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from the 18th century to the present day*

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REJECTING THE WRONG CAUSE. FASCIST PLOTS AND DEMOCRATIC LOYALTY IN THE ITALIAN MILITARY INSTITUTIONS. 1961-1981

Paolo FORMICONI (Italy)

60's: the time is changing

At the beginning of Sixties italian political, social and economic factors was changing. On one side, the end of the old parliamentary deal had forced to enlarge the government to the Socialist Party. On the other one, the transformation of the national economic structure, from an agrarian country to an industrial one, had caused the surge on the scene of a great work class, with a powerful union organization, for the great part oriented on the left side, with the Communist Party.

A worrying rise for those who saw the italian social balance and membership of the Atlantic alliance as threatened in the future.

So, the rough social confrontation that the following years was produced in Italy and the frequent political crisis, joint with the students and industrial workers riots of the 1968-69, make the extreme right side to try an anti-democratic manouver, oriented to a military putch, similar to the one produced in Greece in the 1967.

But when all had started?

Experiments, temptations, deceptions, what else?

Hence the idea of the real possibility of an alliance between neo-fascist movements, Atlantic services and high military ranks to undermine the Italian parliamentary regime.

But what exactly was the framework of this plot? What is the *arrière pensée* of those who wanted to build a conspiracy against the legitimate authority in Italy?

On the far right side, the whole issue began with the end of the Second World War, or the “non-end” of the war. In the historical vision of Italian neo-fascism, the World War was only the first round of a global conflict between the Marxist powers and the Western powers. The defeat of the Nazi-Fascist front in 1945, from this perspective, represented an unfortunate incident, a temporary stage in the natural course of history, in which a new conflict would be replaced by the unnatural alliance of the USA, Russia and Great Britain, that had won the previous war.

From this perspective, exactly complementary to the extreme Marxian historical dialectic, the weak and confused Italian political structure would not have survived for long. In the event of a civil war against the left, or of real danger, as in Greece or the Iberian peninsula, the Western powers would replace the Italian political leadership with a strong government, if not with a second fascist dictatorship, an authoritarian regime, with a large share of military, old and young fascists and various arch-conservatives picked from the industry, judiciary and upper class. A military coup, even with only part of the Military Forces, would have been the expedient to achieve the objective.

The entry of the Italian Socialist Party into the governing alliance in 1962 and the growing strikes and student riots in Italian cities in the following years encouraged, at the same time, the far right that the decisive moment was coming, and that it would be enough only another strong shot to throw the nation into division and civil war, a preliminary and indispensable step to a coup.

Liaisons dangerous

A sort of collaboration between the military secret services and some far-right journalists, especially in the field of information and anti-communist propaganda in the barracks, had been underway since the early 1960s.

At the same time, some neo-fascist militants were inserted by the US services into the secret networks set up in the event of a Soviet invasion. Their rank, as will appear from documents classified in subsequent years, was absolutely low and they were not involved in the confidential part of the organization. But even the collaboration alone had developed in young right-wing militants the exciting idea of taking part in the anti-communist war, and had opened up in their minds the possibility of carrying on the show too.

Furthermore, a part of the official class of the fascist era was still in service but this not have played a great role in the tolerance, or dangerous affinity, with men who, at the same time, cultivated relationships with groups of the extra-parliamentary right.

After the war, the Italian State dismissed all high-ranking Army officers who had taken part in the Italian Socialist Republic, the fascist puppet state created by Nazi Germany in Central-Northern Italy between 1943 and 1945.

Military justice had been quite lenient on them, including war crimes suspects, but all post-war military leadership came from anti-German war veterans.

Only officers from the rank of lieutenant colonel to the lower rank remained in service, but their careers would be cut short at the colonel level, and none would take any positions in the Intelligence Service or in a top command.

Some officers, who were not fascists, despite it, though that in a future war the collaboration of some exponent of the extreme right would be useful, in particular to contrast the red propaganda, that was really underway, among the conscripts, but also in case of asymmetric and psyco war.

So, however the Army Chief of Staff, general Giuseppe Aloja had fight in the war leading a partisan group, he decided to start the collaboration with the extreme right wing journalist Guido Giannettini, close friend of some of the major neo-fascist leader.

Subsequently, some explained that this the relationship was also a sort of indirect control of the extreme right activities, but this idea is incoherent. In the 1965 a sort of think tank, founded by the Minister of Defence, the Pollio Institute, made a congress about the "Revolutionary war".

Attended at the congress many military counselors and journalists, joint with a group of young students as spectators, led by Stefano delle Chiaie, another right wing extremist, in contact with many foreign secret services, in Europe and in Latin America.

While it is clear that a terrorist plot could not have been organized in a public conference, the event is proof that close official contacts such as this were not considered inappropriate.

Aloja was replaced in 1966 at the helm of the Army by Giovanni De Lorenzo, former commander of the Carabinieri and former director of the Italian secret services. De Lorenzo, who also participated in the War of Liberation, was famed as a left-wing soldier, and his nomination was probably also a political signal.

However, in 1967 he was suddenly accused by a journalistic campaign of having organised, together with the former President of the Republic Antonio Segni, a coup d'état, during the political crisis of the summer of 1962, while negotiations were taking place for the first government between the Christian Democratic Party and Socialist Party.

The hypothetical plot, called Piano Solo/Alone Plan, was a public order emergency plan, of which no one was aware at the time and which the general, at the request of President Segni, effectively ordered his staff to prepare. The plan remained in the

confidential drawers of the Carabinieri Command and, probably to hinder the action of the chief of staff De Lorenzo, it was sent to the newspapers by someone still unknown.

Fired from office, De Lorenzo spent the rest of his life defending his reputation.

The following year was 1968, the beginning of the student and industrial crisis in Italy.

Strikes, accidents, riots became frequent, while the government implemented some of the great political and administrative reforms: of public safety, of criminal procedure, of labor law, amidst the opposition of those who judged all this to be too much and those who judged it to be too little.

In this difficult situation, on 12 December 1969 a bomb caused the first massacre of the plumb years in Milan. Initially the blame was placed on the far left, then it became clear that those responsible were on the other side.

Today we know that the authors were some far-right activists, belonging to a group called Ordine Nuovo, which would have accelerated the course of the social crisis towards a civil war.

Just a month later, more or less, on the night of December 8, a former commander of the fascist navy, Junio Valerio Borghese, attempted to occupy the palace of power in Rome, with a few hundred followers, including 196 forest guards .

Interrupted a few hours after it began, and after a raid in the Minister of Interior affairs, the strange operation vanished without anyone noticing, and was discovered only three months later. Shortly afterwards, responsibility for the 12th massacre also became public.

Another Legal proceedings were also initiated against the far-right associations involved in the massacre of Milan, but two witnesses suddenly disappeared abroad, with the help of an intelligence officer, as it turned out shortly afterwards.

In the 1971, the legal italian right wing party, the MSI, were accused by the judiciary of reconstruction of Fascist Party, and started a rough inquiry.

Few months later, the fascist activist Vincenzo Vinciguerra killed with a bombs three soldiers near Udine. In his will, he would destroy the idea, still alive in his comerades, that a deal with the institution were possible.

The Ordine Nuovo organization, involved in the Milan massacre, were banned from the judiciary on the 21th November 1973.

1974: the decisive year

In the autumn of 1973 another attempted conspiracy, called Rosa dei Venti/Rose of Winds has been discovered. The political request to the military structure for a cleaning

were now strong. On the 30 december 1974 the investigations into the various fascist plots were brought together in a single trial. From this moment the action of the Italian state changed sharply. First the heads of the military intelligence services were replaced, then the entire sector was reformed and doubled with the civilian intelligence service.

The chief of the military secret service, general Vito Miceli, was dismissed for his proximity to some of the golpist of the 8 december, and demanded to a trial in the 1975. In the 1978 he were judged not-guilty for treason, but his credibility and the general style of conduction has been strongly censured by the court.

While the new director of military intelligence, Admiral Mario Casardi, was building the new secret service, another strange plot, without the complicity of the fascist wing, was discovered. Called the White Coup, it was a theoretical project by some former monarchist partisans to discourage the Christian Democrats from continuing their alleged left-wing policies. They were arrested and tried along with everyone else.

The far right's reaction to the state's reaction was bloody. On May 28th a bomb caused a massacre in the city of Brescia, a second bomb exploded on August 4th on a train. Many other small attacks were launched in the following days.

On January 24, 1975, fascist activist Mario Tuti killed two policemen who attempted to arrest him. If in their previous plans the civil war was achievable with the help of the state and military forces, from this moment the far right began its battle against the state. Mario Occorsio, the judge who banned Ordine Nuovo was killed in the 1976.

In the sequent years, the Carabinieri Corp, part of the Army, and the Police, reformed as the indication of the minister Taviani, took principal part in the war against the terrorism.

Thus, the of right-wing terrorism failed to create the condition of civil war in 1969 and subsequent years, and shortly thereafter, in 1974, when the government purged the military institution of the last fascist legacy and struck with legal rulings the fascist organizations, they transformed into enemies of the State and also of the military, starting the second phase of black terrorism in Italy, which will end only in the early 1980s, with the victory of the democratic State.

Conclusions

In the crucial years, approximately from 1969 to 1982, the Italian military institutions were involved in a great crisis that occurred within Italian society during the Cold War period.

In this period the old military structures, reborn after the defeat in the Second World War, were forced to transform together with the entire Italian State, following the evolution taking place in the social, political and international context.

This transformation was opposed by a small part of the military community itself, a minority of which dreamed of the possibility of an authoritarian involution of the Italian political course. Some, driven by a surviving fascist suggestion, others driven by the red scare and the search for a quick career advantage, planned a possible coup d'état together with the far right.

The small number of them, the democratic loyalty of most of the high and middle ranks, in the Military Forces as well as in the Police, and finally the fall in the Seventies of the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish dictatorship and the joint action of the government and the judiciary produced the failure of all these plots and the resettlement of the Italian institutions under the democratic banner, followed by the offensive against fascist associations and their companions.

Precisely in the midst of this process, the attacks of political terrorism occurred, from the right at first, then from the left.

However, the chances of authoritarian change in Italy were extremely slim. First of all there was no popular condescension towards political adventures. The defeat in the last war, a discreet and growing spread of well-being and a general, if not in a minimal part of the people, desire for democratic development, demagnetize the idea of a strong government in national politics.

At the same time, the Army and the others military institution, included the military part of the Police, were managed from a leadership anticommunist but strictly loyal to the Christian-Democratic party at the power, that was totally against the idea of lease the power to a re-born fascist regime or such like this.

Finally, the negative experience of the italian fascist dictatorship in the european history was too near in the time yet, and the international favour about this possibility was low, expecially for the dangerous consequences for the democracy regime in West Germany.

Winning the war against terrorism needed many years and many blood yet. Only in at the beginning of the Eighty's the cruel phenomenon was defeated, without special laws, without interruptions of the democratic life, without the obstacles that, in large sense, terrorist wills would want put in to the great transformation of the italian society.

The french example in the case of the Algerian war had showed as a democratic system is not so easy to overpowered.

Authors short CV

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