



Alessandro Brogi. *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xii + 533 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3473-2.

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Politics in Cold War Europe

Recent events in the Middle East have led to fears that the welcome overthrow of dictators, like Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, may be exploited by hard-line Islamist movements, operating on the principle of “one person, one vote, one time.”[1] To combat this, several commentators, such as Barry Rubin of the Global Research in International Affairs Center, have suggested that the Obama administration should identify secular democrats in Egypt and Tunisia and support them, as it did with the Christian Democrats (DC) in Italy in the late 1940s. However, Alessandro Brogi contends that American intervention in the internal politics of France and Italy persisted for over three decades and was actually more complex than is popularly believed.

Indeed, *Confronting America* argues that American policymakers also aimed to discourage those domestic politicians who supported neutrality between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as Communists. The State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency employed a wide range of tactics throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, including covert funding of political parties, collaboration with allies in the Trade Union movement, propaganda, and even attempts at “psychological warfare” (p. 137). Alarmed by the appeal of anti-Americanism, they were even willing to underwrite those who nominally advocated more isolationist policies if such support undermined those who posed more serious threats to transatlantic unity.

Brogi also looks at the response from the Communists. Expelled from the immediate postwar transitional governments, and unable to win power at the ballot box, the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano) in Italy and its French counterpart the PCF (Parti Communiste Français) attempted to broaden their electoral appeal by posing as defenders of national sovereignty. They also used party-sponsored journals and magazines, including those focused on the arts, cinema, and popular culture, to popularize the ideas of communism. Although this strategy, combined with substantial Soviet funding, enabled both parties to maintain their status as the main opposition party in the 1950s and early 1960s, they failed to make a decisive breakthrough in either country.

The splits over the French student riots, which the PCF initially supported and then opposed, and the Soviet response to the Prague Spring led to the development of what Brogi terms “Eurocommunism.” This strategy aimed to fully distance both the PCI and the PCF from the Soviet Union, with both claiming to share “a total rejection of a restored Cominform under any disguise” (p. 321). The PCI even hinted that they could accept continued Italian membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while PS (Parti Socialiste), the more moderate cousins of the PCF, “challenged America’s imperialism in the Third World much more than its command over NATO, underlining their own virtual acceptance of the Western alliance” (p. 318).

From the 1980s onward, increasing pressures within the Soviet Union, combined with waning popular support in their home countries, forced the PCF and PS to continue their journey away from their previous roles as Soviet proxies. For both parties, this involved recognizing the permanence of capitalism and undergoing a through rebranding, which involved the PCI's dissolution and reformation as the Democratic Party of the Left. Although the PCF would briefly serve as a junior partner in François-Maurice Mitterrand's coalition, these measures failed to halt the decline of the European hard left. Indeed, the Democratic Party of the Left would eventually end up being subsumed by the center-left Partito Democratico.

Brogi's work is well structured, with eight chapters and an epilogue that takes the reader from the reestablishment of the Communist parties in 1944 to their new role by the end of the Cold War. He shows a strong command of the secondary literature, and utilizes a comprehensive range of sources from State Department material in the United States National Archives to that of the PCI's and PCF's own repositories. Indeed, those studying post-war Italian and French politics, American policy toward Europe, or the cultural Cold War will find the bibliography and the corresponding notes extremely useful.

The author should also be congratulated for resisting the temptation to bring in some of the more unsubstantiated allegations about American involvement in Italian politics that would have supported his thesis that Washington continually attempted to micromanage events. For instance, Brogi correctly blames the Red Brigades for Aldo Moro's abduction and assassination in 1978. Indeed, he notes that even the Italian Communists did not believe in the conspiratorial notion (still popular in some quarters) that it was part of an attempt by the CIA and right-wingers to undermine the DC-PCI coalition.

However, there are several problems with *Confronting America*, especially in terms of the level of detail provided. In many cases, Brogi just includes a footnote reference to the relevant sources, rather than directly quoting from the vast amount of primary material that he has assembled. This makes it difficult to verify his summaries of them. He also shows a reluctance to provide empirical data, an omission that makes it difficult for the reader to judge the degree to which U.S. funding of the DC in Italy was key to their success, rather than just a useful bonus. Brogi also fails to fully explain how Charles de Gaulle's decision to withdraw partially from NATO in 1966 and the Carter administration's failure to prevent the 1978 "historic compromise" fit into the framework of successful American micromanagement of French and Italian politics. Similarly, while his thesis of Euro-Communist disengagement from the Soviet Union is substantially correct, he overlooks the fact that even in the late 1980s the Kremlin regularly consulted with the PCI on such issues as the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan (which the PCI opposed).[2]

Confronting America is a substantial contribution to the study of the Cold War in Europe. Even those who disagree with its conclusions will appreciate the extensive notes and bibliography. However, longer and more frequent direct quotations, greater use of quantitative data, and a more balanced approach would have made it even better.

Notes

[1]. Lisa Blaydes and James Lo, "One Man, One Vote, One Time? A Model of Democratization in the Middle East," *University of Stanford Working Paper* (2011).

[2]. Artemy M. Kalinovsk, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 142.

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