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**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN ITALY'S FOREIGN
POLICY UNDER THE PRODI GOVERNMENT.
THE CASES OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

by Jacob Christian Mahncke

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**Continuity and Change in Italy's Foreign Policy under the Prodi Government.
The cases of Iraq and Afghanistan**

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1. Introduction: What's new in Italian foreign policy?

“I see that under the Prodi government Italy already now has and even more in future will be able to have a big role in Europe, and that as a result of this role will be able to take on an important function in relation to the United States and the Arab world [...] I believe that in the course of one month Italy has succeeded to launch a strategic rearrangement of its foreign policy.”¹ These are the words of Massimo D'Alema, Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs since May 2006. Indeed, the measures taken by the new Italian government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi indicate, if not a completely new orientation, a revised concept behind Italian foreign policy in contrast to that of his predecessor Silvio Berlusconi. Most striking is the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq, to be completed by autumn of this year. But Prodi wants to maintain Italian involvement in Afghanistan, and the government seems eager to uphold the traditionally good relations with the United States, despite the withdrawal from Iraq. While Prodi and D'Alema are in favour of a more important role of Italy in Europe and of the European Union in the world, close ties are to be kept with the United States. According to D'Alema: “The foreign policy of the government intends to favour the growth of an autonomous European actor but tied to the United States by solid and mature understanding within the alliance.”²

Italian foreign policy is also changing in other fields, mainly in relations with Asian countries like China and India as well as towards Israel. Moreover, Italy is gaining an important role in the negotiations about the current crisis between Israel and the Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, these topics will not be included in this paper. Instead, the focus will be on Iraq, Afghanistan and US-Italian relations. In this frame it will be examined which policies have changed or are changing under Prodi and which are likely to remain the same. The aim is to show policy developments and to offer an overview and orientation on the new government's foreign policy with regard to Iraq, Afghanistan and the United States as it has developed so far.

Since the end of the Second World War Italy's foreign policy has been based equally on support for the process of European integration and a close rapport with the USA.³ A frequent argument is that under Berlusconi the balance shifted decisively towards America, leaving Europe in the second row.⁴ Berlusconi decided to support the Bush

¹ “Io vedo un'Italia che con il governo Prodi ha già ora e potrà avere ancora di più in futuro un grande ruolo in Europa, e che in forza di questo ruolo potrà giocare una funzione importante nei confronti degli Stati Uniti e del mondo arabo [...] io credo che nel giro di un mese l'Italia è riuscita ad avviare una ricollocazione strategica della sua politica estera.”

Massimo D'Alema in an interview, in: “A Kabul obbligati a restare lo deve capire tutta l'Unione”, by Massimo Giannini, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 24 June 2006.

² “La politica estera del Governo intende favorire la crescita di un attore europeo autonomo, ma legato agli Stati Uniti da solidi e maturi rapporti di alleanza.” Audizione del Ministro D'Alema davanti alle Commissioni Congiunte 3a (affari esteri, emigrazione) del Senato della Repubblica e III (affari esteri e comunitari) della Camera dei Deputati. 14 June 2006, p. 2. Available at: http://www.esteri.it/ita/0_1_01.asp?id=1496. Consulted 19/06/2006.

³ See for example: Piero Ignazi: Italian foreign policy since 2001: a preliminary assessment, in: Newsletter No. 1 (University of Bologna, June 2005), http://www.foreignpolicy.it/file_adon/ignazi_edit_2.doc. Consulted 21/07/06.

⁴ Compare: Ibid. Sergio Romano: Berlusconi's Foreign Policy: Inverting Traditional Priorities, in: *The International Spectator*, Volume XLI, No. 2 (April – June 2006). James Walston: The Shift in Italy's

administration on the war in Iraq and to send troops after formal combat had ended. It is not clear whether Berlusconi's motivation was based on real conviction or simply on the hope of increasing Italy's and his personal political weight in international affairs by siding with George Bush. It may have been a combination of both.⁵

In any case, it remains a critical question whether Italy's role in international politics did or did not increase. In November 2004 the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini said: "Italy will have an increased role: because we have won the confidence of Bush and his administration and thanks to this confidence we have been listened to [...]." Berlusconi even went so far as to say that "[...] in the last three years, Italy has become a protagonist in world politics". On the other hand, there are opinions like the one of left-wing philosopher Massimo Cacciari, who said about Berlusconi's government: "It has no autonomy in foreign policy. On the contrary, Italian foreign policy does not exist, it has simply been delegated to the US."⁶ Furthermore, there is the view that while giving priority to relations with the US, Italy's influence inside Europe has diminished. As a result, Italy lost significance for the USA too because the capacity to influence European policy was the major value of Italy for the United States. In the long term the risk of such a policy would be the marginalisation of Italy within Europe not compensated by increased weight in the eyes of Washington.⁷

As the new government of Prodi has been in office only since May, not much research and analysis is available so far. Concerning the present government this paper will therefore rely mainly on newspaper articles and on official statements (interviews and speeches) of government members. The paper will proceed with two chapters on the present government's policy on Iraq and Afghanistan, drawing comparisons to the government of former Prime Minister Berlusconi where necessary. Subsequently, the consequences for the transatlantic relationship will be analysed. The article concludes with an overall evaluation.

2. Iraq

2.1 *The current situation*

In January 2006 the then Minister of Defence Antonio Martino announced the intention to withdraw Italian forces from Iraq. Already in September 2005 the first 300 Italian soldiers had been withdrawn, leaving 2.900 of the originally 3.200 (the fourth largest

Euro-Atlantic Policy. Partisan or Bipartisan?, in: *The International Spectator*, Volume XXXIX, No. 4 (October – December 2004). For a different interpretation see: Osvaldo Croci: The Berlusconi government and Italian foreign policy: change or continuity?, in: Newsletter No. 1 (University of Bologna, June 2005), http://www.foreignpolicy.it/file_adon/croci_edit_1.doc. Consulted 21/07/06. Croci argues the style to present foreign policy may have changed, though the substance has not.

⁵ Romano: Berlusconi's Foreign Policy, pp. 102 – 104 (reasons not clear; slightly siding to personal reasons). Ettore Greco: La politica estera dell'Italia, in: *L'Italia e la Politica Internazionale* (Alessandro Colombo/Natalino Ronzitti, editors), Edition 2004, p. 51 f., 65 (both; also sub product of intimate relationship with Washington). See also: Ignazi: Italian foreign policy, p. 2: "The official motivations of the Italian presence underlined the humanitarian assistance to be provided the Iraqi people, but the real choice was to do with strengthening the relationship with the United States."

⁶ All citations after: Walston: The Shift in Italy's Euro-Atlantic Policy, p. 120 f., 124.

⁷ Valter Coralluzzo: La politica estera del governo Berlusconi: Un bilancio in chiaroscuro, in: *Biblioteca della libertà. Rivista trimestrale del Centro Einaudi*. Anno XLI, No. 182 (January – March 2006), p. 73, 84.

foreign contingent in Iraq) in Dhi Qar, the province where the Italian troops are employed in the operation “Antica Babilonia” that is part of operation “Iraqi Freedom”. An immediate withdrawal was rejected, since it would have meant abandoning the Iraqis who were expected to be able to secure the area by themselves not earlier than by the end of the year. Therefore, the troops were to be pulled out in two phases, the first reducing the presence to about 1.600 by June and the complete removal by December 2006.⁸

After his election in April 2006 Prodi announced that according to the government program all Italian soldiers would be withdrawn from Iraq within the year “taking the technical requirements into consideration”.⁹ Like Berlusconi had planned, the pull-out commenced in June with the replacement of the brigade “Sassari” by the smaller brigade “Garibaldi”, thereby reducing military strength to 1.677 soldiers.¹⁰

Berlusconi had already declared the plan to be in accord with the allies and the Iraqi government. The Prodi government stressed this point: there would be no hasty retreat like the Spanish one two years earlier, but an orderly, responsible and gradual withdrawal, in concert with the Iraqi government, the coalition partners and the British and Romanian contingents that will stay in the area. Gaps in control of the zone were to be avoided, maximal security for the Italian soldiers, the multinational forces, and the population had to be guaranteed.¹¹ The Iraqi government has reacted positively to this procedure. President Talabani stated that as soon as there were sufficient security forces, Iraq was in favour of the removal of all foreign troops. In this way all withdrawals should be carried out like the “Italian model”.¹²

However, assistance for Iraq with other than military means will be continued and intensified. Italy will support the process of pacification and the Iraqi government in its effort to isolate terrorist groups and to reconcile national resistance groups. More specifically, the missions to train Iraqi military or police personnel will be sustained. Following the model of France and Germany, this could be done inside Italy or in Iraq

⁸ Marco Nese: Martino: “Via dall’Iraq a dicembre”. Il ministro: missione compiuta. Gli Usa: “Il segno dei progressi fatti”, in: Corriere della Sera, 20 January 2006.

⁹ “nei tempi tecnici necessari” Dichiarazioni Programmatiche del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri On. Prof. Romano Prodi al Senato, 18 May 2006. Available at: http://www.governo.it/Presidente/Interventi/testo_int.asp?d=28207 Consulted 17/07/2006.

¹⁰ For the numbers refer to: Nassiriya, ridotto il contingente italiano. La Sassari lascia il posto alla Garibaldi: per il 28 giugno i nostri militari saranno 1.600, metà rispetto a inizio missione, in: Corriere della Sera (online version), 15 June 2006. Ministero della Difesa: http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni+Militari/missioni_attività_internazionali/, p. 1. Consulted 24/07/06. Updated 21 July 2006.

¹¹ Audizione del Ministro D’Alema, 14 June 2006, p. 6. Massimo D’Alema: La Politica estera dell’Italia, in: Affari Esteri. Rivista trimestrale. Anno XXXVIII, No. 151 (Summer 2006), p. 461. Interview with the Minister of Defence Arturo Parisi: “L’Italia è tra I grandi, dico si’ a missioni di pace nel mondo”, in: L’Unità’, 23 June 2006. Available at: <http://www.difesa.it/Ministro/Compiti+e+Attivita/Dettaglio+intervista.htm?DetailID=390> . Consulted 18/07/2006.

¹² D’Alema in Iraq, via entro autunno. Talabani elogia “modello italiano”, in: La Repubblica (online version), 7 June 2006.

with the protection by Iraqi troops rather than Italian ones.¹³ Also being considered is strengthening the assistance team supporting the Iraqi government. Finally, Italy will be engaged in financing programs in crucial sectors like sanitation, construction, infrastructure, education, and the development of the labour market.¹⁴

2.2 Continuity and change in the policy towards Iraq

The actions of the Prodi administration seem to be in line with the plans of the previous Berlusconi government. Indeed, the point can be made that there are only minor differences in an overall picture of continuity.¹⁵ However, a closer look reveals some significant divergences.

First of all, Berlusconi's retreat might not have been comprehensive. Prodi put it simply: "It is correct that the Berlusconi government has spoken of a withdrawal of the troops by the end of 2006. But there is a difference. We speak the truth and that government does not."¹⁶ What does this mean? According to Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema the civilian mission in Iraq foreseen by former Minister of Defence Antonio Martino after the troop withdrawal ("Nuova Babilonia") "in reality [...] was that 30 civilian advisors would remain in the area of Nassiriya, among them 15 Italians, under the protection of a contingent of about one thousand soldiers, of them about eight hundred Italians."¹⁷ D'Alema and the present Minister of Defence Arturo Parisi are of the opinion that leaving this number of soldiers would not be enough to guarantee security and would carry a serious risk.¹⁸ To be sure, there is no evidence in this case. Martino protested later, saying that "[A] minister of the Republic [D'Alema] who has given himself to unfounded and outrageous assertions should feel the obligation to excuse himself in public."¹⁹

However, the *Corriere della Sera* quoted reconstruction with military support, and Martino himself in January 2006 spoke of "an eventual future reconstruction team in the

¹³ For that reason an engagement in the framework of a so called PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) is ruled out, since it would demand an Italian military force in Iraq, which is not in the government's intention.

¹⁴ Massimo Giannini: La Farnesina e il ritiro dall'Iraq. "Ci spiace se Bush non capirà", in: La Repubblica (online version), 11 June 2006. Maurizio Caprara: Il piano italiano: 39 ufficiali resteranno in Iraq. Il ministro degli Esteri a Washington dalla Rice con una proposta per il dopo-ritiro, in: Corriere della Sera (online version), 16 June 2006. Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 14 June 2006, p. 7. Audizione del Ministro D'Alema alle Commissioni Riunite III (affari esteri e comunitari) della Camera dei Deputati e 3° (affari esteri, emigrazione) del Senato della Repubblica. 27 June 2006, p. 4 f. Available at: http://www.esteri.it/ita/6_38_227_01.asp?id=2481&mod=3&min=1. Consulted 04/07/2006.

¹⁵ Jason W. Davidson: The Prodi Government and Italy-U.S. Relations: The Case for Optimism, in: The International Spectator, Volume XLI, No. 3 (July – September 2006).

¹⁶ "E' vero che il governo Berlusconi ha parlato di un ritiro delle truppe entro la fine del 2006. Ma c'è una differenza, noi diciamo la verità e questo governo non la dice." Prodi: "Iraq, via dalla guerra. Rispetteremo gli impegni per il ritiro", in: La Repubblica (online version), 12 April 2006.

¹⁷ "in realtà [...] era la permanenza nell'area di Nassiriya di 30 tecnici civili, fra cui 15 italiani, con la protezione di un contingente di circa mille soldati, di cui circa ottocento italiani." Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 14 June 2006, p. 6 f.

¹⁸ Ibid. Arturo Parisi: Né indifferenti né isolazionisti, in: Corriere della Sera (online version), 14 June 2006.

¹⁹ "[u]n ministro della Repubblica [D'Alema] che si lascia andare ad affermazioni infondate e infamanti dovrebbe sentire il dovere di scusarsi pubblicamente [...]" D'Alema: "Su Calipari, dagli Usa ci aspettiamo più collaborazione", in: La Repubblica (online version), 14 June 2006.

province of Dhi Qar until 2007 [...] a task of predominantly civilian character that will not exclude a military presence completely distinct from the current one in order to ensure the security to the civilian personnel.”²⁰ After all, it seems at least possible that the former government might have left a military contingent in Iraq to cover a civilian mission. If this is the case, then there is an important difference to the Prodi government. The latter has left no doubt that not a single Italian soldier is to remain in Iraq, not even for the protection of a possible civilian mission. The withdrawal will cover the entire military contingent. Acting differently would be against the electoral mandate.²¹

Another aspect is the discrepancy between the two governments on why the armed forces should be withdrawn from Iraq. According to Berlusconi and Martino the Italian mission in Iraq was completed successfully. Italy had trained about 2.000 soldiers for the Iraqi Army and about 11.000 policemen.²² These forces would be able to guarantee security by themselves, which enabled Italy to withdraw its military force: mission accomplished.²³

In contrast to Berlusconi, Prodi and D'Alema had never been in favour of the war in Iraq. In his statement to the Senate Prodi strongly condemned the invasion: “We consider the war in Iraq and the occupation of the country a grave error. It has not resolved, on the contrary it has complicated, the problem of security. Terrorism has found in Iraq a new base and a new cover for terrorist actions within and beyond the Iraqi conflicts.”²⁴ D'Alema even goes so far as to blame the war in Iraq to be partly responsible for the current crisis in Lebanon. He is of the opinion that the theory according to which the Middle East was to be remodelled in a democratic manner is a tragic illusion. Paradoxically, the regime of Saddam Hussein in fact had been a counterbalance to fundamentalism. The strength of terrorism and the hate for the West, wide-spread in large parts of the Arab and Islamic world, are in part also due to the war in Iraq.²⁵ D'Alema doubts that the war has made the world more secure. He considers the military presence in Iraq to be part of the security problem itself, having catalysed

²⁰ “Un eventuale futuro team di ricostruzione nella provincia del Dhi Qar fino al 2007 [...] un impegno a prevalente caratterizzazione civile, che non escluderà una presenza militare, del tutto distinta dall'attuale, per garantire le irrinunciabili condizioni di sicurezza agli operatori civili.” Nese: Martino: “Via dall'Iraq a dicembre”, in: *Corriere della Sera*, 20 January 2006 and Martino: missione in Iraq chiusa entro l'anno. Il ministro della Difesa: entro giugno almeno mille soldati italiani potranno lasciare Nassiriya. “Ma la nostra non è una fuga”, in: *Corriere della Sera* (online version), 20 January 2006.

²¹ See for example: Giannini: La Farnesia e il ritiro dall'Iraq, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 11 June 2006. Parisi: “Via i militari dall'Iraq anche se rimangono i civili”, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 11 June 2006.

²² I numeri della missione Antica Babilonia, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 27 April 2006.

²³ Nese: Martino: “Via dall'Iraq a dicembre”, in: *Corriere della Sera*, 20 January 2006. Bush: “Rapporto con Berlusconi strategico”. Il presidente al premier in visita negli Usa: “Il mio rapporto non è solo personale, ma è importante per gettare fondamenta pace.”, in: *Corriere della Sera* (online version), 28 February 2006.

²⁴ “Consideriamo la guerra in Iraq e l'occupazione del Paese un grave errore. Essa non ha risolto, anzi ha complicato, il problema della sicurezza. Il terrorismo ha trovato in Iraq una nuova base e nuovi pretesti per azioni terroristiche interne ed esterne ai conflitti iracheni.” Dichiarazioni Programmatiche – Romano Prodi al Senato, 18 May 2006.

²⁵ Intervento del Ministro D'Alema alla Camera dei Deputati sui recenti sviluppi della situazione in Medio Oriente, 18 July 2006. Available at: http://www.esteri.it/ita/0_1_01.asp?id=1573 . Consulted 19/07/2006.

violent actions. In his view, the peace process depends more on the political process, which had begun, than on military pressure.²⁶

In sum, it seems that both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister see no value in remaining in Iraq. Fulfilling the electoral mandate, the soldiers are to be brought home while maintaining support for reconstruction by political, economic and cultural means.

Finally, it is up to Prodi to actually accomplish the withdrawal. There is a symbolic difference: While Berlusconi supported the war, sent troops and stayed in Iraq (even if he began pulling them out), Prodi is now fulfilling the promised troop removal as one of his first acts. Berlusconi will be remembered as the Prime Minister who sent soldiers into Iraq, Prodi as the one who took them out.

3. Afghanistan

3.1 Italy's policy towards Afghanistan

An Italian military contingent is part of the multinational force ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) engaged in Afghanistan since January 2002.²⁷ It consists of about 1.400 soldiers, of which two thirds are stationed in Kabul and one third in Herat.²⁸ In contrast to Iraq, the Prodi administration wants to continue its military engagement in Afghanistan. According to D'Alema: "In my judgement, the military presence in Afghanistan is not under discussion."²⁹ The government's position is that unlike the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan was neither preventive (since it had taken place after the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001) nor unilateral. While a UN resolution on Iraq was passed only after the war and after Italian troops had been sent in, military actions in Afghanistan from the outset had been developed under a UN resolution. Italy was engaged in Afghanistan as part of a large international coalition that comprised the European Union as well as Arab countries and operated in the framework of a NATO mission.³⁰

²⁶ Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 14 June 2006, p. 8 f. Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 27 June 2006, p. 4 f.

²⁷ The initial task of ISAF was to provide security in the zone of Kabul in order to enable the Afghan authorities and the UN personnel to operate safely. The extension of the ISAF mandate to a larger area was authorized by the UN in October 2003. http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni+Militari/missioni_attività_internazionali/, p. 66. Consulted 24/07/2006.

²⁸ There is no clarity concerning numbers. There are more than 1.300 soldiers according to "Der Standart", see: Afghanistan-Einsatz wird neu finanziert und verlängert. Prodi gewinnt Vertrauensfrage im Senat, in: Der Standart (online version), 27 July 2006. The "Spiegel" speaks of 1.400 soldiers, in: Prodi gewinnt Vertrauensfrage, in: Spiegel Online, 28 July 2006. According to the current state of information of the Ministry of Defence the participation of 1.938 soldiers is "authorized", but it remains unclear whether this number will actually be in Afghanistan at the same time. http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni+Militari/operazioni+in+atto/Afghanistan+-+ISAF/contr_nazionale.htm.

²⁹ "La presenza militare in Afghanistan non è in discussione, a mio giudizio." Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 14 June 2006, p. 7. This chapter is based on: Ibid., p. 7 f. Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 27 June 2006, pp. 5-7. Parisi: Né indifferenti né isolazionisti, in: Corriere della Sera (online version), 14 June 2006.

³⁰ Compare the Interview with Parisi, who speaks of "continuità dell'impegno e condivisione delle responsabilità", in: L'Italia tra i Grandi, in: L'Unità, 23 June 2006.

Minister of Defence Parisi said that “in Afghanistan we are and we feel part of a shared commitment, undertaken by NATO in observance of a mandate of the United Nations.”³¹ Therefore, Italy will act in line with its coalition partners, rejecting a unilateral retreat from Afghanistan like the one from Iraq. In the words of D’Alema: “Because of this, I consider that it is not plausible to open a debate on the possibility of a unilateral Italian exit strategy from Afghanistan. We are in that country with NATO, with the European Union and with the UN, and Italy can neither leave the UN nor NATO nor the European Union.”³²

The government does not deny that there are risks and difficulties such as criminality connected to the production of opium and, of course, the alarmingly intensified military action of Taliban groups. The current situation in Afghanistan appears insecure; more and more people are threatened by terrorist attacks. Meanwhile NATO, which so far was responsible only for Kabul and the relatively peaceful North and West of the country, has taken over command from the USA for the particularly unstable South as well. On the one hand, new NATO troops have arrived, and according to British General David Richards ISAF is determined to stay as long as necessary. On the other hand, the Taliban have announced new attacks for which new troops would be easy targets.³³

However, precisely because there are certain dangers and risks, the military presence in Afghanistan is considered necessary by the Italian government. The armed forces are needed to protect civilian personnel and to secure the results of the reconstruction efforts that have been achieved so far. Problems should be met together with the coalition partners and the Afghan government in order to ensure a joint strategy. Besides military activity a common and clear strategy for political, economic and humanitarian aid for the population should be followed.³⁴

The target of the mission in Afghanistan is to help construct a stable and democratic order in a country that had been suppressed by the Taliban regime. This is a long process of “state building” still far from being achieved. But like Kofi Annan Foreign Minister D’Alema believes that it is in the interest of the international community to remain in Afghanistan in order to set the country on the road to peace and stability.

³¹ “in Afghanistan noi siamo e ci sentiamo parte di un impegno condiviso, svolto dalla Nato in ottemperanza ad un mandato delle Nazioni Unite.” Parisi: Né indifferenti né isolazionisti, in: *Corriere della Sera* (online version), 14 June 2006.

³² “Pertanto, ritengo che non sia plausibile che si apra un dibattito sulla possibilità di una unilaterale exit strategy italiana dall’Afghanistan: noi siamo in quel paese con la NATO, con l’Unione europea e con l’ONU, e l’Italia non può uscire né dall’ONU, né dalla NATO, né dall’Unione europea.” Audizione del Ministro D’Alema, 27 June 2006, p. 5. Compare: Giannini: A Kabul obbligati a restare, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 24 June 2006.

³³ Afghanistan: autobomba esplose davanti una moschea, otto vittime, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 31 July 2006. Nato weitet Einsatz aus, in: *Spiegel Online*, 31 Juli 2006.

³⁴ Concerning civilian support, Italy is particularly engaged in the reconstruction of the judicial system. Italian NGOs provide help in several humanitarian projects. See: Mario Ragazzi: Italian foreign policy in Afghanistan, in: *Newsletter No. 1* (University of Bologna, June 2005), p. 2, http://www.foreignpolicy.it/file_adon/ragazzi_edit_1.doc. Consulted 21/07/06.

3.2 *The vote on Afghanistan*

While the government was determined in its decision to stay in Afghanistan, transforming the program into law was possible only under serious difficulties.³⁵ The Italian Parliament (*Camera*) and the Senate (*Senato*) both had to give their approval for two bills: one being specifically about the mission in Afghanistan, the other about the refinancing of the entire package of Italian international missions. The government requested that 488 million euros be authorized to finance Italian military and security missions abroad. Among them are the mission in Afghanistan as well as the departure from Iraq and other missions like on the Balkans or in Darfur.³⁶

In the *Camera*, where the government has a large majority, the bill for the Afghanistan mission passed by a wide majority. The bill for refinancing was adopted with only four negative votes. In the Senate the outcome was much less clear because the government has only two seats more (158) than the opposition (156) (not counting the seven life-time senators). The situation became critical for the government when in the weeks before the vote first eight and later sixteen senators from within Prodi's coalition indicated that they disagreed with the government's plan to remain in Afghanistan. Most of them belonged to the Greens and the two Communist parties Prc and Pdc. Thereupon D'Alema threatened to resign as Foreign Minister unless the coalition reached an accord on Italian participation in the Afghanistan mission.³⁷ Finally, Prodi decided to call for a vote of confidence in the Senate. The Prime Minister declared that without a vote of confidence there was no guarantee that the dissidents would vote in favour of the bills: "Without requiring confidence we do not control them."³⁸ At last, the dissidents announced that while still opposed to the mission in Afghanistan they would vote 'si' in the Senate since they did not want to overthrow the government of which they were part.

In the end, with a vote of confidence attached to each of them ("doppia fiducia"), both bills passed the Senate. The prolongation of the mission in Afghanistan passed the Senate with 159 'yes' votes on 27 July 2006. One day later the refinancing bill concerning Italy's participation in international military missions abroad, including the mission in Afghanistan, was passed with 161 'yes' votes. The House of Liberties (*Casa delle libertà*, Cdl), the party of Berlusconi, left the chamber under protest against the double confidence motion and did not participate in either vote.

³⁵ This chapter is based on the following newspaper articles: *Camera, solo 4 no al rifinanziamento delle missioni italiane all'estero*, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 19 July 2006. *Claudio Tito: E il Professore deve rassegnarsi. "Con quelli non si può fare altro"*, in: *La Repubblica*, 22 July 2006. *Afghanistan, raggiunto accordo tra il premier e i 'dissidenti'*, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 25 July 2006. *Fiducia del Senato sull'Afghanistan. Protesta la Cdl, scontro sul numero legale*, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 27 July 2006. *Senato, si alla fiducia su Afghanistan. Prodi: "E' andata come doveva andare"*, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 28 July 2006.

³⁶ Maurizio Caprara: *Aiuti ma anche disarmo dei talebani. Ecco il disegno di legge del governo*, in: *Corriere della Sera* (online version), 6 July 2006. *Disegno di Legge: Disposizioni per la partecipazione italiana alle missioni internazionali*. Presented 5 July 2006. Available at: http://www.camera.it/_dati/leg15/lavori/stampati/pdf/15PDL0006150.pdf. Consulted 04/08/2006.

³⁷ D'Alema droht mit Rücktritt. Erste Risse in Prodis Koalition. Streit über italienische Beteiligung am Afghanistan-Einsatz, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 July 2006.

³⁸ "Senza fiducia, non li controlliamo." Tito: E il Professore deve rassegnarsi, in: *La Repubblica*, 22 July 2006.

Thus, the government under Romano Prodi had survived its toughest challenge so far, but the lesson is clear: The government cannot permanently depend on confidence motions, nor can it run the risk of depending on the votes of the centre-right in the Senate. Anna Finocchiaro of the Olive Tree Alliance has stated already that this would be the last confidence motion. On the other side, the dissident Senators made clear that while they had supported the government this time this might not be the case on the next bill for Afghanistan.³⁹ Hence, the situation in the Senate remains problematical for the government coalition. At worst, the Senate might become the stumbling block for the Prodi government, but one will have to wait to see what the future brings.

4. Consequences for the transatlantic relationship

While there may be discussion about whether and how much the former government under Berlusconi shifted away from Europe and towards America and whether this policy can be considered to have been successful for Italy or not,⁴⁰ one thing is certain: The relationship between Italy and the United States in the Berlusconi era was marked by a close and intimate rapport. Having already sent a military force to Afghanistan, Berlusconi gave the Bush administration political support for the invasion of Iraq and later sent soldiers into Iraq, the Italian contingent being the fourth largest. Throughout his term as Prime Minister Berlusconi enjoyed an excellent relationship with President George Bush that was strengthened by a number of visits by Berlusconi to Washington and Bush to Rome.⁴¹ When newly elected Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero took the Spanish troops out of Iraq, Berlusconi declared that “Italy is now the US’s closest ally on the European continent.”⁴²

To be sure, there has been some tension in the US-Italian relationship such as in the case of the Italian secret agent Calipari – who was accidentally shot by American soldiers in Iraq, creating serious friction between Italy and the USA –, the “Niger-Gate affair” or the American “rendition flights” in Europe.⁴³ Nevertheless, the US-Italian rapport does not appear to have suffered seriously or permanently because of these tensions. When Italy announced its retreat from Iraq in January 2006, the United States’ reaction was relatively calm. The Pentagon made clear that each country had to decide for itself about its contribution to the coalition in Iraq. The USA thanked Italy for the engagement in Iraq; Italy would remain a resolute ally in the fight against terrorism.⁴⁴

³⁹ Senato, si alla fiducia su Afghanistan, in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 28 July 2006.

⁴⁰ Compare the texts of Valter Coralluzzo and James Walston and refer to the introduction, p. 2 of this paper.

⁴¹ Roberto Aliboni/Gianni Bonvicini: *La politica estera dell’Italia*, in: *L’Italia e la Politica Internazionale* (Alessandro Colombo/Natalino Ronzitti, editors), Edition 2005, p. 105, 108 f.

⁴² Cited after: Walston: *The Shift in Italy’s Euro-Atlantic Policy*, p. 118.

⁴³ Elisabetta Brighi: *La politica estera dell’Italia*, in: *L’Italia e la Politica Internazionale* (Alessandro Colombo/Natalino Ronzitti, editors), Edition 2006, p. 101. Piero Ignazi: *Italian foreign policy in the second half of 2005*, in: *Newsletter No. 2* (University of Bologna, February 2006), http://www.foreignpolicy.it/file_adon/editing_ignazi_1.doc. Consulted 21/07/2006.

⁴⁴ Nese: Martino: “Via dall’Iraq a dicembre”, in: *Corriere della Sera*, 20 January 2006. Martino: *missione in Iraq chiusa entro l’anno*, in: *Corriere della Sera* (online version), 20 January 2006.

At the end of February 2006, in the midst of the Italian election campaign, Berlusconi was invited to speak to the United States Congress. President Bush described his relationship with Berlusconi to be not only personal but of strategic importance for the foundations of peace.⁴⁵

The Prodi government, too, has stressed that it wanted the traditionally good relations with the USA to continue. In D'Alema's opinion: "The Italian centre-left has opposed American intervention in Iraq in March 2003. However, this does not mean that the new government of Romano Prodi will make Italy a less useful ally for Washington. On the contrary, the opposite is likely."⁴⁶ According to D'Alema, Italy succeeded in avoiding annoyance in Washington.⁴⁷ Indeed, Washington showed signs of treating the Italian decision to move out of Iraq with respect. US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld stated that the Italian retreat would not have a significant influence on transatlantic relations.⁴⁸

D'Alema wants to continue productive US-Italian collaboration. Italy would remain America's friend, even if in a different way than under the Berlusconi government. During his visit to Washington in mid June 2006 he said: "Friendship and the alliance with the US are and remain one of the pillars of our foreign policy." Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reacted positively, speaking of a "global partnership" between the two countries:

Italy and United States share an alliance, share values, share friendship and bonds of affinity. And it is on this foundation that we have had excellent relations and will continue to have excellent relations on the various fronts of the many current challenges in places like Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iraq and recently Somalia.⁴⁹

Besides good US-Italian relations, D'Alema favours effective understanding between the United States and Europe as a whole. Quite similar to Rice, he explained that the USA and the EU needed each other in order to be able to react effectively to global challenges like terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Within this framework Europe had to be a partner of the United States – and not a counterbalance.⁵⁰ Again in line with Rice and shortly before his visit to Washington D'Alema stressed the values and objectives that are shared on both sides of the Atlantic and that tie the two together:

⁴⁵ Bush: "Rapporto con Berlusconi strategico", in: *Corriere della Sera* (online version), 28 February 2006.

⁴⁶ "Il Centrosinistra italiano si è opposto all'intervento americano in Iraq nel marzo 2003. Tuttavia, questo non significa che il nuovo Governo di Romano Prodi farà dell'Italia un alleato meno utile per Washington. Anzi, è probabilmente il contrario." D'Alema: *La Politica estera dell'Italia*, in: *Affari Esteri*, p. 460.

⁴⁷ D'Alema: *Amerika kaum verärgert. Italiens Aussenminister verteidigt den Abzug aus dem Irak*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 June 2006.

⁴⁸ Rumsfeld: "Il ritiro italiano? Nessun impatto negativo", in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 8 June 2006.

⁴⁹ D'Alema: "L'amicizia e l'alleanza con gli Usa sono e rimangono uno dei pilastri della nostra politica estera." Rice: "Italia e Stati Uniti condividono un'alleanza, condividono valori, condividono amicizia e legami d'affinità. Ed è su questa base che abbiamo avuto eccellenti relazioni e che continueremo ad avere eccellenti relazioni sui vari fronti delle molte sfide in atto in posti come l'Afghanistan, il Medio Oriente, l'Iraq e di recente la Somalia." (Retranslated from Italian.) Both quotes from: D'Alema a Washington: "Dagli Usa comprensione e rispetto per l'Italia", in: *La Repubblica* (online version), 16 June 2006.

⁵⁰ D'Alema: *La Politica estera dell'Italia*, in: *Affari Esteri*, p. 460, 462.

Europe and the United States have a common interest in spreading democracy, human rights, economic and social rights on an international scale. To widen the area of the countries that enjoy these rights is one of the best guarantees of security and global development. It is an objective that cannot divide us. We only sometimes have differences on the strategy to follow. Because of this there is reason to call for a real strategic discussion.⁵¹

D'Alema wants a united rather than a divided and fragile Europe. A unified Europe in his view is also in the interest of the United States because the USA prefers to work with Europe as one actor and not (or not any more) with a "coalition of the willing". Consequently, he would encourage the unity of Europe and, parallel to this, promote a "positive partnership" with the United States.⁵²

5. Conclusions

Regarding the statements on both sides of the Atlantic, it seems likely that Italy and the United States will continue to be close allies. Their relationship does not appear to have suffered a critical blow, neither by the withdrawal from Iraq nor by the defeat of Berlusconi. Indeed, the conference of 26th July in Rome on the crisis in Lebanon points to a positive direction for the transatlantic relationship. Italy as a country in the Mediterranean, near Africa and the Middle East and with traditionally good relations to Arab countries, is now – under Prodi and D'Alema – resuming an important role in affairs concerning these areas. After all, the conference with the participation of major European countries, several Arab countries, Russia, the USA, the EU, the UN and the World Bank took place in Rome and was led by both Italy and the United States. Already before the conference *La Repubblica* had judged that Italy had regained lost autonomy and was now a useful ally for Washington where before it had been a useless adherent.⁵³

In a more general picture Jason W. Davidson points out two aspects that make it likely for Rome and Washington to work well together also in future. First, the Bush administration has moved away from its doctrine of preventive war to a more moderate stance. This was illustrated by the case of Iran where Washington, while not ruling out the use of force, was not preparing for war and has even offered to take up direct negotiations with Teheran provided uranium enrichment was halted. Second, the centre-left in Italy has a tradition of pro-American policies. Attaching a motion of confidence to the bill on Afghanistan provided some indication that the Prodi government intended to follow a moderate pro-US policy.⁵⁴

⁵¹ "Europa e Stati Uniti hanno un comune interesse alla diffusione della democrazia, dei diritti umani, dei diritti economici e sociali su scala internazionale. Allargare l'area dei Paesi che godono di questi diritti è una delle migliori garanzie di sicurezza e di sviluppo globale. E' un obiettivo che non può dividerci: può a volte dividerci la strategia per conseguirlo. Anche per questa ragione si pone l'esigenza di una vera discussione strategica." Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 14 June 2006, p. 10.

⁵² Ibid., p. 9 f. Audizione del Ministro D'Alema, 27 June 2006, p. 9.

⁵³ Guido Rampoldi: La difficile scommessa di riportare la pace, in: *La Repubblica*, 22 July 2006.

⁵⁴ Davidson: The Prodi Government and Italy-U.S. Relations.

Concerning Iraq and Afghanistan there is both continuity and change. The withdrawal from Iraq is certainly an important new development in Italian foreign policy. Even if Berlusconi had already announced the retreat, significant differences remain between his policy and Prodi's both in argumentation and practice. In contrast, there is a line of continuity on Afghanistan. From there Italy will not withdraw unilaterally. In order to explain the different approach in the two cases, the government in the first place points to the decisively different authorization of the missions. Secondly, the military presence is not considered to be of much use in Iraq but of major importance to ensure success in state-building in Afghanistan, where a retreat would in the worst case leave the country to become once more a Taliban stronghold. This interpretation appears to result from real conviction, following a clear set of ideas on foreign policy, determining the agenda behind the Italian actions.

Taking into account the statements and actions of the government in Rome so far, it seems that Italy will favour multinational solutions in response to global challenges. A more important role for Italy is welcomed, but only in the frame of international coalitions like the EU, NATO and the UN in order to prevent isolation. Indeed, given its geographic location and its relationships with the Arab world, a strong Italy could be of significant value for productive collaboration inside these coalitions. It could help to resolve crises and confront common dangers like terrorism or nuclear weapons proliferation. The challenges exist, and they can only be met together.

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