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The Italian foreign policy: challenges and continuities

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Italian foreign politics is facing tough challenges in the near future. For more than 60 years, the Italian foreign policy compass was set on two poles, the European Union and the United States. Sometimes alternatively, much more often conjointly, these two polar stars oriented each and every Italian government's choice since the end of Second World War. All this has been changing over the last few years. In this context, the article intends to introduce the special issue on Italian foreign policy drawing a stylized map of theoretical approaches that knits together the dispersed theoretical and empirical studies of Italian foreign policy, using a couple of theoretical perspectives as light posts in orienting the articles in this special issue. This introduction is organized in four sections. First, it discusses the approaches that explicitly combine together domestic and international factors in explaining foreign policy. Next, it maps studies on the Italian foreign policy within these frameworks. Then the main characteristics of Italian foreign policy, using these theoretical perspectives, are discussed. The article concludes summarizing how the contributions in this special issue fits into these theoretical frameworks and help shed light on present Italian foreign policy.

Keywords: international relations; Italy; foreign policy

Introduction

Italian foreign politics is set to face tough challenges in the near future. For more than 60 years, the Italian foreign policy compass was set on two poles, the European Union and the United States. Sometimes alternatively, much more often conjointly, these two polar stars oriented each and every Italian government's choice since the end of Second World War. All this has been changing over the last few years. Both stars are now less bright and it is not clear whether Italy can still use them to orient itself or it should possibly replace them. True, both stars have been clouded in the past, but never were both turning so pale at the same time. The timing is then appropriate for a thorough reflection on what foreign policy has meant for Italy, what role it has played in the domestic realm and how it has been conducted, to reflect upon how past practices and policies can help suggesting future ones. This special issue is intended to offer an analysis of Italian foreign policy over different issue areas, looking at both structural and conjunctural elements. This introduction

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reviews the main approaches to the study of foreign policy and it discusses how relevant they are for explaining Italian postwar foreign policy.

What catches immediately the eye, in going through the main literature reviews[1] about foreign policy analysis (FPA) that, with different emphasis, distill what we know on these issues, is the lack of focus and cumulation in the disciplinary progress, as reflected in the huge variety of theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and research questions that are considered to fall into the FPA.[2] This cacophony pairs well with another sign of unhealthy state of the discipline: a structural lack of communication among different approaches and a loose connection with the most important theoretical and methodological debates in the discipline. Quoting Houghton foreign policy is 'a kind of free-floating enterprise, logically unconnected to, and disconnected from, the main theories of international relations (IR)' (2007: 24).[3]

In such a context, this article does not intend to offer a new review of this literature but rather to draw a stylized map of theoretical approaches that knits together the dispersed theoretical and empirical studies of Italian foreign policy, using a couple of theoretical perspectives as light posts in orienting the articles in this special issue. Accordingly, the introduction is organized in four sections. First, it discusses the approaches that explicitly combine together domestic and international factors in explaining foreign policy. Next, it maps the studies on the Italian foreign policy within these frameworks. Then the main characteristics of Italian foreign policy, using these theoretical perspectives, are discussed. The article concludes summarizing how the contributions in this special issue fits into these theoretical frameworks and help shed light on present Italian foreign policy.

How to study foreign policy?

In an important review of foreign policy studies for the *Handbook of International Relations*, Carlsnaes (2002) suggested that while a relative consensus exists on the

[1] This observation stems from the reading of a limited, but fairly representative, set of literature reviews (in chronological order: Cohen and Harris, 1975; Gourevitch, 1978; Smith, 1986; Almond, 1989; Santoro, 1990; Gerner, 1991; Zakaria, 1992; Moravcsik, 1993; Müller and Risse-Kappen, 1993; Ripley, 1993; Hudson and Vore, 1995; Elman, 1996; Jacobsen, 1996; Fearon, 1998; Rose, 1998; Carlsnales, 2002; Frieden and Martin, 2003; Garrison, 2003; Kaarbo, 2003; Hudson, 2005, 2007, 2010; Stuart, 2008; Taliaferro *et al.*, 2009; Brighi, 2013). We beg the reader's pardon in confessing our Anglophone parochialism since all of these references are in English and no work in French (the only other language we read), German or Spanish has been included.

[2] The very term FPA is controversial; so much so that Rose (1998: 154, note 20), in his often quoted review of neoclassical realism, distances himself from it, as 'Another approach … has generally produced little cumulation of knowledge or lasting impact', citing, as examples, the books by Hermann *et al.* (1987) and Neack *et al.* (1995).

[3] This condition accounts for the uncertain status of FPA in many manuals both in the United States and in Italy. As an example, one of the manuals most frequently adopted in IR courses in Italy (Andreatta *et al.*, 2007), in its second edition, devotes only one chapter to foreign policy issues – under the title 'domestic politics and democratic peace' – in which a huge variety of approaches, levels of analysis, and actors are shortly discussed; all in all, 28 pages out of a total of 355 (8% of the book).

explanandum of foreign policy, much less is agreed upon when it comes to the *explanans*. As seen by Carlsnales (2002: 436–437), this lack of agreement about the *explanans* was due to meta-theoretical debates that persistently storm the discipline. To this, another theoretical challenge – still unmet – has to be added. This challenge has to do with the fundamental multilevel and multicausal nature of any empirically adequate explanation of foreign policy. Once agreed that the list of explanatory factors potentially relevant to account for foreign policy include (too) many variables, the real challenge is to combine them in a logically coherent, theoretically oriented, and empirically parsimonious way. The problem, in other words, is how to model the complex interaction between factors at different levels As Gourevitch puts it: 'The real question is not whether the two "levels" are distinct, but how to study their unmistakable interaction' (2002: 408). This challenge makes 'the study of foreign-policy decision-making … the most ambitious and multifaceted subfield of international relations' (Stuart, 2008: 576).

The current literature returns two different models of how to combine variables at different levels: the integrative and the interactive ones.[4] The former adds variables at different levels in a causal path, the latter instead finds an intersection or focal point to hinge on accounting for the internal–external dynamics.

The integrative perspective

The integrative perspective is fundamentally additive. Theoretical contributions that exemplify this approach are Rosenau's pre-theory, neoclassical realism, and state-society approaches. These quite diverse approaches are all inspired by the same logics: to *combine* together variables at different level in an additive or sequential pattern. They differ in the way this *combination* is done. Let us briefly expands on each of them, starting with Rosenau.

In a seminal essay, Rosenau (1966) made three points that are still relevant to any discussion about integrative explanations in foreign policy. First, Rosenau lists five sets of key variables to explain foreign policy. In a funnel of decreasing temporal and spatial closeness to the behavior to be explained, they are: the idiosyncratic, role, governmental, societal, and systemic variables. Second, Rosenau argues the relative weight of each set of variables in affecting foreign policy is a function of three moderating variables: size, level of development of the country, and openness (i.e. democracy). Third and last, Rosenau suggests that explanations also vary depending on the issue areas involved. Foreign policy changes as a function of the tangible or intangible nature of the values allocated and the means chosen (Rosenau, 1966: 86): the more tangible are goals and means, the greater the number

[4] Moravcsik (1993: 17) first introduced the distinction between additive and integrative approaches to the study of foreign policy. We prefer to avoid the term additive since some of the contributions in this group include also non-additive combinations. To us, as discussed later on, the focal difference is the fact of focusing on the interaction between actors and levels or not.

of actors involved, the intensity of their motivation, the frequency of action and the willingness to negotiate a compromise.

While Rosenau's proposal never fled high, for reasons that cannot be discussed here, two additive perspectives that instead sprung a more fruitful discussion are neoclassic realism and state-society theories. They share what could be called a *most similar design*. The main goal of a theory of foreign policy is to explain national variation in state responses to similar contextual conditions of the international environment. What differentiates them is the way they model the mediated process that goes from international stimuli up to foreign policy responses.

Neoclassical realism and comparative state-society approaches diverge on three points. The first is the postulated sequence of variables. Following the Waltzian recommendation, neoclassical realists set international variables as *primum* and domestic variables as mediators between the international system and foreign policy outcome. Comparativists start all the way round. Domestic preference formation[5] drives foreign policy together with domestic and international institutions.

Second, they see the mediated transmission belt in fundamentally different ways. Neoclassical realist see this mediation process as inherently 'imperfect' and dysfunctional (Taliaferro *et al.*, 2009: 4). Comparative state-society theorists are instead epistemically neutral in assessing the role played by domestic factors as transmission belt of international effects. This transmission is not necessarily 'distortive' of the process of state preference formation based on the stimuli coming from the international system and on the position the state occupies in it (Fearon, 1998).

Third, comparativists introduce a wider set of actors, such as social groups – of different kind, depending from the way preference get formed – than neorealism, for which political elites, implanted in state institutions (Mastanduno *et al.*, 1989), their perceptions and their degree of consensus play the key traction role.

The interactive perspective

The interactive models adopt a theoretical shortcut to address the implicit complexity of any integrative framework. They postulate 'an intersection point' among domestic and international factors, a fulcrum or pivot around which to strike a balance – often precarious and always dynamic – between domestic and international pressures, looking explicitly at the interaction between actors and levels (Lake and Powell, 1999; Evans *et al.*, 1993). Four are the intersection hubs discussed by

[5] The nature of the effects of internationalization on preferences is still controversial in this literature. According to some (e.g. Rogowski, 1990), following the Stolper–Samuelson theorem, it is the relative abundance of production factors to make the effects of globalization felt: the owners of the most abundant production factors will benefit from globalization while those who own the most scarce will suffer. According to others, instead, the effects of globalization are sectorally felt: the greater or lesser exposition to the global economy explain the effects on preferences and the reactions to globalization (Gourevitch, 1986; Rogowski, 1990).

this literature: decision-makers (being them individuals or groups), state institutions, ideas (or political discourse), and roles.

While Hudson suggests that 'The point of intersection is not the state, it is human decision makers' (2005: 3). Mastanduno *et al.* (1989: 458) point to the state structure as the mediating institution between internal and external pressures (458–459). Still others, as an example Brighi (2013: 36) suggests that 'the dialectical interplay between strategic actors and strategically selective context is crucially mediated by discourse.' (See also Hay, 2002: 209–210). Last, some others, like Walker (1987b: 281) claim that the fulcrum is represented by the role states perform in the international context.

Rosenau is again a good starter, discussing the concepts of penetrated domestic system, linkage, and adaptation. Problematizing the concept of sovereignty well before globalization became a catchword, Rosenau suggested most political system are penetrated, in the sense that actors from other states actively participate in the authoritative allocation of values, intervene in the bargaining among domestic actors, taking position in favor of one or the other of them and, above all, these actions and behaviors are fully accepted and acknowledged even as legitimate from the very domestic players of the system in which the intervention takes place.

Next, Rosenau included the study of penetrated system in a wider framework of internal–external relations, introducing first the concept of *linkage* (Rosenau, 1969b) and later that of *adaptation* (Rosenau, 1981). *A linkage* is 'any recurrent sequence of behavior that originates in on system and is reacted to in another' (Rosenau, 1969a: 45). To get around the (too) vast number of multiple linkages in the different issue areas,[6] Rosenau (1970, 1981) put forward the concept of adaptation. Foreign policy is the study of how a political system adapt itself to the ever changing domestic and international circumstances in order to maintain its essential structure. Adaptation is a set of political processes through which a political organism contain its fluctuations of essential structures within limits acceptable to its members. The concept of adaptation was prodromal to two further developments in the discipline.

The first is the two-level game metaphor. First, introduced in a seminal article by Putnam (1988), this approach moves a step forward in accounting for the way states adapt themselves to these dynamics. According to Putnam, in foreign policy 'National governments seek to *maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures*, while *minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments*' (italics is mine). To do so, decision-makers cope with challenges and demands at different tables. Three elements characterize the nature of the two-level game (e.g. Putnam, 1988; Evans *et al.*, 1993; Milner, 1997): preferences, institutions, and information. The preferences of actors (Frieden, 1999) have to be distinguished by the strategies implemented to achieve them. Institutions affect the scope of conflict – when domestic actors have differing preferences – and the likelihood of an

[6] Initially, Rosenau envisaged 144 different national–international linkages, immediately realizing how difficult empirical research based on such a taxonomy could be.

agreement. Last, information affects the uncertainty with which one approach the strategies used to achieve the desired goals.

The second development is foreign policy role theory that helps to define the context within which decision-makers operate. This theory is a continuous, but still 'intermittent', presence in the study of foreign policy. First, introduced into international relations by Holsti (1970), who discussed the connection between role conceptions and role performance (e.g. Walker, 1979; Wish, 1980), it progressed by fits and starts ever since. In 1987, Walker (1987a, b) edited a volume in which the latent tension between the socio-psychological (eminently individualist, as stressed by Hermann, 1978) and the socio-cultural conception (eminently structural and used by (Sampson and Walker, 1987; Walker, 1987a), 1987a, b) of role are discussed. Ten years later, another edited volume, by Le Prestre (1997), this time in a constructivist and sociological frame, links the concept of role to status (a variable already singled out by Wish, 1980) and identity. Although promising (Kuzma, 1998), another decade had to pass before role theory went into what is now a fourth stage, characterized by different developments. In Europe, role theory is definitely constructivist (Harnisch *et al.*, 2011), adding to the traditional distinction between role conception and role performance the one between *ascribed and achieved* role, both related to role expectations, an element often overlooked by the past literature. In the United States, the study of role in foreign policy is revitalized as part of an attempt to re-launch the FPA movement.[7]

How relevant is what we know for explaining Italian foreign policy?

How much these different streaks of literature can help to account for the Italian foreign policy? To answer this question, it is relevant to discuss three elements that characterize how Italian foreign policy has been studied so far.

The first is the close connection between academic reflections and the evolution of the domestic and international context. Political events and developments have propelled the study of Italian foreign policy more than the internal dynamics of the academic debates in the discipline. The two main waves of debates on Italian foreign policy – the first in the 1970s and the second in the 1990s – took place in periods of dramatic domestic *and* international changes.

The second is the (relatively) late arrival of political science in the field of foreign policy with several approaches blossoming and no clear attempt to find a synthesis among them. If in the late 1980s Santoro complained about the study of Italian foreign policy as a 'still mysterious field of research', (Santoro, 1991: 20) dominated by historians (Santoro, 1990: 61–62), data reported in Figure 1 show things have changed over time.[8] The Italian case is now studied by a variety of theoretical

[7] See the special issue edited by Thies and Breuning (2012) on FPA. See also Thies (2010) for a synthesis of this new theoretical phase.

[8] This chart is based on the bibliographic archive set up and regularly updated by Croci. The version here used (February 2013) contains 2579 products, including books, journal articles, chapters in books,

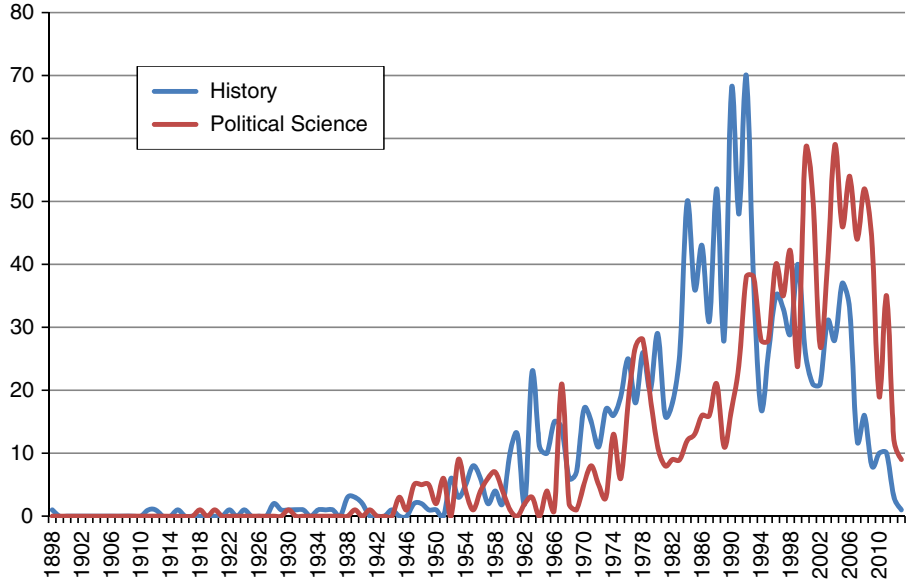

Figure 1 Number of publications on Italian foreign policy from history and political science (1890–2013) (Croci, 2013).

perspectives: policy-making (Santoro, 1990, 1991) neoclassical realism (Davidson, 2009; Cladi and Webber, 2011), cultural (Ignazi *et al*., 2012; Brighi, 2013), the decision-making theory inspired by Brecher (Coraluzzo, 2000) and the two-level game metaphor (Cotta and Isernia, 1996; Ammendola and Isernia, 2000). What is striking, however, is that, with few exceptions,[9] there is a surprising lack of theoretical cumulation. Every theoretical contribution is a stand alone enterprise that does not pay too much attention to what the others might have to say and makes no serious attempt to build a more synthetic approach.

Last, but not least, amidst this variety of approaches and analysis and no matter how intermittent progress has been, the debate on Italian foreign policy is characterized by some recurring elements, irrespective of the historical period and theoretical orientation. At least three should be highlighted: the importance attributed to 'the constant features' (*le costanti*) of Italian foreign policy; the (over)emphasis on the problems of the role of Italy in the world (*il prestigio*), and the stressing of the 'peculiarities' (*le particolarità*) of the Italian political system that

manuals, working papers, and PhD dissertations, and it excludes bibliographies, primary sources, and newspapers or magazines' articles. Of these products, 1224 (47,5%) belong to political science while the others are mostly history work. We thank Francesco Olmastroni for his content analysis of Croci's bibliography and for the statistics reported in this paper. Incidentally, of the over 2500 contributions on Italian foreign policy recorded by Croci, no one has the word theory (or its English equivalent) in the title.

[9] As an example Brighi (2013: 10–43) proposes a systematization of the FPA literature along lines similar to those here discussed.

pose unique problems to Italian decision-makers – as compared to other democracies of similar size – in reconciling foreign and domestic policy pressures and demands. The remaining part of this section discusses how these three themes can in fact be re-framed in one or the other of the different theoretical perspectives discussed above and then brought to bear in explaining Italian foreign policy.

The search for the constant features of Italian foreign policy

Italian political science has been inclined to privilege the *long durée* in explaining Italian foreign policy, evoking a set of constants that help to account for the continuities that cut across Italian foreign policy over different historical periods, political regimes, and cultures. A couple of examples of this inclination, taken from authoritative studies of different periods, could suffice. Santoro, in one of the first systematic attempts to analyze the Italian foreign policy, concludes that 'Italian foreign policy has been characterized by a small group of *permanent* factors…' (1991: 12; italics and translation are ours). They are 'objective/structural factors, that, interacting with events and men, have produced perverse effects of incoherence' (Santoro, 1991: 12). Along similar lines, Ignazi et al. (2012: 11), more recently and using a different theoretical framework, sets national identity as the key independent variable in explaining Italian foreign policy across centuries; an identity whose sources can be traced back to the Roman empire and whose manifestations in foreign policy recur with remarkable similarity across centuries and political contexts.

The Italian role: ascribed, not achieved

These ever present structural elements are also linked to the role of Italy in foreign policy. Although foreign policy role theory has been only rarely referred to in contributions pertaining to Italy (for one recent exception see Giacomello and Verbeek, 2011), the relevance of this analytical framework pops up over and over again in different contributions. Again, Santoro is, again, quite emblematic of this position, when he suggests, evoking a difference between ascribed and achieved role, that 'the only conceptual and operative (sic!) factor able to unify and to rationalize Italian foreign policy … should be found in the intentional redefinition of the formal "rank" of the country as compared to its effective "role"' (1991: 13). Similarly, Ignazi et al. suggests that Italian foreign policy '… can be viewed as a never-ending effort to find a role in the international arena while overcoming structural weaknesses' (2012: 39). The history of Italian foreign policy is, following along these suggestions, an uninterrupted series of attempts (most often failed ones) to address the frustration originating from 'role inconsistency'. Apparently neither two world wars, nor the transition from a multipolar to a bipolar and eventually a unipolar world system are able to affect and change this inherent tension of Italian foreign policy.

The multiple challenges of reconciling the domestic with the international context

A third element that characterizes the study of Italian foreign policy has been the attention devoted to the interaction between the domestic context in which politics is carried out in Italy and the international context in which Italy operates and the specific problems this interaction poses to national decision-makers. This element is detailed in the next section.

Italian decisions-makers in a two-level game: then and now

The importance of domestic politics in explaining foreign policy is effectively captured by a functional question.[10] What is the use of foreign policy for in Italy? One possible answer is that, for a country the size of Italy, foreign policy is a set of toolkits used *to adapt* the Italian political system to the pressure and challenges coming from the international environment in order to survive as a political order. Kogan was the first to suggest that 'the key objective of Italian foreign policy is to protect the domestic social structure from internal dangers' (1963: 136). Others (e.g. Pasquino, 1974, see also Panebianco, 1977) added the one of protecting it from external dangers as well.

If, in itself, such an answer is pretty mainstream, still what it is more interesting is *how* this adaptation has been pursued by the Italian political system. There is a wide consensus among historians and political scientists that the Italian way of adapting the domestic structure to the international pressures has been to closely link the survival of the domestic structure to the international one. In order for this adaptation to work, the main foreign policy goal of the Italian political system quickly became a negative one: to minimize, to the greatest extent possible, the effects on domestic politics of any shock or external perturbance that might threaten its survival (see Panebianco, 1977; Pasquino, 1974). The main posture chosen by Italian decision-makers to fulfill this adaptation task has been inactivity or, as Posner (1978) put it, 'passivity'.

Before detailing the main characteristics and conditions of such a policy of inactivity, it is important to stress that passivity or inactivity should be confused neither with sheer acquiescence to demands of allies and adversaries nor with cooperation. Cooperation, even if tacit, always involves a mutual adjustment of policies and expectations to those of our counterparts, through a coordination process (Keohane, 1984: 51–52; Milner, 1997: 7–9), that is more often than not costly for those who undertake it. 'Cooperation – as Keohane (1984: 51) suggests – requires that the actions of separate individuals or organization – which are not in

[10] Panebianco (1977) analysis is the first we know that explicitly frames the issue of what foreign policy is about in an explicitly functionalist perspective. For Panebianco (translation is mine) 'The foreign policy of a state can be usefully interpreted as the set of processes (of interaction with the external environment) that fulfill specific functions for the political and social system as a whole…' (1977: 852).

pre-existent harmony – be brought into conformity with one another through a process of negotiation, which is often referred to as "policy coordination"'. Such a policy coordination is not without consequence for domestic politics. It implies debates and conflicts among domestic social groups on the preferred solution to pursue in bargaining and, eventually, to ratify domestically. It also implies adjustment to the needs of the negotiating counterpart, in order to achieve a shared solution. A fully cooperative strategy, in fact, calls for a set of institutional structures, rules and strategies able to manage such a process. A policy of coordination relies upon effective bargaining strategies that, in turn, presuppose an institutional context flexible enough to make these adjustments possible.

Inactivity does not imply acquiescence either. A posture of inactivity does not imply a supine passiveness to any requests coming from allies and enemies. It entails instead an attempt to skip, to purposefully avoid, any commitment, if not at a formal and inconsequential level, that might jeopardize the domestic order. This is what Italian political leaders have done since the end of Second World War (and still do now): to intentionally avoid any tie that might imply a need to undertake costly domestic adjustments, more appropriate for an effective cooperative strategies. Far from making foreign policy a residual element of the domestic politics – a quality that the rhetorical content of many of the government programs have evoked and that Kogan (1963) ridiculed more than 50 years ago – inactivity is the conclusion of a complex strategy, systematically, and skillfully pursued across different, often turbulent, times.

How such a posture of inactivity has concretely worked so far? Using the metaphor of the two-level game (Putnam, 1988; see also Cotta and Isernia, 1996; Ammendola and Isernia, 2000), it relies upon the ability to keep the different tables at which decision-makers seat in conducting foreign policy clearly distinct and with only minimal mutual interactions. In other words, it presupposes 'parallel' games (Alt and Eichengreen, 1989). The domestic and international tables, although clearly separated, and here it is the magic of this strategy, were welded together by the fact that any alteration on one table would have implied radical changes also on the other, the international and *vice versa*. This welding has been intentionally realized, since the end of the Second World War, through two strategies dubbed (Pasquino, 1974; Panebianco, 1977) the 'internalization of the external constraints' and the 'externalization of internal constraints'.

The first strategy consists in overlapping as closely as possible the domestic political cleavage with the international political one, so that the domestic left-right cleavage (in Italy, the contrast between Democrazia Cristiana (DC) and Partito Comunista Italiano) becomes a manifestation of the wider international East-West conflict. This strategy has two purposes in mind. On the one hand, it gives the domestic political choice an aura of inevitability, something imposed from outside and, as such, very hard to modify domestically. On the other hand, it strengthens the bargaining arm of ruling parties *vis-à-vis* the domestic political opposition, an important bargaining resource to spend domestically, both in election time and not: the credentials of

international legitimacy that made them the only one authorized to interact credibly with the allies. This twofold strategy had an important consequence: it makes impossible any frank and open discussion of alternative solutions and choices than might put into question the domestic structure as it originally stands.

At the same time, this welding allows the 'externalization of the domestic constraints'. This externalization has also two goals in mind. On the one hand, it intends to minimize demands and requests from outside, in particular from allies, that could shake the domestic political and economic order. On the other, it is a way to justify free riding behavior both in North Atlantic Treaty Organization and in European institutions, with the rationale that a too zealous adherence to the Atlantic and European requests might play domestically in favor of oppositional forces, altering the precarious balance among social and political forces that had in the DC the pivotal ruling actor. In other words, and using Putnam's metaphor, not being willing to enlarge the domestic win-set, the chosen strategy was that of 'tying hands', exploiting domestic weaknesses 'to induce the opposing statesman to compromise at a point closer to the first statesman's preferences – a practice that runs counter the normal expectation that the statesman will preserve the maximum possible level of executive autonomy' (Moravcsik, 1993: 28).

The success of this double strategy presupposes, to properly work, a distinct policy style in foreign policy, characterized by a clear demarcation among the different levels of political activity, in particular the level of the symbolic politics, the one that has been called the level of macro-politics (Cotta and Isernia, 1996) from the level of the concrete politics, of the real decisions. This split is needed in order to avoid the risk of escalating conflict from the symbolic level to the real one, with unsettling implications for the domestic order. Three are the main elements that enter to compose this Italian style of policy and that have been adopted over time and across issues to let the two games run in parallel and independently from one another.

a. The first element, and probably the one more often used, is to exploit the asymmetric information government has *vis-à-vis* the parliament in foreign policy. From this viewpoint, Italian governments are in a systematically stronger position in comparison to the parliament, not only because the governments hold more reliable and valid information than the parliament (and Italian parliament is not very powerful to get those information independently), but also because the rigid separation between symbolic and concrete politics and the emphasis on symbolic politics, in which valence issues are emphasized, make easier for the government to obfuscate costs and benefits of specific foreign policy choices, shifting the discussion from the content of the problems to their ideological valence, from distributional to allegiances issues. Accordingly, the scant attention devoted to international affairs in the Italian political debates it is not only a consequence of the modest Italian position in the international system, but also a calculated choice to preserve some room for maneuvering in the strategic interactions with external actors.
b. There are times, however, in which a foreign policy decision becomes inevitable; times in which to join a coordinated effort is mandatory because so requested by the

United States or by European institutions. In these situations, the government strategy has been the one of locking down the decision-making process. A way to make this possible is to delegate to other actors, both internal and international, public or private, the actual decision-making process. To delegate means to ask to other, possibly less visible actors (such as the Church, the Ente nazionale idrocarburi, NGOs, or the bureaucracy), the concrete management of the bargaining and implementation, while political parties were fully committed to the gladiatorial politics at an ideological level. And this debate, of course flies always high enough not to touch upon the concrete and very substantive questions involved in any specific decision.

c. A third element is the manipulation of the ratification process, subtracting to parliamentary debates issues and problems that fall within the competence of the parliament or, alternatively, presenting key sensitive decisions as part and parcel of wider packages of decisions, that can either be approved or rejected as a whole.

In conclusion, Italian foreign policy, far from being a negligible nuisance in the work of the Italian political system, was a key element to its survival. Of course, it was born in a specific historical context and its survival depended upon the fact that the conditions that made that order possible did not radically change. And Italian foreign policy, not surprisingly, has always better worked out in conditions of deep domestic and international ideological polarization, high international tension, and stable and rapid economic growth (Cotta and Isernia, 1996). However, while most of the conditions that made possible the 'Italian way' of conducting foreign policy have changed, still both the strategy and the style of foreign policy have not changed that much.

Three main changes have affected the ability of Italian political system to adapt to the challenges coming from the world system as it did in the past. First, and this is what makes the post-Cold war period radically different from the previous one, Italian foreign policy interests are not fully and perfectly overlapping with those of our main allies any more. This was to a certain extent true also in the past. But during the Cold War the twin strategy of internalization of international conflicts and externalization of domestic ones made Italian bargaining position stronger than now. As a consequence of the collapsing of the international bipolar system this twofold process of welding the domestic and international order is much harder to maintain and with increasingly diminishing returns. The search for solution in line with our domestic preferences requires a process of active cooperation and mutual adjustment that is costly. In conclusion, the habit to rely upon the politics of 'tying hands' in radically different conditions run the risk of leaving Italian foreign policy simply tied, obliged to countenance solution chosen by others; a change from a policy of inactivity to one of acquiescence.

A second change, in part a consequence of the collapse of the deep ideological cleavages that characterized Italian politics in the past, is the inability to clearly demarcate the foreign ideological policy from the concrete policy-making, the party competition game from the decision-making game. It is therefore easier now to politicize, instrumentally, foreign policy for domestic purposes in forms and with

consequences that can constrain even further national decision-makers in their bargaining strategies. Italian policy-making is not used to it. In a detailed reconstruction of the main peacekeeping operations of the 1990s and the 2000s Ignazi *et al.* (2012) have clearly shown the remarkable gap between the way political actors have defined military missions abroad in public discourse and the actual condition in which these very operation were conducted. While the public discourse in parliament and in the media stressed the multilateral and peaceful nature of these operations – emasculating them if any reference to war and even a real 'enemy' – the concrete operation on the grounds presupposed a quite different scenario.[11]

The third and, possibly, more lasting consequence of the collapse of the rigid separation between domestic and foreign policy is the impact of institutional weakness and government instability on the bargaining credibility of our decision-makers. In these conditions, the expectations that an unstable government might cooperate in effective way drastically shrinks, making more difficult, for such a government, to conclude mutually advantageous agreements. It is a problem of reputation.

Conclusions: what this special issue adds to our knowledge of Italian foreign policy

This special issue addresses continuities and changes in Italian foreign policy looking at two theoretical perspectives that emphasize on the one hand continuity and structural factors and on the other had concrete operation in the policy-making process. To do so, the articles in this issue have been inspired by two integrative approaches to foreign policy: role theory and the two-level game. Caffarena and Gabusi and Olmastroni, using different research designs, follow the former approach. Their contributions look at how Italy's foreign policy is seen, and described, by policy-makers and what role they ascribe to Italian foreign policy. They do so adopting quite different methodological tools, in itself a precious methodological triangulation that confer a greater robustness to the results.

Caffarena and Gabusi update and extend the approach first adopted by Holsti (1970) in his article on role theory, framing it in a wider theoretical context. Examining Prime Ministers and Foreign Affairs Ministers inaugural speeches in office since 2001, the authors suggest that Italy's institutional actors appear to be aware of the changes occurred in the international system after 1989, and in particular after 9/11. The National Role Conceptions sustaining Italy's present foreign policy goals reflect such awareness, showing both similarities and differences with the one offered by Holsti in his seminal work published in 1970. Foreign policy goals are also reasonably well grounded in ideas on how the world works or linked to operational ideas, yet the country's foreign policy appears feebly focused, even

[11] For a short reconstruction along these lines see Auerswald and Saideman (2014: 172–173) on the Italian role in Afghanistan.

though focus is explicitly very much sought for. Olmastroni instead adopts an attitudinal approach in studying what role a sample of different Italian decision-makers, expressly interviewed for this research project, see for Italy, as compared to a sample of the general public. This elite survey is quite unique in scope, including, beside actors usually surveyed, such as members of parliament and opinion leaders, two understudied groups: Diplomacy and the Church. As part of this research, and with the collaboration of both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, the research team was able to interview a substantial number of top level diplomats and ambassadors as well as bishops of the Italian Catholic church, together with members of the Italian and European parliament, media journalist, and opinion-makers (including a group of IR professors). This article look at the amount of consensus at the 'horizontal' level (the left-right cleavage) and at the vertical level (elite-masses) on foreign policy, in terms of threat perception, feelings toward the (American and European) allies, support for the main institutional mechanisms of coordination and cooperation, and willingness to use 'military' power to defend the constituted order and the national interest, while controlling for the position and level of action of each actor within the foreign policy-making process as well as her or his ideological orientations. The results show a more complex picture than the one an observer would assume, with an important role for ideology in shaping attitudes and preferences. While these contributions look at the structural role of Italy in the present international context, another set of articles explore the actual working of Italian foreign policy in three important areas: economy, security, and human rights.

Manuela Moschella analyzes the Italian policy-making process leading to the adoption of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union – also known as the Fiscal Compact. This Treaty stands out for both the scope of intrusion into budgetary sovereignty and the speed of its adoption. Despite its demanding commitment, which could easily turn out to be economically and politically unsustainable, Italy not only speedily signed it, but also raised no question over the basic principles of the Treaty. The question Moschella sets in to ask is why the Italian government did accede to an international agreement whose implementation was so constraining of the country's budgetary sovereignty and potentially damaging for the country's growth prospects. To answer this question, Moschella relies on two major explanations, one emphasizing the normative orientations of the government that negotiated the Treaty, the other the role of exogenous constraints.

Ceccorulli and Coticchia look instead at the role of culture and interests in explaining what has become in the last 30 years *the* distinctive mark of Italian foreign policy: its active participation to peacekeeping and peace-enforcing operations. Italy's activism in this field and the pride of place given to the military instrument to face multidimensional and transnational challenges not clearly related to military issues, such as irregular migration, piracy, and violation of basic human rights, clashes with the pacifism prevailing in several sectors of Italian political culture. Ceccorulli and

Coticchia work out two main arguments (ideational factors and interests relating to the so-called military–industrial complex) and try to intercept their weight in the national debate leading to the respective decision in Sri Lanka (2004–05), Haiti (2010), and in the Central Mediterranean (2015).

Andrea Cofelice's contribution assesses an unusually neglected aspect of Italian foreign policy: Italy's participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC). This topic offers a particular vantage point to see Italian foreign policy at work, for the promotion of human rights, of multilateralism and of an international system governed by the rule of law represents a 'genetic' component of the Italian foreign policy, as set out in the Italian Constitution (art. 10 and 11). Cofelice looks at Italian behavior both as a recommending state and as a state under review, offering an interesting – and quite rare – opportunity to assess whether the human rights policy of Italian governments is only cheap talk or it means what governments say. Using a unique data set, the article dissects Italy's behavior over the first 19 UPR sessions (2008–14), which broadly coincide with Italy's first two membership terms in the HRC looking at both the UPR diplomatic phase in Geneva and the implementation phase, at the domestic level. Cofelice finds that Italy is not obviously coherent and straightforward in its behavior in the UN HRC. Bringing to bear role theory, liberal and constructivist institutionalism and the two-level game approach, Cofelice provides a nuanced explanation of why Italian behavior is somehow disconnected and he contributes to understand how policy is conducted when the policy-making is somehow distanced from the political arena of contested politics.

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