

Italy

A Carter phone call to a Roman squillo

by Umberto Pascali

James Earl Carter personally intervened into the internal affairs of Italy at the end of March by telephoning “caretaker” premier Francesco Cossiga to “invite” him to form a new government immediately. Carter’s undiplomatic action, reported angrily in the March 29 edition of *La Notte*, a Milan daily, was the culmination of a series of strongarm tactics by the British and American governments to ensure that Italy’s next government will be their tool, and not an ally of France and West Germany with policies of East-West detente and international monetary reform.

La Notte headlined its exposé of the Carter phone call, “Govern o Squillo” (government by telephone), capitalizing on the other meaning of the word *squillo*—prostitute. Journalist Walter Semeraro speculated that the U.S. president told Cossiga the U.S. planned a dramatic action in the Eastern Mediterranean—Iran, or possibly Afghanistan—and demanded that he ally his Christian Democratic faction with Italy’s Socialist Party under Bettino Craxi to form a new government the United States “can rely on.”

Treating Italy as a Banana Republic

In short, commented *La Notte*, in case of an American military adventure, Italy will be treated as a “banana republic,” most probably including provision of bases and other staging facilities to American forces. It appears that “big political shifts have always to be accomplished under pressure of events outside the democratic system proper,” concluded Semeraro.

The “Dear Francesco” call from the White House exemplifies the significance of the tug-of-war now underway over Italy. Barring such intervention, the most likely next government would be formed by Giulio Andreotti, the former Christian Democratic premier, who pledges to bring the Communist Party, the nation’s second largest, into a new government to guarantee stability at home and a base from which to conduct meaningful economic

and political diplomacy abroad. Andreotti has applauded the Franco-German alliance behind the European Monetary System, and those nations’ efforts to preserve East-West detente in the face of Anglo-American anti-Soviet posturing.

An Andreotti victory over Cossiga at the Christian Democratic congress in late February was only narrowly averted when pro-Cossiga operations by the Roman black nobility’s Jesuit intelligence service were suddenly augmented by a sudden visit from U.S. Secretary Cyrus Vance. Vance threatened key Andreotti supporters into shifting sides—he carried, according to Italian sources, “a suitcase full of dollars and a pistol.”

Although a well-schooled politician, Andreotti’s response to defeat was to declare the issues too important for “business as usual,” and absolutely refused to compromise, preventing Cossiga from forming a government. Cossiga could not respond to Italian president Pertini’s *pro forma* request that he make the attempt, when the Communists threatened an immediate no-confidence vote.

The U.S. and British governments mounted pressures on Italy dramatically when rumors began circulating that Cossiga would have to renounce his caretaker role to permit Andreotti to form a coalition. On March 25, the London *Times* published a front page interview with British Foreign Minister Lord Carrington, conducted by Italian Aurelio Levi, a journalist in the employe of British intelligence’s International Institute for Strategic Studies. Carrington said he was no longer concerned about the evident willingness of France and West Germany to expel Britain from the European Economic Community over a budgetary-contributions dispute. A Cossiga-Craxi government in Italy, he said, “in two to four weeks ... will tour European capitals in search of a compromise.”

And in fact, Cossiga, as chairman of the EEC, postponed the scheduled March 29 summit at which the showdown feared by the British would have occurred.

Secret U.S. Italian military maneuvers

Even as the punctual telephoned order from the President of the United States was delivered, reports came in that Italian military forces were secretly conducting joint patrols or possible maneuvers with American forces in the Eastern Mediterranean or Indian Ocean region. That exhibits the dangers of London’s *squillo* Cossiga continuing in power: With its deep cultural ties and tradition as a “bridge” between Europe and the peoples of the Middle East, Italy could become a Trojan horse within the peace bloc formed by the European Monetary System nations, to which French President Giscard only recently won the leadership of the Arab world.