

H-France Review Vol. 3 (August 2003), No. 86

Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem. The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958*. Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger Publishers, 2002. xvi + 315 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S.(cl). ISBN 0-275-97293-3.

Review by Julius W. Friend, George Washington University.

Alessandro Brogi states the purpose of his book immediately in his introduction: "Scholars have overlooked the extent to which considerations of prestige or status (I will use the two terms interchangeably) affected France and Italy's relationships with the United States" (p.1). Since Brogi abundantly footnotes references to important books on Italian foreign policy that cover this period^[1] and innumerable books on France and the United States wrestle with the French obsession with status, the question immediately arises, "What's new here?" Although diplomatic history has yielded its formerly pre-eminent role to a number of fields or fashions in current historiography, studies of international relations in the early Cold War years are not exactly scarce. However, separate treatment of France and Italy in this period is the norm. Their comparison, Brogi believes "reveals patterns and characteristics of their foreign policies that have remained hidden in separate treatments of the two countries" (p. 2).

The author asserts that many historians explain away the French and Italian search for prestige during the Cold War as a matter of appearance meant primarily for a domestic audience, with little effect on internal stability and less on international relations (although no examples are cited). Not so, says Brogi, "...appearance and substance were inextricably linked together for France and Italy, even in the first decade of the Cold War.... France and Italy's pursuit of prestige served not only their political, but also their strategic and economic interests, and consequently had a significant impact on the Western alliance in general" (p.2). Prestige, like appearance, was believed by French and Italian leaders to produce the substance of future power—a belief the author considers a "constant assumption in French and Italian international choices" (p. 2).

There is no question that prestige cannot ever be entirely divorced from substance, but was the appearance of prestige or status able by itself to produce future power? And did the French and Italians really think it could, or did they play the only cards they had at the end of World War II? An important case in point is the Yalta decision to include France as an occupying power in postwar Germany and to award France a seat in the United Nations Security Council. In the winter and spring of 1945, French prestige was only slightly above its nadir. Franklin Roosevelt's views were expressed by Harry Hopkins in conversation with de Gaulle: "The reason [for American policy toward France] is above all the stupefying disappointment which France inflicted on us in 1940 when we saw her collapse in disaster and then in capitulation. Judging that France was no longer what she had been, we could not trust her to play a great part.... Are we not justified in using caution in what we expect of her in bearing with us the weight of tomorrow's peace?"^[2] France was not even invited to Yalta. Stalin had no interest in giving France an occupation zone; Roosevelt was only persuaded by Hopkins and Churchill. In a Europe where Soviet power was manifest, where Roosevelt declared that American troops would be withdrawn

within two years, where the future role of Germany was an open question, the British leader believed it essential to strengthen the French position.

Prestige did not produce this result. De Gaulle, to his dying day, never forgave the slight the Allied powers had given France, even though the Yalta decisions had favored her. Churchill believed that, in future, France would have the substance of power; however, appearances in February 1945 better supported Roosevelt's doubts. Rather than prestige producing substance, the anticipation of future substance produced prestige.

Historians primarily concerned with France will also ask themselves whether French and Italian desires to regain prestige are entirely comparable. Certainly the differences in their two situations were great, as Brogi easily concedes. Italy had been Nazi Germany's ally before changing sides and becoming a "co-belligerent." There was no question, despite some Italian hopes, of their retaining the Dodecanese islands, Libya or Eritrea, and even the question of Trieste and its environs dragged out until 1954. Italy had no past military prestige. Nor was it clear, especially after Stalin quarreled with Yugoslavia, that Italy had any great strategic value.

Moreover, by treating American frustrations with France on policy over Germany as perceptions of French weakness, Brogi gives too little notice to one aspect of French strategic importance: simple geography—France as Germany's neighbor. France had to be strongly dissuaded from the idea of carving up parts of West Germany into independent states; France created difficulties during the process of uniting the Western occupation zones for economic purposes, and later needed to be pressured into agreement on a West German government. But in all these matters, the French position was important and had to be taken into account, while the Italian position was not. Even before the French-German reconciliation that began with the Schuman plan in 1950, French-German relations were a central factor in the postwar complex. Given this centrality, Italy's problems with Yugoslavia, although often headaches for the U.S. and Britain, offered nothing comparable.

Brogi's overly narrow focus on France and Italy leads him to an occasional misunderstanding of French-German relations. He remarks, for instance, that the de Gaulle-Adenauer meeting at Colombey in September 1958 "was immediately celebrated as an historical landmark, setting up Franco-German entente in the name of European integration. But it was also an exercise in deception. The chancellor...reacted with rage when he learned, a few days later, of the plan for a world directorate" (p. 246). This is quite true—but Brogi fails to note that Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin soon after, and de Gaulle's strong backing for Adenauer's position, erased that rage and confirmed the French-German entente.

But the two Latin countries did have in common powerful Communist parties and, as the Cold War chilled down, American fears of Communism and the strength of the French and Italian Communist parties lent force to what Brogi well terms, quoting Churchill, "tyrannical weakness" (p. 17 and *ad passim*). For the politicians of the Fourth Republic, raising the threat of increased Communist votes if they did something the Americans wanted was a useful tactic. In Italy, where the Christian Democrats ruled for more than forty years, playing up to the Communist menace in Italy was a trusted way of manipulating the United States. The Americans always responded to the red flag waved at them.

Brogi traces the initial course of what he terms "the old game," in which politicians in both countries tried (rather tentatively, to be sure) to see if they could play off the Soviets against the Americans, with de Gaulle's December 1944 visit to Moscow and an Italian initiative, the earlier Soviet recognition of the Badoglio government. The purpose was to alarm the British and Americans and pressure them to revise the armistice terms (p. 50). Neither of these tactics worked very well. De Gaulle was principally interested in obtaining Stalin's support for setting up small French-dominated statelets in West Germany; Stalin at that point wanted a united Germany, the better to loot it. However, Brogi places

more emphasis on the symbolic aspect of de Gaulle's visit, quoting Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, "The spectacle counted more than the agreement itself" (p. 56). The Italians, for their part, found that the Soviets were not much interested in state-to-state relations, placing their future hopes on the advance of the Italian Communist party.

Even while negotiating with the Soviets, both the French and the Italians recognized that restoration of their status really depended on economic aid, which only the United States could provide. Brogi calls this process "mastering interdependence," which meant rejecting the seemingly attractive course of a third force independent of both Soviet and American influence and working as well as possible with the American hegemon. With the Marshall Plan and early negotiations for the Atlantic pact, statesmen in both Paris and Rome began to think of "interdependence as a new avenue for continental leadership (for France) or to equality with the other great powers (for Italy)" (p.102). But the looming question of German rearmament posed new problems during the long discussion over the European Defense Community.

When describing French motives, American diplomats tended to see them as questions of mere prestige, verging on neurosis. The French view was obviously different, as Charles Bohlen pointed out to George Kennan in an exchange of memoranda in 1949 (p.120). Kennan had used the expressions "neuroses" and "hysterics" when describing French worries about the Germans. Bohlen reproached Kennan for following the still widespread tendency to label the feelings of France and other continental nations "as the product of psychological jitters." In fact, he argued, French behavior was "rooted in a very cold-blooded, realistic appraisal of the probable result of an American withdrawal from the continent, a German-dominated coalition" (p. 120). It is not always easy to determine whether Brogi's insistent emphasis on questions of status comforts Kennan's thesis or Bohlen's.

There can be no doubt that the idea of rank plays a very large role in French diplomatic thinking. For the French, status is always important, and this concept is in no way confined to the diplomats and other elites, but reaches deep into the population at large. Yet questions of rank in France and Italy are not comparable. Certainly after World War II, Italian statesmen sought to gain status for their battered and discredited country. But it is doubtful whether this fixation with status normally applies in Italy. The Trieste question did seem to have evoked widespread popular excitement before its resolution in 1954, but the Italians are, in general, far less nationalistic than the French. "The maxim that every country seeks power, security, and glory has remarkably little application in Italy," wrote Frederick Spotts and Theodor Wieser. "Almost all Italians, political leaders and public alike, take for granted that their country has no appreciable role to play in international affairs and would be mistaken and frustrated if it tried to do so." [3]

In his final chapter, the author restates an earlier emphasis which has occasionally become lost in the complicated argument: "...French and Italian fixations with issues such as the Saar and Trieste were dictated by economic and security imperatives as much as by considerations of national honor" (p. 260). The Saar question, in fact, was far more one of economic interest than of national honor. Although American diplomats thought their interlocutors overly concerned with questions of rank, a historian's judgments equating questions of rank with more mundane considerations are inevitably highly subjective. To this reviewer, an interesting thesis has often been given more weight than it can support.

Brogi certainly knows his Italian sources--an earlier book covers the Italian material under review. [4] Brogi has done a great deal of work, including archival research, in French materials as well. An occasional slip on France creeps in: Robert Schuman is described as "Alsatian" and Algeria as a "formal colony," not a protectorate like Tunisia or Morocco (p. 92 and p. 178). If the Americans, with some justice, considered Algeria a colony, the French emphatically did not, and the distinction was important. Overall, however, Brogi's work is a highly detailed and well-documented retelling of U.S.-French and U.S.-Italian diplomacy from 1944 to 1958 and beyond.

NOTES

[1] James E. Miller, *The United States and Italy, 1940-1950: The Politics and Diplomacy of Stabilization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); John L. Harper, *America and the Reconstruction of Italy, 1945-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[2] Quoted by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, "Changes in French Foreign Policy since 1945, in *In Search of France. The Economy, Society, and Political System in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann (New York: Harper and Row, 1965): 330.

[3] Frederick Spotts and Theodor Wieser, *Italy, a Difficult Democracy. A Survey of Italian Politics* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 263.

[4] Alessandro Brogi, *Italia e l'egemonia americana nel Mediterraneo* (Florence: Scandicci : La Nuova Italia, 1996).

Julius W. Friend
The George Washington University
jwfriend@gwu.edu

Copyright © 2003 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies. ISSN 1553-9172