

“To what extent was the victory of the Christian Democratic Party in the Italian general election, on 18th April 1948, due to US intervention in the campaign?”

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Criteria A: Identification and evaluation of sources

The focus of this investigation is the research question: “To what extent was the victory of the Christian Democratic Party in the Italian general election, on 18th April 1948, due to US intervention in the campaign?” A primary source relevant to the investigation is a telegram sent by the US Ambassador in Italy James Dunn to the US Secretary General G. Marshall on 16th March 1948. The source is relevant because it offers insight into an official diplomatic position at the time of the election campaign and is from an authoritative figure in Italy. A relevant secondary source is historian William Blum’s book ‘Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II’. The book offers this investigation an analysis of US intervention in Italy, and puts its involvement in 1948 into a broader context and benefits from hindsight.

A value of the origin of the telegram is that it offers insight into what the US was told about the situation in Italy and outlines the potential response to a left-wing victory in the Italian election of 1948. A value of its purpose is that, as a confidential communication, Dunn can be direct and frank in his recommendations. A value of the content is that Dunn’s diplomatic position means that he was informed about events occurring in Italy and outlines factors that may have shaped US intervention in the election.

A limitation of the origin is that as a US diplomat Dunn may not fully appreciate the social and cultural sentiments involved in Italian politics and may be influenced by the Truman administration’s position on containing Communism in Europe, thus exaggerating the threat it posed in Italy. A limitation of its purpose is that the telegram merely briefs and advises and it also does not reveal the extent to which Dunn’s views influenced the US government’s policy. A limitation of the content is

that it focuses on the potential 'threat' by left-wing parties and lacks balance in terms of popular sentiment and the role of center and right-wing parties.

A value of the origin of the publication by William Blum is that it was written by an expert on US foreign policy, whose publications have been recognised as authoritative on the subject by historians such as Noam Chomsky.¹ The publication date, 2003,² implies that Blum had the benefit of hindsight and that he could access government sources that were restricted up to the 1990s. A value of the purpose is that as an academic study, Blum may attempt to offer a balanced analysis of events. A value of the content is that Blum had access to declassified CIA reports and government documents and gives examples of when and how the US intervened.³

A limitation of the origin is that Blum is critical of US interventions and this may lead to a lack of objectivity in his account.⁴ A limitation of the purpose is that the book covers a broad scope of US intervention and intends to find parallels between involvement in the Italian election and other intervention. A limitation of the content is that Blum's analysis is primarily focused on US interests and actions, and therefore the role of Italian domestic aspects in determining the outcome of the election are marginalised.

¹ "Killing Hope U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II," William Blum, accessed May 13, 2017, <https://williamblum.org/books/killing-hope>

² William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Zed Books, 2003), accessed October 25, 2017, https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=it&lr=&id=-lbQvd13uToC&oi=fnd&pg=PA3&ots=cJqbNeFmhH&sig=zTMCJKWDtdUvoXgwQif_RYdSMNw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

³ William Blum, "Italy, 1947-1948: Free Elections, Hollywood-style," in *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II*, accessed October 24, 2017, <https://williamblum.org/chapters/killing-hope/italy>

⁴ "Killing Hope U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II," William Blum, accessed May 13, 2017, <https://williamblum.org/books/killing-hope>

Criteria B: Investigation

The events leading to the victory of the Christian Democratic Party in the Italian general election of 18th April 1948⁵ were deeply controversial and went on to shape the country in the post-war period. The election was focused on two possible political outcomes, a victory by the Popular Democratic Front (FP), a left-wing coalition which united the Communist Party (PCI), the Socialist Party (PSI) and other left-wing groups, or a victory by the Christian Democrats (DC), a liberal party led by Alcide De Gasperi.⁶ The outcome of the election, 48% in favour of the DC and 31% in favour of the FP,⁷ was significant as it shifted political control away from the left in a nation that many believed was inclined to become a socialist state.⁸ The controversy of the election lies in the role of the US, who promoted the DC through covert operations, financial assistance and propaganda.⁹ Although historian Noam Chomsky suggests that US action was pivotal in determining the result of the election, historians such as James Miller claim that the defeat of the FP was primarily due to the coalition's weaknesses, and to the DC's inherent strengths.

It could be argued that US intervention was significant in determining the outcome of the election, as it made the defeat of the left inevitable. Historian Noam Chomsky, argues that the key method used by the US to manipulate the result was economic pressure.¹⁰ In 1947 Italy became a recipient

⁵ James Edward Miller, *The United States and Italy, 1940-1950: The Politics and Diplomacy of Stabilization*, 248, <https://www.questiaschool.com/read/98449704/the-united-states-and-italy-1940-1950-the-politics>

⁶ Francesco Bonini, *La Grande Contrapposizione: Aspetti delle Elezioni del 1948 a Reggio Emilia* (n.p.: Tecnograph, 1990)

⁷ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 34

⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *54. Weekly Summary Excerpt, 30 December 1947, Prospects for Communist Action in Italy*, December 30, 1947, accessed February 17, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/assessing-the-soviet-threat-the-early-cold-war-years/5563bod2.pdf>

⁹ James Edward Miller, "Taking off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948," *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 1 (January 1983): accessed March 14, 2017, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.1983.tb00381.x

¹⁰ Noam Chomsky, "Noam Chomsky on the Long History of US Meddling in Foreign Elections," interview by C. J. Polychroniou, *Truthout*, January 19, 2017, accessed March 12, 2017, <https://chomsky.info/20170119/>

of the European Recovery Program and by 1948 it depended on US material aid.¹¹ However, in 1947 the US government threatened to terminate this aid if there was a 'Communist victory' in 1948.¹² In his Marshall Plan speech in June 1947, G. Marshall, declared that if "political parties... which... perpetuate human misery" took power in recipient countries, ERP aid to those nations would be terminated.¹³ This economic coercion was articulated after the Truman administration declared that \$227 million was appropriated for interim aid, and would be sent to Italy to help redress its post-war recession but only following a 'Communist' defeat in the election.¹⁴ This put pressure on the FP, leading to internal divisions,¹⁵ and influenced the opinion of Italian voters, who realised that a left-wing victory would be economically devastating.¹⁶ Additionally, as the Soviets did not want parties affiliated to them to receive Marshall aid, this exacerbated the splits within the FP.¹⁷ Umberto Terracini, co-leader of the PCI, argued that the ERP was fundamental for Italy's development.¹⁸

¹¹ Miller, *The United*, 213,

¹² James Clement Dunn to George C. Marshall, telegram, March 16, 1948, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v03/d526>

¹³ George Catlett Marshall, "The Marshall Plan Speech," speech, June 1947, marshallfoundation.org, accessed February 21, 2017, <http://marshallfoundation.org/marshall/the-marshall-plan/marshall-plan-speech/>

¹⁴ Stefano Luconi, "Anticommunism, Americanization, and Ethnic Identity: Italian Americans and the 1948 Parliamentary Elections in Italy," *The Historian* 62, no. 2 (2000): <https://www.questiaschool.com/read/1G1-60578630/anticommunism-americanization-and-ethnic-identity>

¹⁵ Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 91, <https://www.questiaschool.com/read/121593351/confronting-america-the-cold-war-between-the-united>

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 97

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 91

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 92

Indeed, the US government also supported the DC through covert CIA operations and other economic inducements.¹⁹ Millions of dollars were channeled to the DC between 1947 and 1948; for instance, on 8th January 1947, the US government released \$50 million to De Gasperi.²⁰ The US used its economic power to threaten supporters of the FP and to show that a left-wing victory would be economic suicide. The US also ensured that the DC had adequate resources to pursue a comprehensive propaganda campaign of its own.²¹ Furthermore, the US government encouraged American Labor Unions, comprising of members of Italian descent, to send funds to anti-Communist parties in Italy. One influential union was the Ladies Garment Workers Union, which numbered 40,000 Italian members²² and provided the Social Democratic Party, which split from its radical faction in 1947, with \$200,000 for its election campaign.²³ These funds allowed Italian parties to make investments in anti-left propaganda, which was key to manipulating public opinion. The economic aid provided to Italy allowed the US to position itself as the only power that could lead the nation out of crisis²⁴ and this enabled it to manipulate voters' opinions.²⁵ The US government was open about its alignment with the DC and with De Gasperi. On 31st May 1947, after De Gasperi

¹⁹ "Case Study: Italian Elections and CIA Founding," in *Understanding the hidden side of government*, ed. Loch K. Johnson, vol. 1, *Strategic Intelligence* (Praeger Security International, 2006), 37-38, accessed February 28, 2017, https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=cg39hcj6AxQC&pg=RA2-PA37&lpg=RA2-PA37&dq=cia+payments+to+italian+democratic+party+1948&source=bl&ots=QHlkmVNvo_&sig=0pnF54Brr6bAKdf6pgkNKJNxa18&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewifvZb8oLPSAhWqAMAKHVIVAE8Q6AEIODAF#v=onepage&q

²⁰ Miller, *The United*, 248

²¹ "Case Study" 37-38

²² Luconi, "Anticommunism, Americanization"

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 30-31

²⁵ Miller, "Taking off the Gloves"

returned from a business trip to the US, he excluded left-wing parties from his coalition.²⁶ This was explained as a recommendation from the Truman administration which in return offered increased financial aid and cancelled the Italian debt to the US of \$1 billion.²⁷

Additionally, the US government was able to use the Roman Catholic Church as a tool of anti-left propaganda.²⁸ As Italy was predominantly Catholic, the Pope played a significant role in how political parties were portrayed. In January 1948, Pius XII asked the archbishop of New York for advice on how to approach the Italian political situation; the archbishop responded that the Pope should continue delivering anti-left speeches.²⁹ This was advice that Pius XII followed.³⁰ In one speech he made referencing the election the Pope declared "In this year of... threats... the time for Christian conscience has come".³¹

Furthermore, the US used the threat of military action to influence the outcome of the election. In February 1948,³² the Truman administration laid contingency plans for military involvement in case of a left-wing victory.³³ This consisted of sending military aid to support underground operations in Italy to counter Communist forces.³⁴ Additionally, during the campaign, US warships were often

²⁶ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 29

²⁷ Miller, *The United*, 214

²⁸ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 30

²⁹ Brogi, *Confronting America*, 103

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Pius XII Pope, "Discorso Di Sua Santità Al Popolo Romano," speech, March 28, 1948, w2.vatican, accessed May 14, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1948/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19480328_popolo-romano.html

³² "Secret 1948 Role Disclosed by the U.S.," *The New York Times*, February 11, 1948, accessed May 14, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85B00236R000100150005-3.pdf>

³³ Miller, "Taking off the Gloves"

³⁴ Noam Chomsky, "Restoring the Traditional Order," in *What Uncle Sam Really Wants* (n.p.: Odonian Press, 1992)

found anchored in Italian ports.³⁵ Indeed, military intimidations persuaded many Italians to vote for the DC as there was no public appetite for another conflict that would throw Italy into crisis.³⁶

However, it could be argued that US intervention in the Italian election did not determine its outcome and that the key factor was the weakness of the FP. The exclusion of left-wing parties from De Gasperi's cabinet³⁷ undermined their political credibility. Additionally, the FP failed to gain assurance of economic support from the USSR that could counter US threats to remove aid.³⁸

Indeed the FP's campaign also attacked the Marshall Plan and the Church, which proved deeply unpopular,³⁹ as by 1948 most Italians were pro-American and pro-Roman Catholic. Pietro Secchia, co-leader of the PCI,⁴⁰ stated that the US was the "organizer of sabotage and betrayal."⁴¹ Historian Alessandro Brogi argues that the FP's anti-Marshall campaign was disastrous as it threatened "economic promise" and recovery.⁴²

³⁵ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 31

³⁶ National Security Council, NSC 5/2, (Wash. 1948). Accessed May 14, 2017.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v04/d28>

³⁷ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 29

³⁸ Brogi, *Confronting America*, 92-97

³⁹ Miller, "Taking off the Gloves"

⁴⁰ Robert Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948* (2004), 174, accessed March 11, 2017,
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OKA6i7SenW0C&pg=PA168&lpg=PA168&dq=weaknesses+of+the+PCI+in+1948&source=bl&ots=BNYTV0L9aa&sig=FHiuigJieiNTkT8wrellfuT9YZY&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiD7uul487SAhWIJ8AKHc1bBpYQ6AEIMDAC#v=onepage&q=>

⁴¹ Brogi, *Confronting America*, 104

⁴² *Ibid*, 87

In addition, although divisions within the FP were exacerbated by US intervention, it was already deeply divided and its popularity was diminishing. When the coalition was established, a faction of the PSI split from the Socialist Party⁴³ and this undermined its stability. Historian James Miller argues that the FP was in a state of complete chaos by 1940.⁴⁴ The FP was unable to secure adequate funding to compete with the DC in terms of propaganda. Then, on March 20th 1948, after a declaration on the status of Trieste by Britain, France and the US, which called for the return of the area to Italian administration, Stalin opposed it and took Yugoslavia's side.⁴⁵ This was a death blow politically for the PCI as it became the party associated with a power that opposed historic Italian territorial interests.⁴⁶

Finally, historian Robert Ventresca claims that the inherent strengths of the DC may have been the deciding factor in its victory.⁴⁷ The party invested effectively in its propaganda and relentlessly depicted the FP as 'godless'.⁴⁸ De Gasperi's ability as a leader was also exploited. Ventresca argues that De Gasperi was "indispensable to his... party" as he capably managed disparate groups within it.

⁴⁹ In addition, it was De Gasperi who invited the Church's attacks on Communism and manipulated

⁴³ Miller, *The United*, 220

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ Miller, "Taking off the Gloves"

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Robert Ventresca, *In God's Country: State, Society and Democracy in the Italian Election of 1948* (National Library of Canada, 2000), accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp03/NQ49908.pdf>

⁴⁸ Ventresca, *From Fascism*, 200

⁴⁹ Ventresca, *In God's*, 70

the pulpit to depict the choice of April 1948 as one between 'Christianity and atheism'.⁵⁰ This led voters to believe they needed to put their faith first at the ballot box.⁵¹

In conclusion, the weaknesses of the FP, De Gasperi's leadership and the support of the Catholic Church for the DC were crucial factors in determining the outcome of the Italian general election of 1948. It is however reasonable to conclude that the extensive intervention of the US government, through economic incentives and assistance, was a major factor in persuading Italians to vote for the Christian Democrats. On 18th April 1948, Italians voted primarily to retain US economic support. The threat of the cessation of ERP aid and of economic crisis, ultimately led to the FP's defeat.

Criteria C: Reflection

This investigation allowed me to better understand the methods used by historians.

I learned that there are obstacles when gathering a range of sources, and that accessing sensitive primary material can be difficult. Although the Cold War has been written about extensively by historians, the specific focus of my investigation was less well explored. As historians do, I had to infer and cross reference material from experts, and CIA and military reports. It was also interesting to see how historians reassess their perspectives when sources become available. Historian Alessandro Brogi published his work in 2011⁵² and could access sources restricted up to the 1990s which allowed him to write a more balanced account of events.

⁵⁰ Miller, *The United*, 248

⁵¹ Ventresca, *In God's*, 3

⁵² Blum, *Killing Hope*, 4

Selectivity is another challenge for historians and one I encountered in my investigation. As I developed my thematic arguments, I had to omit evidence such as details about exchanges of information between the US government and De Gasperi. I also had to be selective with secondary sources, and focused on the work of peer assessed, respected historians such as Noam Chomsky. Another obstacle highlighted to me was the potential cultural differences of historians themselves that needs to be appreciated. I worked with both English and Italian sources which revealed nuances in interpretations, particularly regarding religious-cultural factors. There are also challenges in the specialization of a historian; it was in fact difficult for me to interpret the economic data from the time as this is an area I do not study.

The need to evaluate sources was also highlighted to me as a key part of the historian's methodology, for example when using the CIA report titled 'Prospects for Communist Action in Italy'⁵³ as its content had to be assessed in line with the document's intent within the early Cold War context. Historian William Blum argues that US intervention led the DC to triumph,⁵⁴ while historian James Miller argues that the FP lost the election primarily due to its inherent weaknesses.⁵⁵ Both historians used similar evidence, but support different claims and this revealed how the use of reason and emotion is important in historians' methodology and how sources are interpreted; Historian Alessandro Brogi was born in Florence and was educated in Italy⁵⁶ and may have been influenced by national sentiments at the time when developing his account.

⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency, *54. Weekly*

⁵⁴ Blum, *Killing Hope*, 27-34

⁵⁵ Miller, *The United*

⁵⁶ "Faculty Bio - Alessandro Brogi." uark.edu. Accessed March 9, 2017.
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