

TRANSATLANTIC SYMPOSIUM 2021
Special edition

**A Lasting Bond.
Revisiting & Reinvigorating Italy-US
Relations 160 Years since their Inception**

Remarks by Jason Davidson

**CONFERENCE ROOM: SALA ALDO MORO
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
ROME, 13 DECEMBER 2021**

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Takeaway: relationship is strong (all time high) but there are challenges on the horizon

Italy offers to US

- A country of significance
 - 4th largest non-US NATO member in defense spending (\$26 bi. 2020)
 - GDP (3rd largest in EU)
- Italy as “ideal partner” and “producer of security”
 - 8 US bases hosting ~12,000 US troops--location
 - 9,449 troops now in 44 operations abroad (1,216 in UNIFIL/+300 in Sahel)¹
 - 1 of 2 countries to be a top 5 contributor at peak in Afghanistan (3,770 in ‘11) and Iraq (2,600 in ‘06)
- Transatlantic bridge (esp. post-Brexit)/esp. on “strategic autonomy”

US offers to Italy

- One of two power centers in emerging bipolarity
 - World’s largest economy (\$20.9 tri. v. China’s \$14.7 in 2020)
 - World’s most powerful military (\$778 bi. to China’s \$252 in 2020)
- Commitment to defend Europe/presence in Italy
- History of support for military operations that threaten European security/interests
 - Kosovo ‘99/ Libya 2011

The current moment: Biden and Draghi

- Biden’s commitment to allies in general, transatlantic relations in particular is ideal
- Draghi (Politico’s “Most Powerful person in Europe”)
 - His reputation matters in Washington (in EU after Merkel) G20/Ukraine
 - Hardline on China (3X takeover vetoes) and its economic role in Italy

Challenge: Prospect of a return to populism in Rome or Washington²

- Studies (Monteleone, Coticchia) have shown that the rhetoric of populist parties has been more radical than the foreign policy change with the exception of migration
- Trump’s rhetoric was critical of allies but his admin. supported NATO expansion and 2018 NATO readiness initiative. Also bipartisan support for NATO is strong.

Challenge: Different threats

- Italy ‘15 White Paper
 - Euro-Med “of vital national interest” threats from terrorism, crime, migration and instability there means is “focus for national intervention.”

¹ Germany currently has ~3,000 troops abroad

² That said, the rhetoric could lead to an erosion in support over time (Italian pacifism and US isolationism).

- US
 - 3/21 Interim Nat Sec Strategic Guidance: China is increasingly assertive
 - 4/21 ODNI's Annual Threat Assessment: "China's Push for Global Power" (transnational issues near end and less attention)
- Divergence on threats is currently manageable but could be very problematic in the future
 - Italy might become concerned with being forced into conflict w/ China
 - The US might only want allies to help it against China