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***Time to Change. The Six Day War and the Origins  
of Italy's Pro-Arab Foreign Policy***

**Abstract:** *The Six Day War marked a turning point in Italy's attitude toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the crisis the Italian diplomacy tried to mediate in order to prevent an open war but this policy gave rise to harsh polemics among the coalition government. These disagreements revealed a deep rooted change which involved political and security matters. Energy issues became a top priority in the economic and political agenda and most of the Italian public opinion shifted toward a pro-Arab stance while the memories of the Holocaust were fading away. Moreover, the growing Soviet infiltration in the Mediterranean drove the Italian government to envisage security on a global scale while Israel maintained a regional approach. All these differences contributed in gradually shaping a new trend in Israeli-Italian relationships which lasted for a long time.*

**Keywords:** Six Days War; Italian pro-Arab Politics; Middle East.

At the end of the '60's Italy gradually worked out a pro-Arab Mediterranean policy. This paper focuses on the major turning points shaping this new approach which implied a different attitude even regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict.

During the Six Day War,<sup>1</sup> the majority of the Italian public opinion together with the political parties supporting the coalition government

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<sup>1</sup> On this topic see: E. HAMMEL, *Six Days in June: How Israel Won the 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, Washington, DC, Pacifica Military History, 2001; W. LAQUEUR, *The Road to Jerusalem: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967*, New York, Macmillan, 1968; H. MEICHER, *Sinai, 5 giugno 1967. Il conflitto arabo-israeliano*, Bologna, Il Mulino,

backed the Jewish State. Undoubtedly from the beginning of the conflict the Italian diplomacy showed some ambiguities. On one hand, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amintore Fanfani, acknowledged Israeli's position concerning the international status of the Gulf of Aqaba and the right to use the strait of Tiran for pacific purposes according to the Geneva agreement signed in 1958. On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out that the British project for a declaration guaranteeing the free navigation was "irreproachable", but raised some «doubts about its political consequences, especially if a concrete action should follow in a short time».<sup>2</sup>

According to the British Ambassador Shuckburgh, Rome could not join London's initiative since Italy promoted a policy of détente «within the United Nations». In Italy's viewpoint the UN had indeed always played a key role in order to dampen the contrasts between the two superpowers and, in the meantime, it was perceived as a multilateral framework where Rome could preserve its international status. As part of this policy, Italy pressed for a UN declaration in favor of free

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2000; M.B. OREN, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, New York/Toronto, Random House Ballantine Publishing Group, 2002; R.B. PARKER, *The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored*, in «Middle East Journal», XLVI, 2, 1992; R.B. PARKER, *The Six Day War*, Jacksonville, University of Florida Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *Appunto del Mae sul Progetto di dichiarazione britannica per assicurare la libera navigazione nel Golfo di Aqaba*, 2 giugno 1967, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (thereafter ACS), Carte Moro (thereafter CM), b. 56.

navigation, dismissed the French proposal for a summit of the Big Four and labeled as “premature” the British idea for a contingency planning.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the rejection of the British plan coupled with an internal harsh controversy when Fanfani promoted an approach based on the formula of “equal distance”<sup>4</sup> between the two belligerents. Although the Prime Minister Aldo Moro managed to smooth down the disagreements within the coalition, it remained a widespread impression that Italy was inaugurating a new approach to its Mediterranean policy.<sup>5</sup>

However, far from radically changing its policy, Italy was only seeking to maintain its good relationships with the Arabs as shown by the ensuing debate concerning the UN initiatives. The UN resolution sponsored by the Latin-American countries appeared to the Italian government as «the only one able of not just realistic developments but also able to avoid a crisis in the UN prestige».<sup>6</sup> Though agreeing with this view, Fanfani suggested not to simply reject the non-aligned

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<sup>3</sup> On Great Britain’s policy see: M. GAT, *Britain and the Conflict in the Middle East, 1964-1967: The Coming of the Six-Day War*, Publishers, Westport (CT), Praeger 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See D. CAVIGLIA - M. CRICCO, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei. La politica mediorientale dell’Italia dalla guerra dei Sei Giorni al conflitto dello Yom Kippur (1967-1973)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore, 2006, pp. 20-25; L. RICCARDI, *Il “problema Israele”*. *Diplomazia italiana e PCI di fronte allo Stato ebraico (1948-1973)*, Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2006, pp. 215-222. On Italy’s policy during the crisis see also: L.V. FERRARIS, ed., *Manuale della politica estera italiana 1947-1993*, Bari, Laterza, 1996, pp. 168-171; A. VARSORI, *L’Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*, Bari, Laterza, 1998, pp. 164-165.

<sup>5</sup> See L. TOSI, ed., *Sulla scena del mondo. L’Italia all’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite 1955-2009*, Napoli, Editoriale Scientifica, 2010, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *V sessione straordinaria d’urgenza dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite-Istruzioni di voto impartite alla delegazione italiana*, ACS, CM, b. 56, sottofasc. 4 “ONU Conflitto arabo-israeliano. V<sup>a</sup> sessione straordinaria dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite. Posizione italiana”, fasc. 8 “Istruzioni impartite alla delegazione italiana alle Nazioni Unite”.

countries resolution because «all the pro-Arab Western Mediterranean countries (France, Spain, Greece, Turkey) would endorse the non-aligned motion thus allowing the Arabs to enhance critics and initiatives against us».<sup>7</sup>

Once again the Prime Minister Aldo Moro, urged by its diplomatic adviser,<sup>8</sup> skillfully tackled the issue and imposed the decision already taken by the Cabinet to vote against the non-aligned resolution. In the days that followed Moro confirmed the Italian policy which «rather than sentencing», preferred «to investigate the deep rooted causes of the conflict and face them with a creative and constructive spirit».<sup>9</sup> At the General Assembly of June 21, Moro included within the «unresolved problems» the right of every State to have «political independence, territorial integrity and the protection from threats and the use of force», as well as the «guaranteed freedom» of navigation. Two obvious concessions to Tel Aviv's position, only partially balanced by the hints to the refugees whose presence – according to Moro – «was one of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Telegramma di Fanfani per Moro*, Roma, 30 giugno 1967, ACS, CM, b. 56, sottofasc. 3 “ONU Conflitto arabo-israeliano. V sessione straordinaria dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite. Corrispondenza”.

<sup>8</sup> See *Appunto del Consigliere diplomatico del Pres. del Consiglio*, Roma, 4 luglio 1967, ACS, CM, b. 56, sottofasc. 3 “ONU Conflitto arabo-israeliano. V sessione straordinaria dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite. Corrispondenza”.

<sup>9</sup> *Dichiarazioni all’Ansa dell’On. Moro alla vigilia della partenza per New York*, Roma, 19 giugno 1967, ACS, CM, b. 56, sottofasc. 4 “ONU Conflitto arabo-israeliano. V sessione straordinaria dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite. Posizione italiana”, fasc. 3 “a. Consiglio dei Ministri 19 maggio 1967, b. Consiglio dei Ministri 17 giugno 1967, c. Dichiarazioni On. Moro in partenza per New York”. On Moro’s attitude toward the Arab-Israeli conflict see: F. IMPERATO, *Aldo Moro e la pace nella sicurezza. La politica estera del centro-sinistra 1963-68*, Bari, Progedit, 2011; L. RICCARDI, *Aldo Moro e il Medio Oriente (1963-1978)*, in D. CAVIGLIA - D. DE LUCA - F. PERFETTI - A. UNGARI, eds., *Aldo Moro nell’Italia contemporanea*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2011, pp. 551-583.

reasons of the instability and tensions in the region». According to Luca Riccardi, the definition of the refugees as a «human, social and political problem permanently inserted the Palestinian issue into the Italian political agenda»; however Moro never made any reference to the term “people” used by Fanfani in his speech addressed to the Senate on June 7. In his speech to Parliament on July 13 the Prime Minister referred to «the natural sympathy for the courageous Israeli people» and replied to the communist leader Longo that the failure of the Soviet sponsored resolution revealed that «the majority of the members of the United Nations did not accept the unilateral and simplistic explanation, according to which the Middle Eastern crisis derived exclusively from an Israeli aggressive act».<sup>10</sup> The Italian Jewish Community largely welcomed these official declarations as proven in the letters sent to Moro by the President of the Roman Jewish Community and by the President of the Italian Jewish Community.<sup>11</sup>

On the whole, Italy’s policy during the Six Day War was still influenced by some elements favoring the Jewish State.<sup>12</sup> First of all – as Moro explained to the Soviet Ambassador Nikita Rykov – in the

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<sup>10</sup> *Discorso del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri On. Prof. Aldo Moro*, Roma, 13 luglio 1967, ACS, CM, b. 56, fasc. “Segreteria particolare del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri. Medio Oriente. Dibattito in Parlamento 13 luglio 1967”.

<sup>11</sup> *Telegramma di Tedeschi (Presidente Comunità Ebraica di Roma) per Moro*, ACS, CM, b. 56, sottofasc. 5 “ONU Conflitto arabo-israeliano. Il Presidente Moro alla V sessione straordinaria dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite”.

<sup>12</sup> Relations between Italy and Israel are investigated in: J. ABADI, *Constraints and Adjustments in Italy’s Policy toward Israel*, in «Middle Eastern Studies», XXXVIII, 4, October 2002, pp. 63-94; I. TREMOLADA, *All’ombra degli arabi. Storia delle relazioni tra Italia e Israele*, Milano, M&B Publishing, 2003. An overview concerning Italy’s foreign policy in the Mediterranean area is in: A. BROGI, *L’Italia e l’egemonia americana nel Mediterraneo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1996; M. De LEONARDIS, ed., *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003.

Italian public opinion, «not in the more conservative, but in the more democratic and progressive, there was the deeply rooted idea that Israel's existence should be guaranteed». Whether it was a still living guilt for the Holocaust, whether it stemmed from some attracting aspects of Israeli society, a pro-Israel sentiment still prevailed and the government – as the Prime Minister recalled – «had to take it into account».<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the small parties supporting the government maintained their traditional pro-Israel approach and, finally, the Jewish State was perceived as a Western stronghold threatened by authoritarian regimes backed by Moscow. However in the following months this attitude gradually declined when the protest movements began to criticize the Western model endorsing a pro-Third World attitude. The increasing opposition to American intervention in Vietnam identified more and more Israel with Washington's imperialism thus fuelling the harsh criticism coming from the powerful Italian Communist Party.

In this changing scenario a growing coldness between Rome and Tel Aviv gradually took place. More than any other issue, at the core of the dispute lied a different perception regarding security issues. In Italy's viewpoint security implied a global or, at least, a European dimension which consequently required a peaceful solution of the conflict even to face Soviet penetration in the Mediterranean. As Moro significantly remarked during a meeting with Nasser in May 1970, «the Soviet presence [in the Mediterranean] altered the balance of power and the situation upon which wider issues such as global security and peace,

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<sup>13</sup> *Colloquio con l'ambasciatore dell'Urss Nikita Rykov*, Roma, 28 luglio 1967, ACS, CM, b. 157.

mainly European security, were based on». <sup>14</sup> Although aware that at the eve of the détente era neither Washington nor Moscow «could overcome a certain threshold in defending their clients», Moro feared that «the two superpowers could be dragged by the belligerents to overcome the limits that they had automatically imposed on themselves». <sup>15</sup> Against this perspective all the Italian initiatives aimed at downplaying the effects of the so called “war of attrition” involving Israel and Egypt. The Italian diplomacy reluctantly admitted that a political solution was «in the hands of the Four Powers» composing the Security Council, while «the true negotiations were conducted by Moscow and Washington». In this situation Italy could only promote «the diminution of tensions in the region» <sup>16</sup> turning down the Arab demands for «a more active Italian role». <sup>17</sup> This attitude inspired the Italian attempt to seek an agreement in order to freeze armaments supply, the initiative to restore a cease-fire based on the UN resolution adopted in '67, the proposal for a gradual de-escalation lead by the Big

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<sup>14</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per il Presidente della Repubblica e il Presidente del Consiglio, Il Cairo, 24 maggio 1970, CM, b. 128, fasc. “Mae. Visita nella Repubblica Araba Unita del ministro degli Esteri On. Moro (21-24 maggio 1970)”, sottofasc. “Visita nella RAU. Telegrammi e rapporti”.*

<sup>15</sup> *Telegramma di Moro a varie Ambasciate, Roma, 27 marzo 1970, CM, b. 151, fasc. 2.5 “Telegrammi. Iniziative italiane per la composizione del conflitto arabo-israeliano. Questione Medio Oriente”, sottofasc. “Archivio On. Ministro. Medio Oriente. Proposta italiana per un embargo sugli armamenti”.*

<sup>16</sup> *Appunto del Mae, s.d., CM, Mae, b. 151, fasc. 2.5 “Telegrammi. Iniziative italiane per la composizione del conflitto arabo-israeliano. Questione Medio Oriente”, sottofasc. “Archivio On. Ministro. Medio Oriente. Giugno 1970”.*

<sup>17</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Presidente della Repubblica e Presidente del Consiglio, Istanbul, 1 maggio 1970, CM, b. 128, fasc. “Mae Segreteria Generale. Riunione dei capi missione nei paesi del Medio Oriente (Istanbul, 30 aprile-1 maggio 1970)”.*

Four and, finally, the plan to guarantee the territorial integrity of Lebanon.

Although the Italian government realized that the two main actors were very far from an agreement, nonetheless the Prime Minister urged all negotiators «to seize the opportunity to seek [...] a balanced approach promoting a first attempt of de-escalation [of the conflict]». Furthermore, Moro suggested to make the Jarring mission capable of «playing a more active role by submitting concrete proposals». All these initiatives stemmed from Italy's growing awareness that time was working «to the advantage of the Soviet Union»<sup>18</sup> which was extending its control over a large portion of the Mediterranean countries including the Palestinian movements.<sup>19</sup>

On this specific subject, the Italian Prime Minister pressed Joseph Sisco, the US State Department adviser for the Middle East, to take into further account «the increasing importance of the Palestinian issue». According to the Italian diplomats, the growing number of liberation movements was transforming the refugee issue from an economic problem into a political one. This changing scenario should force Israel «not to lose touch with Nasser» and should prompt the Americans «not to give the leaders of these movements the feeling that they were listened to only in Moscow and in Beijing». Inside the Italian public opinion, Moro remarked «an emerging criticism» toward the Jewish

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<sup>18</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Washington e New York*, Roma, 19 giugno 1970, CM, b. 129, fasc. “Mae. Visita in Italia del ministro degli Affari Esteri di Israele Abba Eban (15-17 giugno 1970)”, sottofasc. “Visita del ministro Abba Eban. Telegrammi”.

<sup>19</sup> See *Telegramma di Gaja per diverse Ambasciate*, Roma, 19 giugno 1970, CM, b. 129, fasc. “Mae. Visita in Italia del ministro degli Affari Esteri di Israele Abba Eban (15-17 giugno 1970)”, sottofasc. “Visita del ministro Abba Eban. Telegrammi”.

state which, on its part, «should better not entrench behind a formal position».<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime, the Italian government pressed Washington to reject Tel Aviv's request for Phantom airplanes. According to the Italian diplomacy the supply of new weapons «would produce a dangerous effect» in the region and «would be in contrast with the aim of the mission recently operated [in the Middle East] by the Assistant Secretary of State [Joseph Sisco]».<sup>21</sup> At the eve of Nasser's visit to

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<sup>20</sup> *Telegramma di Gaja a varie ambasciate*, Roma, 24 aprile 1970, CM, b. 128, fasc. «Mae. Riunione ambasciatori Medio Oriente. Telegrammi e Varie».

<sup>21</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Mae da inoltrare all'Ambasciata a Washington*, Istanbul, 1 maggio 1970, CM, b. 128, fasc. «Mae Segreteria Generale. Riunione dei capi missione nei paesi del Medio Oriente (Istanbul, 30 aprile-1 maggio 1970)». On the US role during these years see: H.W. BRANDS, *The Wages of Globalism. Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power*, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, cap. VII; S. DE LA FOYE, *L'administration Nixon et le conflit israélo-arabe*, in «Relation Internationales», n. 94, 1998, pp. 219-232; A. DONNO - G. IURLANO, eds., *Nixon, Kissinger e il Medio Oriente (1969-1973)*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2010; P.L. HAHN, *The View from Jerusalem: Revelations about U.S. Diplomacy from the Archives of Israel*, in «Diplomatic History», XXII, 4, Fall 1998, pp. 509-532; M.C. HUDSON, *To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of US Policy toward the Middle East*, in «The Middle East Journal», L, 3, Summer 1996, pp. 329-343; N. KOCHAVI, *Nixon and Israel: Forging a Conservative Partnership*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 2009; D.W. LESCH, ed., *The Middle East and the United States*, Boulder, Co., Westview Press, 1996; D. LITTLE, *The Making of Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68*, in «International Journal of Middle East Studies», XXV, 4, November 1993, pp. 563-585; W.B. QUANDT, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, Berkely, CA, University of California Press, 2001, part I; S.L. SPIEGEL, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1985; S. YAQUB, *The Politics of Stalemate: The Nixon Administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-73*, in N. ASHTON, ed., *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73*, London and New York, Routledge, 2007, pp. 35-58; G. VALDEVIT, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Mediterraneo. Da Truman a Reagan*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1991.

Moscow, Moro warned again the Johnson administration to delete a decision which «would be psychologically inappropriate».<sup>22</sup>

Against this gloomy background, Italy abandoned the idea of a selective armaments control – considered «a little bit unrealistic»<sup>23</sup> – and realized that «every effort to moderate the two parts was doomed to failure».<sup>24</sup> In autumn 1970 the Italian diplomacy had already come to the conclusion that «both contenders aimed at winning by force» and this skepticism forced Rome to disclaim Abba Eban's offer «to replace France».<sup>25</sup> Certainly Italy did not want to hamper a common European foreign policy for the sake of a leading role in the Mediterranean region, but this decision was mainly due to the consciousness that the Jewish state froze in a «rigid and unchangeable position».<sup>26</sup>

This idea began to surface within the Italian diplomacy as a result of the visit paid by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Israel at the

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<sup>22</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Washington e New York*, Roma, 19 giugno 1970, CM, b. 129, fasc. “Mae. Visita in Italia del ministro degli Affari Esteri di Israele Abba Eban (15-17 giugno 1970)”, sottofasc. “Visita del ministro Abba Eban. Telegrammi”. The evolution of the special relationship between the US and Israel is investigated in: A. BEN-ZVI, *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993; A. BEN-ZVI, *Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel: In the Shadow of the Hawk*, London-Portland, OR, Frank Cass, 2004; D. DE LUCA, *Alle radici dell'alleanza israelo-americana 1956-1963*, Manduria, Lacaita, 2001; S. LASENSKY, *Dollarizing Peace: Nixon, Kissinger and the Creation of the U.S.-Israeli Alliance*, in «Israel Affairs», XIII,1, January 2007, pp. 164-186; E. STEPHENS, *US Policy towards Israel: The Role of Political Culture in Defining the 'Special Relationship'*, Brighton-Portland, OR, Sussex Academic Press, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> *Verbale riunione di capi missione dei paesi arabi e nel Mediterraneo*, Tunisi, 6 settembre 1970, CM, b. 130, fasc. “Mae.”.

<sup>24</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Presidente della Repubblica e Presidente del Consiglio*, New York, 23 novembre 1970, CM, b. 150, fasc. 22 “Telegrammi in arrivo riservati, riservatissimi, segreti e segretissimi”.

<sup>25</sup> *Lettera per Gaja*, Tel Aviv, 29 giugno 1971, CM, b. 153, fasc. 3.4 “Telegrammi in partenza riservati, riservatissimi, segreti, segretissimi”.

<sup>26</sup> *Nota autografa di Moro*, Roma, 31 marzo 1971, CM, b. 153, fasc. 3.4 “Telegrammi in partenza riservati, riservatissimi, segreti, segretissimi”.

beginning of March.<sup>27</sup> Before the meeting took place, the Italian ambassador, Walter Maccotta, urged Moro to stress the importance of a well trained army, of US diplomatic and military support and of a mechanism for international guarantees involving the Security Council<sup>28</sup> in order to improve Israel's security. Notwithstanding, during the conversations with the Italian delegation, Moshe Dayan and Golda Meir clarified that all the security issues were separated from a regional framework and, mostly, from the cold war dynamics. And when Moro proposed a new initiative aimed at reactivating the Channel of Suez, Dayan expressed its «skepticism» as far as «there was still the risk of a resumed conflict». According to the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs the creation of the Jewish state could be compared to «a transplant of an organ into another body (that is the Arab world) which tended to reject it». For this reason, Israel «needed safe and defendable borders as long as the presence of this new state would be accepted».<sup>29</sup> In the following meeting, Golda Meir confirmed this position stating that, after the disappointing experiences of '67, any international guarantee could be taken into account «only if in addition to safe borders».<sup>30</sup> Golda Meir's

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<sup>27</sup> An assessment of the talks is in RICCARDI, *Il "problema Israele"*, cit., pp. 380-386.

<sup>28</sup> *Lettera di Maccotta per Moro*, Tel Aviv, 24 febbraio 1971, CM, b. 133, fasc. "Mae. Visita in Israele del ministro degli Affari Esteri Aldo Moro (4-8 marzo 1971)", sottofasc. "Mae. Visita in Israele del ministro degli Affari Esteri Aldo Moro. Argomenti di conversazione".

<sup>29</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Presidente della Repubblica e Presidente del Consiglio*, Tel Aviv, 8 marzo 1971, CM, b. 133, fasc. "Mae. Visita in Israele del ministro degli Affari Esteri Aldo Moro (4-8 marzo 1971)", sottofasc. "Visita in Israele On. Ministro. Telegrammi e documentazione".

<sup>30</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Presidente della Repubblica e Presidente del Consiglio*, Tel Aviv, 8 marzo 1971, CM, b. 133, fasc. "Mae. Visita in Israele del ministro degli Affari Esteri Aldo Moro (4-8 marzo 1971)", sottofasc. "Visita in Israele On. Ministro. Telegrammi e documentazione".

reply confirmed to the Italian Foreign Minister that «the acceptance of a likely resumption of the hostilities appeared to be a demonstration of strength nourished by the Israeli leaders».<sup>31</sup>

As pointed out by the General Secretary of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ludovico Gaja, the Israelis «were basically convinced that their country was strong enough to afford the disapproval of the majority of the worldwide public opinion and, with some limits, of the American government too». Moreover, the Italian diplomat envisaged a connection between the Israeli and the Soviet position on the grounds of a common interest to promote a situation similar to «neither peace nor war»<sup>32</sup> based on partial solutions. This approach obviously ruled out both the fulfillment of the Rogers plan and the option of a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories, while the declaration of the EEC ministers favoring the application of the 242 resolution increased tensions. Against these growing differences between Rome and Tel Aviv, within the Italian diplomacy began to surface an increasing criticism toward the Jewish state. At times these reproaches coincided with astonishing prejudices as it turned out from this note prepared for Moro by the Italian ambassador in Israel Walter Maccotta: «[The Jews] are, in fact, one people, one entity, one ethnic and one religious group, completely separated. According to the Jews the world is divided into two parts: the chosen people and the Goims. Someone, turning upside down this reasoning has said that the two parts are the anti-semitics and the jews: and this too is partially true. A kind of feeling deeply rooted

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<sup>31</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per Presidente della Repubblica e Presidente del Consiglio*, cit.

<sup>32</sup> *Telegramma di Gaja per varie Ambasciate*, Roma, 14 marzo 1971, CM, b. 153, fasc. 3.4 “Telegrammi in partenza riservati, riservatissimi, segreti, segretissimi”.

in the jews of Israel and especially in the ruling class [...]. They perceived themselves not only encircled by an Arab ocean [...], but as objects, or naturally designated victims, either of hostility or of generalized misunderstandings that they returned with the same coin. The “ghetto complex” – although, today, triumphalistic – is a peculiar element of Israel. This sentiment explains both its unshakeable need of recognition and security, and its tenacity and strong will to resist even against all [...]. In the Middle East conflict two opposing extremisms are clashing, and all territorial, procedural, even economic issues often tend to disappear compared to a deep and irreparable meta-politic difference, involving religious and ideological characters».<sup>33</sup>

Undoubtedly Maccotta’s opinions were far from the one expressed ten years before by the counsel in Haifa, Furio Zampetti, who labeled Judaism as «nothing other than a movement based on racism of a clear nature ».<sup>34</sup>

Nonetheless, in that period the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed a more aggressive attitude and defined Zionism as a «reaction» against «an impossible yet sought assimilation». After this superficial statement, the note prepared in June ’70 examined the “double loyalty” issue maintaining that if the country of residence and citizenship of the Jews should adopt a unfavorable policy towards Israel a “dramatic” situation could arise. This would occur since the Jews «exploited, skillfully and daringly, the accusation of anti-semitism to

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<sup>33</sup> *Appunto di Maccotta in vista della visita di Moro sulle peculiarità di Israele*, Tel Aviv, s.d., CM, b. 133, fasc. “Mae. Visita in Israele del ministro degli Affari Esteri Aldo Moro (4-8 marzo 1971)”, sottofasc. “Visita in Israele On. Ministro. Telegrammi e documentazione”.

<sup>34</sup> On the same subject see RICCARDI, *Il “problema Israele*, cit., pp. 133- 136.

hinder all anti-Israel governments»; and for this purpose they could rely on a strong influence «which could not be compared to their number: just like the feudal lords in the medieval age». The document concluded that «the Jews from all over the world acted behind Israel, with the strength due to a maximum presence in many centers of power and religiously convinced of their presence in the world due to a divine promise, while other states, people, regimes disappeared as history had proven».<sup>35</sup>

The harsh tones of the analysis signaled a growing divide, even psychological, between the two countries. On one hand, the Italian ambassador remarked that «within the Israeli policy makers and public opinion a certain nervousness and an anti-goim sentiment nourished with far-off historic memories apart from recent political events» was increasing. On the other, the international public opinion – as Maccotta explained – was more and more critical about the Jewish state since its position regarding the territories seemed anachronistic in a time which constantly «rejected the burden of conquest».<sup>36</sup>

This new trend following the Six Day War obviously paved the way to the pro-Arab policy that emerged during the October '73 War.<sup>37</sup> It is well known that the risk of an oil embargo carried out by the OPEC countries prompted all the EEC's members, except Netherland, to adopt

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<sup>35</sup> *Appunto del Mae "Lo Stato d'Israele e l'Ebraismo mondiale"*, CM, b. 129, fasc. "Mae. Visita in Italia del ministro degli Affari Esteri di Israele Abba Eban (15-17 giugno 1970)", sottofasc. "Visita del ministro Abba Eban. Brindisi".

<sup>36</sup> *Telegramma di Maccotta per Mae*, Tel Aviv, 22 maggio 1971, CM, b. 152, fasc. 3.2 "Telegrammi in arrivo riservati, riservatissimi, segreti, segretissimi".

<sup>37</sup> For a thoughtful study on Italy's policy in this period see: L. RICCARDI, *Sempre più con gli arabi. La politica italiana verso il Medio Oriente dopo la guerra del Kippur (1973-1976)*, in «Nuova Storia Contemporanea», X, 6, novembre-dicembre 2006, pp. 57-82.

«an autonomous position [...] in regards to the United States»<sup>38</sup> in the joint declarations of October 13<sup>th</sup> and November 6<sup>th</sup>. The Italian ministry of foreign affairs pointed out that «unlike in '67 Europe did not stand unconditionally on Israel's side» and sometimes «indifference and even hostility from a large part of the European public opinion, including Italy» emerged.<sup>39</sup> As far as it was concerned, the Italian government assumed that the oil crisis strengthened the two superpowers and weakened the Arabs and the European countries. Therefore Italy carried on its new Mediterranean approach within the framework of a European policy trying to keep good relations with the Arab countries in sight of a renewed cooperation.

After the conflict, the Italian diplomacy often claimed its pro-Arab initiatives: the bilateral assistance conceded to many Arab states, the attempts to promote in the US «a greater sensitivity regarding the Mediterranean situation» and, finally, the European positions adopted within the Security Council «in favor of the Arab cause and in contrast with the US». Despite all the efforts, in the short term Italy did not avoid the embargo imposed by the OPEC countries in December '73 and the continuation of a divisive strategy which – according to Moro –

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<sup>38</sup> *Appunto del Mae*, Roma, CM, b. 156, fasc. “Mae. Segreteria Generale. Visita dell’On. Ministro nella R.A.E.”.

<sup>39</sup> *Telegramma di Montezemolo per Mae*, Tel Aviv, 17 ottobre 1973, CM, b. 163, fasc. 1 “Telegrammi 1973”, sottofasc. 2 “Telegrammi in partenza riservati, riservatissimi, segreti, segretissimi 1973”.

weakened the European chances «of influencing to a certain degree»<sup>40</sup> the two superpowers.

Nonetheless the Christian democratic leader relentlessly pursued a dialogue between Europe and the Arab countries based on «open minds and looking toward the future generations, involving industrial, agricultural, technological and political aspects». This aim obviously implied some more political concessions to the Arab's viewpoint. In his speech addressed to the Commission of Foreign Affairs in January 1974, Moro called for an integral application of the 242 «wholeheartedly in all its parts», and he referred to the Palestinian issue as «a political problem which could not be ignored» because they «were not seeking for assistance but for a homeland». Therefore Israel should relinquish «all the occupied territories» and even the delicate issue of the Holocaust could not be invoked since the Jewish state should cease being «a besieged fortress» to become «an element composing a geo-political order». In replying to the accusations of opportunism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirmed that Italy was acting «always along the same line», but when he stressed the efforts carried out «in order to guarantee the energetic supplies necessary to the industry and civil life»,<sup>41</sup> the change of Italy's diplomatic priorities appeared evident.

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<sup>40</sup> *Telegramma di Moro per varie Ambasciate*, Roma, 6 gennaio 1974, CM, b. 163, fasc. 2 “Telegrammi 1974”, sottofasc. 3 “Telegrammi in partenza riservati, riservatissimi, segreti, segretissimi 1974”.

<sup>41</sup> *Relazione di Moro alla Commissione Esteri del Senato*, 23 gennaio 1974, CM, b. 156, fasc. “Mae. Segreteria Generale. Visita dell’On. Ministro nella R.A.E.”.

During a visit of Sadat two years later, Moro confirmed Italy's preference for the return «of all the territories occupied by Israel» and the right of the Palestinians «to create their homeland». The change of the Italian attitude was so well understood that during the talks the Egyptian President insisted on arms supply in order to replace the Soviet arsenal. Even though unwilling to sell arms to Cairo, Moro told Sadat that the government «would examine all possibilities»,<sup>42</sup> thus showing how far Italy was from the embargo policy pursued in the previous years.

The different evolution of the concept of security, the change of the public opinions' attitude and the energetic crisis were key elements explaining the increasing tension between Italy and Israel at the beginning of the 1970's. From the second half of the decade another factor emerged: in view of what was later called the "*compromesso storico*" a pro-Arab policy became a common ground encouraging the participation of the Italian Communist Party to the government. In short, many elements concurred in shaping a different approach and the growing consciousness that national interests laid on better relations with the Arabs gradually pushed the Italian diplomacy to adopt a new Mediterranean policy which lasted for a long time.

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<sup>42</sup> *Resoconto dell'incontro tra Sadat e Moro alla presenza dei ministri degli Esteri Rumor e Fahmi*, Roma, 6 aprile 1976, CM, b. 125, fasc. "Mae Segreteria Generale. Visita di Stato in Italia del Presidente della Repubblica di Egitto Anwar El-Sadat. Roma 5-8 aprile 1976".

