or linguistic incongruence aside–it made perfect sense to its proponents. Because the ultimate rationale, and most ambitious aim, of Italy's Mediterranean policy was the desire to acquire a prominent role within the Atlantic alliance, as a "bridge" or mediator between the West and the Arab world.

For both domestic and international reasons, various sectors of Italy's centrist government coalitions felt compelled to upgrade and qualify Italy's role in NATO. Her third-row position in the Alliance inner hierarchy – dictated by vulnerability, weakness, and ineffectiveness– was increasingly resented as the utter dependence and powerlessness of the postwar period faded into memory. Catholic and socialist preferences for international conciliation, rather than confrontation, called for new Western and Italian initiatives in the sphere of economic cooperation and political dialogue.

Once the Trieste issue was settled, and Italy admitted into the UN in 1955, the time seemed ripe for raising Italy's international profile. The Suez crisis and the Eisenhower doctrine appeared to offer juicy opportunities. The embattled decline of British and French influence, the new American presence and determination in the area, and the alleged cultural affinities shared by Mediterranean countries provided Italy with a favorable stage.

If Nasser had to be both contained and seduced who could most aptly carry out the latter task, in close relation with the overall projection of U.S. power in the region? Fanfani thought he should assume such a task. Italy would thus grow into an influential regional power, a useful asset for US strategies and at the same time a protagonist of its own. As the soft-power arm of the West in the Near East she would acquire the resources needed to be a major and respected actor within NATO.

Obviously, lack of real power was Rome's structural constraint. Could it be by-passed by imaginative and nuanced diplomacy? This was the challenge, in many respects the gamble, of "Neo-atlantismo," a policy in which prestige and presence often overshadowed substance,

and which was closely linked to the complicate politics of the domestic "opening to the left."

For a brief moment, in November 1958, the Eisenhower Administration –including the more skeptical Dulles–seemed to accept the notion that Italy could play a useful role. But the gamble did not pay off. The task of mediating in the Near East was well beyond Italy's capacity, the domestic balance that was supposed to support such a policy crumbled, and Fanfani's ambitions had to be shelved.

Brogi's detailed and nuanced analysis provides us with a long overdue examination of the various strands that converged into Italy's "Mediterranean" policy. The dilemmas and inconsistencies of U.S. policy in the area are also illuminated by this peculiar intra-NATO angle. And we learn a good deal about the inherently competitive dimension of every Western European government's attempt to achieve a privileged relationship with Washington, and to reshape NATO's inner hierarchies to its advantage.

My criticism revolves on three issues:

1) Brogi's conclusion makes clear that Italy never managed to "manipulate" and influence U.S. policy in the Mediterranean, and she never achieved the status of "privileged partner" (p. 348) in the area. Whatever support Rome received from Washington (and it was neither strong nor frequent) it originated from the persistent American concern for Italy's precarious domestic balance. "Washington decided to satisfy Italy's national ambitions only to the extent necessary to preserve (her) political stability" (p. 348).

In short, the "Atlantic" relevance of Italy's Mediterranean policy never materialized, and Italy's domestic vulnerability remained the main feature of its presence within NATO. Was this the inevitable outcome of a misconceived policy of prestige that could not overcome or bypass the very weakness it sought to transcend? Or was it caused by poor judgment by the Eisenhower Administration, which failed to take advantage of a real opportunity offered by Italy's new ambitions? Although never so bold as to propose the latter interpretation, Brogi does not fully state the former either, and the reader is left wondering whether Italy's "opportunism" (p. 351) was useful or vain. At the end of his remarkable analysis Brogi could well have abandoned caution and advanced a more clearcut conclusion.

2) Brogi examines the oil policy pursued by Italy's state company ENI when the actions of his controversial chairman, Enrico Mattei, have a direct bearing on Rome's diplomatic initiatives and on domestic coalition politics. So far so good. The economic dimension of Italy's thrust towards the Near East, however, should have deserved a deeper attention. Securing cheap and reliable oil supplies, opening up new markets for Italy's light industrial exports, and getting a foothold in the international market for infrastructures and construction were crucial features of Italy's economic "miracle." In the following years Italy's presence in the Near Eastern markets became large. The success or failure of Italy's re-assertion in the region could usefully be assessed also against such a yardstick. If diplomatic "prestige" was not achieved, and the gamble did not pay off in terms of "neo-atlantismo," national presence and "weight" were however improved, at least in the long term. Or was it not?

3) The concomitant advance of European integration, and its central relevance for Italy's international role and visibility, are conspicuously absent. But Europe was the primary *locus* of, and leverage for, the nation's postwar consolidation and her return on the international scene. Europe was the avenue to modernization, the chosen ground for the reshaping of domestic coalition politics and the "opening to the left," the major tool to reshape Italy's foreign profile.

These two points are not meant as a general claim for the supremacy of economic diplomacy upon "high" policy. Nor do I believe that the age of integration makes "traditional" power politics obsolete. Far from it. But Brogi's stated intention to re-assess the degree of dependence in US-Italy relations, to chart the course of Rome's attempt to "fully re-enter in the high ranks of European powers" (p. 13), and to explore the tension between cooperation and competition in intra-European relations, is surely weakened by such absences.

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