Department of History

Working with the enemy: relations between Italian partisans and the British forces (1943-1945)

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Abstract

The Italo-British relationship during the Second World War has been the object of constant scrutiny and enquiry over the course of the years, especially as far as the relation between the Italian Resistance and British forces during the Italian campaign of 1943-1945 is concerned. Many have pointed out that the British actions were moved by political reasons, such as the fear of a possible Communist takeover after the war. According to this interpretation, this led to a general hostility in the British war machine towards Italians. Others have pointed out how this analysis is fundamentally flawed, as it focuses only on the political aspect of the relationship and does not account for the good relations that often Italian partisans and British forces were able to build in the field. However, both interpretations seem to exist independently of each other and the debate has reached a stale point over the course of the last few decades.

Through the critical re-examination of three main topics (interactions on the field, propaganda and partisan disarmament) this thesis aims at filling the gulf between these two historiographical branches. The analysis is not only focused on British or Italian actions but also how these actions influenced the perception of each other. This point of view allows for a nuanced approach that considers representation and self-representation as two key interpretative tools. Moreover, the elements unearthed in this way can be also evaluated against the historiography and public memory that followed the war, in order to frame elements of *longue durée* which may have influenced the representation of the Italo-British relationship in the future.

Contents

Introduction

The relationship between the Italian Resistance movement and the Allies during the Second World War has been discussed by historians and veterans since the end of the conflict. Countless books, memoirs and works of fiction have been produced both by Italian and British authors. The general consensus reached by this *corpus* of publications through the years has been that Italo-British relations were confrontational. Bitter rivalries between the two sides involving misunderstandings and flat-out lies are a commonly encountered feature when the reader approaches this topic. To summarise the main issue around which the debate has been revolving for the past seventy years, a quotation from the N°1 Special Force operation report dated May 1945 is useful:

> ITALIAN partisans have never been, even at their period of greatest strength - September 1943, June 1944, April 1945 - a secret army; […] To form a secret army in Occupied Territory was not at any time the objective of the Allied Commanders[…][1]

The conflict between the Italian Partisans and the Allied Command has been, in fact, long identified with the debate about the way to conduct the war against the Nazi-Fascist forces. On one side, the Allies, who wanted the Partisans to organise small bands, attack small targets and, in general, be a thorn in the Germans' side and nothing more. On the other, the Partisans, who longed for the '*guerra grossa*', the 'big war', a direct confrontation with the Germans, made possible by the creation of large bands who were supposed to free and administer parts of the Italian territory.[2] Around this conflict on the way to conduct partisan warfare historians (and sometimes politicians) have built the narrative of Italo-Allied relations that largely lasts to this day. Such a representation of Italo-Allied relations has been for a long

[1] Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea 'Giorgio Agosti' (Hereinafter: Istoreto), B16a, Report on N°1 Special Forces activity until April 1945, 3 June 1945.
[2] Pietro Secchia and Filippo Frassati, *La Resistenza e gli alleati* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), p. 34.

time part of the Italian mainstream way of approaching the Resistance, or part of what can be called the 'hegemonic narrative' of the Italian Resistance, to borrow the terminology used by Filippo Focardi.[3] It is, I would argue, the most insidious and long-lasting facet of such a narrative, as it easily slipped under the radars of many historians and was often taken for granted and not properly investigated.

Firstly, this work will investigate this relationship, and its aim is to subvert, or at least challenge, the common notion that an ongoing hostility was at the base of the interaction between Italians and the Allies. I will argue that the contrast between a mass-levy army similar to the resistance groups and networks under the Free French, and small bands of saboteurs is largely tied to a problem of representation on a high, or political level and never really affected collaboration on the field, where Partisans and Allied officers met often in perilous circumstances. I will not argue here against the idea that, on a political level, Italo-Allied relations were often conflicting. I will, however, introduce and consider how relations developed in the field in order to add a new level of complexity and shed more light on more obscure facets of this relationship As such, I would say that this work will deal with the more 'practical' side of Italo-Allied collaboration, as opposed to the 'political' one. This work will focus its attention on the relationship built on the field by the Italian partisans and the British personnel, what one could call the 'coalface' of the relationship, its 'practical side', and with the themes of propaganda aimed at Italy and its repercussions in the key moment of transition between war and peace. The debates around the institutional future of Italy or the political complexion and aims of the Allied Military Government will be the backdrop of such analysis. If we consider the current historiography, both Italian and Anglophone, very little has been written on the 'practical' side of the relationship. Airdrops, liaison missions, and other aspects of cooperation during the Italian campaign are confined to Military history. And even if they are mentioned in broader and less technical publications they are often

[3] Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria* (Bari: Laterza, 2005).

relegated to a side note or a small paragraph, usually to reinforce existing stereotypes about Italo-Allied relations and further foster the author's point of view; rarely adding something to the argument. A good example of such practice is the use of airdrops data to stir the never-ending debate around the supposed preferential treatment granted by the Allies to this or that partisan formation.[4] To add to this, Italians tend to think of their past history as something special, peculiar to them, an experience that cannot find similarities in the history of any other country.[5] However, this is true only up to a point, as it is certain that complicated and fragmented relationships with the past, leaving out the particular contingencies, are not a prerogative of Italy alone.[6] The accusation of opposing the birth of a 'shadow army' itself, for example, should be framed in the overarching picture of the World War, recognising the fact that the British had abandoned the idea of creating a secret army of partisans in all of Axis-occupied Europe well before the start of the Italian Campaign in June 1943.[7] The German and Japanese aggression against the USSR and the USA, in fact, had put an end to the British period of isolation after the fall of France, making the idea of large-scale partisan operations in mainland Europe obsolete. What matters for Italy is that this spasmodic search for the uniqueness of the Italian case has influenced the historiographical flow, directing it to focus on a national perspective that disregards or underestimates the transnational dimension of many events.

This disregard of the practical aspects of the Italo-Allied relationship in favour of the political ones led to two problems that still affect not only historiography but also the common perception of this issue. First, the hostility that surely was there in the interaction between a part of the Italian Resistance and a part of the Allied personnel, became a paradigm to describe all of the interactions between Italians and the Allies

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[4] Angelo Ventura, 'Prefazione', in Chiara Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate e la resistenza nel Veneto. La rete di Pietro Ferraro dell'OSS*, (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1990), pp. 7-10 (p. 8).

[5] Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2011), p. 191.

[6] Ibid., p. 192.

[7] Mark Wheeler, 'The SOE Phenomenon', *Journal of contemporary history*, 3 (1981), 513-519 (p. 518).

during the period 1943-1945. Second, such hostility was not influenced by external factors, and it was confined to the period 1943-1945 because it was caused mainly by the split on how to conduct partisan warfare. I will argue, however, that such hostility was not as clear cut as one may expect, nor it was immune to external factors, nor was it exclusive to the 1943-1945 period.

By the Spring of 1945, a grand total of one hundred and ninety-nine Allied missions had been parachuted to Italy to aid the Italian Resistance movement.[8] Italy was the third largest recipient of airdropped supplies in Europe, counting for 14% of the volume and 5907 tons of materials, after France and Yugoslavia.[9] Yet, despite these numbers, a 'dark legend' is still tied to the British intervention in Italy during the 1943-1945 biennium; that of the British as an uncooperative ally, trying to hinder and fragment the Italian Resistance. The *inglesi* (an umbrella term used in Italian to encompass English as well as Scots, Welsh, Irish and whoever fought under the colours of the Union Jack) were in fact accused, as soon as the war ended and sometimes even before, of the most nefarious acts. Such accusations included, for example, the alleged attempt made to install a conservative Government in Italy (or even a military junta) and to hinder the partisans because they were concerned that the Italian resistance was too left-leaning in its political complexion. Hence the phrase, '*alleato nemico'* to indicate the British, which became popular in the mid-1970s in Italy. David Elwood's book, for example, *Allied Occupation Policy in Italy, 1943-1946*, had its Italian edition titled: *L'alleato nemico: la politica dell'occupazione anglo-americana in Italia 1943-1946*.[10] This was an interpretation which had its roots firmly placed in

[8] Centro di Ateneo per la Storia della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea (hereinafter: CASREC), WO 204/1990 xc/106559, Resistance Movement, Northern Italy, (Reference Message Freedom Signed SAC, Cite FHGLT 191215), 6 May 1945. This number, as pointed out by the document, was 'exclusive of ISLD, IS 9 and other agencies not primarily concerned with Special operations as such'. Malcolm Tudor in his *SOE in Italy 1940-1945, the real story*, gives a figure of 200 missions. Malcolm Tudor, *SOE in Italy 1940-1945, the real story* (Newtown: Emilia Publishing, 2011), p. 1.

[9] Olivier Wieviorka, *Storia della Resistenza nell'Europa occidentale 1940-1945* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), p. 191.

[10] David W. Ellwood, *L'alleato nemico: la politica dell'occupazione anglo-americana in Italia 1943-1946* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977).

the previous decades. The Anti-Fascist philosopher Benedetto Croce, writing in his diary about the peace treaty, eventually signed in 1947, noted how it was a product of the 'infamous English foolishness that, out of vengeance and blind egoism, aims to destroy and nullify a sister Nation that surely is no less qualified than England in the context of European civilization'.[11]

On the other hand, starting from the mid-1980s another historiographical current emerged in Italy, bent on disproving the aforementioned interpretation. Thanks to a wealth of documents made accessible over the years (the Foreign Office and War Office archives were opened in 1976, and the Special Operations Executive archive in 1996) scholars like Elena Aga Rossi and Massimo de Leonardis launched a vast operation of revision, often coming to diametrically opposed conclusions from their predecessors. Despite a hiatus in the 1990s, this historiographical current gained new impetus in the 2000s, especially thanks to the work of scholars such as Tommaso Piffer. However, as Piffer himself was forced to remark in 2010, two different historiographies on this topic seem to coexist: one tied to old prejudices and one proposing a new and more convincing interpretation.[12] This work, thus, has the ambition of expanding the findings of this latter historiographical current in order to give back to the *inglesi* their rightful place as fully-fledged and committed allies of the Italian Resistance, clearing the field of political suspicions and focusing on material and contingent issues which hindered a more constant support of the Italian partisans.

However, this work has also another aim: that of providing an explanation as to why the 'black legend' surrounding the *inglesi* survived for so long, even when it was directly challenged by archival documentation. To attain both these goals this work approaches the Italo-British relationship at what can be called the Resistance 'coalface', rather than focusing on the, at this point overanalysed, political aspect of the relationship. These two aspects are not mutually exclusive, however, I will

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[11] Benedetto Croce, *Taccuini di Lavoro*, 6 vols (Naples: Arte Tipografica, 1987), VI, p. 136. Unless otherwise indicated all translations of original documents or Italian texts are my own.

[12] Tommaso Piffer, *Gli alleati e la Resistenza italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2010), p. 11.

contend that by focusing too much on the latter important aspects of the relationship have been ignored. Relations in the field have, for example, long been overlooked.[13] To focus on these relations, instead, will allow us to frame the issues of the Italo-British relationship in the field of representation and self-representation, which is the central hypothesis of this work.

After a first chapter dedicated to a review of the literature on the Italian Resistance and its interaction with the Allies so far, to better frame my position in the historiography, the main topics of this work will be explored.

The second chapter will be dedicated to the interactions in the field between British Liaison Officers (BLO) and Italian partisans. This will include, of course, the problem of the airdrops, which have been for so long a point of fiery debate amongst historians. Thanks to the material already unearthed by other scholars, as well as some new documents found during the research, this first chapter is aimed at reconstructing this relationship in order to clear the field from the debris of old prejudices against the British, examining the material conditions in which they were forced to operate and the way they juggled their meagre resources.

The third chapter will introduce and expand the issue of representation and self-representation connected to the British image in Italy. It will be focused on British propaganda, its management (and its mismanagement) and the effects it had on the way the British were perceived in Italy. It goes without saying that British propaganda had an enormous impact on Italy. *Radio Londra*, for example, is still a well-known name in Italian popular culture.[14] Let us cite here, for example, Giuliano Ferrara's short-lived tv programme which aired during 2011 and 2012 in a timeslot right after the 8 pm TG1 on RAI1, Italy's main public TV station, aptly titled '*Qui Radio Londra*'. However, as much as it had an impact on popular culture, British propaganda failed to dispel the idea that the British were not trustworthy allies. By

[13] Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate*, p. 15.

[14] Ester Lo Biundo, 'Radio Londra 1943-1945: Italian society at the microphones of the BBC', *Modern Italy*, 1 (2018), 35-50 (p. 35).

putting British propaganda into its context and examining its interactions with American and Soviet propaganda, as well as Fascist counter-propaganda, we can better interpret this failure, apparently in such contrast with the popularity enjoyed, for example, by the BBC during the period and afterwards.

The fourth and final chapter will be devoted to the approach that the British had towards partisan disarmament and dispersion. This was the source of many of the points made after the war to expose the supposed hypocrisy of the *inglesi*. However, similarly to what happens with the BLOs and the airdrops, when examined within the framework of the practical situation in which the British found themselves, it appears clear how they were hindered in their efforts by the resources (or lack thereof) at their disposal, not by political considerations.

I will consider the mistakes made by the Allies during the Italian campaign. From propaganda to the disarmament of the partisans, from the airdrops to the management of the liaison mission, the Allies made a series of fatal mistakes in handling their interaction with the partisans. Many of these mistakes are not tied to a clear-cut political strategy to impede or contain the Italian Resistance, but rather to the lack of any form of strategy, political or not. The Allies simply did not have a strategy for the Italian theatre. From the start, they adopted a wait-and-see approach[15] and considered the Italian front as a way to distract German forces in their overall strategy for Europe.[16] They were caught unprepared by Mussolini's dismissal in 1943,[17] and lacked any form of precise planning for operations after the initial landing in Sicily (Operation Husky), just like they lacked any precise planning for the post-Rome conquest. Considered this, it is clear that an overarching strategy to handle the Italian Resistance was also missing. As such, they were not able to project a coherent image of themselves and present their plans to the partisans. As a result, partisans

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[15] Elena Aga Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando: 8 settembre 1943* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003), pp. 192-193.

[16] Claudia Nasini, *Una guerra di spie: Intelligence anglo-americana, Resistenza e badogliani nella Sesta Zona Operativa Ligure Partigiana (1943-1945)* (Trento: Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche, 2012), p. 14.

[17] Norman Kogan, *Italy and the Allies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 31.

were confused by the discrepancies between the Allied propaganda and the actions effectively taken by the Allied forces. This caused dissatisfaction to grow amongst the partisans (and often amongst the liaison officers too) and, in the long run, exposed the Allies to the accusation of mendacity. Even when handling the disarmament of the partisans and their dispersion, the Allies showed their lack of preparation and coordination. Despite the lessons learned during their advance between 1943 and 1945, they mishandled greatly the disarmament during the spring of 1945, creating fertile ground for dissent and discontent amongst the Italians. It is indeed important to notice how the main narrative about the relations between Italians and the Allies, with the Allies trying to control and impede the growth of the partisan movement, can find much more tangible proof to sustain itself in the last few months of the war.[18] The Italo-Allied relationship, thus, suffers from a double 'flattening' problem. First, only a few 'upper-end' interactions have been taken as a model for the overall relationship between Italians and the Allies, which has led historians to overestimate the relevance of political bickering in the military decision-making process. Second, the last few months of war became a paradigm for the twenty months of the partisan war, as historians have focused on this last period because it fed into their pre-concepts. My work will try to explore this 'flattening' process and explain it, while at the same time restoring the contours. This analysis will, hopefully, contribute not only to the advancement of the field but also help the creation of a shared memory between Italy and the Anglophone countries on the subject.[19]

To conduct my research I was able to utilise the archival sources preserved both in the United Kingdom and in Italy. In the UK, the rich archives of the Foreign Office (FO) and the War Office (WO) are preserved at the National Archives (TNA) in Kew, London. Both those archives were made public in 1972, however, Italian scholars have

[18] As pointed out by Claudia Nasini: 'It was only at the end of 1944 that the [Allies'] choices, especially of the British, towards the Italian Resistance begun to be influenced, partially, by political considerations.' See: Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 15.

[19] Despite the desires of many authors, such a memory is still missing. See Roberto Battaglia, *The history of the Italian resistance* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1957), p. 10.

taken advantage of them in an uneven and discontinuous way. Moreover, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) HS archive is also preserved at the NA in microfilm format. This archive was opened to the public only in 1996 and is partially incomplete, thanks to a fire that destroyed many documents in 1945.[20] It is important to underline the dates when these documents were made public, as many of the scholars I quote and mention in this work worked before 1972 or 1996. The SOE archive, in particular, has only recently been properly investigated by Italian scholars. Thus, this thesis benefits from a much larger *corpus* of archival documents which help to frame better the issue of Italo-British relationship during the war. To complete the British archival sources I also examined the papers of Winston Churchill, preserved by the Churchill Archive Centre (CHAR) in Cambridge. These papers, fully digitalised, represent a precious source of information and context on the actions taken by the British Prime Minister during the war and are rich with references to events which happened in Italy. They are especially interesting for the fact that they highlight the difference in approach between the American political class and the British.

British archival sources present a coherent and multi-faceted picture of the interaction between the Italian partisans and the British personnel. The documents range from internal communications on a ministerial level in London to snippets of radiotelegrams sent by British liaison officers (BLOs) living with the partisans behind enemy lines.

The Italian documentation is comprised of two main archives: the archive of the *Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea 'Giorgio Agosti'* (Istoreto), in Turin and the *Centro di Ateneo per lo studio della Resistenza e della società contemporanea* (CASREC), in Padua. The former contains documents on the Resistance in the Piedmont area, with many documents detailing with the interaction between partisan bands and British liaison officers, and between different bands as

[20] On the topic of the SOE archives see: Duncan Stuart, '"Of historical interest only" the origins and vicissitudes of the SOE archive', in *Special Operation Executive, A new instrument of war*, ed. by Mark Seaman (Routlege: London, 2006), pp. 217-229.

well. Piedmont was the region of Italy where the Resistance first started and saw the largest number of 'independent' or purely military bands compared to other regions. Thus, it represents an interesting area where to examine the relationship between the partisans and the Allies, as it makes viable a comparison between the 'independent' bands and the ones that were more heavily politicised. There are also a number of documents concerning the role and involvement of France in the war in Italy and its attitude towards the Italian Resistance, a topic seldom discussed by scholars. The archive preserved at CASREC is interesting for a different reason. It contains documents copied from the National Archives in the 1980s thanks to the efforts of Chiara Saonara. Saonara later published in 1990 a review of her findings: *Le missioni alleate e la Resistenza nel Veneto. La rete di Piero Ferraro dell'OSS*. The documents are still preserved by the CASREC, thus creating an extensive, albeit incomplete, archive of all the documentation produced by the FO and WO on the topic of the Italian Resistance, without having to select the files from the much larger archives preserved in Kew. Moreover, some of the documents in Padua are now impossible to find in London (at least, that is what I was told by the TNA's archivist when I asked for them during my research), making this archive extremely useful. Saonara's book is a convenient tool to get a first look at the documentation on the Allied missions in the Veneto area, with a selection of documents that include radio messages, letters and memoranda. The North-Eastern region of Veneto is especially important in the matter of Italo-British relations as it was on the main route for the German withdrawal, thus prompting the organisation of operations on a larger scale, compared to other regions of the North, during 1945.

Unfortunately, one problem is that the original documents preserved at the National Archives were re-organised in 2003, when the Public Record Office was merged with the Historical Manuscript Commission to create the National Archives (and this is the reason why, I suspect, some of the documents copied by Saonara are now lost in London). This means that the archival denomination of the documents preserved by the CASREC archive is outdated and of little use to trace those documents in Kew. I took care to specify in my footnotes that these documents are preserved by CASREC.

Unfortunately, it might be that the only way to consult them is to go to Padua, as opposed to London.

Another precious contribution to the Italian sources was provided by the three-volume publication *Le brigate Garibaldi nella Resistenza*, published in 1979 by the *Istituto Nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia*, in Milan. The volumes contain documents produced by the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Alta Italia* (CLNAI), the Garibaldi commands and by the Command of the *Corpo Volontari della Libertà*. They offer a vertical slice of the life in the resistance and are particularly precious when examining topics such as the size and scope of the partisan bands, the level of politicization and the way in which the Allies were seen by the partisans.

These documents allow me to give a wide frame to my research. It spans the whole duration of the Italian campaign, from July 1943 to April 1945, sometimes going beyond these two dates. Geographically, Piedmont and the North-West play a prominent role, thanks to the documents preserved by the Istoreto. Veneto and the North-East are instead fleshed out by the documents preserved by CASREC and by the work already done by Chiara Saonara. The documents preserved at Kew allow the picture to be expanded to the rest of Italy. The South, with the exclusion of Rome, an area where the Resistance was less prominent and the German occupation shorter, does not have much to offer concerning the relation between Italians and BLOs. However, it is the object of intense scrutiny as to matters of propaganda and Allied administration of liberated Italy. Tuscany is the subject of many British documents, because of its strong partisan activity and the presence of many Communist bands. To conclude, the Po Valley of Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna are also well-represented by the documents preserved at Kew. The offensive to capture Rimini, Ravenna and Bologna during the winter of 1944-1945 was widely debated by the commands and the presence of the central committee of the CLNAI in Milan made Lombardy, for obvious reasons, a region of prime interest for the British. Moreover, issues like propaganda or partisan disarmament were approached with an

overarching attitude by the British, making many documents applicable to the whole of German occupied Italy, rather than to a single area.

Ch1: Historiography

For a long time now, scholars have shown interest in investigating the interactions between the Allies and the Italian Resistance fighters (*partigiani*) during the Second World War.[1] Even if the historiography produced by Italian scholars is certainly larger in quantity, the Anglophone world too has produced and continues to produce, a significant amount of research on this topic. However, today we are presented with two, almost completely distinct, historiographies on the matter of Italo-Allied collaboration during the Italian campaign of 1943-1945. The former mostly tries to convey the idea of an Italian supremacy in the fight against the Nazi-Fascist forces in Italy, at least from a moral standpoint, especially in its Socialist or Communist interpretation. The Resistance is portrayed as a national struggle and, as Claudia Nasini pointed out:

> this interpretation, on one side, exalted the role of the social-communist leadership in transforming the initial Resistance into a mass movement, while on the other hand, it denied the significant role played by both the Anglo-Americans and the Southern Government in this process. Moreover, much of the Marxist historiography tried to enlarge, beyond the effective merits, the military contribution of the partisan resistance to the defeat of the Nazi-Fascists, while at the same time downplaying the vital contribution of the Allied armies, without which it could not have been possible to liberate Italy.[2]

However, this is not an attitude confined to the Italian historiography, as all European countries, from France to Denmark, tend to inflate the contribution of their national

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[1] Even if the most interested seem to be the British scholars, rather than the American ones. See on this topic: Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 9.

[2] Nasini, *Una guerra*, pp. 12-13. On the topic of the Resistance's military contribution to the final victory in the Italian campaign in the Marxist historiography see, for example, Pietro Secchia, *La Resistenza accusa 1945-1973* (Milan: Mazzotta Editore, 1973), pp. 268-271.

Resistance to the final victory of the Allies in their country, and this process seems unrelated to the political ideology of this or that historian.[3]

Moreover, in Italy, the Resistance, as a national struggle for freedom, has been often compared to the Risorgimento, the period of the nineteenth century when Italy achieved unification. The ANPI (*Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia)*, the largest association of the former partisans) openly pushed for wider recognition of this idea in public spaces during the 1950s.[4] On the 'liberal' side of the historiography, one can find aptly-titled publications such as *Il Secondo Risorgimento*,[5] published to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the liberation. However, within the 'Marxist' side as well this idea enjoyed a remarkable degree of success. The Communist historiography, of course, had to make a distinction between the 'first' and 'second' Risorgimento. While the Risorgimento saw the Italian bourgeoisie take a leading role and strive for a 'modern, capitalistic development of our Country [Italy] and destroy the residual encumbrances of the old feudal society', the Resistance sought freedom for 'all the people' of Italy and was led by 'the working class, farmers, factory workers and common people'.[6] For this very reason, the Communists tried to forge their connection with the Risorgimento by linking themselves with the name and actions of Giuseppe Garibaldi, arguably the most popular hero of the Risorgimento and the face of the 'revolutionary' nature of that historical period in Italy. The Communist brigades were thus named *Garibaldi* and the attempts of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to overlap the legacy of the Risorgimento with the actions of the party were never ending. The painting by neo-realist Renato Guttuso, *La Battaglia di Ponte dell'Ammiraglio* (1951), for example, features Giuseppe Garibaldi fighting the Borbon troops of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, together with a number of redshirts, many of which depict prominent PCI members such as Luigi Longo, Giancarlo Pajetta and

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[3] Wieviorka, *Storia della Resistenza*, pp. 4-5.

[4] Philip Cooke, 'La Resistenza come secondo Risorgimento: un topos retorico senza fine?', *Passato e presente,* 86 (2012), 62-81 (pp. 70-71).

[5] See for example: Aldo Garosci and others, *Il secondo Risorgimento nel decennale della Resistenza e del ritorno della democrazia 1945-1955* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1955).

[6] Secchia, *La Resistenza accusa*, pp. 315-337.

Antonello Trombadori. The painting was placed in the Party's Central School in Rome, to be admired by those who took classes on the history of Communism,[7] and it is now exposed at the *Uffizi* in Florence. Even the volume published in 1955 as a competitor to *Il Secondo Risorgimento* was titled *Il Secondo Risorgimento d'Italia*[8] (incidentally with the cover art also made by Guttuso), showing the strength of this narrative *topòs*. Even today there is space in the public discourse for the connection between Resistance and Risorgimento.[9] The President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, for the 65° anniversary of the Liberation in 2010, made the point that 'the memory of the Risorgimento' and its legacy was 'an important component of the ideological foundation for the Resistance' even if he warned against 'misused formulations' and 'easy generalizations'.[10]

The English-language historiography, instead, presents a fragmentary view composed of memories and military texts, which sometimes seem completely estranged from the Italian interpretation of the events, as well as a few more in-depth analyses. However, unfortunately, these more analytical works often simply replicate Italian historiography. Part of the scarcity of Anglophone literature on this topic is due to the fact that Italy, during the war and after, represented a secondary front inside the European theatre and was obscured by other fronts like France or the Pacific theatre which had held the attention of historians and of the general public for a long time. However, in recent years a new wave of interest on the topic has emerged, bringing a much-welcome shift from memoirs and other collections of military anecdotes to fresh analysis which has proved invaluable for anyone approaching not only the topic of the Italian campaign but also that of Italo-Allied collaboration. The most glaring issue to this day is that the general public in anglophone countries is

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[7] Cooke, 'La Resistenza', p. 72.

[8] *Il Secondo Risorgimento d'Italia nel Decennale della Resistenza* (Rome: Centro Editoriale d'iniziativa, 1955).

[9] Cooke, 'La Resistenza', p. 81.

[10] 'Intervento del Presidente Napolitano al 65° anniversario della Liberazione', (24 April 2010). <http://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=1832>

generally still unaware of the fact that a resistance movement existed in Italy at all, or that it had a fruitful collaboration with the Allied armies during the Italian campaign.[11]

Italian historiography on the Resistance has produced a large *corpus* of publications. From the very end of the war (and arguably even before)[12] Italian scholars have analysed and interpreted the Resistance in all of its aspects, including of course the issue of Italo-Allied interaction, despite the fragmented nature of the experiences of different Italians in different parts of Italy. That is why, in recent times, expressions like 'memoria frammentata [fragmented memory]' have entered the language of Italian historiography to better describe the different recollections, often in open opposition with one another, present in Italy. Such is the case of the works by Filippo Focardi and Mario Insnenghi.[13] The difficult relationship between history and memory in Italy had also been the object of inquiry of British scholars as well, including Philip Cooke and John Foot.[14]

The history of the Italian historiography too has been the subject of inquiry over the course of time and many aspects of it have been criticised.[15] To provide some sort of compass to navigate the evolution of Italian historiography we can consider a broad periodisation as follows:[16] 1943-1947 are considered as the years in which the narrative of the Anti-Fascist war started to take shape and was finally established. 1948-1953 was a period of crisis for the 'hegemonic narrative' under the resurgence

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[11] Tom Behan, *The Italian Resistance, Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies* (Pluto Press: New York, 2009), p. 1.

[12] See for example: Istoreto, B45a, Comunicato del Comando del I Settore Cuneese delle Langhe, 22/07/1944. Also Istoreto, B15b, Il contributo della resistenza alleata italiana in un documento alleato, 1945; where a first judgment on the 'real' approach of the Allied Commands to the Resistance was made. Also, The National Archives (henceforth TNA), Foreign Office (FO) 371/49870, PWB Consolidated Report on Conditions in Liberated Italy No.56, 22 February 1945; where is reported a claim made during a pro-partisan meeting about the 'great deal of credit' that was due to the partisans for their role in the Liberation of Italy, together with the Allies.

[13] Focardi, *La guerra*. Mario Isnenghi, *Le guerre degli italiani. Parole, immagini, ricordi 1848-1945* (Milan: Mondadori, 1989), p. 247.

[14] Cooke, *The Legacy*. John Foot, *Italy's divided memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[15] See on this topic, the work of Renzo De Felice; and Focardi, *La guerra.*

[16] For a more in-depth analysis on this topic see: Focardi, *La guerra.*

of neo-Fascist memory which challenged the main *tòpoi* of the Resistance narrative and tried to subvert its interpretations.[17] However, this was met with a blunt response from the proponents of the hegemonic narrative in the period 1953-1960 which ultimately led to the main narrative being strengthened. And again this narrative was strengthened and reaffirmed in its hegemonic nature during the period between 1960 and 1978 thanks to the popular reaction to the Tambroni Government decision to allow the neo-Fascist party MSI (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*) to hold its rally in Genoa, a 'symbolic city' of the Resistance. Another driver for the narrative was the beginning of the centre-left period in 1963 when the socialists of the PSI (*Partito Socialista Italiano*) entered the Government together with the Christian-Democrat DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*).[18] This period saw a reaffirmation of the Anti-Fascist nature of the Italian Republic. However, the 1980s saw a new crisis of the hegemonic narrative on the Resistance. The birth of the so-called *pentapartito* (five parties Government) in 1981 pushed the Communist Party PCI (*Partito Comunista Italiano*) into a state of isolation, damaging the narrative according to which the Resistance has been a unitarian effort carried by all Anti-Fascist parties. Moreover, the institutional reforms ushered in by the new socialist prime minister Bettino Craxi fuelled the polemic against the Italian Constitution. As the Constitution was irredeemably tied with the Resistance, according to the hegemonic narrative, the attacks against it indirectly opened new spaces to assail the narrative itself.[19] Old accusations against the Resistance and its participants were brought back to the table,[20] while the idea that a 'national reconciliation' was necessary was pushed forward. According to this idea, Italy

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[17] Ibid., p. 19.

[18] Ibid., p. 41.

[19] Ibid., p. 57.

[20] This moment saw a reprise of Renzo De Felice's theories on the 'Anti-Fascist vulgate' started in 1975 with De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo* (Bari: Laterza: 1975) and with the publication, widely commented on in the media, of two books of the third volume of his Mussolini biography: *Gli anni del consenso: 1929-1937* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974) and *Lo stato totalitario: 1936-1940* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981). De Felice's position was later reaffirmed in the second book of the fourth volume: *La guerra civile: 1943-1945* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), published posthumously in 1997 and, more importantly, in his *Rosso e nero* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1995) in which De Felice attacks directly the mainstream narrative on the Resistance. See: Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), I-II; and Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), II.

needed to re-evaluate its past and accept the fact that during the Resistance mistakes were made. Now it was the time to admit them and reconcile with the other half of the country that fought on the losing side of the war. This idea gained traction with the electoral growth of the neo-Fascist MSI and was pushed under the spotlights in 1994 when the MSI became one of the main components of the coalition which won that year's elections.[21] In 1995 the MSI was dissolved and re-founded as AN (*Alleanza Nazionale*) and its leader, Gianfranco Fini, proposed the need to surpass both Fascism and Anti-Fascism; as the latter was the legacy of only a part of the Country (the Communist part, to be specific) and thus could not be a shared value on which to build Italian identity.[22] The centre-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi was never shy in its attacks against the Resistance, even attempting to abolish the 25 April (Italy's liberation day) as a national holiday.[23] These renewed attacks on the hegemonic narrative of the Resistance led to a memory more fragmented than ever before. The following period, beginning in 1999 and lasting until today, saw the contraposition between what was left of the hegemonic narrative tied to the 'unitarian' interpretation of the Resistance as a war of national liberation, now reborn as a 'constitutional patriotism',[24] and this new narrative of 'reconciliation'.

As this brief summary of the history of the historiography on the Resistance shows, the interpretation of the Resistance has been challenged and partially reshaped many times. However, some of its *tòpoi* are still intact. This is not the place to analyse in-depth which ones have been transformed or why, as such an operation would be far beyond the scope of this research. What will be analysed here is one of the most long-lived *topoi* of the Resistance, which is hard to crack even to this day: that of the hostility of the Allies towards the Italian Resistance, or, at least, towards some parts

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[21] Focardi, *La guerra*, p. 63.

[22] Ibid., p. 65.

[23] Mirco Carrattieri, 'La Resistenza tra memoria e storiografia', *Passato e presente*, 95 (2015), 5-18 (p. 8).

[24] Focardi, *La guerra*, p. 111.

of it (namely the left).[25] It is worth mentioning here Roberto Battaglia who, in his *Storia della Resistenza italiana* openly accuses the Allies of misconduct in handling the Italian Resistance, as they showed favouritism to partisan bands on the basis of their political colour.[26] Battaglia claims that the Allied missions parachuted into German-occupied Italy established their HQ close to 'centrist' bands, that they systematically 'avoided reporting to the local CLN [*Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale*]' and pursued a 'systematic policy of discrimination with the airdrops, which aimed to exclude the strongest formations, the *Garibaldine*'.[27] This representation of how the Allies handled the Resistance movement in Italy has lasted, with few exceptions to this day. Pietro Secchia, a militant Communist, wrote in 1955 that the Alexander Proclamation of the winter of 1944[28] was nothing more than a 'vile scheme', put together by the Allies in

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[25] This is especially connected to the idea that the British were also staunch defenders of the Savoia Household in Italy and tried constantly to keep them on the throne and in a position of power. While this position was surely present in the British political élite at the time, it was more connected to the need for political stability and a fixed interlocutor, rather than a political will to suppress republican or liberal movements in Italy. The misguided idea that the King could have been a rallying figure for Italians also played a role. See on this topic what Churchill wrote to Roosevelt in July 1943 in: Winston Spencer Churchill, *Closing the ring*, The Second World War, v (London: The reprint Society, 1954), p. 67. However, there was no such thing as an official plan for handling the Institutional question in Italy. See for example what Harold Macmillan noted on the 2 November 1943: 'I do not want the Allied Governments to be associated at his stage with the dispute, either for or against the King. [...] If they [the Italians] can solve their problem without direct interference by us it will be infinitely better both for us and for them, now and in the future'. Macmillan shows also how even for this fundamental matter there was no clear-cut plan prepared by the British commands. He was left without any directions. As he stated: 'Incidentally, I have no guidance whatever from London as to H.M.G'.s views about abdication or anything else.' Harold Macmillan, *The blast of War 1939-45* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 466.

[26] Battaglia, *The history*, p. 149.

[27] Roberto Battaglia, *Storia della Resistenza italiana, 8 settembre 1943 - 25 aprile 1945* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), p. 287.

[28] On the 13 November 1944, General Alexander issued a proclamation asking all Italian partisans to lay low and wait for a more favourable time to strike against the Germans and Fascist forces, fighting a 'defensive war'. Despite the fact that the Alexander proclamation was issued mainly because of military reasons in order to guide the partisan's strategy and help them survive the winter when Allied support would have been more difficult to provide it has been often used by Italian historiography as the centrepiece of harsh attacks against the Allies. As we will see, the main accusation is that the military necessities put forward by Gen. Alexander were nothing more than excuses to hinder and weaken the Italian resistance by letting it face the Nazi-Fascist forces alone. For the text of the proclamation see: Charles R. S. Harris, *Allied military administration of Italy 1943-1945,* The History of the Second World War: Civil affairs and military government, IV (London: Her Majesty Stationary Office, 1957), pp. 199-200.

order to cut down to size the Italian resistance, hiding their political aims behind practical difficulties used as excuses.[29]

However, Battaglia softened some of his statements against the Allies during his life, and his introduction to the English version of *Storia della Resistenza Italiana* shows more sympathy for the hard choices that the Allies had to make on the spot during the Italian campaign. As he states: 'It is true that during the war of liberation the relations between the Allies and the partisans were fraught with difficulties, difficulties that were the result of political differences', however, 'I feel […] that my burning devotion for our Resistance Movement has occasionally prevented me from seeing events in their historical perspective, and that my outlook has sometimes been too personal, nor sufficiently objective'.[30] One year later, he conceded that some of his claims were too generalised or expressed with excessive bitterness.[31]

And even Secchia, when writing *La Resistenza e gli alleati* together with Filippo Frassati is considerably more lenient towards the Allies compared to when he writes on his own. While not disavowing the idea that the Allies tried to hinder the Resistance, he also points out the fact that the documentary evidence on the topic at the time was extremely scarce (the book was published in 1962, when both the FO, WO and SOE archives were still closed to the public).[32] Moreover, the two authors recognise the will of the Allied Commands to coordinate with the partisans large-scale operations at the eve of Liberation and the fact that airdropped supplies destined to partisans were increased starting from the end of 1944. They also show some sympathy and recognise the 'commendable bravery and spirit of sacrifice' of the Allied liaison missions.[33]

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[29] Pietro Secchia, 'Il proclama di Alexander', in *La resistenza al fascismo: scritti e testimonianze*, ed. by M. Milan and F. Vighi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1955), pp. 182-185.

[30] Battaglia, *history*, p. 9.

[31] Roberto Battaglia, 'I risultati della Resistenza nei suoi rapporti con gli alleati', *Il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia*, 52/53 (1958), 159-172 (p. 159).

[32] Secchia and Frassati, *La Resistenza*, p. 10.

[33] Ibid., pp. 475-476.

In 1966 Giorgio Bocca wrote in his *Storia dell'Italia partigiana* about the 'suspicions' of the Anglo-Americans. As Bocca claims, the actions of their secret organisations in charge of keeping contacts with the Resistance were led by political concerns, as politicians, not military personnel ran these organisations. And again, like Battaglia, Bocca too accuses the Allies of discriminating between the Communists and the other partisans, thus laying the seeds for discontent and diffidence amongst the Italians.[34] Arrigo Boldrini, in his entry about the Allied liaison missions on the field in the *Enciclopedia della Resistenza* (1980) is even blunter. The liaison officers were often 'arrogant' and unable to understand the nuances of the 'partisan mentality'. When dealing with the *garibaldini* they never hesitated to fracture and weaken the partisan actions, a task facilitated by the fact that they were recruited amongst the more 'duri e puri [hard and pure]' elements of the anti-Communist personnel available.[35] This judgement on the Allied behaviour when confronting the Italian partisans is still present in the 2001 *Dizionario della Resistenza* published by Einaudi. Here, it is said that the Allies, and the British especially, tried to contain the resistance for political reasons, as they were afraid of the Communists gaining hegemony over the movement. The Allied liaison missions are described as a 'means of control' against the partisans actively seeking contacts with the 'moderate parties' while discriminating against the Communists and denying them supplies. Admittedly, it is said, this situation changed when Allied agents had to operate in the field. However, even when single agents showed a friendly attitude towards the partisans their successors as head of mission tried to restore the 'orthodoxy'.[36] The AMG/AMGOT (Allied Military Government) is also not an exception in this picture. It is said that the Partisans in the North were able to present to the Allies a much better situation in 1945 than what the Italian Government was able to do in the South in 1943. The Allies, in fact, during the spring of 1945 encountered: 'a state of enthusiasm but also order,

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[34] Giorgio Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana* (Bari: Laterza, 1977), pp. 155-156.

[35] Arrigo Boldrini, *Enciclopedia della Resistenza* (Milan: Teti, 1980), p. 249.

[36] Renato Sandri, 'Missioni dei Servizi segreti alleati in Italia', in *Dizionario della Resistenza: Luoghi, formazioni, protagonisti*, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), II, pp. 307-315 (pp. 310-311).

working institutions and a general well-being of the populations of cities, towns and villages' as opposed to the 'disappeared institutions, non-existent services and starving populations' they met after the initial landing in Sicily in 1943. However, this show of efficiency by the partisans, it is claimed, was not well viewed by the AMGOT, as it was considered a 'prelude to revolutionary explosions or a scheme', and thus was used as an excuse to prolong AMGOT's control over Italy.[37]

This last claim, in particular, seems to have little ground in archival documentation; the Allies, in fact, were often quite favourably impressed by the level of efficiency reached by the partisans in the administration of an area. The short-lived experience of the liberated city of Alba in Piedmont, for example, was considered by the 15 Army Group a great example of good administration and praised for its efficiency and ability to keep the local population 'entirely satisfied'.[38] During the last push of April 1945, the local CLNs were praised for their governing capabilities. On clandestine radio a British officer declared they were 'admirably suited to continue the task of preserving law and order and administration until the ALLIES arrive'.[39] The city of Genoa was described as 'quiet and in complete order' with all services running normally.[40] The OSS as well proposed an approach to Liberation heavily reliant on the local CLNs who were supposed to fully administer cities, towns and rural districts before the arrival of the Allies, taking on not only administrative functions but police functions as well.[41] Moreover, the Allies recognized the difference between the conditions they encountered in the South in 1943 and those encountered during their advance in the rest of Italy. In Rome, for example, they noted how 'the difference between political atmosphere' was 'obvious', as they noted a 'far greater political maturity among the educated classes'.[42] In Florence, they praised the 'keenness and

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[37] Ferdinando Sessi, 'Amgot', in *Dizionario della Resistenza: Luoghi, formazioni, protagonisti*, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), II, pp. 301-303 (pp. 302-302).

[38] TNA: War Office (WO) 204/7301, Special Operations under Rankin conditions in NW Italy, An estimate by C-3 Special operations, 15 Army Group, February 1945.

[39] TNA, WO 204/7299, Translation of Broadcast by Radio Milano 2020 hours 26th April, 26 April 1945.

[40] TNA, WO 204/7299, Memo From C-3 Special Ops, 28 April 1945.

[41] TNA, WO 204/7031, Proposal for S Day, 2 April 1945.

[42] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report on Conditions in Liberated Italy – No.23, 8 July 1944.

discipline' of the Garibaldi brigade that fought for the city's liberation.[43] The No.1 SF report for the month of April 1945 was extremely congratulatory with the CLNs, stating how the work done by the partisans was 'excellent'. They praised the 'splendid work of the CLNAI' in the interim period claiming that 'what they have done, they have done well'.[44]

On the topic of airdropped supplies, in his *Resistenza tra unità e conflitto*, Mirco Dondi states that: 'No study puts in doubt the discriminatory practices carried on by the Allies (until the eve of the 1945 Spring) against the partisan formations. Such practices were carried on both in the distribution of supplies, delivered via airdrops, and in the distribution of funds'.[45] The letter by McCaffery to Parri, written in 1943,[46] was 'more a threat than a piece of advice' and it was indicative of the British mentality, opposed to any form of agency for the Italian resistance.[47] It was only the presence of the American OSS, Dondi claims, that forced the British to shift to a more soft approach towards the partisans.[48] But despite the 'softer' position held by the Americans, according to Dondi, the Allies consciously schemed to divide and control the Resistance.[49] They created artificial differences between the various components of

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[43] TNA, FO 371/43956. PWB Report on Conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy – No.20, 16 August 1944.

[44] Istoreto, B16a, 'Report on No.1 Special Forces Activities During April 1945, May 1945.

[45] Mirco Dondi, *La Resistenza tra unità e conflitto, vicende parallele tra dimensione nazionale e realtà piacentina* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), p. 42.

[46] John McCafferey was in charge of the SOE in Switzerland and had the occasion to meet Italian leaders like Ferruccio Parri and Alfredo Pizzoni. After a letter wrote by Pizzoni to him on the 24 July 1944, McCaffrey wrote to Parri what has been for a long time identified, especially by left-wing scholars, as a harsh letter in which he criticised the choice of building up a large partisan army and warned Parri of the fact that he had 'friends' and should do his best 'not to lose them'. The letter was written in a context where the SOE was under pressure, in the framework of its never-ending conflict with the Foreign Office and was influenced by the events of the summer of 1944 when the mirage of a quick victory in Italy seemed realistic. As such, it should be seen simply as a surly but still friendly critique to the Resistance leadership and its requests, rather than an expression of the British will to control the Italian partisans with mafia-like menaces about lost friends or, even worst, put them back in their place. On the Communist interpretation of McCafferey's letter see: Secchia and Frassati, *La Resistenza*, pp. 99-100. For a revision of such interpretation in a wider context see: Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Resistenza e postfascismo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995), pp.74-75.

[47] Dondi, *La Resistenza*, p. 38.

[48] Ibid., p. 42.

[49] Ibid., p. 35.

the partisan movement, and, starting by the end of 1944, they exploited such differences to keep the Resistance disjointed.[50] Dondi confirms this judgement also in his *La Resistenza italiana*, claiming that the Allies acted only to safeguard their interests in Italy[51] and that they tried to hinder the action of Communist bands by denying them supplies.[52]

These few examples can be retraced to a general accusation moved against the Allies (and the British in particular): the attempt to disrupt the unity and mass nature of the partisan movement. As is repeatedly said by those authors the Allies were interested only in small groups of saboteurs without any political affiliation or commitment.[53] This interpretation, it must be said, was also favoured, and sometimes encouraged, by the political climate in Italy. Italy had to rebuild its identity after the war and the Resistance was one of the tools used to do so. As such, the size and scope of the partisan movement were enlarged and the external factors which contributed to its success (like the Allied support) diminished. Moreover, the Allies became a scapegoat for the lack of change in Italian society after the war. Finally, Communist prejudices against the Allies and the Americans in particular, spiked as the Cold War entered its highest phase and the split between the two sides became wider.[54]

Moreover, when the Allied liaison missions are not accused of the most nefarious acts against the Italian partisans, they simply are not mentioned. The example of the *Atlante storico della Resistenza italiana*, published by Mondadori in 2000, is paradigmatic of such an attitude, so widespread in the Italian historiography.[55] The Atlas is indubitably a fine piece of scholarship and a much needed publication in the Italian scenario, where maps and physical representation of history are somewhat scarce and not fully part of the historiographical culture. However, contrary to any

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[50] Ibid., p. 44.

[51] Mirco Dondi, *La Resistenza italiana* (Milan: Fenice, 2000), p. 80.

[52] Ibid., p. 83.

[53] Boldrini, 'Missioni', p. 249.

[54] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 10.

[55] Istituto Nazionale per la storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia, *Atlante storico della Resistenza italiana,* ed. by Luca Baldissara (Milan: Mondadori, 2000).

reasonable expectation, there is no map dedicated solely to Allied liaison missions in Italy. Missions are mentioned here and there in the text and a couple of maps do indeed mark (amongst other things) the spots where liaison officers were parachuted in and operated. However, there is no rhyme or reason as for why these particular maps present the liaison missions and the rest does not. Some of the maps present the airdropped supplies but not the parachuted personnel, some others present the parachuted personnel but not the airdropped supplies. Moreover, the marked missions are few and sparse, not at all representative of the large number of missions actually deployed by the Allies during the Italian campaign and no explanation is offered as for why some missions have been put on the maps and some others have not. This publication is indicative of a more diffuse and general tendency of the Italian historiography towards the Allied support of the Resistance: to consider it only a footnote in a much greater theatre. Allied liaison missions, airdrops and such forms of support are often relegated to a small paragraph or a short chapter and they are frequently used only to reaffirm and reinforce existing stereotypes on the relation between Italy and the Allies.[56] This is also partly due to the fact that, to this day, Italian historiography finds it problematic to see the Resistance in a transnational perspective, and tends to consider it a purely internal affair, where international actors, such as the Allies, have only supporting roles.

This is, however, only half of the picture in Italy. The Allies were not always depicted as unwilling to collaborate with the Resistance to the bitter end. Already in 1949, Ferruccio Parri wrote an article published in *Il movimento di Liberazione in Italia* where he described the collaboration between the Allies and the Italian Resistance. Parri identified the main problem with the scarcity of airdrops and the effective scarcity of resources available to the Allied commands during the Italian campaign. This was a problem, he said, that rarely the partisans on the field were able to understand. As for supposed discriminations between the bands based on their political colour, Parri

[56] Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate*, p. 8.

pointed his finger at the individual liaison officer and the different influence they had on the central commands. However, he stated, any accusation of '*censura* [discrimination]' against the left was 'without any basis'.[57] Nevertheless, Parri too affirmed that one of the goals of the Allies when dealing with the partisans was to divide them into smaller groups to better control them. Even if, he said, there was no high-level scheme to do that, but rather a common strategy adopted independently by the majority of the liaison officers.[58] However, positions like Parri's were not common in post-war Italy and were quickly obscured by the louder and much more numerous authors who proposed a more antagonistic view of Italo-Allied relations. And, it must be said, Parri himself seems to waver in his convictions. In time, he became increasingly critical of the Allies and their support to the Resistance.[59] Fifteen years after his first comments on the Allies he wrote that the unconditional surrender imposed on Italy was a product of a 'hostile and punishing attitude which was not dispelled even by the partisan comeback'.[60] Moreover, he also lamented that the soldiers of the Italian Army were employed by the Allies only in marginal roles in order to exclude Italy from the peace talks.[61]

Only during the second half of the 1980s, some revisionist positions started to emerge in Italy on the topic of Italo-Allied collaboration during the Second World War.[62] Elena Aga Rossi was one of the first scholars to approach the topic of Italo-Allied interaction during the Italian campaign from a different point of view, centred around a transnational perspective and fully aware of the military context in which this

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[57] Ferruccio Parri, 'Il movimento di Liberazione e gli alleati', *Il movimento di liberazione in Italia*, 1 (1949), 7-27.

[58] Ibid., pp. 7-24.

[59] For a short summary of Parri's position on this topic see: de Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, II, pp. 216-218.

[60] Ferruccio Parri and Franco Venturi, 'La Resistenza italiana e gli alleati', *Italia contemporanea*, 63 (1961), 18-55 (p. 20).

[61] Ibid., p. 20.

[62] As it was correctly noted by Claudia Nasini, up until the 80s the mainline narrative in Italy on the Italo-Allied relations had privileged an interpretation based around the idea that the 'Anglo-americans had always hindered the development of the Italian Resistance, scared of the possible growth of potentially dangerous political factions'. See: Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 11.

interaction took place. In 1985 Aga Rossi published a collection of her essays on a number of different topics related to Italy after 8 September 1943. One of them in particular, *Alleati e Resistenza in Italia*, represents perhaps the most coherent analysis of the Italo-Allied relationship of its times and a cornerstone for following interpretations. Aga Rossi criticised the Italian tendency of 'looking inward', considering the Resistance as a purely national phenomenon, while at the same time perpetuating a series of 'mythical' stereotypes on the Resistance.[63] She also chastised the lack of interest shown by Italian scholars in foreign studies on the Resistance, made apparent by the slowness with which non-Italian publications were translated in Italian. Moreover, these two points were even more incomprehensible from a research standpoint if we consider the fact that in 1972 the British and American archives started to disclose their material, thus creating a potentially enormous amount of research possibilities, scarcely exploited by Italian scholars.[64] Aga Rossi's contributions to the debate can be summarised as two points: first, the enunciation of a principle that we can call a 'delegation of powers'. Aga Rossi, in fact, correctly noticed how decisions were made by multiple centres of power during the Italian campaign. These centres did not always share the same view on the same issues and were often in open competition with one another.[65] This point is of extreme importance to understand why Italo-Allied relations are so hard to tackle and explain coherently. Many times it was the absence of coordination between the Allies that caused the glaring problems which afflicted this relationship. Not only was there was a lack of coordination between the Americans and the British on a political level, but military operations were far from harmonious as well. Several offices were supposed to superintend the problems caused by the invasion and occupation of Italy and by

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[63] Elena Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta: politica interna e situazione internazionale durante la seconda guerra mondiale* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1985), pp. 191-192.

[64] Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta*, p. 194. Even though, when Aga Rossi was writing in 1985, the Archives of the SOE and OSS were still not open to consultation, nevertheless the materials preserved at the National Archives in London alone (FO, WO, etc...) were made available to historians more than ten years before. I would argue that still today, many Italian scholars approach this topic with a 'pre-1972 mindset', as if the British and American archives were still closed.

[65] Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta*, p. 198.

the Resistance movement. More often than not, however, these offices aggravated the problems that they were supposed to solve, or created brand new ones. The PWB (Psychological Warfare Branch), the SOE, the AMG (just to cite a few of the actors on the Italian stage) often acted independently from one another and sometimes not knowing what the others were doing at all. Other times, orders were ignored if deemed counter-productive. On top of this, the military structure frequently ignored or contested the politicians in London, taking decisions based solely on contingent factors. This is a particularly important point put forward by Aga Rossi: it was the military personnel that ultimately called the shots in Italy. And they acted on a ruthless utilitarian policy. Not only did they consider the Italian campaign as a secondary theatre in the overall world conflict,[66] but they also took all their decisions following considerations dictated by contingencies. In this context, the interpretation of the Alexander proclamation is reversed. It was not an act required by politicians who were short-sighted to its military repercussions for political reasons (the containment of the Communists in Italy); but it was the product of a military strategy which saw Italy as just a small part of a much bigger picture and was, ironically, short-sighted to the political repercussion that the proclamation had on the British image in Italy.[67] These two points made by Aga Rossi are of capital importance in a re-interpretation of the Italo-Allied relation. Only widening our outlook to include the wider perspective of the war in Europe and recognising the multiplicity of the centres of power in Italy, in fact, can give a coherent interpretation of this relationship. Moreover, as we will see in the following chapters, an interpretation based on these principles is also useful to explain why the Italian historiography has remained for so long so faithful to outdated interpretations of the issue at hand. It is my opinion that the British deeds in Italy were the primary source for the creation of the narrative surrounding Italo-Allied relations, rather than the post-war political situation in Italy.

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[66] Ibid., p. 201.
[67] Ibid., p. 214.

Massimo De Leonardis, in 1988 in his book: *La Gran Bretagna e la resitenza partigiana in Italia*, came to similar conclusions as Aga Rossi. De Leonardis points out resolutely that, to speak of 'spirit, programs, aspirations born of the Resistance and 'betrayed' because of British (or Allied) politics does not make sense'.[68] He points out, like Aga Rossi, how the military personnel was in charge in Italy and the politicians, and the FO in particular, only sent out warnings from time to time concerning the left-wing nature of the partisan movement but ultimately always let the military have a free hand over the decisions to take in Italy.[69] He also pointed out how it is impossible to truly recognize an 'American' position, clearly separated from the British one concerning Italy and its future. As De Leonardis said, the Americans were 'fully co-responsible' for the decisions taken regarding the Italian Resistance. And that there is nothing that points at a supposedly softer American approach, dictated by the, again supposedly, more politically liberal nature of the Americans compared to the conservative British.[70] The American, in fact, as it will be explored further in the following chapters, managed to maintain a 'cleaner' public image in Italy compared to the British. They are generally remembered as friendlier towards the Italian population and more supportive of the institutional transformation of Italy from a monarchy into a republic.

De Leonardis also correctly pointed out the widespread lack of organisation and resources that both the SOE and the N°1SF were forced to face when operating in Italy.[71] Moreover, he also pointed out how, with the USA and USSR entering the war, the period of isolation of the UK ended and the ambitious plans to 'set Europe ablaze' were put aside in favour of more traditional military operations.[72] De Leonardis's work widens and supports Aga Rossi and together they present a key moment in the re-interpretation of the Italo-Allied relationship in Italian historiography. Both of

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[68] Massimo de Leonardis, *La Gran Bretagna e la Resistenza partigiana in Italia (1943-1945)* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988), p.402.

[69] Ibid., p. 400.

[70] Ibid., p. 389.

[71] Ibid., p. 113.

[72] Ibid., pp. 43-44.

them, however, do not deal with the reasons the 'black legend' surrounding the British in Italy survived so long and, arguably, survived also after their research shed so much light on why it was an inherently flawed interpretation.

Renzo De Felice touched briefly on the topic of the Allied contacts in Italy with the partisans during the 1943-1945 period in the last volume of his biography of Mussolini, published posthumously in 1997. De Felice draws from Aga Rossi's position to build his argument on Italo-Allied collaboration and pushes forwards two main points: 'Firstly: even if the political motivations and strategies laid down by [the Governments of] London and Washington played an important part, a much greater role in shaping the Allied attitude [towards Italy] was played by military considerations, almost always made by personnel deployed *in loco*'.[73] Secondly, 'that being said […] old and never forgotten hostilities (of which Eden and the Foreign Office were the main standard-bearers and point of aggregation) soon overpowered Churchill's initial *disponibilità* [openings] towards Italy'.[74] Moreover, claims De Felice, the Allied military commands were tied to a somewhat outdated military doctrine which gave scarce relevance to guerrilla warfare. Another factor was that the commands were much more willing to put their trust in Badoglio as a legitimate guide for the Italian state.[75] The Italians, on the other hand, were bogged down by ideological concerns which put them in contraposition with the Allies (the politicisation of the Resistance, the constitution of a 'partisan army',)[76] and thus collaboration was hard and slow. De Felice states that: 'to reconcile in some way such different outlooks it would have taken a lot of patience, goodwill, attention to avoid false steps and a comprehension and will to negotiate concessions which neither parts had and, it must be said, were lacking more on the Italian side than on the Allied one'.[77]

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[73] De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, II, p. 207.
[74] Ibid., p. 207.
[75] Ibid., p. 210.
[76] Ibid., p. 215.
[77] Ibid., p. 214.

De Felice, in other words, built his argument on the more recent studies on Italo-Allied collaboration in order to attack the traditional narrative on the Resistance. This attack was carried in the larger picture of his long-lasting deconstruction of the mainstream interpretation of the Resistance, the 'vulgate', which, according to him, built a mythology that alienated many Italians from the State and violently censored any debate on the subject.[78] I will not enter here the debate on the figure of De Felice, nor on his interpretation of the Resistance or Resistance historiography. However, there are a couple of points that I think are worth commenting on.

First of all, regarding Churchill's supposed '*disponibilità*' towards Italy, De Felice himself is not able to provide a convincing argument for this statement, mentioning that is impossible to tell how sincere the British Prime Minister was.[79] I would argue that Churchill was sincere in his deep affection for Italy. However, he was also bound to his belief that Italy was, after all, a defeated country.[80] Moreover, Italy had put the survival of the British Empire in jeopardy by entering a war against Great Britain totally unprovoked,[81] after having taken a series of actions, starting from 1935, seen as greatly destabilising to world peace.[82] As such, Italy was bound by the conditions of the armistice signed on 8 September 1943 and had to 'work her passage',[83] as, in the view of Churchill, Italians were not completely innocent of the acts of the Fascist regime. This helps explain and put in perspective the almost dogmatic opposition of Churchill to any project of renewal to the Italian Government after the Armistice, but also his scepticism towards collaborating with the Anti-Fascist émigrés before 1943 to create a credible alternative to the Fascist regime.

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[78] De Felice, *Rosso*, pp. 12-25.

[79] De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, II, p. 209.

[80] As Churchill wrote to Gen. Wilson 21 February 1944 on the topic of a reshuffle of the Italian Cabinet asked by the Italian parties, the British Government was 'firm' in its 'resolve not to be intimidated by threats from people who have already surrendered unconditionally'. See: The papers of Sir Winston Churchill, held at Churchill Archive Centre (Hereinafter: CHAR), CHAR 20/157/73, Telegram from W. S. Churchill to General Wilson, 21 February 1944.

[81] As Churchill himself told Stalin at Yalta: 'The British people would not easily forget that Italy declared war on the Commonwealth in the hour of her greatest peril, when France resistance was on the point of collapse, nor could they overlook the long struggle against her in North Africa before America came into the war'. See: Churchill, *Closing the ring*, p. 562.

[82] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 26.

[83] Churchill, *Closing the ring*, p. 157.

The case of Count Carlo Sforza is emblematic of such closures, as all attempts made by Sforza to convince Churchill were doomed to failure from the start, not because of the Foreign Office exerting some sort of control over British policy towards Italy, as one might expect, but because of Churchill's hostility towards any sort of concession to the Italians in the peace deal. Count Sforza was an Anti-Fascist of liberal tendencies who had a crystal clear record of opposition to fascism. He had held many positions in the Italian administration prior to 1922, including that of Foreign Minister and Italian ambassador in France. In 1927, fearing for his own life he fled from Italy and started a long period as a political emigré abroad, ending up in the United States, but always carrying on his fight against the regime. Significant in this picture is the fact that Churchill scheduled for Sforza a visit to London to 'indoctrinate'[84] him before allowing the Count to return back to Italy, in order to make sure that the Count would not try to build an opposition to the armistice's clauses. I would say, therefore, that Churchill's '*disponibilità*' should not be considered as possible openings to a more lenient attitude towards Italy during the war, but simply as a good intention to let Italy became a good friend of the United Kingdom *after* the war and *after* her moral debts had been repaid in full. This, I would say, was the nature of the disagreement between Churchill and the Foreign Office.

Secondly, despite mentioning many times that the Allies made a number of mistakes in handling the Resistance and that their actions can be the object of 'many critiques',[85] De Felice never actually mentions any. This, of course, can be accounted for by De Felice's critique of the Resistance 'vulgate' as he was far more interested in critiquing the partisans' actions. After all, as he claims in the passage quoted above, the will to negotiate was 'lacking more on the Italian side than on the Allied one'.[86] He, on the

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[84] The visit of Count Sforza to London was matter of discussion between Churchill and Roosevelt. See on the topic of the 'indoctrination' of Sforza: CHAR 20/119/62 Telegram from W. S. Churchill to F. D. Roosevelt, 1 October 1943; and CHAR 20/119/94 telegram from F. D. Roosevelt to W. S. Churchill, 2 October 1943.

[85] De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, II, p. 216.

[86] Ibid., p. 214.

other hand, has no problem in finding and pointing out the Resistance's leaders shortcomings in handling the cooperation with the Allies.

Thus, despite the fact that he actually puts forward some interesting points, his interpretation of how the mainstream representation of the Italo-Allied relation came to be is exclusively tied to the Italian historiography. The Italians only are the ones who built and perpetuated this narrative for political reasons.[87] Once again, De Felice's main objective is the Resistance 'vulgate', rather than an analysis of Italo-Allied relations. One is left to wonder how and why such a narrative survived so long if it was so easy to dismiss it. All in all it is clear that De Felice's position on Italo-Allied collaboration suffers from the scholar's attempt to use it as a tool to deconstruct the Resistance 'vulgate' and, because of that, he falls short of any meaningful interpretation compared to, for example, Aga Rossi's work, even if De Felice strongly based his analysis on it. Nevertheless, the argument in favour of a military explanation for many of the Allied actions towards Italy and the critique of the Resistance leaders' outdated ideological mindset are not to be discarded.

However, with the noticeable exception of De Felice, the interpretations provided by Aga Rossi and de Leonardis never really took off in popular knowledge; in fact, they barely took off amongst historians. Works like Aga Rossi's were fully accepted in their documentary parts, but few decided to take on their far-reaching historiographical implications. Part of the 'blame' for such a situation could be put upon the publication, in 1991, of Claudio Pavone's book *Una guerra civile, saggio storico sulla moralità nella resistenza*. There goes without saying that Pavone's book is a remarkable work, which had many merits in shaking up the Italian historiographical discourse. The main one, arguably, was to reclaim and re-qualify in a serious perspective the terminology 'civil war' referred to the Italian Resistance, a terminology that was previously unfairly relegated to a rather inelegant neo-Fascist historiography.

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[87] See, for example: de Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, II, pp. 215-216.

Pavone's book, however, caused also a 'withdrawal' of the Italian historiography on the Resistance within the familiar and comfortable boundaries of national historiography. As a result, the historiographical focus shifted back on Italy's internal struggle and the Allied contribution to the Resistance was put back on the side-lines. Moreover, Pavone himself seems to endorse a rather 'old-school' interpretation of the Italo-Allied collaboration. He correctly points out that there was a strong hostility against Italy and Italians in the British political world.[88] However, he does not look, nor care to look, for a more in-depth analysis than that. He quotes Parri to point out how the Allies wanted to keep Italians in the condition of 'obscure allies',[89] implying that this was the sole and only position amongst the Allies. Pavone claims that the Allies wanted to exclude every form of political debate from the fray and this caused 'diffidence' amongst the partisans towards the British and the Americans.[90] He also points at a 'discriminatory policy' concerning the airdrops as one of the reasons why the *garibaldini* held a grudge against the Allies.[91] Overall, his position concerning the Allies in *Una guerra civile* appears to have been outdated already in 1991.

More interesting are perhaps the middle-of-the-road positions, such as the one of Gian Enrico Rusconi, in his *Resistenza e Postfascismo*, published in 1995. His work is more focused on the Italian side of the conflict, as he deals with the points put forward by Pavone, but it has also a section dedicated to the relation between Italian partisans and the Allies. Significantly this chapter is titled '*una cooperazione competitiva* [a competitive cooperation]', apparently putting Rusconi together with the scholars who fostered the argument of an unbridgeable distance between the two actors at play. However, there are elements that seem to pull away from such interpretation, as if the author himself was trying to disprove the title of his own chapter. Rusconi

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[88] Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), p. 190.
[89] Ibid., p. 191.
[90] Ibid., p. 192.
[91] Ibid., p. 193.

talks not only about a 'cognitive dissonance'[92] between the Partisans and the Allies concerning the scope and aims of the Resistance but he also disqualifies McCaffery's letter to Parri as a form of menace or imposition.[93] He lays the foundations for a more 'practical' inquiry into Italo-Allied relations, for example, by dismissing Communist accusations against the Allies[94] or by interpreting Alexander's proclamation as a purely military act.[95] However, he never truly embraces it.

Only in the last few years, we have seen a resurgence of studies that put the Italian Resistance back in the bigger frame of the world conflict, following the path laid down in the second half of the 1980s. The most prominent contribution to this topic in the last few years is the 2010 *Gli alleati e la Resistenza Italiana* by Tommaso Piffer. Piffer makes a comprehensive and coherent argument concerning the relationship between the Allies and the Italian Resistance and is able to disprove most of the myths concerning this relationship. However, his book falls short in delivering a 'unified' historiography concerning the subject. Whereas he is able to redefine and in some way re-interpret the phenomenon, Piffer is not able to give a satisfactory explanation of why the Italo-Allied relationship has been depicted for so long in such a polarising way, with often open disregard for archival evidence. His explanations of these problems are tied to old considerations of a political nature, like the Cold War or the use of the Allies as a scapegoat for the Italian political paralysis.[96] What I am suggesting here is not that those factors played no role in shaping the historiography and the public memory on the subject, especially during the postwar years. However, as an overall explanation, they are insufficient (as they are tied only to the Italian side of the relationship) to understand why the mainstream view on the Italo-Allied relations has remained for so long mostly unchallenged and still survives today. As Piffer himself points out, two different Historiographies on this topic seems to coexist

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[92] Rusconi, *Resistenza*, p. 69.
[93] Ibid., pp. 74-75.
[94] Ibid., p. 77.
[95] Ibid., p. 81.
[96] Ibid., p. 10.

now: one tied to old prejudices and one proposing a new and more convincing interpretation.[97] Why the former survives with this great degree of success, as we saw in the previous pages, is something Piffer struggles to answer. Moreover, there are other problems with his work. In his interpretation, for example, the role of the Allies themselves is very minor. They are, in fact, almost victims of the Italians, as if they had no control over their representation. In addition, his interpretation seems to be rather static. While it is true that the political climate in Italy might have encouraged the birth of an interpretation of Italo-British relations based on the assumption of British hostility in the post-war period, nevertheless the political situation in Italy changed many times during the past seventy years. The interpretation of the Resistance itself, as Filippo Focardi pointed out, had been disassembled and reshaped many times during this period, often following the earthquake-like movements of the Italian political word.

Other than Piffer it is necessary here to mention other two publications of the 2010s on the topic of the Allied-Italian relationship. Claudia Nasini's *Una Guerra di spie, intelligence anglo-americana, Resistenza e badogliani nella Sesta Zona Operativa Ligure Partigiana (1943-1945)*, published in 2012, and Mireno Berrettini's *La Resistenza italiana e lo Special Operation Executive britannico (1943-1945)*, published in 2014.

Claudia Nasini positions herself on the tracks laid down by de Leonardis and in the wider historiographical current of revisionist studies concerning the role played by the Royal Italian Army during the Italian campaign of 1943-1945. The role of the soldiers and other Italian military forces, in fact, has been for a long time overshadowed by the partisans in Italian historiography. Save for some heroic acts of resistance against the Germans in the immediate aftermath of the armistice on 8 September 1943 (one above all: the Aegean island of Cefalonia, where the Italian soldiers refused to be disarmed by the Germans, prompting the German reaction

[97] Ibid., p. 11.

which caused the death of over three thousand Italians), in fact, the Army was considered to be too compromised by the Fascist regime to be a credible force in the narrative of Italy's liberation.[98] While this is certainly true for many high officers, it seems to be a rather unfair judgement for many lower officers and soldiers who took an active part in the Resistance or rallied again in the Southern Italian Kingdom to fight together with the Allies, grouped in the 15th Army. Claudia Nasini thus investigates the SIM (*Servizio Informazioni Militari*), the secret service of the Italian Kingdom and its role in supporting and coordinating the Resistance before the Allies took over most of the liaison operations during the summer of 1944.[99] By means of this analysis, Nasini comes to two important conclusions: firstly, that, pushed by the Allied statement that Italy's future would depend on her efforts during the war, neither Badoglio nor Bonomi attempted to seriously hinder the Resistance.[100] Secondly, that the SIM, an actor often disregarded in its role by both Italian and anglophone historiography, managed to create an efficient network of operations, which the Allies were able to exploit with great results.[101] Nasini's book is a solid work, supported by a wealth of archival references, however, it does not engage with the matter of historiography and representation concerning the Italo-Allied relationship, as it is not part of her aims. It is, nevertheless, a useful book for whoever approaches this topic, as it provides a comprehensive description of the intertwined relationships created in the field between the SIM, the OSS, the SOE and the partisans while dealing also with some political aspects of the Italian campaign. The book also contains a map of the OSS missions deployed in Italy as of March 1945, a precious tool to orientate any scholars who might feel overwhelmed by the number of missions deployed by the Allies and the confusion about their positioning in the North of Italy.

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[98] Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, pp. 12, 17.
[99] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 177.
[100] Ibid., p. 13.
[101] Ibid., p. 15.

As for Berrettini's work, it is an important piece in the positive reconstruction of the British involvement in Italy between 1943 and 1945. Above all, what is especially commendable is the enormous quantity of archival work which forms the basis for Berrettini's analysis of the topic. Berrettini is able, in fact, to give a complete and interesting picture of what he calls the 'everyday diplomacy' between Italian partisans and the British liaison officers, thanks to a minute reconstruction based on a remarkable *corpus* of archival finds. The book is especially relevant as it comes to two important conclusions: firstly, that to the British 'every partisan band was the same, as long as it killed the enemy', regardless of its political colour.[102] This is especially important as it underlines how politics were only a secondary concern for the BLOs and the British personnel on the field. Secondly, he correctly points out, albeit only briefly, how the lack of men and resources was one of the main hindrances to more open collaboration between the British and the Italian partisans.[103] Once more, this points at how politics were only a secondary concern in the field. However, it also fails to deliver a more in-depth and coherent examination of the topic. This limits its Historiographical scope severely. Berrettini does not dwell on the mistakes made by the British too much or how these mistakes impacted on the British image in Italy, limiting himself to generic considerations on lack of resources. Moreover, he has no interest in confronting the conundrum of the long survival of the 'black legend' surrounding the British involvement in Italy during the Italian campaign. Once more, this was not set as an aim for his work, so it should not come as a surprise. All in all, Berrettini's book is a precious example of solid archival work and another valid piece in the re-evaluation of the British presence in Italy between 1943 and 1945, tackled from a much-needed bottom-up approach.

As for the other 'branch' of the historiography on the topic of Italo-Allied relations during the Second World War, I will now turn to some anglophone authors. The early

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[102] Mireno Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana e lo Special Operations Executive britannico (1943-1945)* (Florence: Le lettere, 2014) p. 132.
[103] Ibid., p. 144.

British historiography on the Italian campaign was not very much interested in the issues of the Italian Resistance, or in the Resistance at all.[104] Winston Churchill, in his massive work on the Second World War, barely mentions the Resistance movement in Italy.[105] Marshal Alexander, in his memoirs on the Italian campaign, does not even mention the existence of the Italian Resistance.[106] The official history series as well does not mention Italian partisans, (the only reference is to Yugoslavia) when talking about the military aspects of the Second World War.[107] Moreover, in the volume about the Allied administration of Italy authored by C. S. R. Harris (who served with the Allied Military Government and other controlling bodies in Italy) and published in 1957, the issue is treated as a simple problem of public order, for the Germans in enemy occupied territory and later for the Allied Military Government.[108] Harris claims that the issue of the Italian Resistance was the 'most difficult question confronting Allied Military Government'. The Resistance had been 'advertised in flattering terms in the press and the radio and deliberately somewhat inflated for propaganda purposes, in order to discourage the enemy and to support the 'patriots' in German-occupied territory'.[109] Beside the menace to 'public order' that was posed by the presence of armed partisans on the ground, 'a far more fundamental issue' was the CLN in Milan. According to Charles Harris, the Milanese CLN 'at one time showed signs of intending to constitute itself the government of Northern Italy, and a revolutionary government at that'.[110] In order to prevent any threat to public order in the 'hiatus' between the German withdrawal and the AMGOT arrival, three officers were parachuted to the North to instruct local missions on how to handle the interim

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[104] Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta,* p. 196.

[105] See for example: Churchill, *Closing the ring*, p. 166, where Churchill briefly mentions the beginning of a civil war in Italy before a long excursus on the Badoglio Government and the British attitude to it, ignoring the interaction between the Southern Kingdom of Italy and the partisans in the North.

[106] Harold Alexander, *The allied armies in Italy from 3rd September, 1943, to 12th December, 1944* (London: His Majesty's stationery office, 1950).

[107] John Ehrman, *Grand strategy*, The History of the Second World War: United Kingdom military series, V-VI (London: Her Majesty Stationary Office, 1956).

[108] The same position appears in Harold Macmillan's memoirs when he briefly mentions the Italian Resistance, see: Macmillan, *The blast*, pp. 554, 677, 684.

[109] Harris, *Allied military administration*, p. 274.

[110] Ibid., p. 282.

period.[111] Moreover, it is said that the Italian Resistance never had much autonomy or the capability to inflict any serious damage to the Nazi-Fascist forces; especially after the 'severe suffering inflicted on the partisans by the enemy during the previous winter [the winter of 1944-1945]'.[112]

The early Anglo-American publications, thus, did not dwell upon the Italian Resistance. It is possible that the Italian Resistance was never a topic which particularly interested either the American or the British scholars, as it was considered a secondary topic inside a secondary theatre in the Second World War.[113] However, this alleged reticence in exploring the topic of the Italian partisans in the immediate aftermath of the war can be better understood in the framework of a small conflict inside Allied historiography on the war, which favoured the military in charge of 'orthodox' warfare rather the men and women involved in covert operations. The British High Commands, in fact, always disliked the idea of fomenting rebellions and revolutions, and the controversial legacy of Lawrence of Arabia had strengthened this attitude.[114]

This is reflected in the official historiography that, as with the partisans, only barely takes interest in the liaison missions. As David Stafford pointed out, 'the memoirs of Britain's war leaders were singularly disappointing or reticent' on this topic.[115] When the SOE was created in 1940, Churchill emphatically ordered his director, Hugh

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[111] Despite what may be seen as a confirmation here of what scholars like Sandri and others said about the Allied missions as 'means of control' there are couple of points that are worth noticing. Firstly, it is clearly stated that the Allied missions had no 'executive powers' nor the authority to set up any form of control or government while they were waiting for the AMGOT to arrive. Secondly, the agreement signed between SACMED (Supreme Command of the Mediterranean) and CLNAI (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Alta Italia) on the 7 December 1944, and the following agreements between the CLNAI and the prime minister Bonomi and between Bonomi and Alexander, are deemed satisfactory for the AMGOT to trust the CLNAI. The Allied were thus reassured about the CLNAI's intentions and the strategy for the interim period found the approval of the AMGOT and, despite a few days of uncertainty, was 'orderly' applied by the CLNAI when the time came. See: Harris, *Allied military administration*, pp. 274-277, 282-284, 296-297, 303.

[112] Harris, *Allied military administration*, p. 282.

[113] Tommaso Piffer, 'Office of Strategic Services versus Special Operations Executive competition for the Italian Resistance', *Journal of Cold War Studies,* 4 (2015), 41-58 (p. 42).

[114] Frederick William Deakin, 'La Gran Bretagna e la Resistenza europea', *Il Movimento di liberazione in Italia*, 65 (1961), 3-31 (p. 4).

[115] David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940-1945, a survey of the Special Operations Executive, with documents* (London: Thistle Publishing, 2013), pp. XV-XVI.

Dalton, to 'set Europe ablaze'. This grandiose order was suggested to the British Prime Minister not only by his theatrical sense but also by the peculiar situation of isolation in which the United Kingdom found itself in the wake of France's collapse. As David Stafford points out, this situation acted as a 'detonator' for the British, persuading and forcing them in equal measure to rely more and more on propaganda, bombing and acts of internal rebellion to defeat the Axis.[116] This was an idea that dated back to 1938,[117] however, because of the UK's desperate situation, resources to be destined to this kind of operations were scarce and the SOE struggled to carry out its task. And when finally they became available, the war had fundamentally changed its shape, making the SOE if not obsolete, then subsidiary. The American and Soviet involvement, together with a better understanding of the difficulties of organizing a secret army on the continent, made the 'orthodox' methods of warfare regain their predominance during the Spring of 1942.[118] As was pointed out, 'sober calculation of the number of aircraft necessary to create and maintain such secret armies rendered the plan impossible even before American entry in the war made it unnecessary'.[119] The role of the SOE in the war, thus, followed a somewhat murky path in historiography, with a debate around its usefulness that continues to this days.

An official history of SOE in Europe was written but never published completely. The first comprehensive volume of the official history, *SOE in France*, authored by M. R. D. Foot and published in 1966.[120] The book had a wide public success but its conclusions, albeit supportive of the French Resistance as a whole, scaled down the size and successes of both the SOE in France and of the local *maquis*. This provoked the ire of retired SOE agents and French resistance groups alike,[121] sparking a controversy so big, that it was decided not to continue the series.[122] In the same years,

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[116] David Stafford, 'The Detonator Concept: British Strategy, SOE and European Resistance after the Fall of France', *Journal of contemporary history*, 2 (1975), 185-217 (p. 208).

[117] Ibid., p. 186.

[118] Ibid., p. 209.

[119] Mark, 'The SOE Phenomenon', p. 518.

[120] Stafford, *Britain*, p. XVIII.

[121] Brian Bond, 'MRD Foot Obituary, *The Guardian*, 21 February 2012.

[122] Stafford, *Britain*, p. XVIII.

in 1962, a conference was held in Oxford on Britain and the European Resistance. Unfortunately, the proceedings were not published and were restricted in circulation.[123] Mark Wheeler in 1981 remarked how 'the jury is still out on SOE'[124] and as late as 2008 M. R. D. Foot was still asking 'What use was SOE?'.[125] In Italy especially, the SOE's life was difficult. It was not until October 1941 that Italy had finally its own country section (J). The situation, however, was still hazy, as the J section chief, Col. Cecil Roseberry, had no Italian background. His assistant did, but these two were to remain the only members of the J section until the Summer of 1943.[126] After the landings in Sicily and the capture of parts of southern Italy in September 1943 the Italian section of the SOE mission in Algiers ('Massingham') was moved to the town of Brindisi and then to the small village of Monopoli, under the name of No.1 Special Force (No.1 SF), also known as 'Maryland'.[127] From these headquarters the No.1 SF carried on its operations, enjoying (and providing) increasing support from the 15th Army Group that, especially during the spring of 1944, came to realise the advantages of covert operations and of partisan warfare in Italy, at least informally, urging the No.1 SF to reinforce their liaison missions to the partisans with British officers.[128]

From the end of the war, and sometimes even before, the efficacy of SOE in Italy (and in the rest of Europe) was put under scrutiny by the 'orthodox' military personnel. They, in fact, had a strong distaste for irregular warfare,[129] and thus it should not come as a surprise if they preferred to sideline the achievements of the SOE.[130] Already during the Spring of 1945 the Number one Special Force (No.1 SF, the SOE division in charge of operations in Italy) tried to draft a balance of its activities, claiming how the unanimous satisfaction expressed by the commands, from the division

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[123] Ibid., p. XVIII.

[124] Wheeler, 'The SOE Phenomenon', p. 514.

[125] M. R. D. Foot, 'What use was SOE?', *The RUSI Journal*, 1 (2008), 76-83.

[126] Christopher Woods, 'SOE in Italy', in *Special Operation Executive: a new instrument of war*, ed. by Mark Seaman (Routlege: London, 2006), pp. 91-102 (p. 92).

[127] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[128] Ibid., p. 99.

[129] Kogan, *Italy*, p. 101.

[130] Stafford, *Britain,* pp. XVIII-XX.

commanders to the Prime Minister was a clear indicator of the success of their actions. They remarked on their role not only in military liaison but also as key actors in the political reconciliation between Italy and the Allies. It was only thanks to the liaison missions, they claimed, that the Italians were finally convinced that they had the full support of the Allies in their struggle against Nazi-Fascism.[131] Considering the accusations that were hurled against the liaison officers over the course of the years, this last point seems sadly ironic. However, this positive image was put in danger only a few months after, as the protests made by the liaison staff to the Eighth Army's appreciation of their efforts in Italy reveal. They, in fact, contested the reconstruction made concerning the results achieved by No.1 SF in Italy. As the author of the memorandum said: 'the inference drawn from these paragraphs must be that in Italy S.O.(M) achieved no success either strategically or tactically or in other words, the activities of No.1 Special Force were from a military point of view entirely a waste of time'.[132] The document produced by the Eighth Army was considered by the No.1 SF to be 'a vote of censure on No.1 Special Force' and they asked for the possibility to refute those charges with documentary evidence. Covert warfare was fundamentally different from regular warfare and did not 'comply with the principles of ordinary military manoeuvres'.[133] They went as far as to claim that to judge covert operations by conventional warfare standards was like 'a member of the Royal Academy of Art to have his views authentically accepted on the merits and technicalities of a Cinematograph Film'.[134] The success of SOE operations in Italy, the No.1 SF argued, was indisputable.[135]

This goes to show how, if the contribution of the partisans to the final Allied victory in Italy was the object of fiery debate, the same can be said for the SOE activities. It should not come as a surprise, thus, if military history written with an 'orthodox' outlook on warfare often downplayed the role of partisans as well as that of the SOE.

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[131] Istoreto: B16a, Report on No.1 Special Forces Activities during April 1945, May 1945.
[132] CASREC, WO 204/10247 98855, Assessment of S.O.(M) Operations, 8 August 1945.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

Just like Allied airdrops in Italian historiography were used mainly to stir controversy, SOE activities in Anglophone historiography are often debated only in the framework of discussing its efficacy with allegations and counter-allegations bouncing back and forth,[136] including that of being the *longa manu* of the British conservative establishment (embodied by Churchill, Eden and the Tory party), interested in restoring the pre-war *status quo*.[137] However, even if this historiography is somewhat distant from the problems of Italo-Allied relations and the role played by the SOE, it is nevertheless of great help for a scholar who approaches the topic of the Italo-Allied collaboration for the first time, as it provides a large *corpus* of detailed information which can be drawn upon. This, however, remained for a long time the main limitation to the Anglophone approach to the Italian Resistance. The 'second rank' position in which Italy was relegated in favour of more 'attractive' theatres of joint guerrilla operations, like France,[138] surely contributed to this limitation. Moreover, much of the Anglophone literature is composed of memoirs written by agents and officers and for this reason, is limited to single areas and is often anecdotal.[139] David Stafford described this kind of publication as 'highly spiced, melodramatic or exculpatory memoirs' which only fuelled further the controversy surrounding the SOE activities in Europe.[140]

A first attempt to conduct a more systematic enquiry into the SOE's activities was Michael R.D. Foot's book on the SOE, *SOE 1940-1946*, published in 1984. Foot does not discuss Italy extensively; in fact, he barely mentions it, together with Spain.[141] However, he draws a complete picture of what the SOE was and, more importantly, how it operated, which is invaluable to any research on the topic of British-Resistance

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136 Stafford, *Britain*, p. XVIII.

137 Ibid., p. XXII.

138 Roderick Bailey, *Target: Italy: the secret war against Mussolini 1940-1943* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), p. 4.

139 Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta*, p. 195.

140 Stafford, *Britain*, p. XVIII.

141 M. R. D. Foot, *SOE, The Special Operations Executive 1940-46* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984), p.229.

collaboration, no matter the country in which the events took place. Significantly, Foot points out how the SOE cared very little for the political affiliation of their contacts in occupied countries, or even for their criminal records.[142] The only aim which guided the SOE's actions, he claims, was to defeat Hitler and win the war.[143] In Italy, as well, episodes like the positive collaboration between the British and the Otto organization, led by the Communist Ottorino Balduzzi,[144] shows that the British were not overly concerned with the political affiliation of their contacts in Italy, as long as they were not openly hostile to British positions.[145] This position earned the SOE much criticism in the years after the war, and contributed to creating an image of the Service described as 'downright inefficient, wasteful and even damaging of the war effort'.[146] Moreover, during the Cold War, the support that the SOE often granted to left-wing partisans made it the target of political assaults for its meddling with radicals and revolutionary elements.[147]

Foot kept writing about the SOE during his career, however, he rarely if ever mentioned the operations in Italy. In 1981, examining the role that the SOE had in the final victory, he does not even consider Italy, while mentioning France, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Norway and even, rightfully, the often forgotten operations in Burma against the Japanese.[148] However, despite its limitations in dealing with the specific topic of Italo-Allied collaboration, Foot's work can provide a backdrop to better frame the problem.

One of the main British voices in describing the SOE activities is David Stafford, as already mentioned. In 1980 he published what he described modestly as an interim

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[142] Ibid., p. 58.

[143] Ibid., p. 149.

[144] On the activities of the Otto, see: Antonio Martino, 'L'attività di intelligence dell'Organizzazione OTTO nella relazione del Prof. Balduzzi', *Quaderni savonesi. Studi e ricerche sulla Resistenza e l'età contemporanea*, 24 (2011), 35-42.

[145] De Leonardis, *La Gran Bretagna*, pp. 107-108.

[146] Richard Deacon, *A history of the British Secret Service* (London: Muller, 1969), p. 343.

[147] Stafford, *Britain*, p. XIX.

[148] M. R. D. Foot, 'Was the SOE any Good?', *Journal of contemporary history* , 1 (1981), 167-181 (pp.176-178).

assessment of SOE action and its liquidation after the war, *Britain and European Resistance 1940-1945, a survey of the Special Operations Executive, with documents*. Stafford made good use of archival documentation, giving an all-around view of the SOE and, more importantly, of the internal conflicts which hindered its actions, being bogged down by contrasts with the already existing SIS, the RAF, the Foreign Office and many others. While his view in this volume can be described as London-centred,[149] it nevertheless provides a precious bird-eye view on the attitude that the British had towards the European resistance movements, trying to be as all-encompassing as possible.

In 2005 Stafford was appointed to write the official history of the SOE in Italy, which was published in 2011 with the title: *Mission Accomplished SOE and Italy 1943-1945*.[150] This is, to this day, the most complete and accurate description of the SOE's involvement in Italy. Stafford once more makes good use of a wealth of archival documents to attempt an in-depth and extensive analysis of the SOE's activities. Successes are celebrated, but the author does not shy away from recounting failures and analysing them with a critical eye. He gives an account of the difficult cooperation of the SOE and the Italian partisans, often suspicious of the real British intentions. However, the book sometimes slips into anecdotal narratives, it presents a vast cast of characters and, as a result, is somewhat fragmented in its exposition. It is sometimes difficult to glimpse the overall Allied strategy in the Mediterranean and how these singular stories fit in it.

A more recent publication related to the specific topic of Italo-Allied collaboration is *SOE in Italy 1940-1945*, by Malcolm Tudor. Tudor clearly lays out the main points of SOE's *modus operandi* and provides examples of actions in the field carried on by the SOE together with Italian Resistance forces. However, he does not provide any historiographical outlook to his work. His book is a purely military history publication and deals very little with problems of historiography. Moreover, even

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[149] Wheeler, 'The SOE Phenomenon', p.517.

[150] David Stafford, *Mission Accomplished SOE and Italy 1943-1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2012).

when he touches on the topic of the relations between Italian and the Allies he simply talks about political disagreements between the CLN and the Allied commands.[151] He only briefly mentions the ideological problems of collaboration,[152] and he barely mentions the issue of cooperation in the field. And when he does it, he simply quotes Battaglia and his complaints about the airdrops being rigged against the Communists.[153] Evidently, this particular *tòpos* of the Italian hegemonic narrative proved to be strong enough to cross the Channel and influence British historiography. In conclusion, as useful as it is from a 'factual' standpoint, Tudor's book is limited in its scope and does not provide much in the way of interpretation when it comes to Italo-Allied interactions. This, however, is not a fault particular to Tudor as the same can be said for almost all the British historiography concerning the military history of the Italian campaign.

Finally, on the topic of 'factual' publications, I would like to touch on the 2014 book by Roderick Bailey *Target: Italy*. Despite the fact that his timeframe (1940-1943) is different from mine (1943-1945), Bailey's book is still relevant in this context as it deals with some issues that will influence the Italo-Allied collaboration in the period 1943-1945 too. First, the fact that SOE (and all the special forces deployed by the Allies in Italy) did not have a proper plan of action. The nature of this secret war and the lack of resources that the SOE could employ compared to the Fascist regime forced them to proceed with a trial-and-error approach, counting more on the ability and intelligence of their agents than on any sort of carefully laid out plan.[154] This, as we will see, will also be true for the Italian campaign. He also dwells on the topic of collaboration and of self-representation felt by the Italian émigrés when they tried to collaborate with the British. From Max Salvadori to Emilio Lussu, Bailey takes into consideration a handful of cases. However, he seems to imply that agency was

[151] Tudor, *SOE in Italy*, p. 49.
[152] Ibid., p. 11.
[153] Ibid., p. 55.
[154] Bailey, *Target: Italy*, p. 9.

nothing more than a bargaining chip for the émigrés in their negotiations with the British.[155] I would strongly argue against that, as the comparison between different choices made by the émigrés shows how deeply this issue was felt. Moreover, Bailey's book suffers from an over-fragmentation of his narrative. It seems sometimes more interested in describing the breath-taking landing of an SOE party behind enemy lines than analysing why that party was sent there, how we can relate its activities with the overall Allied strategy and the results that Italo-British collaboration produced.

It is also true that there is no lack of more ample historiographical works in English. However, much like in Italy, such works tend to focus more on the political side of the Italo-Allied collaboration. Not only that, often these works seem to propose and perpetuate stereotypes on Italo-Allied relations taken from the Italian historiography.[156]

Interestingly enough, it seems that American scholars seemed to be more open to recognise and investigate the role of the Italian Resistance from a historical perspective, instead of simply relegating it to military history. In Norman Kogan's *Italy and the Allies*, published in 1955, two themes are presented as the centrepieces to what shaped the relations of post-Fascist Italy with the rest of the world. Kogan's book is interesting as he tackles two particular problems: the 'efforts of the Italian people to rise from the ruins of a lost war in which they were plunged against their will' and 'the threat to the Italian social structures created by the rise of the political left'.[157] It might seem, from this quotation, that the author embraces a series of misconceptions and prejudices common to many non-Italians when approaching Italy and its troubled relationship with the Fascist regime and the Resistance. And, for the most part, it is true. Kogan shares the myth of an Italy mesmerised by Mussolini, up until the declaration of war against France. He also points out that the Allied military personnel were distrustful of the Italian partisans. Not only because

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[155] Ibid., p.114.

[156] As we already saw, for example, in M. Tudor, *SOE in Italy*

[157] Kogan, *Italy*, p. VII.

they had 'a natural distaste for irregulars', but also because of the 'political complexion of the movement'.[158] He thus pushes forward the idea of a threat represented by the left in Italy during the 1943-1945 period. According to Kogan, it was only after the agreements of December 1944 between the CLNAI and the SACMED (Supreme Allied Command for the Mediterranean) that the Allies finally gave full support to the Resistance, leading to the uprising of the 1945 spring.[159] This is a position that starkly clashes with the Italian historiography on the period, which sees the winter of 1944-1945 as the high point of contrast in the Italo-Allied relations because of the Allied fears of an uncontrollable partisan uprising during the following spring.[160] However, there are also present many historiographical directions that would later be examined and extended by other authors.

First of all, Kogan draws attention to the pre-war Anti-Fascist opposition, describing it as the first phase of the armed Resistance,[161] a concept that nowadays has almost disappeared from anglophone historiography on the Resistance. Second, he points out the role of disbanded military men who joined the Resistance.[162] This was a topic that was mostly disregarded by Italian historiography and it is still somewhat underestimated today.[163] Finally, he links the Resistance experience with the early years of Italian democracy and makes an appreciation of the difficulties that Italian politics faced when confronted with the issues of reforming society and the purge of Fascism.[164] All in all Kogan's book represents a scenario where the Allies were hostile towards Italy only for political reasons tied to their desire to avoid any uncontrollable insurrection. Once they were reassured that the Resistance would not be a threat to

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158 Ibid., p. 101.

159 Ibid., p. 102.

160 In this context took shape in Italy the idea of the Alexander proclamation as a 'vile scheme' to hinder the growth of the Resistance movement in anticipation of the final Allied push against the Germans during the spring of 1945.

161 Kogan, *Italy*, p. 8.

162 Ibid., p. 101.

163 See, for example on this topic, Battaglia, *Storia*, p. 138. Not only Battaglia dismisses episodes of armed resistance carried on by the disbanded Italian army as 'an exception, compared to the more usual state of things', but he goes as far as to put a divide between a first, improper, resistance made by soldiers (which lasted only a few days) and the real Resistance, which was a struggle of the Italian people as a whole.

164 Kogan, *Italy*, pp. 193-194.

public order they supported it. The Italians, on the other hand, were divided amongst themselves, as the party in charge repeatedly tried to influence Allied policy towards Italy. For example, he points at Badoglio and the *badogliani* as the instigators of a defamatory campaign against the partisans to foster the Allies hostility against the Resistance[165] and strengthen the position of King Vittorio Emanuele III.[166] In conclusion, as dated as Kogan's book may appear today it must be nevertheless be appreciated as a voice in stark contrast to the Italian historiography in his period (which corresponds to the 1953-1960 period in Focardi's periodisation, or the period of violent reaffirmation of the 'hegemonic narrative' on the Resistance).[167]

In his book, *Italy 1943-1945,* David W. Ellwood gives a solid account for the Allied policy towards occupied Italy and the context in which it was produced. Its main contribution was to point out the differences between British and American policies, the contrasts that often ensued from those differences and the issues in dealing with Italian problems which descended from these contrasts. Ellwood takes a political approach, but he does not shy away from mentioning and analysing the military aspect of the Italian campaign and other more 'practical' sides. His judgement on the Italo-Allied relations concerning the liaison missions and their relations with the partisans, however, echoes some of the claims made by Italian Historians of the same period. Ellwood embraces the idea that the Allied position on Italy was dictated by

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[165] The main result of this campaign was the rushed disbandment of General Pavone's brigades, organised by Pavone himself, the philosopher Benedetto Croce (both members of the Action Party) and the OSS General William Donovan. These troops were supposed to form units fighting in the name of Italy (not the King) and be under direct control of the Allied Command, not the Italian General Staff in Brindisi. This project, of course, was met with a wave of paranoia by Badoglio, King Vittorio Emanuele III and their associates who, in the end, managed to convince the Allies that Pavone and his men were a threat to stability in Italy and had the brigades dissolved in November 1943. See: Kogan, *Italy*, p. 100.

[166] To attain this objective, Badoglio sent General Basso in Naples to purge the local armed forces of all 'unreliable' elements. See: Kogan, *Italy*, p. 100.

[167] For example, Battaglia's *Storia della Resistenza italiana* was published in 1953 and Secchia published his *Il comunista e l'insurrezione* and *La Resistenza e gli alleati* respectively in 1954 and 1962. Both authors, as seen before, present a very different picture compared to Kogan, despite some common points (namely the ineptitude of Badoglio and the British almost dogmatic support to him and the King). Also, see the anthology *Il secondo Risorgimento*, published in 1955 for the tenth year anniversary of the Liberation.

the British Foreign Office.[168] The Allied military missions were a means of control used against the Partisans and 'there can be little doubt that these missions preferred to work with the *Autonomi* non-party bands or at least those dominated by the Right-wing parties'.[169] According to him, moreover, the decision to keep politics and military matters separated was a scheme to 'impose Allied and Italian government control on the resistance structures'.[170]

To add to this, Richard Lamb's *War in Italy*, published in 1993, is another example of an analysis which starts on a different topic than the political aspect of the Italian campaign, but loops back to it, almost as this topic exerts an unescapable pull for historians. Lamb's book is mainly about military history, and it represents a precious contribution in anglophone literature, because of its account of the Italian Army actions after the armistice of 1943 as a co-belligerent with the Allies. This topic received little attention from the Italian historiography and even less by the Anglophone one. Lamb manages to give a comprehensive picture of it, shedding new light on a seldom analysed aspect of the Italian campaign. However, much of his argument is centred around the dispute on the figure of King Vittorio Emanuele III and the future of the Italian State,[171] rather than on actual interaction in the field between Italians and Allied personnel. The space dedicated to partisan warfare and liaison missions is relatively small, but he at least points out that there were two different approaches to the Italian campaign: one carried on by General Alexander, and the other by the Foreign Office.[172] However, this point does not seem to have any relevance in his overall argument.

Other remnants of the old Italian interpretations can be found in the book *The Italian Resistance*, by Tom Behan, published in 2009. Behan dedicates only the last sixteen pages of his book to the collaboration between Italians and the Allies and talks about an: 'uneasy collaboration', like Rusconi. However, unlike Rusconi, he embraces this

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[168] David W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985), p. 9.
[169] Ibid., p. 159.
[170] Ibid., p. 161.
[171] Richard Lamb, *War in Italy 1943-1945* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1993), p.210-211.
[172] Ibid., p. 208.

definition and does not go against the Italian hegemonic narrative on Italo-Allied relationship. According to Behan, in fact, the partisans and the Allies collaborated mostly because of military needs. In the end, according to him, the Italo-Allied collaboration was an 'unconsummated marriage'.[173] He only briefly mentions the collaboration on the field before going straight back to the political level of collaboration and focusing on the Rome protocols of 1944.[174]

In conclusion, considering the various approaches present in the Anglophone literature, we should mention Charles Delzell's *Mussolini's enemies*. Published in 1961 Delzell's book hints at various topics that would later be accepted by Italian historiography, such as a purely military explanation for the Alexander proclamation of 1944.[175] He also puts forwards points that were never truly internalised by anglophone historiography. For example, the fact that the armed uprising of 1943-1945 was but the end of a much longer process started with the Fascist takeover of Italy in 1922.[176] Moreover, he shows interest in a topic usually confined to local chronicles: the interactions between the Italian Resistance and France.[177] Delzell's book is, because of this, somewhat unique in the Anglophone environment and, in many ways, in the Italian one too. He carefully distinguishes between the political affiliation of the brigades and the political affiliation of the single combatant inside the brigades. 'Not all Garibaldini were Communists',[178] is a statement that many scholars have overlooked. Instead, they took for granted that liaison officers had to deal with hardcore Communists every time they interacted with the *garibaldini*. Delzell describes a clean and concise picture of the Italo-Allied interaction, making a distinction between interactions in the field and in political talks. Not only that, but

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[173] Behan, *The Italian Resistance*, p. 219.

[174] Ibid., pp. 209-212.

[175] Charles F. Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies, The Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 451-455.

[176] Ibid., p.VIII. See also on this topic: Stanislao G. Pugliese (eds), *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and the Resistance in Italy 1919 to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

[177] For example: Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies*, pp. 379-381.

[178] Ibid., p. 290.

he even tries to outline how these two levels influenced each other. It must be said that this operation is not carried out in a satisfactory way, as Delzell often drifts too much towards the political aspects of the interaction and tends to present the decision of the Allied commands as part of an organic plan, which they were not. However, he correctly identifies the moment of disarmament as a critical point in the Italo-Allied relations, when the most egregious mistakes were made by the Allied personnel which in turn caused the most dissatisfaction amongst the partisans.[179] Moreover, he also considers the immediate repercussions of the Resistance in Italian politics in the aftermath of the war and the delusion felt by large strata of the Italian population for the lack of change in Italy.[180] All things considered, thus, Delzell's research appears to be ahead of its time and surely represents an interesting cue for a revaluation of the Italo-Allied collaboration. The picture drawn by Delzell in 1961 aimed to present an organic interpretation of the issue of Italo-Allied collaboration and, in many ways, the author succeeded in his task.[181]

At this point, it should be clear that this thesis will fulfil a much-needed role inside the Anglophone literature, as it will take the legacy of historians like Delzell, Ellwood and Stafford, and modernise it thanks to the most recent contributions by Italian scholars which have not been translated into English, like Piffer. And it can find a place inside the Italian historiography too, as it will help cement the newer interpretative current on the Resistance and provide a more coherent explanation for some of the points that are currently lacking. Overall I hope this work will serve as a bridge between the two Historiographies and stimulate a renewed interest in the subject.

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[179] Ibid., p. 410, 509, 551.
[180] Ibid., p. 554.
[181] Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta*, p. 193.

Ch2: Fieldwork

In this chapter, I want to touch on some points concerning the nature of Resistance warfare that have been, for a long time, at the centre of attention for scholars. This will serve the purpose of 'setting the stage' for the rest of my work, providing a bedrock upon which I will build my hypothesis. There are four main points I want to touch in this chapter which all, in one way or another, connect to the general theme of the scope the British liaison missions deployed in Italy and their alleged 'control function' on the Italian Resistance. Firstly, I discuss the issue of the size of the partisan bands, in the never-ending debate that sees the Italians, who wanted to build large bands, pitched against the British, who wanted to keep the bands small and nimble. Secondly, the issue of the airdrops supply, often indicated as the means with which the British tried to keep the Italian resistance in check, operating a discriminatory policy against left-wing formations and using the scarce supplies dropped to avoid an excessive increase in bands' size. Thirdly, politicisation inside the bands and the risk that this represented according to the BLOs, especially concerning the 'Communist menace'. Fourthly, and finally, how Greece and its complicated situation influenced the Italo-British relationship, especially in connection with, possibly, a new British assessment of the 'Communist menace' in Italy.

Allied liaison missions in Italy during the 1943-1945 campaign have for long been forgotten.[1] They were just a small part of a much wider debate around the interaction between Italian partisans and the Allied forces; for this reason, they never enjoyed much recognition. As Angelo Ventura points out, they were, at most, mentioned briefly to strengthen one position in the debate on whether or not the Allies tried to hinder the Italian Resistance.[2] British missions especially suffered this fate, often accused of being agents on the field for the mischievous schemes devised in London to control and weaken the partisan movement. They were accused, as it was examined in the previous chapter, of trying to exert political control on the partisans,[3]

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[1] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 171.
[2] Angelo Ventura, 'Prefazione', in Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate*, p. 8.
[3] Sandri, 'Missioni', pp. 310-311.

of 'playing favourites' with the distribution of supplies[4] and, in general, of doing anything in their power to suppress the action of the more left-wing formations of the Resistance in favour of 'independent' bands or monarchist elements.[5] However, archival documentation paints the picture in a much different light. And indeed more recent research focused entirely on the examination of liaison missions, has put forward a number of interesting finds, chiefly that the idea the liaison officers in Italy acted to hinder the Resistance has no ground in reality.[6] Tommaso Piffer is particularly firm in his evaluation, claiming that "the idea of a discriminatory policy put in place against left-wing formations has no basis in the archival documentation and […] it survived to this day due to political and polemical reasons, often thanks to a distorted use of the available documents".[7]

Indeed, the liaison officers shared with the partisans the harsh life of the *guerrigliero*. They shared the hunger, the cold, the constant danger of a Nazi-Fascist attack, and their gruesome consequences. As was pointed out by the liaison officers themselves, in fact, the Germans made little distinction between Allied personnel and Italian partisans, leading to the summary execution of captured liaison officers.[8] A captured liaison officer had only 'the slenderest chance of survival'.[9] Partisans and liaison officers fought alongside one another and in nearly all cases this created a bond of mutual respect between them. Moreover, the liaison officers, exactly because of the particular conditions of guerrilla warfare enjoyed an enormous degree of autonomy in their decisions. They had their orders, but how to follow them was left entirely to them. And they often had to comply with the contingencies of their situation when making decisions, rather than adhering to some political scheme devised by their

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[4] Battaglia, *The history*, p. 149.

[5] Battaglia, *Storia*, p. 286.

[6] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, pp. 241-242.

[7] Ibid., p. 241.

[8] TNA, FO 371/43877, Letter from M.O.1 (S.P.) War Office to Southern Division Foreign Office, 4 April 1944.

[9] TNA, WO 106/3964 Report on Partisans and Subversive Activity in German-Occupied Italy from September 10, 1943, to May 14th, 1944, by Brigadier J.F.B. Combe, D.S.O., and Brigadier E.J. Todhunter, 11 June 1944.

superiors. Exactly as it was for the military commands they tended to put practicality before political considerations and thus, more often than not, they had a very accommodating attitude towards the partisans' requests. They did, indeed, often 'play favourites' with the limited resources they had at their disposal. However, it was in order to answer their need to avoid any kind of waste. The Allied command had limited material to be shipped to Italy, to begin with, it was only natural that 'trusted' bands, bands which had an Allied officer as their guarantor or bands who were closer to the front line, were privileged when it came to airdrops.[10]

The underestimation of the role played by liaison missions in shaping Italo-Allied relationship, especially in its double Italo-British and Italo-American components, led to a general deficit in historiography which failed to properly represent the complexity of the relationship. Not only is an examination of the liaison missions useful to shed more light on Italo-Allied relations, but it also adds an extra layer of complexity when approaching the inner workings of the Allied war machine in Italy. When discussing Italo-Allied relations, in fact, it is equally important to keep in mind that a British-American, and an internal relation between different actors inside the British field, both existed at the same time. The study of the relations built in the field by liaison officers during the war of 1943-1945, thus, becomes a cornerstone to rebuild the picture of the Allied war in Italy and its representation in Italian memory.

As mentioned before, systematic interest in this topic is fairly recent; for this reason, I believe it is productive to spend some time on it. It will set the stage for more in-depth analysis of the concept of representation and self-representation in Italian memory that will be explored later in this work.

Partisan warfare

The single most significant point of contention identified by scholars in the Italo-British relationship was the disagreement on the size of the partisan bands fighting in Italy. Traditionally, we can say that Italian scholars have generally backed the idea

[10] Berrettini, *La Resistenza Italiana*, p. 26.

that Italian partisans wanted to build up a secret army and thus wanted to organise large units capable of fighting the Nazi-Fascists directly and controlling large portions of the Italian territory. The British, on the other hand, were more interested in small units, to employ following a hit-and-run strategy. Many Italian scholars have affirmed that this position was actually employed by the British not for military reasons, but for political ones. It was a way to keep the Italian Resistance weak and disjointed and more easily manageable after the end of the war.[11] British scholars present more variegated positions on this issue, putting military considerations above political ones. With time and thanks to the materials preserved in the National Archives in London, a number of Italian scholars have started pushing for an interpretation more tied to military contingencies, disregarding any possible political meddling.

It is indeed true that the British generally preferred the Italians to fight in small units, in order for them to be able to strike quickly and disappear. The SOE examined the situation in October 1943 to decide what to do with the Italian Resistance and how to help (and shape) it. First of all, as noted by John Stevens in 1965, both the British and the Americans did not expect a resistance movement to emerge in Italy at all,[12] given the preconception that Italians were not inclined to armed resistance.[13] After some discussions, in the end, it was Col. Cecil R. Roseberry's[14] opinion which emerged as the general line of approach towards the Italian Resistance. Roseberry was a strong proponent of an action based around a large number of small bands, rather than the creation of a secret army, as in his opinion large bands were only easier to target by the Germans. Moreover, small bands of saboteurs had the added benefit of being easier to organise and supply thanks to the organisation of CLNs. Roseberry's position stemmed also from the consideration, shared with the SOE mission in Algeri, and based on the requests made by Parri, that the military capabilities of the partisans

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[11] Dondi, *La Resistenza tra unità*, p. 41.

[12] John M. Stevens and others, 'L'Inghilterra e la Resistenza italiana', *Il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia*, 80 (1965), 75-100 (p. 80).

[13] Piffer, 'Office of Strategic Services', p. 48.

[14] Col. Cecil R. Roseberry (J) was the Commander of the N°1 Special Force.

were irrelevant and the bands were destined to be crippled by the coming winter.[15] At this point in time, in fact, the Resistance was still disjointed. Relatively large bands of disbanded soldiers without a real political background or aims co-existed with smaller formations belonging to political parties like the PCI and the Pd'A, which were more ideologically driven and resolute in the fight against the Nazi-Fascist occupation.[16] Thanks to these factors the SOE did not have an organic plan to exploit the Italian Resistance at the end of 1943. However, the fact that the Italians were organising themselves autonomously forced them to move, as they realised that Italian partisans could have been of great utility against the Germans.[17] Despite some uncertainties inside the SOE itself regarding the capabilities of the partisans,[18] starting from mid-December 1943 the first official policy on airdropped supplies for Italian partisans was launched. This policy followed a strictly utilitarian line, directing supplies to those groups which looked to have better chances to perform military actions.[19] This first line of conduit was maintained for the whole duration of the war. Supplies were assigned following military needs, and partisan bands were strengthened when they were present in theatres of Allied operations, whereas bands that were far from the action or were deemed unable to perform military actions were left with the bare minimum to survive. This policy was the best one possible, in order not to spread the scarce resources destined for the Italian theatre too thinly. However, the partisans did not have a complete vision of the war and often their 'information on the situation at the front is likely to be surprisingly inaccurate, and usually optimistic', as was noted by the 8th Army.[20] This, in turn, meant that the British were

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[15] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, pp. 24-25.

[16] Lutz Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca in Italia 1943-1945* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993), p. 322.

[17] CASREC, WO 204/1993, 98589, An estimate of the effect which our support of Italian Resistance has so far achieved in terms of military results and forces now available, 14 January 1945.

[18] For example, see: HS 6/775, AD/E to Berne 1 January 1944 and HS6/781, Italy, appreciation by the SOE, 10 January 1944. Both documents are also cited in Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 27.

[19] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 26.

[20] TNA, WO 204/7288, Eight Army Partisan Summary No.2 Based on Information Received up to 28 Oct, October 1944. See also: TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.33 on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 20 December 1944.

exposed to countless accusations from the partisans, as British policy surely seemed completely arbitrary from the outside.

The SOE's directives too were developed against this background: guerrilla warfare in Italy had to be carried on with a large number of operations, however, these operations were to be small in scope.[21] As Mireno Berrettini sums up: 'Italian Resistance, therefore, was to be halfway between the Maquis' flexibility and the organization of a clandestine Fourth Army',[22] being neither and both of them at the same time. Springtime in 1944 brought an intensification of the guerrilla activities in Italy, thanks to the strengthening of the bands due to the good weather and the high hopes for a quick end of the war caused by the Allied offensive. And the Germans started taking notes of these 'rebels', as their act of sabotage and diversion increased in frequency and scale, so much that they dispatched an order to 'fight and destroy' those groups, as they were a danger to the Wehrmacht supply and communication lines near the front.[23] This expansion of the Resistance caused a partial reassessment of the British 'rules of engagement' in Italy concerning support given to the partisans. Despite that fact that many concerns were raised against the idea of expanding the scope of action of the Italian Resistance, mainly due to the fear of Communism,[24] missions were sent out to the partisans to organise their action and coordinate it with the Allied advance, in order to 'stimulate' the Resistance in the North.[25] In this context, partisan bands were encouraged to expand, following the favourable situation.[26] This was also the moment when the liaison work, previously mostly managed by the SIM was definitively put into the hands of the OSS and the SOE, even if both organizations kept relying on Italian personnel. As Claudia Nasini points out, one of the

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[21] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 29.

[22] Ibid., p. 30.

[23] Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca*, p. 324.

[24] Cfr. Harris, *Allied military administration*, p. 180, and Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies*, pp. 403-405.

[25] HS 6/775, CD to AD/H, 31 May 1944.

[26] However, even in this favourable context some bands and BLOs remained under-supplied. See for example: CASREC, WO 204/1990, xc/106599, No.1 Special Force participation in future military operations, 26 April 1944; CASREC, WO 204/1990, xc/106599, *Office of Strategic Services Allies armies in Italy*, 6 May 1944.

considerations that played a role in this process for the British was also the need to avoid any meddling from the Brindisi Government in the liaison operations, as the SIM was, after all, an organization which answered to the Badoglio Government. Further proof that the British were not particularly fond of Badoglio and his entourage.[27]

Once again, however, the background for action and supplies drops remained strictly tied to military necessities.[28] This meant that, if military conditions were to change, directives would change as well. And the military situation changed indeed with the autumn of 1944. Already during late summer, it was starting to appear obvious that the Allied offensive was dwindling and it was brought to a grinding halt on the Gothic Line by the well-planned German defence. Moreover, the new context of the European war, after the Normandy landings of June 1944 had firmly relegated Italy to a secondary front, used to tie down as many German divisions as possible.[29] All of this meant that resources for the Italian theatre became even scarcer and that the possibility of supplying a large force of Italian partisans was no more. To add to all of this, bad weather conditions made air sorties even more difficult. In this context, the first instructions to curtail the bands' size were sent out. Already in August 1944, some missions received the directive to invite the partisans to consider a reduction of the size of their fighting formations, as there were too many requests for airdrops and too few planes to carry them.[30] A couple of months later, the infamous Alexander proclamation was issued, urging the partisans to reduce the bands' size and lay low, waiting for more favourable times. Seen by many scholars as the moment when the British finally 'dropped their mask' and revealed their true intention towards the Italian Resistance,[31] the Alexander proclamation was really nothing more than the

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[27] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 177.

[28] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 37. Also, the table at p. 38 showing the different nationalities of each mission during the period June-September 1944.

[29] Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta*, p. 201.

[30] TNA, WO 204/7315, Progress Report Italian Section, Week ending 13th August 1944, 13 August 1944.

[31] Secchia, *La Resistenza,* pp. 182-185.

continuation of the policy that the British had followed in Italy from the very start: that of contingency.[32] As underlined by scholars like Gian Enrico Rusconi and Elena Aga Rossi, in fact, the British (and the Americans as well) never truly had an organic plan for the Italian campaign and preferred to adopt a 'wait-and-see' approach.[33] This meant that plans for Italy were often drawn at the last minute, changed on the fly and were very susceptible to changing circumstances. The official history series confirms that up until the end September 1944, the Allied Commands were unsure about the possibility of success of their final push in Italy to reach the Po valley, and the situation was evaluated as a 'close-run thing'.[34] The Alexander proclamation perfectly fits in this approach: it was but the acknowledgement of a new situation that called for a new strategy. Thus, during the autumn and winter of 1944-1945 band size was reduced due to the lack of supplying and the harsh winter weather.

However, during the spring of 1945, with the return of good weather and the new prospect of the war ending soon, the SOE noted how the Italians were eager to resume the fight on a larger scale.[35] This, of course, sprung a new debate inside the British camp on the feasibility of letting the band grow in size, with the prospect of having to deal with a much larger number of partisans once the war was over. Both practical concerns, on how to feed and clothe a large number of partisans, and political ones, on the risk of a possible Communist insurrection, were put forward. At first, it was noted how it would be impossible to re-equip a large number of partisans in time for an insurrection in April, however, as reported by the N°1 SF, 'abnormally fine weather in February' allowed for the delivery of a much larger amount of supplies than expected.[36] The idea of supplying only non-Communist bands was proposed and discussed, however, the No.1 SF found it to be impractical and even potentially dangerous as the Communists would have surely caught wind of it. They instead

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[32] Rusconi, *Resistenza*, p. 77. See also: CASREC, WO 204/1993 98589, An estimate of the effect which our support of Italian Resistance has so far achieved in terms of military results and forces now available, 14 January 1945.

[33] Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, pp. 192-193.

[34] Ehrman, *Grand strategy*, VI, p. 37.

[35] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 121.

[36] Istoreto, B16a, Report on N°1 Special Force activities until April 1945, 3 June 1945.

proposed to concentrate on the delivery of small arms for defensive use, explosives, foodstuff and clothes.[37]

It was not only the possibility of trouble caused by well-armed and politicised partisans that concerned the British, they also pointed out how indiscriminate expansion would require a commitment on the front of air support which they were not able to sustain, as well as the probable flood of Italians 'whose only contribution to victory has been to jump off a sinking ship at ten minutes to twelve'.[38] The general idea was that the existing partisan bands were 'the most militant and uncompromising Anti-Fascists, tested over a long period, including a bitter winter' and thus fully capable of handling the tasks assigned to them. Expansion would have meant a flood of inexperienced recruits.[39] The final decision was to supply the bands in order to have them ready for the insurrection, however, discourage the indiscriminate growth of the partisans' numbers.[40] The SOE interpreted these directives in an expansive way,[41] and the 15th Army group Commands as well pushed for a bigger commitment to re-arming the Italian partisans. Col. Riepe claimed that blocking partisan expansion was openly against the 'overall directive to CG 15th Army group which was to destroy the enemy with all resources available. […] such resources included partisan activities behind the lines'.[42] It was also pointed out that the numerous liaison missions were a guarantee for the good behaviour of the partisans and, more importantly, partisan bands were bound to expand anyways, with or without the Allies' support.[43]

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[37] CASREC, WO 204/7301 99920, Appreciation by N°1 Special Force, of the implication of the present policy of supply dropping operations to the Italian partizans in the light of recent information about the Communist controlled bands, 15 January 945.

[38] CASREC, WO 204/2795 106013, Special Operations Policy in Northern Italy, 11 April 1945.

[39] CASREC, WO 204/7024 99356, Report on Special Operations in Italy March 1945, March 1945.

[40] CASREC, WO 204/6839, Cipher Message to 15 Army Group, 31 January 1945.

[41] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 119.

[42] CASREC, WO 204/2795 106013, Minutes of meetings, 16 March 1945.

[43] CASREC, WO 204/2795 106013, Special Operations Policy in Northern Italy, 11 April 1944.

Thus, despite a reduction in warlike stores, arms and ammunition were delivered to the bands and expansion, even if was officially discouraged,[44] was often tolerated.[45] The BLOs on the field, in fact, quickly realised that a too strict application of the directives would compromise their relationship with the partisans and they preferred to contain the band's expansion, rather than cutting the bands down to size.[46] As pointed out by a memorandum at the beginning of April 1945, 'undue restriction of supplies when genuinely and urgently needed creates deep resentment and is more likely to prejudice than to promote eventual disarmament and restoration of order'.[47] Moreover, the flow of new recruits was impossible to stop, fuelled by the war's end and the sudden influx of a number of last-minute partisans, looking for cheap glory or quick redemption.[48] In the end, preventing expansion proved to be impossible, as the No.1 SF pointed out, and partisans 'were thus encouraged to reform far more quickly than had been thought possible after their winter set-back'.[49]

From this brief analysis, it should appear how the size of the partisan bands was a secondary concern for the British Commands, only concerned with the effective efficacy of the bands on the territory, and always connected with the ever-shifting plans in the Italian theatre. In periods (and areas) when it was deemed appropriate and useful for the partisans to organise large bands they were let free to do so, as happened during the Spring of 1944 when the mirage of victory in Italy was also widespread both among Partisans and the Allies. On the other hand, when the situation required it, like during the Winter of 1944-1945, they were called to reduce band size to avoid wasting lives and materials.[50] Of course, this created a disconnect

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[44] For example see the strict orders given by the Allied mission in Piedmont: Istoreto, B15b035, Protoc. N.51 Comitato di Liberazione Naizonale Corpo Volontari della Libertà, 25 March 1945.

[45] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana,* p. 122.

[46] CASREC, WO 204/7298 98427, Suggestion for Italia Combatte directive, 22 February 1945.

[47] CASREC, WO 204/6839 99395, Cipher message to Freedom 357 info 15 Army Gp, 1 April 1945.

[48] CASREC, WO 204/1993 98589, An estimate of the effect which our support of Italian Resistance has so far achieved in terms of military results and forces now available, 14 January 945.

[49] Istoreto, B16a, Report on N°1 Special Force activities until April 1945, 3 June 1945.

[50] See, for an example of this type of process: CASREC, WO 204/7301 99920, Report on Coolant Mission – June to November 1944, November 1944.

between the Commands and the partisans, often unaware of the general circumstances of the war, which resulted in grudges held by the partisans against the British for a supposed general hostility to the creation of large bands and, eventually, a full-fledged partisan army.

I will, however, also consider the 'other side of the barricade', to shed a little light on the Italian approach to band size during the war. If it is true that on an ideological level there was a constant push towards the creation of larger and larger formations, which saw their high point in the creation of the free partisan republics during the 'partisan summer' of 1944; it is also true, however, that on an operational level often the partisans had to take decisions tied to the situation in which they found themselves. They too, just like the British, often realised the limitation of their actions, especially after the unrealistic enthusiasm of 1943, due to their inexperience, lack of weaponry or the simple orography of the terrain in which they were fighting. They were not blinded by their own ideology and thus, for the most part, were able to discern when it was sensible to expand a band and when it was a bad idea. The Communists themselves, who supposedly were the most stalwart proponents of the idea of a massive people's army to fight the Nazi-Fascist forces, were extremely elastic in their approach to band size.

One of the first directives, put out during September 1943 by the PCI, shows a keen understanding of the precarious conditions of partisan warfare, and of the measures necessary to conduct it. Here, the orders were to create *distaccamenti* (contingents), 'scant in numbers', of a maximum of forty-fifty men. These small bands were supposed to stalk the enemy and attack it only when conditions were favourable, the action was to be fast and precise, allowing for the band to quickly disappear afterwards. For the time being, any band 'which has more than fifty men, […] can only detract to the actions of single units and to their political, military and moral

unity'.[51] During Autumn-Winter 1943, the Communists organised their work mainly on this line of action, discouraging the formation of large units, that would have been an easy target for Nazi-Fascist's *rastrellamenti* (roundups). Rather than on the *guerra grossa*, the Communists focused on organising the partisan movement and building its foundations to facilitate its survival. The Communist *Comando* of Friuli, on 27 September 1943, reported having had a discussion with another band operating in the same area, composed mainly of disbanded soldiers. The former soldiers wanted the creation of a single fighting force. However, this was rebuked by the Communists on the ground that 'partisan guerrilla warfare demands small battalions which can be easily moved around'.[52] And the PCI central Command in Milan on 21 October 1943 sent out another directive where it restated the order of maintaining units on the basis of small *distaccamenti*, comprised of a maximum of forty or fifty fighters. This was because 'there is no need to switch to bigger formations'.[53] The expansion of these units was to be taken into consideration only in the case of 'contingent or particular reasons'.[54]

With the Spring of 1944 and the new Allied Offensive in Italy, however, bands were expanded again. New recruits flocked to the partisans' banner, many surely encouraged by the Allied victories and hoping for a quick end of the war. The British too, as we have seen, encouraged this tendency, with a larger investment in both liaison missions and supplies dropped. However, this did not mean that all the bands were supposed to be expanded. Expansion was still tied to the nature of the terrain, and the availability of resources. The report written after the *rastrellamento* of the

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[51] Istituto Nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia, Istituto Gramsci, *Le brigate Garibaldi nella Resistenza*, ed. by Giampiero Carocci and Gaetano Grassi, 3 vols (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), I, pp. 102-103.

[52] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, p. 99. It could be argued that the Communists simply did not want to share the command with former military officers and made up an excuse. However, the document is internal to the Communist organisation and the other band is painted in a very positive light; to the point that an agreement was reached for sharing supplies. All things considered, it seems unlikely that the Communists were just looking for an excuse. Moreover, at this point in time, the Communits were actively looking for former officers to lead their formations, as they recognised their own military unpreparedness. See: Pavone, *Una guerra civile*, pp. 98-103.

[53] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, p. 108.

[54] Ibid., p. 108.

Tobbio area (in the Ligurian-Piedmontese Apennines) in March 1944, for example, points to the indiscriminate expansion of the local bands as one of the main reasons the *rastrellamento* was so easy for the Nazi-Fascist forces. The sudden influx of a large number of people, unarmed, untrained and unprepared, had in fact led to a disintegration of the chain of command, to a relaxation of discipline and, more importantly, to the impossibility for the band to move around quickly and freely. The lesson learnt by the *Garibaldini* was clear: in that area 'small mobile bands with a certain degree of autonomy [in their action] are preferable'.[55] The Command of the *Corpo Volontari della Libertà* (CVL), gave similar directions in its directive on how to handle German *rastrellamenti* in May 1944. Forces were not to be massed in a single place, as this made the Nazi-Fascists' job incredibly easy, but rather dispersed in smaller groups in a wider area. It was an obvious conclusion, as it was stated that 'with the current strength ratio we must convince ourselves that we cannot victoriously defend any valley or village because the enemy can always attack us with enough forces to root us out'.[56] Thus, the best way to avoid the *rastrellamenti* was, firstly, not to be found all lumped together in a single, slow, formation, and secondly, to quickly disperse and disappear, fracturing the band in even smaller groups (*nuclei*), fighting to upset the enemy advance, but without any unrealistic hope of stopping it.[57]

The liberation of Rome in June 1944 was met with great enthusiasm in the North of Italy, as hope surged for the end of the war. This led to the 'partisan summer' of 1944 and the occupation of a number of villages and valleys on the Alps and the Apennines. However, not every partisan was convinced that the *guerra grossa* was a good idea. In a directive for the organisation of the Garibaldi brigades, it was noted how 'many small surprise attacks are just like a great battle', and thus it was advised

[55] Ibid., pp. 376-367.
[56] Ibid., p.423.
[57] Ibid., p.423.

that the general strategy of the Resistance should not change.[58] The fight was to remain tied to guerrilla tactics: 'small groups, high mobility, surprise attacks against the enemy and movement; never confront the enemy in a direct battle'.[59] As Berrettini points out, this directive was probably never put out as it was in open contrast with the *Ordine del giorno* n°8, a plea for a general insurrection and mass partisan levy of 10 June 1944.[60] However, it is important to note that there were internal fractures inside the partisan movement on the topic of bands' size even in a moment of great enthusiasm as the Summer of 1944. It is important as it shows how, if the British side was riddled with internal quarrels, the Italian side was not free from them. And indeed the *Ordine* could not be applied uniformly across Northern Italy. One of the members of the Insurrectionist Triumvirate in Piedmont noted in June 1944 how in some valleys the actions carried on by local bands were still of a small nature. The local leaders had to be reminded of the new dispositions but even then they found themselves unable to carry them out on with their full capability. The lack of weaponry made it impossible to face the Nazi-Fascists in large engagements and the influx of new recruits, disarmed, meant that there was a general relaxation of discipline and a drop in morale.[61]

In a memorandum written by a member of the Garibaldi brigades, in July 1944, it was pointed out how the occupation of two villages in Emilia had been a grave mistake. Together with the local BLO the Italian partisan noticed how the local band decided to occupy an area impossible to maintain because of the nature of the terrain and the type of armaments supplied by the Allies who 'had always the intention to send weapons useful for guerrilla warfare, not for war and surely not for a war of position'.[62] Expansion of the bands and occupation of areas were thus to be carried on, for sure, but terrain and circumstances were still the chief factors in determining

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[58] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, II, p.28.

[59] Ibid., p.28.

[60] See: Massimo Legnani, *Politica e amministrazione nelle repubbliche partigiane* (Milan: Istituto nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione, 1968), pp. 62-63.

[61] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, II, p. 86.

[62] Ibid., p. 165.

the partisans' course of action. And things got even worse in August 1944, when Allied supplies started to dwindle, as the Allied advance in Italy was slowed down on the Apennines. As a political commissar reported from Northern Emilia the 'crisis' which had struck the local partisans after a large *rastrellamento* operation by the Germans could be explained with the decision to 'occupy permanently a large zone, in the subsequent need to defend said zone and in the material impossibility to carry on such defence, because of the lack of heavy weaponry'.[63] According to the commissar, the occupation had been an impulsive act that should have been avoided and stopped by the local Command, but which instead did nothing, and did not consider the nature of the terrain or the band's weaponry, leading to the disastrous events of the *rastrellamento*.[64] Moreover, large-scale war posed a series of new challenges to the partisans' commanders. As an Italian liaison officer in the Modena area reported to the Central Command in Emilia, partisan commanders lacked the mentality to conduct warfare on a larger scale. They threw themselves on the front lines and, while this bravery was admirable, this meant they were completely useless, as they could not direct military operations. Nor did they have any sense of what was going on during the battle; moreover, they were not able to give proper directions to the whole battalion.[65]

The partisan republics which saw the light during the Summer of 1944 were also not unanimously considered a positive development inside the partisan movement. The occupation of large zones was made possible by the transfer of German divisions nearer the frontline, to repulse the Allied advance. For this reason, the republics were often born as the result of a situation independent from the partisans' action, rather than as the product of a coordinated plan.[66] However, the CVL and General Cadorna were hesitant to support this process, as the occupation and administration of large parts of Italian territory deeply modified the premises of partisan warfare,[67]

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[63] Ibid., p. 187.
[64] Ibid., p.187.
[65] Ibid., p.224.
[66] Legnani, *Politica,* pp. 51-52.
[67] Ibid., p. 51.

transforming it from an offensive war into a defensive one.[68] And the partisans, it was argued by the CVL, did not have the armaments to conduct this type of warfare, as they lacked artillery or mechanized troops. This problem was tragically exposed by the Germans when the Allied offensive died out and they were able to carry on the ruthless *rastrellamenti* that led the partisans republics to their end.[69]

Of course, Autumn, the end of the Allied offensive and the Alexander proclamation changed the situation drastically, and the partisans were now left with the problem of having to scale back down to size the formations.[70] In some areas already in mid-October local leaders decided to stop recruiting new partisans, as they did not have the resources to arm, clothe or feed them. These decisions were chastised by the Central Command, on the basis that if weapons were not available, then partisans should take them from the Germans.[71] However, with the bad winter weather and the ruthless German repression raging on in Northern Italy, there was no other choice but to disperse and lay low. A 'too military' attitude inevitably condemned the brigades to be *rastrellate* by the Germans as they were 'nailed' to their position, without being able to quickly disappear during an attack.[72] In these conditions, going back to guerrilla warfare was a necessity and bands quickly adapted to survive.[73] This situation continued well into February 1945,[74] especially in the areas where the Allied interest was minor, and thus the supply drops fewer and smaller.

Contingency, thus, was what informed the decisions of both the British and the Italians. If during the Winter of 1944 the British certainly played a role in the decisions

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[68] Santo Peli, *Storia della Resistenza in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015), p. 103.

[69] It has been argued, however, that, once the republics had been proclaimed, the partisans had no other chance than to defend them, as the breaking up of the bands in smaller groups in order to elude the *rastrellamenti* (while militarily sound) would lead to the exposure of the local population to the Nazi-fascist reprisal. See: Michele Beltrami, *Il governo dell'Ossola Partigiana* (Milan: Sapere, 1975), p. 100.

[70] See, for example, *Le brigate Garibaldi*, II, p. 513.

[71] Ibid., p. 556.

[72] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, III, p. 12.

[73] Ibid., p. 110.

[74] Ibid., pp. 420-421.

taken by the partisans, because of their policy on supplies and the ill effects of the Alexander proclamation, the idea that the partisans pursued always and without doubt the *guerra grossa* during the whole 1943-1945 period is equally surely too *tranchant*. Even during the Summer of 1944, arguably the high point for the Italian Resistance, there were cases where expansion was discouraged or at least deemed inappropriate. The partisans had the ambition to create an army, but they also had the good sense to understand when this was impossible. Moreover, partisan bands always rebuked the institution of a military-like discipline and hierarchy, preferring more democratic approaches.[75] As was reported by an SOE agent, the partisans operating in the Ravenna area were wary enough to wisely choose to fight in small bands until a flood created the perfect conditions to concentrate a larger force in the newly created swamp and to launch bigger operations against the Germans.[76] On the banks of the Brenta river in Veneto, partisans were organised in radically different ways. On the left of the river, where the terrain was mountainous, large bands were organised. On the right, where the valley was more open and plain, formations were small and kept carrying on small-scale operations.[77]

The ruthless conditions of partisan warfare called for an equally ruthless utilitarian policy when it came to bands, their size and their actions. When lives were at stake in the especially brutal context of the Italian civil war, and the survival of the Resistance itself was put in danger it should not come as a surprise if there was a divide between words and deeds. In this case, while the words were spent to organise a 'secret partisan army' decisions were taken with a much narrower outlook, often simply to make the partisans survive. This does not mean that the 'ideological layer' was not there, or did not shape some of the decisions taken during the 1943-1945 period. It means, however, that an interpretation based merely on it is inherently flawed. Just

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[75] Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate,* p. 14.

[76] CASREC, WO 204/7288 xc/98320, Eight Army Partisan Summary No.4 based on information received up to 13 Jan 1945, 13 January 1945.

[77] Vittorio Marangon, *Val Brenta valle partigiana* (Padova: Centro Studi Ettore Lucini, 1996), p. 35.

like for the British, for the Italians as well, contingency, and not policy, was the main driver for action.

Airdrops

Despite the aforementioned points, the accusation of purposefully withholding supplies to weaken the Partisan movement for political reasons is still very present in recent historiography.[78] Often reports and memoirs from partisan leaders are quoted to support this position, and liaison officers are described as accomplices in this scheme produced by the Allied High Commands. However, not only, does the idea of a scheme to cripple the Italian Resistance fail to stand up to more in-depth scrutiny, but also the idea that the liaison officers were in some way part of it can be dismissed without much effort.

Liaison officers lived in close contact with the partisans making this kind of operation ill-advised and difficult to carry on. Moreover, they often developed a deep affection for the Italians that they were helping. They were often kept in the dark by the high commands in regards to the allocation of resources. I would go as far as to argue that they rarely were taken into consideration at all and even more rarely were informed of overall strategic decisions during the Italian campaign. Let us consider here the months of Autumn-Winter of 1944-1945, arguably the harshest test for the Italian Resistance, when the terrible weather conditions and the decision to divert resources to other theatres left the Italian front without the capability to supply the partisans fighting in enemy occupied Italy. During this period the liaison officers kept asking for supplies, almost as if they were not aware of these issues. It is indeed striking o read these messages which may very well look like they were written by the partisans themselves. Protests and complaints started as early as August 1944 when the lack of promised airdrops was identified by the N°1 SF as a possible issue because it could compromise the relationship that agents on the field had built with the Italian partisans after great efforts. As they wrote on 6 August: '[the lack of airdrops] has not

[78] Dondi, *La Resistenza tra unità*, p. 42.

only discouraged the ever increasing resistance groups, but has also caused some of their leaders to believe that we are refusing to deliver stores for '"political reasons"'.[79] For this reason, in particular, the N°1 SF felt frustrated in its efforts to build up not only the Italian resistance as a military machine but also in its efforts to create a climate of trust between Italians and the British. The heavy British tutelage of the SIM missions had already cost the latter much of their prestige, favouring, on the other hand, the OSS-sponsored missions.[80] In the light of these problems, on 22 October 1944, the N°1 SF collected the messages received from the Alps region and pushed forward the case of an increase in air supplies for the partisans in the North.[81] They were, as they said, 'responsible for the men in the field', and they urged that 'everything possible is being done to ensure that the tonnage allocated is actually delivered in spite of the anticipated difficulties of weather conditions and enemy action'.[82] The situation depicted by this memorandum was dire: 'at least seven British missions and four Italian missions in North East Italy alone (exclusive of any OSS missions) […] are in imminent danger of being overrun by the enemy owing to their shortage of supplies'.[83] As such 'time factor is paramount' to allow these missions to survive and help the partisans to 'pull their weight' and help the Allies advance in Italy. The creation of a forward base on the Adriatic coast was proposed to alleviate the logistical problems. In the end, 'if no suitable airfield can be made available for use by 15 November at latest it may well be necessary to inform AAI that it is impossible to maintain Italian resistance with the resources available and in that event efforts would have to be made to withdraw the surviving missions'.[84] Significantly

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[79] CASREC, WO: 204/10238 xc/106559, Progress report Italian section, week ending 6th August 1944, 6 August 1944.

[80] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 54. On this topic, see, for example, the case of the Italian organisation Franchi set up by Edgardo Sogno under British tutelage to coordinate air supplies in the North. On the 26 February 1945 the GL Command for Piedmont lamented how all the supplies in their area had been dropped following requests from the OSS mission, while the Franchi's request were left unanswered. All of this gravely damaged the Franchi's reputation. See: Istoreto, B11l016, Segnalazione lanci, 26 February 1945.

[81] CASREC, WO 204/1931 106343, Airdrops requests, 22 October 1944.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

the Alexander proclamation, which asked the partisans to lay down and wait for the winter to pass, was disclosed on 13 November, apparently with little to no consultation with the SOE.

The memorandum itself is quite firm in its position and requests, but the attached messages from various liaison officers are even more direct. S/Ldr. Beckett from the Tolmezzo area (near Udine) started asking for more supplies at the end of August, claiming that his task was 'getting more impossible every day owing to delay'.[85] However, the drops never came and, at the beginning of September he started to show signs of impatience as he stated repeatedly that 'weather has been perfect' and abruptly asked to know 'what is the excuse this time' or whether the explanation can be found in 'sheer incompetence'.[86] He also pointed out a problem which would condition Italo-Allied relations in the future and the representation of it: the issue of broken trust. In fact, many liaison officers had made promises to the partisans concerning airdrops and now found themselves unable not only to fulfil them but also to present a sensible explanation for the lack of supplies. As Beckett stated: 'How can I get partisans to believe me when again perfect weather last night [?]'.[87] Morale, however, dropped rapidly as the airdrops never came, 'I hate to see these men trying to fight with nothing' Beckett wrote on 15 September.[88] One month later the situation had not changed and Beckett unleashed all his frustration for the setbacks and defeats that his mission and his men were forced to suffer because of the lack of supplies. As he wrote on 15 October:

> Due RAF not liking good bad or indifferent weather routes into Austria closing. Due RAF we are now cut off from Carnia. Due RAF partisans are now suffering heavy casualties without being able to do much damage. Due RAF we are going to have to disperse. Due

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

> RAF really hard and good work done by 6000 partisans this area now being rendered useless. Due RAF British prestige now sunk below zero.[89]

He ended disheartened: 'Is policy to help or not[?]'. Finally, on the 17 October, he sarcastically comments that the partisans were 'completely surrounded. Cheerio'.[90] And Ldr. Beckett was not the only one whose morale and discipline was put to the test. Major Rudolf sent a message on 21 October stating that:

> It is difficult to work, men often in snow whose boot soles are tied on with string and we have only shirts and shorts. […] both men and self have suffered for 2 months from mistakes over cracks and RAF promises. I was repeatedly assured at Base that I should get drops. Not one promise had been honoured and the only support we have received is your keenest simply which personally I find comforting, but which is of little practical value.[91]

The only explanation he could fathom was that 'my Mission of so little importance as to make no priority or your influence negligible'.[92] Captain O'Regan from the Val di Susa area was far less diplomatic as he asked for supplies while adding 'damn the RAF' to his message.[93] Major Wilkinson repeatedly contacted his superiors asking for more airdrops stating that his men were 'dropping grounds daily' and inciting the Commands to 'pull out fingers' despite the fact that the situation could already be compromised due to the long period without supplies.[94] And indeed at the beginning of October Wilkinson was forced to face a desperate situation. As he stated, morale

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

was 'very low' due to no drops being received despite the 'perfect weather'.[95] The reputation of the British forces was quickly deteriorating as 'we are blamed largely for loss GRAPPA owing no drops. You are prejudicing whole show. Your name mud'.[96] Captain Brietsche was forced to withstand the German attacks on Mount Grappa (Veneto) and was slowly expending all the ammunition he had at his disposal. He convinced the partisans to hold their ground against the Germans, to turn Mount Grappa into a 'second Verdun', trusting that he would be handsomely supplied with arms and ammunitions.[97] However, the drops never came. As he said he and his men would have had to 'start running within few days unless you can arrange a drop'.[98] When the airdrop was finally agreed upon, it was already too late. Brietsche found himself 'completely surrounded by Hun' and unable to prevent the German occupation of the area.[99] As he commented acidly: 'What a life'.[100] The *rastrellamento* on Mount Grappa turn out to be one of the most infamous events of the war, as the Germans conducted it with ruthless brutality, indulging in mass executions and exposing the hanged bodies of the partisans in the nearby town of Bassano. [101]

Even Major Temple, organising the partisans in the Cuneo area insistently asked for supplies, trying to make a clear point that: 'no stores, no Partisans, no us'.[102] His irritation grew daily as promises were not fulfilled, 'if you want action send urgently needed sorties. If you don't want action say so now and save us wasting our men and time waiting for non-existent planes'.[103] Temple too, pointed out how this was leading to a severe deterioration in his relations with the partisans who were losing men and their trust in the British. On 26 September he stated that the 'weather had been perfect

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate*, p. 326.
[98] CASREC, WO 204/1931 106343, Airdrops requests, 22 October 1944.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Guido Crainz, *L'ombra della guerra. Il 1945, l'Italia* (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2007), p. 65.
[102] CASREC, WO 204/1931 106343, Airdrops requests, 22 October 1944.
[103] Ibid.

for […] three nights' and sarcastically added they were rotating their fingers like 'chums'.[104] In the Belluno area, Major Tillman was left to face similar problems. He organised his men and new recruits flocked to the brigades every day; however, by mid-September, half of his division had already been forced to disperse due to the lack of arms and ammunitions. Once more, it was the uncertainty and the unfulfilled promises that paralysed the liaison officer's actions and compromised his relations with the partisans. Tillman was clear: 'If unable to send arms say so'.[105] It was surely better to know clearly one's position than being promised over and over supplies that were never to come.

Major Nicholson was another officer who could not understand why his requests for supplies were ignored or dismissed with the excuse of bad weather as he repeatedly pointed out the good weather conditions in his area, North of Pordenone. He tried to carry on sabotage and demolitions but found himself unable to get explosives. In mid-October Nicholson had to face the German offensive without explosives, heavy weaponry and not enough ammunition. He urged quick actions as 'procrastination will destroy partisans' and asked 'where are [the] planes?' as 'all excuses confounded by weather here and daily passage hundreds of planes over'. He finally stated that 'remainder enough ammunition for six hours resistance'.

After some unanswered messages, Major Johnson asked the commands at the beginning of September to clarify their intentions 'please state if you are not sending drops and signal stores we asked for so many bands' so that he could organise his men accordingly. The uncertainty, once more, was what must have stung more for the liaison officer as he wrote that 'in view of your order asking us to make final effort you must support us with supplies and not promises'. On 6 October he resolutely asked again for clarification as to the supplies allotment 'will you at least give us an answer'. Four days later the issue was still unresolved and Johnston went back to write that: 'all missions on the field surprised by your lack of inters […] our incessant outcry for ammo not even answered. Missions feel neglected. Weather is cold and we

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

are all hardly clothed. Hope you will act'. However, despite the good weather, no supplies were delivered as the liaison officers and his men became 'fed up' with the situation and with being 'constantly on the run and not being able to fight back' due to the lack of ammunition. As Johnson later stated in his final report, even when they managed to get some supplies they were of scarce use as:

> the quality of stores […] left much to be desired; we were crying for ammunition and arms, because they were the most urgent requirements. In our signals we took great care to stress what calibre of ammunition we needed, etc. but we kept on receiving standard containers which included such items as woollen underpants, battle-dresses […] with the result that our supply problems were not solved.[106]

Meanwhile, Captain Wilcockson was trying laboriously to organise the partisans' offensive against Modena to join the incoming Allied Army but found his work complicated by the lack of airdrops. Taking Modena was a matter of pride for the partisans as they 'feel that unless they take Modena they will not be recognised as true patriots by Allies'. Wilcockson tried to 'foster this warlike attitude'; however, it was 'very hard when not backed up by supplies'. And distrust was rising rapidly amongst the Italians as he wrote that 'leaders state they will keep their last bullet for me' and quickly specified that 'they have only three bullets left'. At the end of September he sarcastically said that he appreciated 'your 28 (message of congratulation)' but he also 'would exchange them all for five rounds of .303'. In mid-

[106] TNA, WO 204/7296, Report on the activities and experiences of major V.R. Johnson of the Envelope Mission from 12th June to 24th December, 1944, 5 January 1945. On the same topic see also: TNA, WO 204/7298, Situation in the field in the CARNIA/FRIULI Zone by S/Ldr CZERNIN, 27 November 1944 where is stated that: 'a certain amount of warm clothing would come in very useful, but apart from boots, arms and ammunition should be given top priority in all cases'. Moreover: 'it has been noticed that in most drops the quantity of ammunition dropped per arm has been hopelessly inadequate, therefore, the proportion of ammunition to arms should be greatly increased'.

October, he even resorted to asking for his supplies to be delivered by mules, as a last-ditch effort.

The N°1 SF kept pressuring for more airdrops, continuously arguing that morale and relations with the partisans risked being compromised.[107] At the beginning of November, they clearly spelt to their superior that it was primarily a matter of morale and image. They claimed how 'all that has so far been achieved will go for nothing; British and American OSS, SO, OG and SI agencies will be repudiated'.[108] Again, in December 1944 they wrote that: 'Failure to supply has gravely prejudiced Allied prestige, led to resentment on the part of the British personnel, despondency and lowering of morale amongst the Partisans, and placed in the hands of the Fascists and Germans a powerful weapon for anti-Partisan and anti-Allied propaganda. This failure has been due to unavailability of aircraft during August and September'.[109]

In this climate of suspicion, the British started to be held responsible for any major defeat suffered by the partisans. When the Domodossola (capital of the self-proclaimed *Libera Repubblica dell'Ossola*) area was overrun by the Germans, the Italians 'under the strain of disappointment, blamed the Allies for not having supplied them with heavy arms and ammunition' because 'their [the partisans] political leaning did not happen to harmonise with Allied political views'.[110] The N°1 SF especially stressed this point in their communications because when airdrops did arrive they were often a key factor in solving dangerous situations and had the added effect of boosting Partisans' morale and the good name of the Allies.[111]

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[107] The OSS shared this view, see: CASREC, WO204/10300m 106481, Company D 2677th Regiment OSS (Provisional) APO 512 U.S. Army, 27 November 1944.

[108] CASREC, WO 204/2029 98642, Memorandum to Major General Noce, 3 November 1944.

[109] CASREC, WO 204/7296 98427, Supply dropping operations to SIMIA and GELA missions, 9 December 1944.

[110] TNA, FO 371/43878, Partisan Resistance at Domodossola: an appreciation, 10 November 1944. When asked directly by the CLNAI chair, Alfredo Pizzoni, Col. Roseberry claimed that the supplies were ready to be shipped, but a prolonged period of bad weather forced the planes on the ground. An explanation that did not convince Pizzoni. Alfredo Pizzoni, *Alla guida del CLNAI. Memorie per i figli* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995), p. 91.

[111] CASREC, WO 204/7294 xc/98320, Report from Italian Section, Appendix A, 27 August 1944.

The only actor that benefitted from this situation was the American OSS, which was able, as examined by Claudia Nasini, to definitively break, during the 1944-1945 winter, the *de facto* monopoly on liaison missions that the British had previously maintained.[112] Italy was, in this sense, the testing ground for the OSS to establish itself as an independent agency,[113] as they refused any shared arrangement with the SOE, like the ones reached in the Balkans or North Africa.[114]

All these experiences seem to have two key points in common. First, partisan forces were built up over time taking for granted that airdrops would continue to be constant and increasing. Secondly, there was also the problem of the lack of any coordination between the high commands and the liaison officers as to these airdrops. Not only does the picture that emerges here openly contradict the idea that liaison officers were in some ways accomplices of a British scheme to cut the Italian resistance down to size, but, even if such a scheme was in place, they would have been the victim of it together with the Italian partisans.

Partisans and liaison officers, thus, shared the adversities of the war and the frustration of unfulfilled promises on the same ground. Both were kept ignorant of the command's strategy and it seems that what can be considered borderline lies were fed to the BLOs in the field to contain their protests. If the Italian historiography is generous in its accusations against the British for being tight with their supply drops it does so by relying almost only on Italian sources, thus creating the impression of a 'home-crafted' critique. On the other hand, British scholars underline the difficulties caused by bad weather and the fact that allocated supplies were few to begin with. However, they both fail to mention the experience of these liaison officers, so similar to that of the partisans and yet forgotten by both British and Italians. Instead of creating a common memory around the experience of the resistance, this aspect is completely ignored by both sides.

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[112] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 54.

[113] Piffer, 'Office of Strategic Services', p. 42.

[114] Ibid., p. 47.

However, the men on the field were not the only ones to vehemently protest. The reason supplies for Italy dwindled during the summer of 1944 was that a reduction of tonnage for Italy had been decided in London in order to give more help to Yugoslavia, diverting the airdrops there. Indeed the liaison officers often did not get any answers because their superiors had their hands tied, not because they were trying to deceive them. While Wilkinson, Beckett and other agents were desperately asking for supplies their superiors were also asking for the same things, contesting the shift of priority from Italy to Yugoslavia. On 26 October 1944 the Minister of Economic Warfare, Roundell Palmer, sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister on the topic of supplies for the Italian Resistance, urging him not to approve the reduction in allocated tonnage. He was 'much disturbed already at the meagre allotment of air lift for supplies to the Italian maquis' and gave 'vent to further alarm at the absolute priority which general Wilson has given to supplies for the Yugoslav Partisans'.[115] Significantly, the Minister's argument was based around the British responsibilities towards the Italian partisans and the promises that were made during the summer. As he stated: 'acting on instructions I called the Italian Maquis out and they have done a magnificent job, far better than I ever expected; in fact, just as good as the French did' thus, 'when you have called a Maquis out into open warfare it is not fair to let it drop like a hot potato' as 'these men have burned their boats and have no retreat. If we fail them with ammunition, death by torture awaits them'. He pleaded for the instruction to restrict the tonnage allotted to Italy to the minimum necessary to maintain the partisans forces active to be 'liberally interpreted'. Moreover, he added, a reduction in British supplies would play right into the hands of the American Officers of the OSS in the field in Italy, disproportionally increasing their status and influence amongst the Italian Partisans.[116] The OSS moved actively to eclipse and overtake the SOE, missing few occasions to let the Italians know that the US was more friendly towards them than the UK and that it was doing more to help

[115] TNA WO 106/3964, SOE Operations in Italy, 31 October 1944.
[116] TNA FO371/43838, SOE operations in Italy, 29 October 1944.

Italy.[117] Palmer lamented that the Americans were already 'inclined to exaggerate seriously the importance of their relatively small contribution to the total effort'. For this reason, too it was 'very important for political reasons to maintain the British effort as well'. It is also worth noticing that the Minister claims that no-one informed him of this decision until the day before, showing how little coordination was present inside the British war machine.[118]

And surprisingly enough the Foreign Office itself, the sworn enemy of the Italian Resistance according to certain scholarship, had asked for an increase in airdropped supplies to the Italian Resistance almost a month before. On 9 September 1944, in fact, they asked the Resident Minister in Caserta: 'would it be possible to give a greater allocation to the Italians at the expense of the Yugoslavs', ironically, for 'political reasons'. As they stated 'the Italian patriots we believe are fighting extremely well at present' and the Yugoslavs could have been supplied by sea, freeing aircraft for the Italian theatre.[119] Once again, we can see as there is no clear policy towards Italy, every office seems to operate on its own according to the mood and the impressions of the moment, adding more confusion to the already complicated issue of Italo-Allied relations.

Another problem liaison officers had to face was the scarce coordination between missions and with the military commands, which led to misunderstandings and accusations between liaison officers and the Partisans. As Lieutenant Colonel McMullen, a N°1 SF agent, noticed in February 1945, an airdrop ordered by another mission in the Lorsica area had an adverse effect on his relationship with the local *Garibaldini* command. The airdrop, in fact, 'has the effect of arming a political minority

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[117] Piffer, 'Office of Strategic Services', p. 50.

[118] TNA FO371/43838, SOE operations in Italy, 29 October 1944.

[119] CASREC FO371/43877 99523, Message from Foreign Office to Resident Minister Central Mediterranean, Caserta, 9 September 1944. The proposal, however, was muffled down by the Resident Minister who pointed out the insufficient number of aircrafts available to increase the allotted airdrops for Italy, despite recognising that 'Italian resistance has paid and is paying first class dividends and it is general Wilson's policy to give Italian patriots the maximum support by way of air effort.' See: CASREC FO371/43877 99523, Message from Caserta (Resident Minister Central Mediterranean) to Foreign Office, 15 September 1944.

who are militarily inactive behind the back of their Command. Political feeling thereby increased and political suspicions of Command GARIBALDINI against Allies and us immediately aroused'. The agent vehemently claimed that he had:

> twice protested against present system of independent missions and uncontrolled drops and have twice asked for assurance that all drops within 6th Zone will be ordered through VAN or myself only. Have had no answer or comment. Since above drop was ordered, accepted and sent without us being informed, can only assume it is intended to continue present system […].

McMullen kept piling on it as he said that: 'present system has done and is doing harm rather than good. If you confirm it is to continue, [I] would prefer not to be held responsible for [the] present muddle and [a] possible future civil war and [I] respectfully request permission to withdraw'.[120] The Italians also protested against the decentralised liaison system which basically saw the competition of the British and the Americans on the field of airdropped supply,[121] *de facto* duplicating the agencies in charge of the matter,[122] and increasing confusion as a result. Stucchi, partisan commander in Val d'Ossola, complained about contradictory indications as to the airfield attribution between British and American missions.[123] And the Piedmontese partisans wrote, in March 1945, to their BLO reminding him that they already asked the Allied Command to clarify the role and powers of the Allied missions present in

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120 TNA WO204/7298, Air Supply 6th Zone, 25 February 1945.

121 TNA FO371/43947, Memorandum on the Political Situation, 23 December 1944. The memorandum was written by Colonel Pieri, an officer sent to the North with General Cadorna.

122 See, for example, Istoreto, B16f, Verbale della riunione tenutasi il 14 luglio in una località della Valle d'Aosta, 1944. Where the American liaison officer pitch his services almost like a sale to the Italians ('a regular weekly service, which never takes more than two or three days'), while showing little knowledge of the activities of the Italo-British mission Franchi.

123 Anita Azzari, 'I rapporti tra l'Ossola e gli alleati nell'autunno 1944', *Il Movimento di liberazione in Italia*, 52-53 (1958), 95-99 (p. 98).

the area and, since that request was never fulfilled, now Piedmont was 'overrun by missions acting on their own'.[124]

Politicization

Another topic debated at length in the historiography is the degree of politicization of the partisan bands, and how this influenced relations with the Allies and the British in particular. What is of particular interest here, for the scope of this work, is the matter of how politically homogeneous the bands were. Already in 1961, Charles Delzell pointed out the fact that not all the combatants in a Communist formation were Communists.[125] As obvious as this statement might sound it was a breakaway from the traditional interpretations of the Resistance, which saw the bands as heavily politicized. It was the period of the Tambroni Government, and of the violent re-affirmation of the 'hegemonic' narrative on the Resistance.[126] The issue of politicization, of course, is connected with the common accusation moved against the British of 'playing favourites' against the Communists.[127] Sometimes the British were openly accused of trying to direct, or even quash, political life inside the bands.[128] This British attitude was supposedly tied to the fear of a possible Communist revolution in Italy after the war; a fear that was supposedly widespread in the British administration and was strengthened by the Greek crisis.[129] For these reasons, the British officers in charge of liaison missions in Italy were chosen amongst the more 'hard and pure' anti-Communist elements available.[130]

However, more recent interpretations have shown not only that politicization and political affiliations were much more feeble than was previously thought, but also that the British policy towards politics in general, and the 'Communist threat' in

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[124] Istoreto, B16b, Al signor comandante PAT capo missione inglese (delegazione Piemonte-Biellese), 15 March 1945.

[125] Delzell. *Mussolini's enemies*, p. 290.

[126] Focardi, *La Guerra*, p. 41.

[127] Battaglia, *The history*, p.m287. See also: Bocca, *Storia*, pp. 155-156. And Dondi, *La Resistenza* p. 42.

[128] Boldrini, 'Missioni', p. 249.

[129] Nasini, *Una guerra*, p. 15.

[130] Boldrini, 'Missioni', p. 249.

particular, must be reassessed in light of a multi-level analysis of the different circumstances of the 1943-1945 period and the different attitudes manifested inside the British political and military machine.

The documentation preserved in the SOE archives shows how politics had a marginal role in the decision-making process to assign supplies. The only concern for the men of the British secret services was the ability of a band to perform actions against the Germans with efficacy. It is only from the end of 1944 that the SOE started to 'play favourites' with the Italian bands. However, this decision was not tied to political considerations, but, once more, to practical ones. Northern Italy, in fact, had been divided into two sectors: North-West and North-East. Bands in the North-East sector were on the trajectory of the German withdrawal and thus were supplied generously in order to hinder the Germans as much as possible. Bands in the North-West, on the other hand, were sacrificed in order to supply the ones in the North-East, deemed more important for the strategic aims of the Allied Campaign in Italy.[131] The SOE, in particular, had almost no interest in politics, and by 1943 it was already actively working with Communist organizations, for example in Yugoslavia and Greece.[132] As for Italy, already in June 1943 a telegram from the Berne Headquarters summed up the aim of the SOE as the defeat of Germany and nothing else. In this picture, political considerations were deemed of secondary concern.[133]

The armistice and the subsequent birth of a Resistance movement in Italy, however, changed the picture. Now Communist partisans were organising themselves in armed bands and it was clear that they were the most numerous, best equipped and most motivated. What was unclear was if their objective was merely the liberation of their country or the creation of a proletarian dictatorship, since the first steps of the

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[131] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 12. Also, In CASREC, WO204/6839, Cipher Message to 15 Army Group, 31 January 1945; CASREC, WO204/2795 106013, Special Operations Policy in Northern Italy, 11 April 1945.

[132] Foot, *SOE*, p. 58.

[133] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 65.

Communist organisations in Italy were taken independently from the CLN.[134] Moreover, the 'apolitical' line of the SOE did not enjoy full support from the totality of the British administration. The Foreign Office, in particular, was critical of the SOE's attitude as many thought that it was this attitude which had led to the catastrophic events of Greece,[135] where the British found themselves fighting a civil war against the Greek Communists after the liberation of the country from German occupation. It is thus clear that the situation needed clarification, to appease the authorities in London and to produce at least some guidelines to approach the issue of politicization inside the Italian resistance. In the first general memorandum on the Italian Resistance, dated 22 November 1943, the Italian partisans were defined as 'Anti-Fascists and Anti-Germans', not politicians who had picked up a weapon to push forward their political aims.[136] The Eighth Army, one year later, confirmed that, to partisans, politics was 'a minor consideration'.[137]

In general, the SOE and most of the Allied organizations operating in Italy kept faith in its line of describing the bands always in military terms, often skirting the issue of politics. When they talk about it, they generally stressed how politics were not a matter of concern and, above all else, did not hinder the collaboration between partisans and the BLOs.

In April 1944 the PWB noted how the partisans, on the whole, were 'impatient of politics' and wished 'only to concentrate on the struggle at hand'.[138] In May, they put forward the testimony of a refugee from enemy occupied Italy, stating that, while the

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[134] Until the first months of 1944, in fact, the Communist Party fought in a state of relative isolation and independence from the CLN. See: Gaetano Grassi and Gabriella Solaro, 'I militari nel Comando generale' in *Formazioni autonome nella Resistenza*, ed. by Gianni Perona (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1996), pp. 19-35 (p. 22).

[135] See for example: TNA, FO 371/43877, Memorandum on Partisans, 5 August 1944. Where Maj. Radclyffe remarked that: 'Like the poor, SOE are always with us, but in spite of them we may as well do what we can to avoid creating in Northern Italy conditions similar to those which they created so enthusiastically in Greece'.

[136] HS 6/902, Guerrilla Bands in Italy, 22 November 1943, The document is also cited in Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 66.

[137] TNA, WO 204/7288, Eight Army Partisan Summary No.2 Based on Information Received up to 28 Oct, 28 October 1944

[138] TNA, FO 371/43944, PWB Report on Conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy No.6, 28 April 1944.

leader of the local partisans was a Communist, 'politics were never touched upon'.[139] Brigadier Combe and Brigadier Todhunter gave the most balanced review on the issue of politicization in the Italian Resistance. As they pointed out, in the Communist band they worked with, there was a 'great activity in singing 'The Red Flag', and using the hammer and sickle as a badge whenever possible'.[140] However, it was not true that the whole band was composed of Communists. On the opposite, it seemed that the partisans had 'recruited men of every shade of political opinion except Fascist'.[141] They came to the conclusion that men flocked to the Communist banner not because of political convictions, but simply because the Communists were the only party to have carried on active underground opposition to the Fascist regime before the war.[142] Major Davies, Commander of the Envelope Blue Mission, deployed in Emilia, reported in November 1944 how partisans in the area regarded themselves as 'being closely associated with the Allies' and that they were 'most cooperative, friendly and correct in their attitude'. He pointed out that there was indeed a 'keen natural political rivalry between the brigades', however, 'the war and cooperation with the Allies' were nevertheless paramount. He sharply argued the case that the Italian Resistance was not only a struggle for freedom of the country, but also for political freedom of the individuals: 'one may not have much sympathy for the close association between Partisans and party politics but it is more understandable because apart from fighting for their freedom which is foremost, these men are fighting for the right to have political parties again'.[143] Major Davies also pointed out how political affiliation inside a brigade was a different matter than the political affiliation of the brigade itself, as the 'political emphasis' was not 'strong or much

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[139] TNA, FO 371/43944, PWB Report on Conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy No.7, 5 May 1944.

[140] TNA, WO 106/3964, Report on partisan and subversive activity in German Occupied Italy from September 10th, 1943, to May 14th, 1944, by brigadier J.F.B. Combe, D.S.O. and brigadier E.J. Todhunter, 1 June 1944.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

[143] TNA, WO 204/7298, Report on the Parma Mission for August, September and October, by Major J.T.M. Davies, R.E., 21 November 1944. Col. Roseberry as well noted in December that: 'without political activities the partisans would not function'. TNA, FO 371/43947, Memorandum on the Political Situation, 23 December 1944.

propagated in the rank and the file'. Moreover, partisans did not disturb the local civilian population with politics or party propaganda. All these things considered, politics was not, 'therefore, a problem which needs trouble the BLO'.[144] As two BLOs reported, it was common that, in a band, 'the leaders alone have definite political ideas. The ordinary partisans join a particular formation because it is well organised, or happens to be nearest to their house, or is the first one they could surrender to'.[145] Another Memorandum from November 1944 pointed out how, in Piedmont, 'the vast majority of the rank and file have joined their particular Partisan unit because it was near their home or because it had a good fighting record'.[146]

Indeed, these reports often stressed how partisans inside a band were not necessarily members of that band's party of reference. According to the BLOs, only 15% to 20% of the members of the Garibaldi brigades were actually Communists, and many of them were in any case too young to have 'clear political ideas'.[147] A BLO who had the chance of listening to a lecture on Marxism given by a political commissar of a Garibaldi brigade commented sarcastically that it was: 'a Communism barely understood by the lecturer himself'.[148] There was even the case of a BLO chastising the habit of other non-Communist partisans of considering all *garibaldini* as Communists.[149] The CLN too was praised by the PWB, as it showed 'good sense' in avoiding 'playing politics', thus preventing a split between the CLN itself and the independent bands.[150] Political bickering, while surely present in the Italian Resistance, did not reach the levels of Greece; and the Communist Party, as reported

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[144] TNA, WO 204/7298, Report on the Parma Mission for August, September and October, by Major J.T.M. Davies, R.E., 21 November 1944.

[145] TNA, FO371/43878, Report on North-West Italy, sent by Col. Roseberry to Southern Division, Foreign Office, 16 November 1944.

[146] TNA, WO 204/7305, Assistance to be Expected from Patriot Formations during Operation "Cinders", 15 November 1944.

[147] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 70.

[148] TNA, WO 204/7301, Report on zone of operation "Bergenfield". Between 24 Oct 44 and Feb 45, 12 March 1945.

[149] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 72.

[150] CASREC, FO 371/49869 98713, Italian Theatre Headquarters Psychological Warfare Branch, report on conditions in enemy occupied Italy, November 1944 and FO371/49869, Report on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy No.32, 4 December 1944.

at the beginning of 1945, had put on hold its revolutionary aims, at least for the time being.[151] Moreover, the CLN had also a control function over the actions of the partisans and the SOE was happy to report that the Communists had no issue about following the CLN's directives; in fact, political unity was assessed as being greater in the CLNAI than in liberated Italy.[152] There were some reports from the field which pointed at a possible Communist insurrection after the end of the war.[153] However, as a whole, there seems to be a great minority of the overall reports and memoranda produced by the Allied liaison officers and Commands. Even more complicated relationships with the Communists, like the one of Major Johnson of the Envelope mission, in the end, were described in a positive light, recognising the fact that the partisans were determined to fight the Nazi-Fascist forces.[154]

And this view on the politicization of the Italian Resistance was not confined in the SOE. Noel Charles himself (the British Resident Minister in Italy), wrote in January 1945 to the FO stating how political affiliation in Italy was a tenuous affair. Commenting on his telegram, the FO noted how Italians were Fascists before, and now there was the danger of them becoming Communists. However, 'in the same way as most Italians were said Fascists, we can be quite sure that the same can apply to those Italians who are Communists'. Individualism was the prime characteristic of the Italian people, which trumped political affiliations: 'the Italian Individualism is quite likely to make a Communist pro-British and pro-American rather than pro-Russian'.[155]

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[151] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, pp. 81-82.

[152] CASREC, WO 204/1990 xc/106599, No.1 Special Force participation in future military operations, 26 April 1944. See also: CASREC, WO 204/7288 xc/98320, Eight Army Partisan Summary No.3 Based on information received up to 11 Nov 1944. Where is again stated how the Communist Party remarkably put much emphasis in the documents it issued on co-operation with the other Anti-Fascist parties.

[153] CASREC, Report on Airdrops, 15 January 1945 and CASREC, Report on C. insurrection, 15 January 1945.

[154] TNA, WO 204/7296, Report on the Activities and Experiences of Major V.R. Johnson of the ENVELOPE Mission, 5 January 1945.

[155] CASREC, FO 371/49768 99731, Political situation in Italy, 20 January 1945.

In his appreciation of the Italian Resistance to Winston Churchill, Noel Charles too gave his positive opinion regarding the partisan movement in. Once again, he reaffirmed that politics in the partisan movement was a minor factor. Charles wrote that: 'organisation was run on military lines and the party banners were more in the nature of regimental standards than symbols of a political creed'. Moreover, he too reaffirmed the idea that political literacy among the partisans was very low and that 'the ideas of young partisans about socialism and communism are, more often than not, sketchy'.[156]

Unsurprisingly, thus, instructions to the liaison officers seldom mentioned political matters.[157] And when they did, it was to order the officers to stay out of them. Both the SOE and the OSS issued strict orders to their agents, so as to avoid becoming involved in politics while in Italy. Agents were to avoid 'local politics, frontier disputes, or similar sources of internal dissension'[158] as they had 'no political authority whatsoever'.[159] Political dissent between partisan forces was the exclusive competence of the Army's Headquarters and all personal initiatives were to be strictly avoided.[160] Even the CLN underlined this point in its instructions to the partisan formations.[161] And when they were accused by the partisans of political meddling the missions did not hesitate to vehemently push back such accusations.[162]

The British, thus, did consider the issue of politicization. However, they found it not to be a pressing issue when they confronted the Italian Partisans. Preoccupations in London were still present, however; the military personnel in Italy largely placed

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[156] CASREC, FO 371/49803 99731, Sir N. Charles to Mr. Churchill, 16 June 1945.

[157] For an example, see: CASREC, WO 204/11413 xc/106559, Operation instruction, 21 September 1944.

[158] CASREC, WO 204/10186A 98244, Instructions to SOE/OSS liaison officers, 20 September 1944.

[159] TNA, WO204/7293, Operation Instruction, 25 September 1944.

[160] CASREC, WO 204/10238 xc/106559, Instructions to SOE/OSS liaison officers, 30 January 1945.

[161] Istoreto, B15a007, Missioni alleate, 20 October 1944.

[162] Istoreto, B15b033, Relazioni della Missione con le Formazioni Partigiane, 16 March 1945. Ironically, in this case, is an American mission to be under accusation, despite the fact that Americans are generally considered, in historiography, to have been more 'open' than the British towards the Italian resistance and less willing to control it politically. The same document (?) B16b, Relazioni con i partigiani, 16 March 1945.

politics into the background of their action after a first phase of inquiry that led to the conclusion that partisan bands were not internally homogeneous in their political colour. This was despite the fact that, in some areas, namely the Friuli-Carnia zone, the *garibaldini* did raise some more than legitimate concerns for the Allied missions.[163] In fact, considering some events in the Friuli area, such as the Porzûs massacre,[164] it could be argued that the British paid too little attention to politics. Tragically, at the end of 1944, it was reported that the relations between the Garibaldi and the Osoppo brigades, albeit worsened by the stress of fighting the Germans and having to deal with the near Slovene partisans, were still good and that there was no reason to suppose that differences were 'serious or lasting'.[165]

The British evaluation can find further support in the Italian documentation about politics in the partisan bands. Italians indeed put politics on very high ground. It was true that the Resistance was not only a war of national liberation but also a laboratory for democracy and politics. As historian Santo Peli wrote: 'the partisan war is a political war. This means that, while the aim is the liberation of the national territory, it is equally crucial *how* this liberation will be achieved'.[166] However, politicisation seldom reached a level deemed satisfactory.[167] Otherwise, the CLN would not have needed to remind its members to actually put effort into the political education of their combatants. In November 1944 the CLN produced a guide for political commissars in the bands as it was stated that 'the endeavour of guide and education' was essential. Politics was paramount as the partisans were supposed to be soldiers who knew 'why they fight in a war'. The task bestowed on the political commissars was, however, quite daunting. On the one hand, they were supposed to explain how

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[163] See for example the shocking behaviour reported in: CASREC, Garibaldini in N-E Italy, 20 December 1944, akin more to banditry than to an army of patriots.

[164] On 7 February 1945, after a summary trial a number of partisans belonging to the Catholic Osoppo brigade were executed by Communist partisans belonging to a *Gruppo di Azione Patriottica* (GAP).

[165] CASREC, WO 204/7301 99920, Report on Coolant Mission – June to November 1944.

[166] Santo Peli, 'Dimensioni militari e politiche della Resistenza', *Italia contemporanea*, 237 (2004), 569-579 (p. 570).

[167] See: *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, p. 174, where is lamented the 'excessive political immaturity among the partisans'.

parties and politics were important to fight against Fascism and the Germans, as Anti-Fascist parties were the first to oppose the regime. On the other, they were supposed to keep the political debate inside the frame of 'good concord' envisioned by the CLN. It was stated how every partisan 'could belong to this or that party but, since all parties today want unity, liberty and independence, who belongs to them should never speak to put the good Italians one against the other'. Political commissars, in other words, 'should not do propaganda for their own party' as their task was to conduct 'national' propaganda.[168] Giorgio Bocca remembers how politics were more of a projection of an idealised version of the future, rather than a proper political creed:

> we youngsters did not know what pre-Fascist democracy had been, nor what Stalin's Communism was. We believed in a Resistance that was virtuous and rejuvenating, we had to believe in that to keep our men together, there was no room for the history of disappointments and deviations, for history as it really was.[169]

Even for the Communist bands, often presented as the more 'granitic' when it came to their political affiliation, it seems that the British appreciation was mostly correct. At the beginning of the civil war (September 1943), the PCI was aware that the situation was hazy and fluid and that politics had to be put temporarily to the side. In the PCI's directives to the partisan *distaccamenti* it was stated with a good measure of realism how partisan bands were born as a reaction to German occupation and 'Fascist betrayal'. As such, bands did not have 'a precise political physiognomy'. Thus, every political opinion or religious practice was to be respected, as long as it was Anti-Fascist. The only political requirement for a band to be recognised was its adhesion to the CLN. It was fully understood that discipline could only come from

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[168] Istoreto, B12e088, Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale per l'Alta Italia, La Guida del Commissario, 8 November 1944. See also: *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, p. 263, where is stated how partisans could have their own political beliefs, but the partisan struggle requested a singular belief: that of national liberation.

[169] Giorgio Bocca, *Partigiani della montagna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2008), p. 7.

'conviction and not coercion', the role of the political commissars, thus, was to provide such motivation.[170] After this first, uncertain, period and with the strengthening of the Resistance movement the Communist Party started a campaign to better educate its partisans and to have a more strict political control over the bands that called themselves *garibaldine*.[171] However, to what extent it was a success is hard to assess. The Piedmontese delegation of the PCI, in July 1944, scolded the commanders of the Val di Susa area, remarking how there were a number of things to improve in the local bands, first and foremost, political cohesion. The brigades' expansion during the summer, in fact, produced a relaxation of discipline and a dilution of the political affiliation of its members.[172] This issue was noted with satisfaction by the British as well, who pointed out how ideological fragmentation was a direct consequence of a band's growth.[173] Ironically, from this point of view, band expansion was a positive factor for the British. Again, during the Autumn of 1944 political commissaries lamented the scarce political conviction of the partisans fighting in the Garibaldi brigades, pointing at this issue as one of the reasons why in some areas the partisans seemed totally unprepared to defend themselves against German attacks.[174] Political affiliations remained feeble during the whole duration of the war, with cases of bands changing 'colours' without much trauma.[175] Often, the Communist affiliation of a band had more to do with the prospect of gaining funds and supplies, rather than with political convictions,[176] as the Communist bands were the largest and more organised.

As for the 'Communist threat,' it is almost easier to find references to it in the Italian documentation, rather than the British one. Italian political rivalries, in fact, pushed

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[170] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, p. 102.

[171] See, for example, *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, pp. 133-137. And Ibid., pp. 173-179.

[172] Ibid., p. 117

[173] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, pp. 72-73.

[174] See, for example: *Le brigate Garibaldi*, I, p. 303

[175] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana,* p. 72. See also the story of partisan leader 'Davide' who was little more than an adventurer trying to grab as much as he could. Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca*, pp. 324-327.

[176] See the report by Mj. Johston: HS 6/838 Political and Military Liaison Missions, 9 June 1945.

partisans one against the other much more than they did with the British, who had enough detachment to be able to appreciate the Italian situation in its entirety. Edgardo Sogno, who was a stalwart anti-Communist, was one of the most vocal about the danger posed by the Garibaldi brigades for the future stability of Italy. In February 1945 he strongly argued in favour of the Italian Army entering Milan together with the Allied troops on the day of the city's liberation. The risk he envisioned was that the population would otherwise have seen the partisans as the only legitimate fighting force and, since the majority of the local partisans were *garibaldini*, the PCI would enjoy a renewed wave of support.[177] The Franchi organisation, put together by Sogno to coordinate supply drops in Northern Italy was never shy in its criticism towards the Communists and in its reports to the British authorities tried to influence the British perception of the 'Communist threat' in Italy. In a memorandum dated 3 March 1945, a Franchi agent described the Communist threat as pressing, although easy to solve, as support for Communism, just like for Fascism, stemmed from political ignorance. For this reason, the Allies needed to 'keep an understanding eye on the political evolution of Northern Italy'.[178]

Even today the myth of an omnipresent and all-powerful Communist party, perfectly capable of indoctrinating, controlling and coordinating dozens of partisan bands is still a *topòs* dear to the right-wing press. *Il Giornale*, in April 2017 chastised the SOE for 'the underestimation of the quantitative weight of the Communists in the Resistance' and the fact that they did not realise that the Communists had 'complete control of the Garibaldi brigades: through the military commands, but especially through the political commissars'.[179] However, archival documentation from both British and Italian sources shows how baseless this claim is.

How much the British were influenced by reports like Sogno's is hard to assess. In October 1944, for example, the PWB even came to disprove the alarmistic reports

[177] Istoreto, B12e063, Lettera di Sogno da San Vittore 'per gli amici PL', February 1945.
[178] CASREC, WO 204/2795 106013, Report by Fabrizio, 3 March 1945.
[179] Roberto Festorazzi, 'Così gli agenti britannici infiltrarono la Resistenza', *Il Giornale* 27 April 2017.

made by other partisan formations. When the Commander of the Langhe Division (probably Mauri himself) accused the local Garibaldi brigade of being 'anarchists' and 'conserving their arms for use in a future coup-d'etat', the PWB observer 'did not confirm this impression'. As he reported, 'only a small percentage of the rank and file' were Communists, the rest being part of the band because it was the only one close to their homes and because of its efficiency.[180]

It is clear that the issue of politicisation, especially as the Communists are concerned, needs to be re-framed. Firstly, there were parts of the Italian Resistance that viewed the Communists with the same level of suspicion as the more anti-Communist elements inside the British administration. On the other hand, military personnel, and a portion of the British administration, such as Noel Charles, seem to have been unfazed by the presence and the organisation of the Communists. They recognised the existence of politics inside the Italian Resistance. After all, as the N°1 SF stated after the end of the war: 'anybody who has worked with resistance movements well knows the interplay of politics and their repercussions cannot and should not be excluded from the conduct of special operations'.[181] However, the utilitarian policy applied in Italy by the military authorities allowed them great freedom in their actions, without needing to concern themselves too much with the political affiliation of the bands they were in contact with. Discipline and efficacy of action were the two most important factors in evaluating a band's usefulness for the Allied cause. And the Communists, with their long experience in clandestinity, were the first and the most capable in organising guerrilla warfare. Thus, BLOs and military authorities worked with them, regardless of the hesitation that London might have had.

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[180] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report on Conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy No.29, 25 October 1944.

[181] Istoreto, B16a, Report on N°1 Special Forces activities until April 1945, 3 June 1945.

Greece

The Greek question is strictly tied with the issue of politicisation of the Italian Resistance and especially with the issue of a possible Communist armed uprising in Italy after the end of the war.

Italy attacked Greece at the end of October 1940. In the wake of Hitler's successes in Europe Mussolini wanted to conduct a 'parallel war' to get his share of glory and loot. However, the campaign was such a complete disaster that, as Giorgio Rochat put it: 'many scholars tried to find some element of rationality in it, however, the results were meagre'.[182] The Italian Army was under-equipped, under-manned and poorly led against an enemy that, while inferior on paper on account of armaments, transportation and aviation, was highly motivated by the defensive war, could count on the support of the local population, and had better knowledge and understanding of the terrain. Thanks to these premises the Greeks managed to keep the initiative of the operations well into February 1941.[183] After being stopped in its offensive, the Italian Army found itself fighting on the defensive and even being pushed back into Southern Albania by the Greeks. It was only thanks to the German intervention, during April 1941, that Greece was finally forced to capitulate and surrender against the well-planned and well organised German invasion.[184] Greece was thus partitioned in zones of occupation between the Germans, the Italians and the Bulgarians who had a minor role in the campaign. Hitler tried in this way to strengthen the popularity of Mussolini, after the disastrous campaigns Italy waged in Africa and Greece, however, the concession of some territories in Greece did not appease Italy's hegemonic ambitions in the area and, moreover, caused frictions between Italy and Germany as to which power was dominant in the Balkans.[185]

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[182] Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943 Dall'Impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), p. 259.

[183] Rochat, *Le guerre*, p. 263.

[184] Charles Cruickshank, *Greece 1940-1941* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1976), p. 175.

[185] Gabriella Etmektsoglou, 'Gli alleati dissonanti. L'Asse e i costi dell'occupazione della Grecia', *Italia contemporanea*, 209-210 (1997-1998), 109-142 (p. 111).

Defeat did not mean, however, the end of the fighting in Greece. The King escaped to Egypt and a Government in exile was created under British tutelage. Meanwhile, partisan groups quickly organised themselves, with the help of the SOE to harass the occupying forces.[186] Particularly prominent was the organisation led by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), the ELAS-EAM. The Communists, up to the beginning of the German occupation, had been a marginal presence in Greek politics.[187] The party did not perform well at elections and was eventually disbanded by the Metaxas regime in 1936, surviving only as a clandestine organisation. However, the brutality of the occupation and the long experience in secrecy gave the Communists the upper hand in organising guerrilla warfare. ELAS dominated the partisan organizations and gave the Greek people a clear political hope for the future.[188] Much like the PCI in Italy, the period before the war served as a ruthless training regime for the Greek Communists. The other democratic groups, the EKKA and EDES, struggled to emerge and even clashed with the ELAS. Tension rose inside the Greek resistance with the end of the occupation approaching, and infighting became more common. Foots claims that EDES commands were able to resist an attack launched by ELAS during the Autumn of 1944, while the Germans were withdrawing, only thanks to the SOE.[189] The situation only apparently calmed down with the creation of a Government of National unity led by the social-democrat Georgios Papandreou. On 3 December 1944, the KKE launched a street protest against the Government as they were not satisfied with the ministries assigned to them. The protest and the clashes between protesters and the police led to the intervention of the British forces who opened fire on the crowd. On 25 December, Churchill himself

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[186] For an appreciation of the SOE's exploits in Greece, see: Foot, *SOE*, pp. 233-236. See also, Procopis Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece during the Second World War, 1941-1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1984), p. 129.

[187] John C. Loulis, *The Greek Communist Party, 1940-1944* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 1.

[188] Richard Clogg, *Parties and elections in Greece: the search for legitimacy* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 13. See also: Loulis, *The Greek Communist*, pp. 10-28, where the author analyses in-depth four main factors that led to the rise of ELAS: the brutality of the occupation, the Communist familiarity with clandestinity, the Greek socio-economic conditions and the lack of mobilization from other Greek parties.

[189] Foot, *SOE*, p. 236.

offered to help mediate between the sides and an agreement was reached in February between the Government, now led by the General Nikolaos Plastiras, and ELAS on the disarmament of the partisans in exchange for full amnesty. The situation, however, remained tense for the whole 1945, with the Communists still controlling their strongholds in the mountains and the Government holding the cities, and eventually led to a full-fledged civil war at the beginning of 1946.

Unsurprisingly, a cursory examination of the historiography shows it is as divided on the issue of the British attitude towards the Greek Resistance as it is on the British attitude towards the Italian Resistance. Some scholars support the idea that the KKE followed a structured plan to seize power in Greece that was stopped only by the British intervention.[190] Others believe that the British wanted to keep Greece in its sphere of influence and that no means were too low to attain such a goal.[191]

This is not the place to sort these historiographical disputes. However, it is a legitimate question to ask if the events in Greece had some sort of effect as to the British attitude towards the Italian Resistance, and towards the Communists in particular. It is rather easy to see the connections between the Greek situation and the Italian one and to imagine the similarities that must have been drawn in Italy as events in Greece unfolded. In many ways, Greece, with its strong Communist movement, could be very well compared to Italy. And the British actions in Greece could very well be replicated in Italy as well. The imposition of General Pastiras as head of the Government, for example, was made by the British under the false assumption that it would help the moderates finding a rallying point.[192] To many in Italy, this situation was unsettlingly similar to the support that the British were

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[190] Loulis, *The Greek Communist*, p. 189. See also Foot, *SOE,* p. 236.

[191] Papastratis, *British policy*, p. 217. And Heinz Richter, *British intervention in Greece from Varkiza to civil war, February 1945 to August 1946* (London: Merlin Press, 1986), p. VII. The author points out how the lack of a strong American presence in Greece allowed the British a much greater freedom in handling the situation according to their plans compared to other theatres of the war. See also: Jon V. Kofas, *Authoritarianism in Greece the Metaxas Regime* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 181. Kofas accuses the British of openly supporting the quasi-fascist Metaxas Regime.

[192] Clogg, *Parties and Elections*, p. 14.

granting to General Badoglio and King Emanuele III.[193] Moreover, the fact that a number of Italian deserters joined the Greek Resistance after the collapse of the Italian Army (as they did in all of the Balkans),[194] made possible an emotional connection with the Greek situation even for the non-Communist Italians. On the other hand, it is similarly easy to imagine that fears for the Greek situation might have led to a stiffening in the British administration, concerning the 'Communist threat' in Italy.

The FO especially had its suspicions towards the Italian partisans after the troubles experienced in Greece, as the official history series reports.[195] The main reason for concern was that the CLNAI could have attempted a coup and replaced the legitimate Government in Rome.[196] The agreement reached between the CLNAI and the SACMED, signed at the end of 1944, was especially criticised by the FO in this context. The FO pointed out how they had no intention to criticise the military side of the agreement, but that, in view of the 'experience with EAM in Greece', they 'felt that from the political aspect the situation was potentially dangerous'. The FO was especially concerned by the idea of the agreement giving legitimacy to the Communists, who were 'by far the best organised of the Anti-Fascist parties in the North as well as in the South of Italy' and encouraged them to seize the CLNAI 'with a view to building up as a rival of the Italian Government in Rome'. In Eden's view, there were many similarities with the Greek case, and there was an actual danger of creating a Government in opposition to the one in Rome, supported by its own army.[197]

The men-on-the-spot however, tried to clarify the situation. As already said, they had many times pointed out how the Communist affiliation of a brigade did not completely equate to the Communist affiliation of its members. The SOE, in

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[193] Not to mention the fact that the British, similarly to what they did with Vittorio Emanuele III, also endorsed the Greek King George II, causing fractures in the non-Communist front, as some of the parties were of republican tendencies. See: Loulis, *The Greek Communist*, p. 76.

[194] Rochart, *Le guerre*, p. 432.

[195] For a summary of the FO position on this matter see: WO 106/3964, History of the Agreement Signed between SACMED, C.L.N.A.I. and the Italian Government, 12 January 1945.

[196] Harris, *Allied military administration*, p. 274.

[197] CASREC CAB 80/80 106262, Copy of a letter from the Foreign Office to the Secretary Chief of Staff Committee, 9 January 1945.

particular, pointed out how the Communist leaders had, at least for the moment, renounced any insurrectional aim, even suppressing in some cases the impetuosity of some of its members.[198] The policy devised to placate the FO's fears was a slight review of the supply policy towards the entire Resistance movement, and not aimed at the Communists alone. The idea was to provide the partisans with a larger amount of explosive and other sabotage material and decrease the number of arms dropped. It is worth noticing, in this regard, that the British personnel in Italy examined the idea of curtailing supplies to the Communists to reinforce other bands, however, they decided against it. Firstly, because it was hard to tell apart a Communist band from a non-Communist one and, secondly because they realised this would lead to a hostile reaction from the g*arbialdini*.[199] All in all, things were considered to be completely under control and the possibility of a Greek-style uprising were considered low. The 15th Army Group, in particular, pointed out five key differences between Italy and Greece: firstly, the fact that partisan forces were more evenly split, with a large number of liberals, social-democrats and Christian-democrats. Secondly, in Italy, there was present a much larger contingent of Allied troops compared to Greece, which acted as a serious deterrent. Thirdly, the Italian Government was not a Government in exile,[200] it was already in Italy and the Communists were part of it. Fourthly, the CLNAI was considered reliable and it had promised to collect the partisans weapons once the war was over. Finally, the lack of heavy weaponry available to the partisans made any chance of an armed uprising completely unrealistic.[201]

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[198] Berrettini, *La Resistenza,* pp. 79-81.

[199] Ibid., p. 83.

[200] Ironically, prominent Anti-Fascist Emilio Lussu made similar remarks to Count Carlo Sforza in 1942, before the start of the armed Resistance. Lussu opposed Sforza's idea of creating an exiled Italian Government as, according to him, it would lack legitimacy to conduct political action and it would be delegitimised in the eyes of the Italian population. Antonio Varsori, *Gli alleati e l'emigrazione democratica antifascista 1940-1943* (Florence: Sansoni Editori, 1982), p.138. See also Lussu imself: Emilio Lussu, 'Ancora sulla legione', *Per l'Italia dall'esilio*, ed. by M. Brigaglia (Cagliari: Edizioni della torre, 1976), 261-264 (p. 261).

[201] WO 204/7300, Special Operations under Rankin Condition in NW Italy, 29 January 1945.

It seems that, in the end, despite a first moment of uncertainty, Greece did not cause the British to change their attitude towards Italy. On the contrary, it was almost considered a blessing in disguise. As Maj. Hope reported in March 1945 the uncompromising attitude showed by Great Britain in Greece had good repercussions in Italy. The Communist party, in fact, 'used to state that their aim was seizure of power as soon as enemy withdraws'. However, they were now willing to loyally cooperate with the other parties. According to him, they did not feel strong enough to 'impose their New Order' and this was thanks to the 'British attitude in Greece' which made 'a deep impression and has encouraged all moderates'.[202] The only tangible effect of the Greek crisis for the Italian campaign was the necessity felt by the British to divert troops from Italy to Greece,[203] which worsened the already precarious situation of the Italian front during the autumn of 1944.

More than with the British, the tragic Greek events had an effect on the Italians. Many saw in what was happening the 'true colours' of British foreign policy. And Nazi-Fascist propaganda was quick to exploit the issue to demoralise the partisans and to demonise the Allies.[204] The Nannetti brigade, operating in Northen Veneto, reported having to do some clarification work after the Greek events had aroused some suspicions towards the Italian Communists. They even sent a message of celebration to King George VI on his birthday. As it was wittily noted by the *garibaldini*: 'politics has a whole set of necessities to satisfy'.[205] More than anything else, it seems, Greece represented for many the proof that trust could not be put in the British word. A memorandum to the political commissars in the Piacenza area stated how in Greece reactionary elements backed by the British had tried to smother the people's march to liberty. In Italy too, reactionaries, or 'Fascists with different clothes', were trying to suppress democracy; partisans were thus called to fulfil their role and protect what

[202] CASREC, WO 204/7298 98427, Message from M.11, 18 March 1945.
[203] Ehrman, *Grand strategy*, VI, p. 39.
[204] TNA, FO371/49869, Report on Enemy Occupied Italy, 11 January 1945.
[205] *Le brigate Garibaldi*, III, p. 61.

they had conquered on the battlefield.[206] And the British liaison officers picked up on this uneasiness, as the final assessment made by the N°1 SF reported that at the beginning of 1945 partisan morale was low and that 'great concern was felt about the future of the partisan movement; and conditions arising in Greece after liberation tend to increase the anxiety'.[207] This problem was not limited to enemy occupied Italy either. In liberated Italy as well, the Greek crisis was seen as proof that the British were bent on imposing right-wing governments in Europe.[208] The situation was so serious that the PWB suggested newsreel depicting the Allied liberating troops in Greece to be withdrawn in order 'not to excite more than necessary public feeling in this very delicate matter'.[209]

I would, therefore, argue that the bigger psychological effect of the Greek crisis was on the Italians, not the British. It led to an increase in diffidence and suspect against any British initiative in Italy and produced a faulty lens for the partisan to examine British motives and actions. While the events in Greece were unfolding it became easier to assume that the British had ulterior motives for their actions in Italy. In this case, therefore, the relation should be reversed: it was not the British who were scarred by Greece and adopted a more rigid stance against Italy. It was the Italians who thought they had found in the Greek events confirmation of their worst fears, thus reinforcing their hostility towards the British and creating a vicious circle, similar to the case of partisan disarmament that will be examined later.

Liaison missions: a reassessment

The four topics just examined, connected to the activity of the British liaison missions in Italy, provide a different picture of Italo-British relations compared to much of the current and past historiography. Out of the four of them, only the Greek crisis seems to have had a significant impact on Italo-British relations. However, it had more of an

[206] Ibid., pp. 138-139.
[207] Istoreto, B16a, Report on N°1 Special Forces activities until April 1945, 3 June 1945.
[208] TNA, FO371/49869, PWB Report No.48 on the Conditions in Liberated Italy, 28 December 1944.
[209] TNA, FO371/49869, PWB Report No.49 on the Conditions in Liberated Italy, 05 January 1945.

impact on Italian opinion of the British, rather than vice versa. I would argue, thus, that a reassessment of the role and impact that the BLOs had in Italy is in order. liaison missions were considered of vital importance by the Allied command, not because of some need for political control over the partisans, but, simply, for coordinating their actions and to ascertain the needs of each zone beyond the front line.[210] And the British quickly realised that liaison could not be left to Badoglio's men, as they had little sway with the partisans.[211] Coordination was needed not only between different bands but also between the bands and the Allies themselves. liaison officers had to coordinate the actions carried on by the bands with the operations of the Allied army on the field and the air bombings.[212] And, in the last phase of the Italian campaign liaison missions assumed a new importance in the framework of anti-scorch activities.[213] The importance of coordination during military operations, especially on such a large scale, is often overlooked. Liaison officers, thus, were a key component of the Allied war machine and were needed for military reasons, rather than political ones.

All of the four topics examined have for a long time captivated the interest of scholars because they were immediate and easily identifiable. However, after an in-depth analysis of the archival documentation, it stands to reason that their importance must be reconsidered. It appears that they are not the main cause of friction between the partisans and the British as previously thought. In a context of guerrilla war and contingency, in fact, the main motive of friction, rather than political or ideological concerns can be traced to the management of supplies. The British agents and commands were anxious not to waste what little materials they had at their disposal,

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[210] Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate*, p. 15. And Stevens, 'L'Inghilterra', p. 82.

[211] TNA, WO 106/3964, Report on partisan and subversive activity in German Occupied Italy from September 10th, 1943, to May 14th, 1944, by brigadier J.F.B. Combe, D.S.O. and brigadier E.J. Todhunter, 01 June 1944.

[212] This was not only the case for bombing operations against enemy targets, which benefitted from partisan reconnaissance work, see: CASREC, WO204/7309 99920, Suggested Plan for Co-ordinating Partisan Activity with our Bombing Policy in N.E. Italy, 9 November 1944; it was also necessary to avoid the unfortunate case of Allied planes attacking partisan troops and their vehicles, causing, to put it mildly, 'a strong adverse affect on our [the Allies'] relations with the Partisans'. See: TNA, WO 204/7309, Partisan Defence against Air Attacks, 12 December 1944.

[213] Istoreto, B16a, Report on anti-scorch in Northern Italy 1944-1945 No.1 Special Forces, 1945.

while the Italian partisans were always hungry for more weaponry, explosive, food and medicines.

The BLOs encountered a number of problems in managing supplies for the partisans, including the disorganisation of the partisans themselves, their reluctance to follow directives and the theft of supplies. As Brigadier Combe and Todhunter reported in June 1944, partisans tended to ask for too much material compared to their actual needs, mainly because they greatly overestimated their ability to effectively use such material against the Nazi-Fascists. They reported that Italians, if 'left to themselves will ask for a great deal of useless material'. In particular, the two Brigadiers had experienced the request for 'eight mortars', despite the fact that such heavy armament would have been 'quite useless for guerrilla warfare'. The plan of the partisan leader who requested them was to 'shoot up Fascist barracks'. Apparently, he was unperturbed by the fact that the local terrain would have been impossible to traverse carrying the mortars, as the partisans had 'practically no means of transporting them [the mortars] through the mountains'. This issue was 'brushed aside as a difficulty which would be overcome somehow when the mortars arrived'. Brigadier Combe and Todhunter also remarked on Italian disorganisation as they reminded their command that 'organisation is not a strong point of the Italian character, and there is every chance that droppings under Italian arrangements would go wrong'.[214] The risk of losing valuable materials and resources, as well as time, was the paramount concern which drove the British action in setting up the liaison missions and, considering the situation, could not have been otherwise. Of course, the refusal to comply even with the most absurd requests disappointed the partisans, which led to a second problem, that of coordinating the reception of supplies between the bands operating in an area. However, to provide even a basic form of coordination while juggling the needs of the bands proved to be a tricky task. The needs of the bands were so high that supplies were never enough, generating resentment. In many ways,

[214] TNA, WO 106/3964, Report on partisan and subversive activity in German Occupied Italy from September 10th, 1943, to May 14th, 1944, by brigadier J.F.B. Combe, D.S.O. and brigadier E.J. Todhunter, 01 June 1944.

the liaison officers were called to a Sisyphean labour, as it was noted that 'partisans will never be satisfied with the variety or quantity of supplies dropped'. This was not a matter of greed, but of fear, as they gained confidence the more they were equipped.[215] To make things even worse, disgruntled partisans often set up lights to trick the pilots into delivering to them supplies meant for other bands that they thought were rightfully theirs. Near Parma, for example, two escaped POWs who spent some times with the local partisans reported how 'the need of each individual band is so great that irrespective of messages they each prepare fires and light them on the sound of passing aircraft with the result that the entire partisan area resembles a Guy Fawkes display'.[216] Major Johnson of the N°1 SF reported that in the Modena area before the liaison Officers' arrival most people, partisans and farmers alike, had the habit of lighting fires in the hope of getting an airdrop. The end results were not pleasant as 'at the beginning the Air Force used to drop to everybody and a huge quantity of material was wasted'. Moreover, 'the Germans grasped the idea and they also lit fires' adding to the confusion and the loss of precious materials. It was only thanks to the presence of the British Officers that the partisan commands were able to restore order and implement some form of coordination, even if the problem of irregular fires was only 'partially solved'.[217] Moreover, theft was also a problem that led to wasted materials. Common theft was an occurrence that liaison officers had to consider. Theft was perpetrated by both Italian liaison agents who were supposed to link the fighting partisans and the CLN and by partisans or pretend partisans. The former case followed a somewhat 'classic' procedure, typical of pyramidal structures: materials were promised to the bands but were intercepted by the liaison agents and

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[215] CASREC, WO204/7301 99920, Report on Coolant mission – June to November 1944.

[216] TNA, WO 204/7296, Report by two escaped P.O.W. on the partisan activity in the Parma-Piacenza area, November 1944. Also, TNA, WO 204/7305, Copy of a letter from Major Temple head of the FLAP Mission operating in the Cuneo area, 12 November 1944.

[217] TNA, WO 204/7296, Report on the activities and experiences of major V.R. Johnson of the Envelope Mission from 12th June to 24th December, 1944, 5 January 1945.

then sold on the black market,[218] by those interested in these 'fruitful commercial ventures'.[219] This was made easier by the nature of guerrilla warfare and secrecy, which made the effective direct control of the CNL on its representatives almost impossible, especially in the more remote areas.[220] The latter instead was achieved through false signals laid down to trick pilots or simply by swiftly rushing to an airdrop site to steal the materials.[221] This could severely disrupt Allied plans, as it seems to have been the case for an OSS mission in Friuli, which was dropped in the wrong spot because of a false signal lit by a priest in his garden, who was hoping to snatch a drop of cigarettes.[222] The CLN of course was concerned with this problem too and repeatedly tried to crack down on theft and looting.[223]

BLOs thus found themselves often in unpleasant positions, being caught in between disputes amongst the partisans, either of a political nature or for the distribution of supplies. In October 1944, for example, the Commander of the *Val Chisone* autonomous partisan division, Maggiorino Marcelli, wrote repeatedly to the local BLO, Cpt. Pat, asking for airdrops, lamenting the fact that his formation had been disregarded and mistreated by the local CLN because it was a purely military, 'white band'.[224] And, of course, there were even the fringe cases of personal rivalries arousing between a partisan and a British officer. The story reported by the Garibaldi brigade of a partisan leader and a British field medic who both were chasing the same woman,

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[218] For an example see: Istoreto, B12e028, Bande militari operanti nella zona Pian Cavallone - Zeda - Val Canobina, June 1944. The partisans of the Cannere valley (Piedmont) had 'their activities sabotaged for nine months by a despicable individual who took advantage of his position of CNL delegate to commit frauds and cons against them [...]'.

[219] Istoreto, B15a067, Istruzioni, 14 March 1945.

[220] See, for example, CASREC, FO898/173 99523, Copy of a letter on the Lombardy CLN from the Lombardy Liaison Officer to his sub-mission, 16 April 1945. And: TNA, FO371/49869, PWB Report No.32 on Conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 4 December 1944.

[221] Istoreto, B11c, Disciplina avioriformimenti, 27 November 1944.

[222] TNA, WO 204/7298, Report on the Situation in the field in the CARNIA/FRIULI Zone, 27 November 1944.

[223] See: Istoreto, B12d005, Fronte patriottico militante, 25 December 1943.

[224] Istoreto, B15c001, Al Capitano Pat, 27 October 1944. And Istoreto, B15c003, Al Capitano Pat, 23 November 1944.

leading to tension building between the partisans and the British mission, seems almost an extract from a Beppe Fenoglio novel.[225]

In conclusion, it seems that the reasons for the negative reputation that the British have in Italian historiography have to be found elsewhere, as the archival documentation does not support the idea that the liaison missions, with their actions, were the source of animosity between Italians and the British. The BLOs shared with the partisans their hard life and their cry for airdrops, often unanswered, are starkly similar to those of the partisans themselves. Politics played a minor role in their activity and they seemed, in general, not to have much hesitation to work with Communist formations,[226] which were the better equipped and organised to achieve their goals of sabotage. Even requisitions carried on by partisans seemed to have left them largely unfazed.[227]

The British decision-making process was rooted in a ruthless utilitarian policy, rather than in a deliberate will to direct political evolution in Italy and balance out the more left-wing components of the Resistance. However, it was the lack of communication and coordination in the Allied field that caused this policy to be misinterpreted by the partisans. As David Stafford has pointed out, the SOE was obsessed with secrecy to a fault, 'hindering its effective functioning in wartime'[228] and even basic coordination between British liaison missions and American ones was difficult and faulty. In this context, confusion had almost free rein. And, in the end, this lack of understanding of the bigger picture of the war on the partisan side, was one of the main foundations for the interpretation of the Italo-British relationship which

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[225] *Le brigate Garibaldi,* III, pp. 144-145. Eventually this led to the disintegration of the band during a German *rastrellamento*. The g*aribaldini* sarcastically remarked how the British field medic even took a 'pair of new shoes' without paying for them before leaving.

[226] It is worth mentioning here, for example the case of the Coolant mission, which spent much time and energy convincing the Osoppo brigade to cooperate with the local Garibaldi brigade in Friuli, see: CASREC, WO204/7301 99920, Report on Coolant mission – June to November 1944.

[227] TNA, WO 106/3964, Report on partisan and subversive activity in German Occupied Italy from September 10th, 1943, to May 14th, 1944, by brigadier J.F.B. Combe, D.S.O. and brigadier E.J. Todhunter, 1 June 1944.

[228] Stafford, *Britain*, p. XVI.

represented the British as meddling and unfriendly towards the Italians. In the next chapters, I will expand on issues of representation, exploring the British use of propaganda and the disarmament of disbanded partisans once the war was over.

Ch3: Propaganda

The issue of propaganda was paramount in Italo-British interactions and played an important role in shaping the image that Italians had of the British. The British set up their propaganda organisations well before the actual landing in Sicily and kept nurturing them for the whole duration of the Italian campaign, and afterwards. In fact, The United Kingdom was well aware of the need for foreign language propaganda in Europe once the war started and constantly increased its efforts in disseminating it. There were two were the methods of spreading propaganda in Europe: open, or 'white' propaganda and covert, or 'black' propaganda'. Over the course of the war, nearly 1.5 billion British leaflets were dropped over Europe and the BBC transmissions reached a total of 295 hours weekly by May 1945. Complementing this 'white' propaganda clandestine radio stations, printed material and disseminated rumours were provided by the 'black' subversive propaganda.[1]

However, despite these efforts, the end results attained with the use of propaganda in Italy are contradictory, if we consider the image that the Allies (and especially the British) were able to project of themselves, as exposed by the historiography examined in chapter one. The British, in fact, struggled to build the image of liberators and, in the end, were largely unsuccessful in doing so, if we consider the image portrayed by many Italian authors after the war. A number of problems prevented them from really being able to convince the Italian population that the British were truly friends of the Italians and that they were fighting in Italy to liberate the country and not to occupy it. Some of the difficulties that the British encountered on their path were internal to their propaganda machine, like the lack of coordination and how propaganda was structured and delivered. Others were external and the British had little to no control over them, like the competition with the Soviet and American propaganda, or the neo-Fascist counter-propaganda. These issues led to a general problem of self-representation, with the British unable to project onto Italy the image

[1] Tim Brooks, *British Propaganda to France, 1940-1944, Machinery, Method and Message* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. XVII.

of liberators that they wanted for themselves and instead being forced into the representation 'enforced' by the Italians. This problem arguably was one of the cornerstones for the long-lasting narrative of a rapacious and ruthless British attitude towards Italy.[2]

This statement, however, is not intended to downplay the difficulties that the British encountered in their efforts to manage propaganda. First of all, since Italy was the first country that was part of the Axis to be occupied, it is necessary to consider that the British had to face a task which was not only difficult but also unprecedented. From the start of the British occupation, the areas under control of the AMG became what could very well be defined as a laboratory to experiment *in vivo* with propaganda, Fascist purges, and administration of an occupied country which was part of the Axis. Unfortunately, as remarked by Victoria Belco in her imposing work on the Allied presence in central Italy, untrained soldiers, with almost no experience of Italian affairs (or of civil affairs at all) were thrown onto the stage and expected to manage complex issues of economic and civil administration.[3] Trial and error was, in many cases, the only possible approach. Sicily was the first place where this experimentation began and the British were well aware of this. The actions taken in the island became a test-case to explore 'the possibilities' to be put in practice in 'other liberated territories and eventually for Germany'.[4]

However, these experiments were studded with small failures and setbacks which ultimately proved to be too much to overcome. The problem that British propaganda had to face in the first instance was its bombastic nature and the expectations that this created in the Italian population. During each Allied advance, from the landing in Sicily to the conquest of Rome, Allied propaganda stressed how victory was within

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[2] For a recent example, see: Andrea Cionci, 'La vera storia dello sbarco in Sicilia', *La Stampa,* 24 July 2017, where a mixture of clichés on the British intentions and unproved assumptions that dated back to the Fascist propaganda of the '30s and '40s, paint a picture that has much to do with the British weakness in projecting a positive image in Italy during the period of the Second World War.

[3] Victoria C. Belco, *War, massacre, and recovery in central Italy 1943-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 108.

[4] TNA, FO 371/43942, Letter attached to the surveys of public opinion held in Sicily November 1943-January 1944, 16 February 1944.

grasp and the end of the war was close. However, the Allies were stopped each time, on the Gustav Line in 1943 and on the Gothic line in 1944, generating a sense of disappointment in the Italian population.[5] Moreover, the British were running what can be called a 'two-headed' propaganda machine. On the one hand, in German-occupied Italy, their propaganda aimed at magnifying the victories of the Allied armies and the swiftness of the Allied advance to prevent partisans' morale from falling and to keep the Resistance alive. On the other, in liberated Italy, the situation called for a completely different kind of propaganda. Re-education, de-Fascistisation, and making the Italians understand that they were held responsible for the foolish and dishonourable war initiated by the Fascist regime were the main themes and aims of British propaganda. This machine was set up, obviously, to accommodate with the Italian situation, where a portion of the country had been liberated, while another portion remained in the enemy's hands. However, in an equally obvious way, these two kinds of propaganda were in stark contrast with one another. The Allied advance in Italy was, at the same time, quick and effortless for the Northern partisans, and slow and costly for the Southern Italians. This duality in British propaganda inevitably led to confusion, misunderstandings and a deep sense of disillusion and frustration among the Italians.

The moment of transition from one type of propaganda to another, when the Italian population in German territory was overrun by the advancing Allied armies, became critical. Unfortunately, it was not managed well. The case of the province of Arezzo, as examined by Victoria Belco, provides a clear example of this dissonance.[6] The tone of the regulations imposed on the civilian population 'made it very clear on a daily basis who had won and who had lost the war'.[7] Partisans and civilians alike who found themselves behind the Allied lines were subjected to a completely different kind of propaganda from one day to another, and often disillusion followed bewilderment. This 'double-headed' propaganda was the main issue, which

[5] Stevens, 'L'Inghilterra', p. 80.
[6] Belco, *War, massacre*, pp. 111-119.
[7] Ibid., p. 114.

prevented the British from projecting a coherent and consistent image of themselves, and it was the main reason as to why so many partisans grew distrustful of the British. These issues continued to cripple the ability the United Kingdom had to project its image in Italy for the entire duration of the war and arguably deeply shaped the image that Italians had of the British, paving the way for their post-war representation in Italian historiography.

However, these were not the only issues affecting the effectiveness of British propaganda in projecting the desired image of Britain in Italy. The context, both internal and external, in Italy made propaganda work an arduous task. Internally, the issue of the King and the Badoglio Government contributed to creating a climate of distrust towards the United Kingdom, which was accused by the Italian Anti-Fascists of being too supportive of people and institutions gravely compromised by Fascism. Moreover, there was a widespread ignorance in Italy about the international situation and frequent comparisons were drawn between the situations of Italy and France, Greece and other countries, often to underline how the British held a punishing attitude towards Italy. The problem, which the British failed to understand, was not that the Italian Anti-Fascists rejected the idea of Italy as a defeated country in the war, but rather that they rejected the idea of being lumped together with the Fascists. In other words, the Italian Anti-Fascists were ready to comply with the demands of the victorious powers but were not going to yield on political matters regarding the future of Italy. The comments made by Benedetto Croce on this topic are paradigmatic of this attitude. In July 1943 the philosopher noted in his diary that, while having to choose between defeat and liberation or victory and Fascism, Croce had no doubts that defeat was better than an 'illusory victory', nevertheless, he was full of 'sadness and sentiments of rebellion because of the words spoken by English

statesmen who may be ready to put on our shoulders, in the name of justice and morality, our deplorable war'.[8]

As for the external context, the United Kingdom soon found itself competing with both the USA and the USSR on the terrain of propaganda in Italy. Both the USA and the USSR were more effective at presenting themselves as liberators than the UK. On top of all of this, coordination in the British propaganda machine was severely lacking. The PWE, AMG and Military Commands did not operate harmoniously. This was also true for the interaction between the PWE, the FO and the WO. Finally, British propaganda had also to fend off the attacks from German and neo-Fascist counter-propaganda. This proved to be a trickier task than could be expected, especially considering the fact that the over-enthusiastic propaganda made by the British often backfired badly and made the work extremely easy for the Nazi-Fascist propaganda. All these factors came together in determining the partial failure of British propaganda in projecting a coherent image of Great Britain as a friend of Italy. This does not mean, however, that British propaganda was always a fiasco. British propaganda largely influenced the idea, widespread in Italy, that the good-natured Italian soldier had been betrayed and mistreated by the cruel Germans.[9] Moreover, the BBC's *Radio Londra* was, and remains, a staple in Italian popular culture,[10] commonly associated with the Resistance in an inextricable way.[11] However, despite these successes, which arguably largely outweigh the failures, it is on the failures that

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[8] Benedetto Croce, *Quando l'Italia era tagliata in due, estratto di un diario (luglio 1943 – giugno 1944)* (Bari: Laterza, 1948), p. 2. Croce will maintain this attitude for the rest of the war and even after, opposing the idea of the modification of the Italian borders as a result of the defeat, and even opposing the peace treaty, considered to be the product of a vendetta against Italy carried on by the *inglesi*. See: Croce, *Taccuini*, V, pp. 174-175. And Croce, *Taccuini*, VI, p. 94.

[9] See: Charles Cruickshank, *The fourth arm, psychological warfare 1938-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 110.

[10] Ester Lo Biundo, 'Voices of Occupiers/Liberators: The BBC's Radio Propaganda in Italy between 1942 and 1945', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 1 (2016), 60-73. Despite all the critics about imprecision and untrustworthiness in fact, *Radio Londra* and the BBC were still held by most Italians as a far better radio service than its Italian counterparts. The PWB reports on conditions in liberated Italy show a general appreciation of the efforts made by the British radio, often directly used to criticise the poor conditions of the Italian ones. See for example: TNA, FO 371/43943, PWB Report No.3 on conditions in Enemy occupied Italy, 07 April 1944 and TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.27 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 22 July 1944.

[11] Lo Biundo, 'Radio Londra', p. 35. On Radio Londra, see, for example: Piccialuti Caprioli, *Radio Londra (1939-1945)* (Bari: Laterza, 1979).

attention must be focused. These failures, in fact, are a key component to explain how and why the image of Great Britain in Italian historiography remained tarnished for so long.

Too much optimism and a rude awakening

The invasion of Sicily began on the 10 July 1943 with combined landings of both airborne and amphibious troops. The island was conquered in little more than a month, with the last German division evacuating Sicily on 17 August 1943. After securing a position in Sicily, the Allies launched an assault on the Italian mainland at the beginning of September 1943, with a series of landings which led to the capture of most of the Southern part of Italy. Eventually, the Allied advance became bogged down by the determined German resistance, helped by the difficult terrain of the Apennine mountains and the Allied failure to capture Rome which remained in German hands. However, the Fascist regime and the whole Italian state were severely destabilised by these events. Mussolini was deposed after the landings in Sicily on 25 July 1943 and the new Government, led by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, opened secret negotiations with the Allies for an armistice. Eventually, an agreement was reached on 3 September 1943 and the armistice was publicly announced on 8 September. It is of scarce interest here to narrate the strategy that Badoglio and King Vittorio Emanuele III followed while negotiating with the Allies and managing the proclamation of the armistice. Suffice to say, it was a fiasco that gravely damaged the reputation of Italy in the eyes of the Allies.[12] In less than 24 hours the Italian State simply collapsed, the Italian Army disintegrated and the Germans were given free rein to set up the occupation of Italy.[13]

It is clear that the Allies did not anticipate such a catastrophic turn of events for the Italian State.[14] Initially, the landings in Sicily were supposed to be a small side-operation in the European theatre, it was only during the Québec conference (August

[12] Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, p. 184.
[13] Rochat, *Le guerre*, pp. 430-433.
[14] Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, pp. 180-183.

1943) that Churchill was able to convince the Americans to turn it into a large-scale invasion of Italy.[15] However, as pointed out by Ennio di Nolfo, the Allies were conditioned by the scarcity of troops and equipment at their disposal and the military commands were forced to draw up plans which relied on the support from the Italian troops and the civilian population.[16] Their plans for propaganda were thus based on encouraging Italian resistance against the Germans and boosting Italian morale so that major cities could be defended for the time needed by the Allied Armies to reach them and fend off the Germans. This was only possible by depicting a very optimistic scenario, putting emphasis on the Allied gains and the inevitability of the Allied victory. The British were depicted as liberators and guarantors of peace and prosperity well before the Sicily landings in the hope of creating a sentiment of friendliness among the Italian population.[17] On the 7 September 1943, the propaganda directives for the Avalanche operations were prepared on this basis. The following few days were expected to be 'formative' for the Italians behind enemy lines. Italian morale, in fact, was expected to 'crystallise either into active national resistance or disunity and apathy'. Thus, the 'main task of propaganda during this period' was 'to ensure that the former occurs'. The main obstacle to this result was the 'fear' that the Germans instilled into the Italians. To circumvent this problem, propaganda had to 'embarrass German strategy', in particular by 'creating the impression' that many simultaneous landings were possible and that the Italian resistance against the Germans was widespread. Italian resistance, whether military or civilian, was to be emphasised, even 'giving the Italians where necessary the benefit of the doubt'. Moreover, it was stated that it was important to 'stress the size and power of Allied Forces' both concerning naval and air power while overlooking the strength of the German armies in Italy since it would depress Italian morale. It is clear that this directive contained many sensible points and indeed was perfectly reasonable in the context in which it was produced to attain the maximum possible result. However, it

[15] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 57.
[16] Di Nolfo, *La Gabbia*, p. 41.
[17] Lo Biundo, 'Voices'

also represented an early instance of the line pursued by British propaganda which, in the long run, would cause it to backfire, damaging the image that the UK was trying to project in Italy. Two main points are underlined here to attain the goal of avoiding the collapse of Italian morale and inciting resistance. Firstly, it was necessary to convince the Italians that their resistance against the Germans was 'backed by great Allied Forces' and that 'only a short violent effort' was necessary for victory. Secondly, propaganda to Italy had to deliberately 'slur over unconditional surrender' in order to 'encourage Italian resistance to the Germans'.[18] However, both those lines of propaganda turned sour in the long run. The 'short and violent effort' required turned into a long and protracted guerrilla civil war, as the Allied advance was bogged down by the Germans, with all the suffering that this kind of war entails. People were given 'the vivid impression of the overwhelming strength of allied arms', and consequently, they were later left to wonder why those powerful armies were not moving on the offensive, the PWB reported in April 1944.[19] Moreover, the deliberate vagueness towards the Italian surrender was later interpreted as part of the British plot to contain and block Italian political initiative, adding another block to the picture of Great Britain as an oppressive, imperialistic power.

Meanwhile, the Allied advance had been slowed down by the German defence and this, together with the collapse of the Italian State, forced the High Commands to re-evaluate their plans for Italy. Less than a week from the directives made for the Avalanche operation the situation had drastically changed and propaganda had to adapt. Propaganda, in fact, had now to 'be based on tacit assumption of [a] long and arduous campaign between enemy balanced forces'. The enthusiasm of the first weeks had evaporated and even the capture of Naples was now in doubt. This raised the problem of 'how to prevent [a] sudden slump [of the] volatile Italian morale as Italians come to realize what lies ahead'. Of course, it would have been 'disastrous' to suddenly disclose the 'grim prospect' of a campaign that could 'well last into 1944';

[18] TNA, WO 106/3919, Propaganda Plan for AVALANCHE and Related Operations, 7 September 1943.

[19] TNA, FO 371/43944, PWB Report No.6 on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 28 April 1944.

especially after the triumphalist announcements made before. On the other hand, it was also 'impossible to maintain propaganda at high pitch of confidence' as the difficulties in the Allied advance were evident. Caught between a rock and a hard place, propaganda had to find a suitable 'middle way' to continue its activities. Unfortunately, this attempt produced only a confused directive, without anything more than vague advice on how to proceed. Propaganda officers were told to 'Continue in all propaganda to Italy' to present a 'confident [and] optimistic picture [of the] military situation' while stressing Allied strength and calling Italians to take part in sabotage and passive resistance against the Germans. At the same time, it was also necessary to 'admit' that 'Germans control Rome and Northern Italy', however, German strength was not to be commented upon, all stress was to be put 'upon German strategic embarrassment' across Europe.[20] It is clear that this directive marked the beginning of a new phase in British propaganda to Italy. The 'first phase', 'exploiting [the] dramatic combination' of the Armistice proclamation and of the landings in Naples was now over.[21] The enthusiasm had dwindled and now Italians had to be prepared for a long and drawn-out conflict. During October 1943 British propaganda lines followed this direction, as the frontline crystallised on the Gustav Line, leaving Rome and the North of Italy firmly in German hands.

This period marked also the point of divergence for propaganda aimed at occupied Italy and liberated Italy. In occupied Italy propaganda was centred around the value of active and passive resistance, stressing 'what the Italians should [do] to help'.[22] Propaganda was to stimulate the Italians, making them realise that it was 'the duty of each one of them to join the fight against Germany in every possible way'. A 'vigorous resistance to the German forces' was presented not only as a way to help the liberation of Italy from German occupation, but also as a way to 'hasten the redemption of Italy' in the eyes of the Allies.[23] This line was consistent with the

[20] TNA, WO 106/3919, Directive for PWE OWI Radio to Italy, 13 September 1943.
[21] Ibid.
[22] TNA, WO 106/3919, Propaganda to Italy, 4 October 1943.
[23] TNA, WO 106/3919, Telegram from Algiers to HQ ETOUSA, 18 October 1943.

memorandum produced during the recently closed Québec conference, which raised Italian hopes for a separate peace with the Allies. The memorandum stated that the armistice conditions could have been modified if the Italian Government and the Italian people supported the Allied war effort during the rest of the war.[24] The general line given to propaganda was to keep Italian morale high at all costs.[25] At the same time, as the economic conditions in liberated Italy were getting increasingly worse because of a scarcity of goods, the British wanted to avoid the accusation of being responsible. The solution proposed was to remind the Italians that they were partially to blame for their own misery.

However, this approach encountered the opposition of the PWB. They were convinced that, on the topic of food in Italy, the 'emphasis should be on frank discussion [on the] existing food shortage and difficulties'. It was true, they admitted, that it was necessary to 'give where possible constructive advice' to the Italians. At the same time, it was also considered unwise to attempt to convince the Italians that ''it is up to them to do something''. The situation was already starting to deteriorate, with 'general discontent springing from alleged unfulfilled promises by Allies', there was no need to add more fuel to the fire. And 'anything which could be construed as implying [the] Italians themselves [were] to blame', or even 'any general recommendation unsupported by practical suggestions' would have only had an 'adverse and embittering effect'. Propaganda on this topic should have been focused instead on the material difficulties encountered by the Allies in supplying Italy with food while at the same time having to fight the Germans and on recommendations on how to preserve and distribute food locally.[26] This line of presenting a 'frank picture' of the 'tremendous problem [of] bringing food to liberated populations' was the one followed by PWB to counter the 'apathy [of the] local population' and the 'rumours' about unfulfilled promises made by the Allies concerning food

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[24] Elena Aga Rossi, *L'inganno reciproco, l'armistizio tra l'Italia e gli Angloamericani del Settembre 1943* (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1993), pp. 40-41. For the complete declaration, see: 'The Italian Armistice', pp. 172-174.

[25] TNA, WO 106/3919, Telegram from Algiers to ETOUSA, 27 September 1943.

[26] TNA, WO 106/3919, Telegram from Algiers to ETOUSA and AGWAR, 11 December 1943.

distribution.[27] These considerations remained the backbone of British propaganda in liberated Italy for the rest of the war. However, food distribution and the rumours that it generated remained one of the major issues the British had to contend with for the duration of the war,[28] always trying to explain the situation to the local population, but seldom being fully able to convince them of their good intentions. The British found themselves in a delicate situation, and they struggled to find a solution to it.

Macmillan was dubious about the efficacy of British propaganda in liberated Italy. As he complained in July 1944 there was no clear-cut line in propaganda. 'Was the Allied policy to squeeze the Italians for all we could get or was it to win their gratitude for the post-war Europe? Were we to be avenging or ministering angels?' Macmillan asked. He clearly disliked the directives from London which stated that the Italians were to be 'made aware that their troubles were their own fault; first, because of years of unsound policy, and secondly, because Italy had declared war on us and that was the only reason we found ourselves now on Italian soil'. As Macmillan noted: 'These reproaches were true, but neither generous nor constructive'.[29] Despite his doubts, however, Macmillan supported the hard-line towards Italian protests at the first meeting of the psychological warfare sub-committee at the beginning of August 1944. He was especially concerned that 'there was some danger of an unfavourable comparison being drawn, both in the Allied press and on the Italian side, between conditions in Italy under the German occupation and conditions in Italy after liberation'. Macmillan not only 'suggested that such a comparison should not be permitted', but that 'any tendency in this direction should be met by a virile line of propaganda […] recalling the serious interference to the Allied war effort caused by the Italian people during the first four years of war and that it was not by the Allies' own wish that they had taken on the responsibility of feeding and supplying the ex-

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[27] TNA, WO 106/3919, Summary PWB directive for the week beginning December 27, 29 December 1943.

[28] See for example, one year later: TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB report no.48 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 5 January 1945. Where is reported a 'repressed discontent because of the serious discomforts, physical, moral and economic, the lack of food, etc., to which the population is subjected'.

[29] Macmillan, *The blast,* p. 543.

enemy Italian people'. As for criticism of the present administration in Italy, his rebuttal was simply that 'at no period in the history of modern Italy had an efficient and honest administration been in existence'. MacMillan's position was contested by Robert D. Murphy, the American political adviser of the Allied HQ, who pointed out how:

> The unsatisfactory position which Mr. Macmillan's suggestions were designed to remedy was to some extent the result of Allied propaganda before the Italian armistice, which had, during that period, been obliged to emphasise the benefits which would accrue to the Italian people after liberation and at the same time to gloss over the sufferings of the Allied Nations at war.[30]

In Murphy's reply the problem of how to cut down to size Italian's hopes, fuelled previously by Allied propaganda, is made apparent, as well as the risks that a too abrupt dismissal of the issue would entail.

It seems that the final result was a mixture of the hard-line approach and a softer one, aimed at making people understand the true difficulties faced by the Allies in Italy and, in doing so, captivating people's sympathy. PWB's directives were dispatched to 'impress on the Italian people the realities of their situation'. This meant that the general approach to propaganda in Italy had to be 'reasonably tough'. As such, 'Comparisons unfavourable to the Allies as to conditions in Italy before and after the liberation will not be tolerated'. It was also paramount to make the Italians understand that 'Italy was allied to Germany' and that Italy, 'by closing the Mediterranean, is largely responsible for creating the economic conditions about which she now complains'.[31] At the same time, to avoid too severe repercussions on Italian morale and on the British image in Italy it was also decided to continue the

[30] TNA, FO 371/43946, Minute of the 1st Meeting of the Psychological Warfare Sub-Committee, 4 August 1944.

[31] TNA, FO 371/43946, Letter from Russel Barnes PWB to Brigadier general A.J. McChrystal INC, 25 August 1944.

line started in December 1943, explaining in a frank manner the difficulties encountered by the Allies in supplying Italy and debunking many myths surrounding the daily lives of the Allied personnel in Italy. This was true both for the low and for the high classes in Italy. The lower classes had to be targeted by propaganda explaining 'the help the Allies are giving in the way of supplies'. In fact, 'Italians are not yet aware that the little sugar, meat, rice and bread they get at the moment are all brought into Italy at some cost and risk by the Allies'. Moreover, the emphasis had to be put upon 'payment made to Italians who sheltered and fed Allied prisoners and escaped soldiers during German occupation'. This would have produced 'great effect […] on the sentimental side of the Italians, while a proof would also be afforded of the loyalty and generosity of the Allies'.[32] At the same time, intellectuals, politicians and other members of the higher classes had to be made aware of the difficulties in bringing new cultural products to Italy. As things were, in fact:

> Italians do not realise fully the difficulties which beset America and, still more Great Britain with regard to the production and distribution of books and newspapers. They do not realise also how difficult it is for two countries which are so fully mobilised, to send members of learned professions on tour in a country which is still more or less in the war zone. […] Croce and Omodeo, for instance, complain bitterly because they do not receive foreign books and newspapers, and because their communications with the outside world are still hampered.[33]

All of this had to be amended to prevent any further loss of Italian trust. At the same time, it was important to accurately describe the lives of Allied personnel in Italy in order to dispel the idea that the Allies were living like kings, while the Italians were

[32] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.32 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 2 September 1944.
[33] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.35 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 September 1944.

struggling to eat. It was noted that 'Conversation with Italians of various classes reveal that few of them know the conditions under which Allied personnel lives in Italy'. For instance, they were surprised to hear that we eat only allied rations, brought here from abroad, consisting only of canned and frozen food. […] They don't know that we cannot buy Italian products intended for the Italian population'. It was thus pointed put how 'this lack of information on the ticklish subject of food' suggested 'the urgency' of clarifications, in order to 'clear doubts of this sort which invariably cause ill-feeling'.[34]

Meanwhile, in German-occupied Italy, a different situation required a different approach to propaganda. Here, Allied propaganda needed to be more bombastic and enthusiastic to keep Italian morale high and ensure the participation of the population in both passive resistance and the partisan war. However, this approach suffered from two major problems. First, the propaganda was often too bombastic, and this compromised its trustworthiness in the eyes of the Italians. Second, the Italians who were overrun by the Allied advance were often bewildered once they were updated on the reality of the situation by the propaganda aimed at liberated Italy and this generated dissatisfaction and resentment.

Fascist propaganda was quick in picking up the exaggerations of the BBC and other Allied propaganda,[35] however, there was really no need to do so. Often, the discrepancies between what really happened and what was reported by the BBC were in plain sight. A student, questioned by PWB criticised the BBC in August 1944, 'for sometimes giving exaggerated news of strikes or riots in Rome which had not taken place'.[36] Another informant, this time behind enemy lines, lamented how the BBC gave him imprecise news about the Allied advance in the Bologna area, leaving him

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[34] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.47 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 19 December 1944.

[35] For example, on the March 1944 strikes in Northern Italy, see: TNA, FO 371/43942, Political intelligence report on Italy No.53, 12 March 1944. Or the fake news allegedly spread by the BBC on the theft by Germans of the bronze horses from St. Mark basilica in Venice: TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.4 on conditions in Enemy occupied Italy, 11 January 1945.

[36] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.29 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 5 August 1944.

'surprised at this inaccuracy'.[37] Partisans especially lamented these kinds of inaccuracies because they damaged the image of the partisans and the trustworthiness of the Allied radios with the general public and those Italians who were still on the fence as regards the good faith of the Resistance. This was an especially careless move on the Allies' behalf, the partisans argued, because there was no need to embellish the actions of the Resistance: 'even reporting the pure truth the Allied radios would have more than enough news to give an impressive picture of the German occupation and of the strength of the Italian people's resistance against it'.[38] In general, the complaints made were very similar and focused on the fact that:

> Broadcasts are made which contain inaccuracies of detail and refer to minor events, while major events are ignored. Sometimes new appears improbable, or based on improbable details as if it were being related at third hand without sufficient knowledge of the real military situation in Occupied Italy.[39]

The enthusiastic propaganda also created a problem of expectations, just like in the first days of the Avalanche operations. Italian partisans, in fact, after being encouraged by propaganda and their actions being played up, expected recognition from the Allies. The Allied propaganda willingly played on the partisans' expectations in order to keep their morale high and make a steady flow of new recruits available to partisan bands. The result was that 'more and more Italians' started looking towards the partisans 'to redeem the honour of Italy',[40] tarnished by Fascism and by the embarrassing display of the King and Badoglio during the armistice with the Allies. However, this kind of recognition given to the partisans

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[37] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.32 on conditions in Enemy occupied Territory, 4 December 1944.

[38] Istoreto B16f, Verbale della riunione tenutasi il 14 luglio in una località della valle d'Aosta, 14 July 1944.

[39] TNA, WO 204/7296, Memorandum on BBC Italian Transmissions, 16 December 1944.

[40] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.34 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 16 September 1944.

produced a number of problems. First of all, it exposed the Allies to criticism because of their ambiguous official relationship with the Italian Resistance and because of the mistakes they made in managing it. We already saw how the winter 1944-1945 crisis, for example, caused the BLOs to protest because the trust that the partisans had put into Allied help was now broken. In liberated Italy as well this was an issue, as the Italian press attacked the Allies, while 'most Italians are acquiring the conviction […] that it is the Allies who have failed to help the patriots', by denying them the supplies needed to face the Germans during winter.[41] Moreover, this kind of attention granted to the partisans fostered resentment, when it was not followed by any official political recognition for Italy. This situation only got worse with time; by February 1945 it was 'clear that the Italians would like some concrete recognition of their efforts to assist the Allies in the liberation of Italy'. After eighteen months of fighting 'on the side of the Allies', in fact, Italy's status was still undefined.[42] In this climate, the idea of promises made by the Allies to the Italians, which were later left unfulfilled, crystallised. It is worth noticing here that these promises were not a creation of unrealistic Italian expectations, they were, for the most part, a direct result of the overly optimistic British propaganda, willing to overlook the more unpleasant aspects of the Allied occupation of Italy to keep Italian morale high, even at the cost of 'having to straighten out misunderstandings' afterwards.[43] I will explore further this topic in the fourth chapter, as it is one of the most important reasons that Italian historiography was able to sustain for so long the idea of the British hostility towards Italy. However, to better frame the problem of propaganda, it is worth mentioning here that the issue of promises made and expectations created by the Allied propaganda gravely damaged the British image in the areas that passed from German to Allied occupation. Speaking of the newly liberated city of Rome in June 1944 the PWB was forced to admit that 'the initial source of wild enthusiasm with which the

[41] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.45 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 7 December 1944.
[42] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.55 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 15 February 1945.
[43] TNA, WO 204/7282, Resistance groups, 18 June 1944.

population welcomed the Allied troops has gradually abated'.[44] After nine months of war and prostration, it was natural for the population to be overjoyed for the liberation and the newfound political life.[45] However, it was also natural that that moment of exhilaration was of short duration. In general, it was felt by Romans that 'everything possible is being done by the authorities to remedy the matters', and the population was accepting 'with good temper on the whole and without undue murmuring' privations like the lack of water or the restrictions on movement, which was gravely paralysing the economy of the city. However, there were some alarming sides to the situation that were worth noticing. Food was a problem, but even more than that it was a problem the overly optimistic broadcasts made by the BBC, stating that 'plentiful food supplies were coming along in the wake of the Allied armies', which convinced the population that 'an immediate era of plenty' was on the way. Of course, the era of plenty never came; and on top of that, the black market was 'flourishing'.[46] The PWB had already made the same mistake the year before, during the advance on Naples, when leaflets were disseminated claiming that '800,000 kg of flour, 200,000 kg of condensed milk, 100,000 kg of soup' and '70 tons of medicines' were about to be shipped by the Allies;[47] generating untampered expectations in the local population that were later let down. In Rome, at that moment, the situation was still calm. However, the PWB warned, 'should the food problem not be solved to some extent, in the comparatively near future, there might be a revulsion of feelings'.[48]

This sense of weariness in the Roman population was captured in the 1946 film *Paisà*, by the neo-realist director Roberto Rossellini. One of the episodes narrated by the movie (six in total) is set in Rome and presents the juxtaposition of the moment of the liberation with the life of the population six months later. The scene depicts a young prostitute, Francesca, convincing a drunken American soldier, Fred, to get into her

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[44] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.23 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 19 June 1944.
[45] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.27 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 22 July 1944.
[46] FO371/43945, *PWB Report No.23 on conditions in Liberated Italy*, 19/06/1944.
[47] Paolo De Marco, 'Il difficile esordio del governo militare e la politica sindacale degli alleati in Italia', *Italia contemporanea*, 136 (1979), 39-66 (p. 50).
[48] FO371/43945, *PWB Report No.23 on conditions in Liberated Italy*, 19/06/1944.

apartment. Lying on her bed in a drunken stupor, Fred starts reminiscing of the day he arrived in Rome, in June 1944. At this point, a flashback begins. This is the only flashback in the movie and it is instrumental to create the juxtaposition between the two moments. From the dark apartment of Francesca, the movie moves to the sunny streets of Rome during the summer, where a crowd of joyful Italians swarms the Allied troops entering Rome, covering them with cheers and flowers. Fred is then brought by a young girl to her house, clean and luminous, and offered some rest and water. The spectator and Francesca realise that the girl Fred is remembering so fondly is actually Francesca herself, now reduced to be a common prostitute. The movie than snaps back to the present and Francesca manages to get Fred to agree to meet her again the next day when she plans to reveal him her identity. Unfortunately, Fred leaves Rome without going to the appointment and without ever realising that that nameless prostitute was the girl he had met when he first arrived in Rome and who left such a lasting impression on him. In this scene, the contrast between the gleeful climate of the liberation and the widespread sense of resignation of the winter of 1944-1945 is painted vividly. Francesca's house was bright and clean, and it is now shrouded in dark. Francesca herself seems to have gone through a change in her character: the cheerful girl is gone, replaced by a salacious woman, disenchanted with life. All the dreams that the Roman population had concerning the liberation are shown here as shattered against the reality of everyday life[49] as the Italian campaign dragged on and the Allies were in charge of administering liberated Italy. Even Fred, the American, was not immune to this transformation, as he switches from bold liberator to being just another drunken soldier roaming the streets of Rome. Rossellini's *Paisà* is especially significant in this context as it was released in 1946, less than one year after the end of the war in Italy. It represents a testimony, albeit in an artistic form, of the sentiment of the Roman, and Italian, population.

[49] Gianni Rondolino, 'Cinema e Resistenza', in: *Conoscere la Resistenza. Storia, letteratura e cinema della guerra civile in Italia (1943-1945)* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2016), pp. 65-94 (p. 77).

Frustrated expectations were not only a problem for the Allied image in Italy but also for the support that the Allies were receiving from the local population. After the Liberation of Rome and the troubles that the Allies were experiencing in administering it, the PWB pointed out how this kind of support was being eroded. This was not because of a particular change of heart in the Italian population, but because the Allies were considered to have failed to fulfil many of the Italians' expectations and were not able to provide a good explanation for such a failure. As it was reported: 'the first people to show disappointment in the Allies' were 'the intelligent Anti-Fascists, the people who have waited for us [the Allies] with the most impatience and greeted us with the greatest expectations'.[50] They had hoped that the Allies' arrival would have allowed them to 'commence at once some constructive activity in the service of their country'.[51] Instead, the Allies were treating those Italians 'with reserve and caution, and a great deal of their enthusiasm is being lost in the wave of depression'.[52] As they stated:

> Any Allied officer or man who comes into contact with Italians cannot fail to notice their desire for any information that will aid them to explain to their own circle of contacts the difficulties and exigencies under which the Allied administration […] has to labour. This is particularly true with those friendly and tried Italians who have never doubted in the eventual victory of Allied arms.[53]

If before the liberation of Rome these Italians were 'able to answer doubts and questions with the assistance of BBC' and with the hope that the arrival of the Allies would bring a solution to the problem of labour, and 'some alleviation of the food question', after the Allies arrival they were now 'acutely embarrassed'.[54] Not only

[50] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.24 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 1 July 1944.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

because the problems were still there, but also because the AMG seemed deaf to the Italian cries for help and unable to provide a convincing explanation for the situation. This meant that their capacities to act as 'natural' propaganda agents for the Allies were gravely compromised. The erosion of this kind of support was especially serious because it compromised the trust of the Italians on a deep level. The end result was that, among the workers, the idea that, economically, they were 'better off under the Germans and the Fascists'[55] was already spreading. This sense of betrayed expectations was felt almost everywhere in Italy after an area was liberated by the Allies.[56]

The British were, of course, aware of the problems with their propaganda. They knew that something was not working quite right as many reports indicated a drop in Italian morale starting at the beginning of 1944. And they were able to correctly identify the problem with the too wide separation between what war propaganda was saying and the results actually attained by the Allies. A PWB Report dated May 1944 pointed out that the Italian people had fallen into apathy, as they felt trapped in limbo. The war was dragging on beyond even the most pessimistic predictions and Italy was at the same time an enemy of the Germans and not a friend of the Allies.[57] A few days after the capture of Rome a memorandum was produced by the Italian division of the political intelligence department (PID), on the issue of propaganda in Italy, talking about wireless, printed and cinema propaganda. The main issue was, according to this memorandum, the lack of concrete results to impress the Italians with. Previous British propaganda, in fact, could take advantage of the 'receptivity of the Italian mentality' during the 1940-1943 period.[58] Italians, it is said, were eagerly

[55] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.30 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 14 August 1944.

[56] See, for example, in Lucca, where 'Relations with the Allies are not so cordial as they once were. The is due above all to disappointments in national problems [...]'. TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.1 on Tuscany and adjoining regions of Liberated Italy, 12 January 1945. Also, TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.24 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 1 July 1944 were is hinted to a similar situation which took place in Naples.

[57] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.20 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 26 May 1944.

[58] TNA, FO 371/43906, Memorandum on British Propaganda to Italy, 14 June 1944.

waiting for the 'destruction of Fascism' thanks to the belief in 'Britain's power to wrest victory from the jaws of defeat'. However, the clarity of the British propaganda message to the Italian people got lost after the Armistice of 8 September 1943. Since then, 'British propaganda has had no clear message for Italians'. This was combined with the 'slowness, […] of the Allied advance' and caused 'the disillusion of that logical but volatile people [the Italians]'. And this was particularly apparent when British propaganda was confronted with the Soviet one, both in terms of military successes and political friendliness towards Italy.[59] Moreover, the lack of any 'constructive policy' to support British propaganda left it vulnerable to attacks from Fascists and Communists alike; 'the British can afford all these fine things, we cannot' was the succinct example made by the memorandum's author of an effective argument used by Fascism before the start of the war and now 'put to good use by the Communists'. As such, there was the necessity of an extra effort by the United Kingdom not only to clarify that Italy would attain the same level of prosperity as Britain but also that Britain would help her to do so. Key to this problem was the difference between war propaganda and propaganda for reconstruction. As war propaganda was mostly 'pie-in-the-sky' and 'it is of little consequence whether the pie be edible or made of cardboard', but during the occupation period suddenly it becomes 'all-important whether the pie contains anything eatable either immediately or in the future'. It was thus called for an increase in British propaganda efforts for Italy, especially in the field of printed propaganda, with the definition of more clear-cut principles and the removal of the more superfluous and intricate procedures which slowed down the propaganda machine considerably.[60] However, this memorandum did not tackle properly the issues that it underlined. Making the British propaganda machine more efficient and fast, in fact, did not solve the fundamental issues of representation from which British propaganda suffered. The fracture between wartime propaganda and reconstruction propaganda remained intact and

[59] In this context, the public recognition of the Italian Government by the USSR before the USA or the UK was a very sound move from a propaganda point of view for the soviet image in Italy.
[60] TNA, FO 371/43906, Memorandum on British Propaganda to Italy, 14 June 1944.

the wide distance between words and deeds was not made any narrower. However, even just solving the coordination problems would have probably meant a significant improvement in the situation.

Competition

As British propaganda suffered from a lack of clarity and scope, propaganda made by its competitors, the USSR and the USA did not seem to have encountered the same problem.

Soviet propaganda was able to take advantage of the rapid Soviet advance in the east, thanks to the nature of the terrain on the eastern front, and also from a constant utopian approach, as the Soviets could promise not only victory in the war but also the prospect of a socialist utopia in their propaganda. The comparisons between the operations in Italy and on the eastern front were almost always unfavourable to the British, bogged down by the rough terrain of central Italy and by the determined and well-planned German defence. Over and over again this comparison spread discontent among Italians, both in liberated and enemy occupied Italy. In April 1944, for example, the PWB reported how 'the victorious Soviet offensive in the east, and the halt in the Allied advance near Cassino are said to have given rise to much unfavourable comment'. In Naples it seemed like many people had already forgotten 'the sufferings inflicted on them by the Germans, and though they praise the Russians for their rapid advance; they likewise openly praise the Germans; and speak despairingly of the Allied lack of success at Cassino'. The PWB could not come up with a better solution than trying to explain to the people the difficulties encountered by the Allied advance in Italy, due to 'the difficulties of terrain which prevent a rapid advance'.[61] Unfortunately, this did not seem to have worked in convincing the Italians and the general sentiment remained of 'disappointment at the slowness of the campaign in Italy compared with the swiftness on other fronts'.[62] The Soviets were also praised for conducting a more 'loyal' type of warfare, without unnecessary

[61] TNA, FO 371/43944, PWB Report No.15 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 18 April 1944.
[62] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.35 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 September 1944.

bombing of civilians.[63] Another issue that made British attempts to stop this kind of propaganda mostly fruitless was the number of clandestine radios operating in Italy, often only posing as independent radios, but in reality on the Soviet payroll. Such was the case for example of *Radio Milano Libertà*, a clandestine radio operating in Lombardy. It was the PWE who reported alarmingly in November 1944 that, while it was posing 'as [a] purely Italian clandestine station' it was 'in fact a Communist station located [in] Russia'. Its programmes were 'of patriotic nature', however, this was only a way to increase its credibility in its 'glorification of Russia', while only 'faint praise' was reserved to the Anglo-American efforts in Italy. Once more, the slow advance in Italy was compared unfavourably to the victorious cavalcade of the Red Army on the eastern front.[64] Moreover, Soviet propaganda benefitted not only from the more spectacular military successes of the USSR on the eastern front but also from the Communist promise of a proletarian revolution. The Soviet propaganda had the advantage that their war against capitalism allowed for what the British had identified as 'pie-in-the-sky' rhetoric, even after the end of the fighting operations. Soviet propaganda, in fact, made good use of the utopian nature underlying the Communist struggle, with the promise of a never-ending age of peace brought forward by the spread of Communism all over Europe.[65] British propaganda, thus, had to contend with a kind of propaganda that that was able, because of the very different context in which it operated, to make the most unrealistic promises.

Even more than with the Soviet propaganda, however, the British found themselves in open competition with the Americans. Since the United States entry into the war, it became more and more necessary for the PWE to keep in touch with the American

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[63] TNA, FO 371/43876, Public Opinion in German Occupied Italy, 11 January 1944. Also: TNA, FO 371/43876, Conditions in Northern Italy, 10 February 1944.On the topic of bombings and their adverse effect on Allied image see, for example, TNA, FO 371/43876, Telegram from Berne to Foreign Office, 11 March 1944; where partisan leader Concetto Marchesi described the recent bombing of the city of Padova (Veneto) as '*bestiale* [animal-like]' and pointed at this event as one of the causes for the 'bitter disappointment' that was starting to spread in the area.

[64] TNA, FO 371/43842, Propaganda in Italy Draft telegram to Rome from PWE, 18 April 1944.

[65] TNA, FO 371/43876, Public Opinion in German Occupied Italy, 11 January 1944.

OWI.[66] It was in 1943 that an Anglo-American Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB) was set up in Algiers and attached to Gen. Eisenhower's headquarters. Formally, Italy was a territory subjected to the shared Anglo-American control of the PWB and neither the British nor the Americans had prevalence in the decisions made.[67] However, the direction of propaganda on the field in Italy was largely British and it was conducted by former members of the PWE.[68]

For this reason, the Italian public was soon convinced that there was a distinction between the British (more pervasive) and the American (more considerate) presence. In practice, this led to the British and Americans' images clashing with each other, in a fight which ultimately led the British to be regarded with hostility, while the Americans were able to maintain their good name as liberators most of the times. It was ironically the British PWE who had pushed the American OWI to pursue its own lines of purely American propaganda, rather than to be a 'belated and frequently inaccurate version of the BBC'.[69] British propaganda officers found themselves competing with the Americans with the added burden of a slow and uncoordinated organisation that, in theory, was supposed to support them.[70] Sir Noel Charles, for example, lamented in June 1944 that 'British officers in PWB are complaining that their organisation is already receiving quantities of American propaganda material about Normandy landings which naturally tends to give the impression here that it is an entirely American show'. To avoid giving this impression he urged London to send 'similar material' to 'correct the balance'.[71]

The reasons that the Americans were able to project such a different image in Italy were varied and partially connected to the continuation of a 'pie-in-the-sky'

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[66] Cruickshank, *The fourth arm*, p. 38.

[67] Ibid., p. 39.

[68] David Garnett, *The secret history of PWE the Political Warfare Executive 1939-1945* (London: St Ermin's press, 2002), p. 315.

[69] Ibid., p. 272.

[70] Gen. Eisenhower, in fact, managed to keep open propaganda (made by the OWI) and subversive propaganda (carried on by the OSS) under a unified direction, effectively limiting the chances for contradictions. See: Cruickshank, *The fourth arm*, p. 38. Moreover, the American PWB staff in Algiers outnumbered the British staff by six to one, see: Ibid., p. 39.

[71] TNA, FO 371/43906, Telegram from Naples (High Commissioner) to Foreign Office, 21 June 1944.

approach. Even after September 1943, their propaganda remained tied to the immediate military situation, following 'local and short-term' goals, an attitude which was noted with preoccupation by the British who wanted to win not only the war but the following peace as well.[72] This attitude helped the Americans in projecting an image of friendliness that arguably was absent in British propaganda after the first impetus of the Summer of 1943. A report by a liaison officer in Northern Italy, dated December 1943, pointed out this fact. It is stated that, despite the fact that 'nearly every Italian we met […] told us that practically all Italians are completely pro-British', yet 'some of the best class of Italians feel that they are being despised and looked down upon by the British Army in Southern Italy, and are treated as a useless, defeated enemy'. Meanwhile, the Americans were considered to have a much better attitude towards Italians.[73] This difference between the perceived British and American attitudes was to become a constant in Italy and arguably composed much of the bedrock for the long-lasting idea that the British had some kind of generalised hostility towards Italy. In June 1944 the PWB alarmingly reported that more and more Italians were convinced that 'British policy towards Italy was hard and was largely responsible for the severity of the Armistice terms'. Meanwhile, many Italians also believed that 'the Americans show[ed] a greater sympathy for Italy's plight than the British, who are often considered to be rather contemptuous towards Italians'. Moreover, 'some Italians are firmly convinced that Allied policy in Italy is principally initiated and directed by Great Britain',[74] thus putting all the responsibility for any problem in Italy on the United Kingdom's shoulders. It was reported over and over again over the summer of 1944 how Italians 'look to America, in particular, to help them out of their tragic plight, because of the [feeling] that the Americans are more disinterested than the British'.[75]

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[72] Cruickshank, *The fourth arm*, p. 39.
[73] TNA, FO 371/43876, Notes on the Political Situation in Northern Italy, 13 January 1944.
[74] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.21 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 2 June 1944.
[75] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.29 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 5 August 1944.

With the exhaustion of the Summer offensive of 1944 and the progressive contraction of the help and supplies sent to the northern partisans (the same that the British propaganda had built up to be seen as instrumental in restoring Italy's lost honour), the situation did not improve. It was clear, as stated by 'several reports' that 'more and more Italians are looking toward America rather than to England for morale and economic assistance'. This was also due to the climate of uncertainty in Italy, as the surrender clauses were still shrouded in mystery.[76]

Over the course of the war, the British kept faith in a more factual, and arguably more honest, kind of propaganda in liberated Italy, leaving no space for the 'pie-in-the-sky' approach. This, however, severely hampered their abilities to contrast the American propaganda when it kept the idealistic and generous tones of pre-1943. Already during the spring of 1944, in a series of letters between Col. Roseberry of the SOE and a functionary of the FO, it was noted with alarm how it was commonly said among Italians that the Americans were the ones providing money, the Soviets the ones providing weapons while the British kept an attitude of hostility and contempt towards Italy.[77]

The case of the meeting of the Italian Trade Unionists held in Rome at the end of September 1944 was emblematic of this distance between the American and British propaganda and of the different results they elicited. Here, in front of an audience composed mostly of workers the British and American (and one from the International Federation of Trade Unions) delegates made their speeches in an atmosphere of 'great spontaneous enthusiasm'. However, the responses to the British and American speeches were widely different. First of all, the British delegates spoke in English, while the Americans delivered their speeches in Italian, already marking a difference between them. Moreover, the speeches of the British Trade Unionists 'contained nothing but words of admonition and sympathy' and thus, unsurprisingly, 'evoked little enthusiasm'. The American delegates, on the other hand, 'drew a sharp distinction between the Fascists and the Italian people and

[76] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.37 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 16 September 1944.
[77] De Leonardis, *La Gran Bretagna*, p. 166.

declared that in America they never considered the Italian people responsible for the war'. One of the two Americans went as far as to pledge 'both material and moral support' for Italy and that he wanted to ensure that 'Italy was well-treated at the peace [conference]'. Unsurprisingly, this speech was greeted with 'tremendous applause' and the American Trade Unionist was 'undoubtedly the most popular figure at the meeting'.[78] It is self-evident here how there was a growing impression in the Italian public that the British and American positions regarding the future of Italy were very different.

The British were unable to dispel this impression, being bogged down by political considerations and outdated convictions about spheres of influence, while the Americans took a much more open-minded approach which, in the long run, benefitted them while at the same time it damaged the already compromised British reputation. As exposed by David Elwood, the Americans suspected the British of conducting an imperialistic policy towards Italy for the duration of the Italian campaign.[79] In order to pursue a different policy, they missed few opportunities to differentiate their position from the British, often causing the ire of Winston Churchill and Antony Eden. During the Italian Government crisis of the end of 1944, for example, the British made clear that they would not tolerate the appointment of Count Carlo Sforza as Foreign Minister of Italy. Sforza, who had already been Foreign Minister before the Fascist regime and who was a proven Anti-Fascist, was in fact considered untrustworthy by Churchill himself and the higher level of the British political class.[80] Eden attacked Sforza in a speech at the House of Commons, on 1 December 1944, claiming that not only had Italy surrendered unconditionally and 'we were therefore entitled to say what we thought about the appointment to office of any Italian statesman', but also that Sforza was not a man worthy of trust since he 'had

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[78] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.35 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 September 1944.

[79] David W. Ellwood, 'Nuovi documenti sulla politica istituzionale degli alleati in Italia: 1943-1945', *Italia contemporanea*, 119 (1975), 79-104 (p.85).

[80] For a detailed analysis of the reasons for such positions see: Varsori, *Gli alleati*, pp. 293-312. See also the words of Churchill himself in: CHAR 20/176/61-62, Telegram from W.S. Churchill to Lord Halifax, 4 December 1944.

not kept his promises which he had made to us on returning to Italy, and worked against the Governments of Marshal Badoglio and Signor Bonomi'.[81] The Americans were quick at distancing themselves from the minefield the British were running into. The American State Department regarded the British move on Sforza as an unjustified interference in a crisis that was entirely an Italian internal problem and the Secretary of State, Mr Edward Stettinius stated that the composition of the Italian Government was an Italian matter, which no-one had the right to meddle with. This led to a series of bitter complaints by Churchill to President Roosevelt,[82] that eventually led to the enforcement of the British position on Sforza. This position taken by the British Government obviously led to outrage in Italy, as Count Sforza might have not been supported by all parties, but it was surely a respected figure because of his stark Anti-Fascist position. Ironically, the British found themselves attacked by both the anti-Sforza and the pro-Sforza formations as Italians found themselves bewildered by the level of hostility shown by the British. The PWB reported that Eden's speech caused the Rome press to react 'strongly and resentfully'. It was regarded as 'the disclosure of the real intention of Britain […] towards Italy'.[83] Benedetto Croce noted how Sforza had been 'insulted and defamed' by Eden, even if he had an immaculate past as an Anti-Fascist. Moreover, Croce noted, Eden used the Sforza affair as an excuse to use 'harsh and rancorous words against Italy, which hurt those like us who are Anti-Fascists and Anglophiles'.[84] This was especially damaging for the British image in Italy as it came at the 'most inopportune moment' when Italian troops were about to go to the front, and the partisans were 'facing another hard winter of war'. It was only an obvious consequence that 'more and more Italians' were 'turning towards America as the one country from which they may expect sympathy and assistance'.[85]

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[81] Edward Woodward, *British foreign policy in the second world war* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1962), p. 404.

[82] See for example: CHAR 20/176/91-92, Telegram from W.S. Churchill to F.D. Roosevelt, 6 December 1944.

[83] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.46 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 14 December 1944.

[84] Croce, *Taccuini*, V, p.221.

[85] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.46 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 14 December 1944.

American propaganda was especially keen on underlying the difference between the invasive British position towards Italy and the more accommodating American one. A document preserved by the *Istituto della Resistenza* in Turin, dated 5 December 1944 is particularly enlightening on this matter. In it, the American press was described by the radio-orator *Americus*, as 'generally absolutely opposed to any foreign intervention' into Italian politics to 'influence the composition of the Government'.[86] This kind of propaganda was of course incredibly damaging for the already compromised image of Great Britain in Italy and soon enough any problem or setback suffered by Italy internally or internationally was pinned down on the British. The Yalta Conference (4-11 February 1945) only worsened the situation, as Italy was not mentioned in the final communiqué and Italians were left with the still unresolved issue of their unclear international situation, fighting alongside the Allies without being recognised as a proper ally. The PWB noticed that there was 'more and more evidence' that Italians were 'placing their hopes in the friendly intervention of America' to solve this problem. There was a growing suspicion that Great Britain was 'pursuing a vindictive policy towards Italy'.[87] Of the people interviewed by the PWB after the Yalta Conference, in fact, 'none felt that England had the interests of Italy at heart', however, 'half thought Roosevelt was Italy's friend, whereas the other half considered Stalin as Italy's friend' again remarking how Soviet and American propaganda had retained a degree of influence and efficacy that British propaganda had lost almost entirely by 1945. These kinds of comments were common to almost every PWB informant. As it was reported at the end of February 1945, one of their Italian sources claimed that 'British policy towards Italy' was 'causing considerable anxiety' as it was 'creating an anti-British atmosphere' which was gaining ground daily. This was further strengthened by the British press and politicians, hostile to Italy. According to the informer, Italians were asking themselves:

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[86] IstoretoB15e, Radio Londra Conversazione di Americus, 5 December 1944. It is worth noticing that in this transmission is explicitly cited Sforza, described as 'one of the best exponents' of the right-wing liberal anti-fascism.

[87] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.55 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 15 February 1945.

> "what more do the British want from us? Instead of helping us at least to rehabilitate ourselves morally, why do they insist upon continually humiliating us, as if we were the most abject beings in the world?' […] 'Don't they feel that we Italians have already been sufficiently punished for a crime which many of us did not commit […]?"

On the other hand, 'The United States […] is looked upon as a saving anchor'.[88]

All these mistakes in representation and the inability to present a coherent and unified image of Great Britain and its project for the future of Italy had severe repercussions. The issue of Count Sforza was reported by the PWB to be a major cause of diffidence against the British in Milan as late as March 1945, more than four months after the incident. The PWB's informant stated that the Sforza affair had, in fact, led 'many to fear least the reactionary forces in Italy find help from the Conservative leaders in the British government'. At the same time, the Milanese did not 'fear this danger from America' causing a 'marked difference' to develop 'in the attitude of the Milanese towards Great Britain and the United States'.[89] This situation was coupled by the better reputation that the OSS enjoyed in most of German Occupied Italy, as we saw in the previous chapter, thanks to the better image that the American liaison missions were able to project.

It is interesting to note how the American image was able to recover from minor setbacks,[90] while the British one was not. In his work on the Allies and Italy, Ennio di Nolfo pointed out how the American elites had a different approach to the Italian political question, informed by the different relationships that the USA had with Italy.

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[88] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.56 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 22 February 1945.

[89] TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.59 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 23 March 1945.

[90] See for example: TNA, FO371/49869, PWB Report No.1 on conditions in Tuscany and adjoining regions of liberated Italy, 12 January 1945, where Roosevelt is harshly criticised for his speech which, according to Italians, confirmed 'that which public opinion has been thinking for some times [...] that the acquisition of the Po valley was of no great importance to the Allied Command'.

First, because of the strong economic ties between the two countries. And second, because of political opportunity, as the large Italo-American community had been instrumental in guaranteeing the election of President Roosevelt.[91] Overall, this meant that American propaganda maintained a more conciliatory tone. These two aspects, the different attitude of the elites and conciliatory propaganda, compounded in cases like the Sforza incident and helped cement in Italy the idea that Americans were the real liberators, being held back by the imperialistic aims of the British.

Fascist counter-propaganda

Soviet and American propaganda, however, were not the only threats that British propaganda had to face. Perhaps even more insidious was the menace of Fascist and German counter-propaganda in Italy. Fascist propaganda against the Allies drew upon the mistakes made by AMG and the ACC in controlling the provinces of liberated Italy, the divisions between the Anti-Fascist parties and the heavy bombing operations that the Allies engaged in Northern Italy to disrupt Nazi-Fascist production and communications. Liberated Italy was described as a poor, devastated land where the Allied armies ruled as conquerors and not as liberators. From 1943, in fact, the theme of 'Allied brutality in liberated South Italy' was prominent.[92] There was constant stress on the 'disastrous conditions in the provinces of S. Italy occupied by the United Nations', as a proof 'illustrating the essential brutality of the British and Americans'.[93] The land was in disorder, as all the achievements of the regime were gradually being destroyed by the Allies and the bickering of the Italian Anti-Fascist parties.[94] These claims were reinforced by alleged 'refugees […] who, at great personal risk, have escaped northward through the enemy lines' and were now willing to act as witnesses to denounce the Allies atrocities. Allied armies were represented as 'slave traders in Italian labour, oppressors of the freedom of the Italian people and careless of the health and well-being of the civilians'. In the South, the Fascists

[91] Di Nolfo, *La gabbia*, pp. 8-9.
[92] TNA, FO371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.43, 2 December 1943.
[93] TNA, FO371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.44, 16 December 1943.
[94] TNA, FO371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.49, 3 February 1944.

claimed, 'arbitrary oppression and requisitioning' were 'the normal order of the day'.[95] Much hostile propaganda also focused on the conditions of the Italian prisoners of war in Allied hands. This was made in order to 'impress on the minds of the people that the Allies (especially the British) are relentlessly cruel to their prisoners' and that prison camps were 'an Inferno'.[96]

It did not help the Allied image how some of the more striking images conveyed by Fascist propaganda found some semblance of truth during the Allied occupation of Italy. Besides the various mistakes made in handling the partisans and their rehabilitation that I will explore in-depth in the fourth chapter, it is arguable that the lack of discipline displayed by some of the Allied troops in the immediate aftermath of the liberation of certain areas was extremely damaging for the Allied image. This was especially true for the French coloured troops. A PWB informer noted that, before the Allies arrival, 'the Germans and the Fascists had put up propaganda pictures on the walls, depicting the rape of women and other atrocities reported to have been committed by the Allied troops and especially coloured troops'. As it was reported, 'at the time, such posters were looked at with irony, but now it is felt that perhaps they were not entirely without foundation'.[97] Another leitmotif of Fascist propaganda was the apparent un-Christian nature of the Allied Army in Italy, as they were composed of would-be Protestant heathens, it was argued, they showed no mercy or consideration for the millenary tradition of Italian Catholicism. Their associations with the 'atheist' USSR, moreover, further proved their anti-Christian nature.[98] In

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[95] TNA, FO371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.47, 21 January 1944. See also: Matteo Mazzoni, 'I nemici della Rsi nella propaganda del fascismo toscano', *Italia contemporanea*, 224 (2001), 445-466 (p. 453).

[96] TNA, FO371/43946, PWB Report No.32 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 2 September 1944.

[97] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.24 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 1 July 1944. See also: TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.25 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 8 July 1944. On the topic of violence on the Italian women and on the general population, see also: TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.37 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 9 October 1944; where is reported how, in Naples, the 'the behaviour of Allied soldiers (not only Moroccan) [...] is far from satisfactory'. See also: Chiara Fantozzi, 'L'onore violato: stupri, prostituzione e occupazione alleata (Livorno 1944-1947)', *Passato e presente*, 99 (2016), 87-111 (p. 92).

[98] TNA, FO 371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.50, 10 February 1944. The reconciliation with the Orthodox Church carried by Stalin during the war did not seem to have had any impact on this representation of the USSR.

accordance with this line, Fascist propaganda exploited to the maximum events like the bombing of the Monte Cassino monastery as proof of Anglo-Saxon barbarism.[99] Besides the cruelty of the Allies, another topic that Fascist propaganda stressed were the setbacks that the Allied armies suffered in Italy during the campaign. Every time the Allied advance slowed down, Fascist propaganda was quick at ridicule the Allied efforts.[100] When the BBC aired bulletins which contained recognitions of the value of Italian soldiers or admissions of setbacks in the Allied advance, these were pointed out as 'confessions' made by the British that discredited their own propaganda.[101] On this topic, Fascist and Soviet propaganda found common ground. Moreover, tactless Allied moves like the request for one third of the Italian fleet to be surrendered to the USSR, or the Alexander proclamation were 'little short of a Godsend'[102] for Fascist propaganda as they proved the fact that the Allies were not really interested in the well-being or the honour of the Italian people. The Alexander proclamation, in particular, was, of course, a very important piece in this representation of the Allies, and the British in particular, as it was presented as the proof that the Allies had no interest in supporting the Italian partisans. It was, according to Fascist propaganda, a 'serious embarrassment' for the partisans as it revealed how the Allies were ready to 'sacrifice thousands of them'.[103] And, up until the very end of the war, Fascist propaganda kept repeating that the Allies had abandoned the partisans and that they wanted to use them to fight the Japanese or simply put them in concentration camps.[104] Fascist propaganda was not confined to German occupied Italy either. There was a constant filtration of material to liberated Italy as well.[105] This kind of propaganda was a mixture of old *topoi* already well-tried

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[99] TNA, FO 371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.52, 25 February 1944.

[100] See for example: TNA, FO 371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.49, 3 February 1944 and TNA, FO 371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.50, 10 February 1944.

[101] Caprioli, *Radio Londra*, p. 56.

[102] TNA, FO 371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.53, 12 March 1944.

[103] TNA, WO 204/7309, Extract from Radio Milano Libertà in Italian, 16 November 1944.

[104] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.37 on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 7 February 1945.

[105] TNA, FO 371/43942, PWB Reports No.1 and 2 on conditions in Liberated Italy, January 1944. See, also, the reports on a fifth column in Bari, in: TNA, FO 371/43876, PWB Report No.52 on the Conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 January 1945.

upon by the Fascist regime, like the idea of a plutocratic plot against Italy orchestrated by the Jewish who controlled the Allies,[106] and a series of new accusations against Great Britain that were a product of the inconsistent and disjointed British propaganda and of the mistakes made by AMG in liberated Italy as well as the Italian ignorance of the world situation. This produced a kind of Neo-Fascist propaganda which mixed together old and new prejudices. The Allies, it was claimed, were 'bent upon the systematic and progressive shifting of material and political life in Italy and upon impeding her rehabilitation' to make her a puppet state. It was also stated how this was mainly a British position. President Roosevelt 'wished to be more generous' but 'was forced to give way to British pressure'.[107] Finally, Fascist propaganda drew also from the inaccuracies in British propaganda broadcasts. They were quick to ridicule British exaggerations of events in Northern Italy,[108] and to point out imprecisions by the BBC.[109]

The Allies were, of course, not oblivious to this kind of libellous propaganda. The PWB worked with its collaborators to find a solution to the issue. As one of their informants reminded them in April 1944, it would have been 'unwise to underestimate the effect of Fascist and German propaganda upon Italians on the other side'. It was necessary, therefore, 'to counter that propaganda'. This did not mean falling back 'on the defensive and reply bit by bit to that propaganda', but always bearing 'in mind what was being said by Rome radio'. First, it was paramount to show the Allies as a united force, moving in unison without quarrels among them. Second, 'it was important to convey an impression to the north of unity among Italians' in the south. Ministers and prominent members of the opposition parties should have been invited to speak to the radio programmes about Italian politics, while 'technical experts in AMG' were supposed to explain to the Italians 'on the other side' how 'Allied administration had improved conditions in liberated Italy

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[106] Mazzoni, 'I nemici', p. 451.

[107] TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.61 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 4 April 1945.

[108] See for example: TNA, FO 371/43942, Political Intelligence Report on Italy No.53, 12 March 1944.

[109] See for example: TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.4 on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 11 January 1945.

[…]'. Finally, 'Resistance should be built up in the north by exhorting Italians there to organise themselves and prepare for the day they could engage in action […]'. [110] Allied propaganda underlined how the artistic treasure of their country had been preserved, to counter the Fascist claim that indiscriminate bombing had left only ruins in liberated Italy;[111] and to warn the civilian population of imminent airstrikes, while encouraging them to endure, promising a quick liberation from their oppression.[112]

All things considered, it is hard to properly assess the impact that Fascist and Neo-Fascist propaganda had in Italy. However, it is also true that this is a topic that had been largely overlooked by scholars, to the point that its impact has been underestimated in the historiographical discourse. It stands to reason that some of the imaginary of Fascist propaganda in some way played a part in shaping the idea that Italians had of the British. Fascist propaganda was not always simply the depiction of the Allies as ogres wanting to destroy Italy. It was more subtle and mixed some themes that were common to other representations of the Allies that were present in Italy at the time, from Soviet accusations of a slow and ineffective advance, to the more widespread suspicion that the British were imposing their will upon the Americans, who were supposedly more open and friendly towards Italy. Some of these points pushed forward by Fascist propaganda might very well have influenced subconsciously the image of Great Britain in Italy after the war and they should be considered part of the reason that the image of the UK as a force largely hostile to Italy was left uncontested for so long. For example, the Fascist *topòs* of the United Kingdom as a 'plutocratic' nation, with unlimited resources compared to Italy (and which were used to negate to Italy her 'place in the sun') was surely widespread, and had been inadvertently reinforced by British propaganda during the war, as the

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[110] TNA, FO371/43944, PWB Report No.14 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 18 April 1944.

[111] See for example: TNA, WO 106/3919, Telegram from ETOUSA to Algiers, 23 October 1943. Cfr: Lo Biundo, 'Voices'

[112] See for example: Istoreto B12d, Al popolo dell'Italia settentrionale avvertimento, 18 February 1945.

British claimed that they had overwhelming resources at their disposal to end the war quickly.[113] In this way, British propaganda confirmed Italian prejudices and exposed itself to criticism when these resources failed to materialise in Italy. The Allies themselves, seemed to have considered this possibility: the PWB observed how the conservative elements of the Italian populations were, in fact, still under the effect of the anti-British propaganda campaign of the previous twenty years,[114] and that such a campaign was still having a 'delayed effect', influencing 'a large number of people'.[115]

The Italian context

Another issue which complicated propaganda in Italy was the relative state of isolation in which the Italian population lived. Partly this was due to the isolationist nature of the Fascist regime, exacerbated after 1936 by the League of Nations international sanctions inflicted on Italy after the invasion of Ethiopia. But after 1943 it was also due to the fact that the rebuilt media network of Italy was still in its infancy, strictly controlled by the PWB and propaganda officers were still unsure of what kind of news was best fitted to capture the attention of the Italian public. Still, one year after the proclamation of the armistice, there was indeed in Italy a demand for news from the outside world. Many of the PWB informers in liberated Italy agreed on the point that they, and their circle of acquaintances, wanted to know more about foreign affairs, both political and military. This lack of news was pointed out as a deficit in the Italian press controlled by the PWB. Italians were said to eagerly wait for such news, as it was natural for a 'resurgent but bankrupt nation' as was Italy at the moment.[116] They suffered, as they were 'entirely cut off from real contact with democratic countries', and there was a 'thirst for new ideas'. There was a widespread interest in what was 'really happening' in the UK and the US which was not met at

[113] Absalom, *Gli alleati*, pp. 3-4.
[114] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.53 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 1 February 1945.
[115] TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.59 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 23 May 1945.
[116] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.21 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 21 August 1944.

all by the press and radio news.[117] This lack of information on the outside world in liberated Italy was shared with the partisans in the North as well. It was reported by liaison officers that partisans had 'little or no idea' of what was happening 'in the world outside their province'.[118] They were eager to know news not only from the world outside of Italy but also from Italy itself, as the broadcasting signals of Italian radios were often 'feeble' and the partisans were left wondering what was happening to their Government.[119] The liaison officers requested newspapers to be dropped alongside ammunition, arms and supplies, as this would have done 'much good' to the partisans' situation.[120] In the last months of the war, even the BBC came under fire as the people in Northern Italy vehemently requested detailed news about the situation in liberated Italy.[121]

This ignorance of the outside world was not only a problem for distributing news, as they had to be contextualised constantly for people to fully understand them, it also had wide ramifications on the whole propaganda system set up by the Allies. Most notably, it made it harder to inculcate the idea that Italy had a responsibility for the conditions in other countries caused by its declaration of war against them if Italians were convinced that Italy was the only country to suffer from the war. The PWB noted how there was, in Italy, 'a general unawareness among many Italians of the suffering caused by the war in other countries'. Italians tended to believe that they truly were the most unfortunate people on Earth. 'Many people in Rome and elsewhere in Italy' were under the impression that 'the destruction of bridges and railways, the shortage of transport, the lack of light and heat, and the low rations are peculiar to Italy'. Many seemed to ignore that conditions in Greece were even worse or that 'France, England and other countries are suffering from many of the same restrictions'. As a result of

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[117] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.35 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 September 1944.

[118] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.33 on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 20 December 1944.

[119] TNA, WO 204/7309, Appendix XII to Report on Patriot Activities in Region XII; General report on the city of Belluno, 9 October 1944.

[120] TNA, WO 204/7309, Report on the situation in the field in the CARNIA/FRIULI Zone, 27 November 1944.

[121] Caprioli, *Radio Londra*, p. 79.

this situation, an increasing amount of Italians appeared to 'have lost any sense of initiative', lost in their own self-commiseration, expecting the Allies to 'help indefinitely'.[122] It seems true that there was a stark inability on the Italian side to comprehend the international situation and its nuances. When comparisons were drawn between Italy and other countries they were often inaccurate and their only aim seems to have been to underline the unfortunate situation of Italy. At the end of Summer 1944, for example, the USSR accepted the capitulation of both Rumania and Finland. These two events were used in Italy to draw attacks against the Allies, showing in the process the lack of understanding that Italians had about international politics. The PWB reported that:

> Many politically minded Italians as well as the ordinary people have drawn comparisons between the treatment of Italy by the British and Americans and the treatment of Rumania and Finland by the Russians. Although the armistice terms with Finland and Rumania have not yet been published, many Italians have immediately jumped to the conclusion that they will be more lenient than those applying to Italy.

This reasoning stemmed from a number of comparisons drawn between Italy and Romania and Finland. Firstly, Italians noticed that the Russians had not 'demanded the unconditional surrender of Finland and Rumania'. Moreover, there was no 'Allied Control Commission so far set up in either country'. Italians also 'pointed out that the Rumanians have not been disarmed and that, from what news is available, they seem to have been treated more leniently than the Italians. […]' The general consensus seemed to be that Rumania was on the way to receiving the status of ally, unlike Italy, and thus would enjoy a much stronger footing at the eventual peace conference.[123] These suspicions seemed to find confirmation a few days later when the terms for the

[122] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.43 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 18 November 1944.
[123] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.33 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 9 September 1944.

surrender of Rumania were published. This was especially disappointing for the Italians, as the Italian terms for surrender were still unpublished. The PWB again reported that: 'the press […] complained that although a year had passed since the armistice the Italian people still did not know the terms of this agreement'. Meanwhile, they pointed out how 'the terms of the armistice between Rumania and Russia, Great Britain and America have been published and that these terms seem relatively mild'. The Rumanians were allowed to fight alongside the Allies and the indemnity demanded was considered to be small. All in all, the peace conditions were considered to be 'magnanimous (sic)'. As a result of this, there was a growing suspicion among the Italians that the terms of the Italian armistice were 'too severe to permit their publication' without compromising Italo-Allied relations. This was especially painful as the Italians felt that 'after a year's fighting at the side of the Allies, Italy's contribution should be recognized, by a clearing up of certain misunderstandings'. The final, and clear, result of this unfortunate situation was that 'the comparison drawn between the terms granted to Rumania and those granted to Italy has created an unfavourable impression and there is a danger that the democratic forces in Italy may be discouraged'.[124]

Moreover, Italians did not compare themselves only to other defeated members of the Axis like Rumania, they even compared themselves to bona fide Allies like France. It was noted by the PWB how Italian public opinion was following 'with great attention [to] the English and American attitude to France'. Italians were in fact convinced 'that France collaborated with the Germans more than she should have done'. According to public opinion, a good portion of the French people shared Pétain's views and, because of that, after two years this French attitude enabled 'the Germans to speak of European collaboration'. It was believed in Italy that the Allies should keep a rigid attitude towards France, as they 'should not forget' this was 'the construction of the new Europe of after the war'.[125] This campaign in the Italian press

[124] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.34 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 16 September 1944.

[125] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.1 on conditions in Tuscany and adjoining regions of liberated Italy, 12 January 1945.

seems to have kept going for a while, and the PWB was forced to admit after a few months that, indeed, to judge from some of the articles which appeared in the Italian press 'it would seem that there are many Italians who fail to see any difference between the position on Italy and France'. This led many Italians to nurture a sense of regret because of the fact that 'Italy [was] not on the same footing as France' and to 'confuse the recent past histories of the countries'.[126] Even well-informed men like Benedetto Croce seemed to have been of this general opinion.[127]

This situation, comprising of a mixture of ignorance and self-pity was not the ideal terrain for the kind of propaganda envisioned by the British, aimed at explaining to the Italians their faults and to re-educate them to democracy and peaceful coexistence in Europe. It instead brewed a climate of suspicion and discontent, with the Italian people commiserating with themselves as they insisted on drawing unrealistic comparisons with other countries. It is hard to assess whether these tendencies were caused by simple naiveté or a resurfacing of anti-British sentiments; or even a subconscious psychological response, a way to shift the blame for the war away from Italy. Probably these factors all came into play in different degrees. However, what stands to reason is that this situation provided a challenge that British propaganda was unable to overcome, leaving a bitter aftertaste in the mouths of many Italians who fell for simplistic explanations to complex issues of international politics.

Coordination

Besides all these problems there was an additional one which made it arduous for the British to project a coherent image of the UK in Italy: the issue of coordination inside the British propaganda machine; or the lack thereof. This lack of coordination was present both on an operative level on the field and on a higher level in London. On the field, the PWB was, in fact, an office with both British and Americans sharing its control. This meant that it was a clumsy institution, unable to act rapidly and seldom unified in its direction. Lack of coordination inside the PWB was the prime reason for

[126] TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.64 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 24 April 1945.
[127] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.38 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 16 October 1944.

complaint from the Military Officers who had to deal with it and had to consider its activities when planning the administration of liberated Italy. As the resident Minister in Algiers wrote to the Foreign Office at the beginning of February 1944 there was 'no doubt that PWB activities in Italy have been inevitably dispersed and rather uncontrolled'. For this reason, 'the desire of HQ of ACMF to see a secretary elected for regional control in touch with themselves [was] justified'. However, the 'main anxiety' that the PWB lamented was 'not so much in terms of organization as of availability for Italy of the right quality of personnel'. Thus, the Minister concluded, 'unless you can help them to provide one or two really first class people, PWB may again be exposed to legitimate criticism from the military side'.[128]And the military personnel was especially concerned with the issue of coordination between propaganda and AMG, as they lamented a tendency in propaganda to go overboard with promises to raise Italian morale, leaving the AMG with the role of the 'bad guys' in charge of denying the Italians what they expected as their fair rewards.[129] However, the consolidation of intelligence agencies and thus better coordination in propaganda was still on paper by August 1944. Moreover, in the Mediterranean theatre, the organisation of PWB's Intelligence Sections was not uniform. There were three principal reasons for this: firstly, the components of which PWB was ' formed grew up independently of each other, and in different conditions'. Secondly, the organisation of PWB was 'predominantly regional rather than functional; the areas or categories which have to be covered vary widely in character'. Finally, even the issue of personnel had remained unresolved, despite the six months that had elapsed. In fact, 'an alarming feature' of intelligence work in Italy was the 'shortage of reserves of trained Intelligence Officers'. Difficulties were found 'in recruiting suitable officers at this stage, particularly having regard to PWB's other needs'. Consequently, 'any immediate opening up of a large new area of Northern Italy would present serious

[128] TNA, FO 371/43842, Telegram from Resident Minister Algiers to Foreign Office, 5 February 1944.

[129] On this topic see for example the complaints made by Col. Walker in: TNA, WO204/7309, Discussion on 15/16 Nov. AMG Fifth Army SCAO IV Corps and Patriots Rep (Adv), 15 November 1944; and TNA, WO204/7309, The status of Partisans, 29 August 1944.

problems, to which a reduction of services in Southern Italy would be the only solution'.[130]

Besides these problems of coordination in the field, British propaganda suffered also from a lack of coordination at the higher levels in London, which arguably was an even bigger hindrance to the proper functioning of the propaganda machine. The various organisations who were in charge of administering and spreading British propaganda, in fact, often operated disjointedly and in competition with one another. In theory, the MoI was responsible for overt political propaganda, while the MEW was responsible for covert propaganda. Under the MEW's jurisdiction thus fell the activities of the SOE for active sabotage and of the PWE for political propaganda. However, another actor at play was the FO, which had control over the activities of the British Council for cultural propaganda in neutral Europe.[131] Edward Corse explored the attempts made by the FO to push for a more active role of the British Council in covert operations, which caused a squabble with both the MoI and the MEW.[132] Moreover, the FO had a voice in the activities of both the SOE and the PWE, however, its prerogatives in this field remained always nebulous and the FO tried to play on this vagueness to expand its control over covert activities, causing much strife with the MEW.[133] The FO and the MoI often fought with one another, both claiming their rights to control all British publicity in Europe, with the MoI trying, for example, to seize control over the British Council and the FO fiercely defending its prerogatives over it.[134] Despite the fact that the institution of the PWE in 1941[135] had drastically improved the situation, by diminishing the amount of inter-departmental wrangling in London,[136] the situation was still far from optimal. The fact that the PWE was under the joint control of the FO and the MoI meant it was devoid of any single-minded

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[130] TNA, FO 371/43946, Minute of PWB meeting, 11 August 1944.

[131] Edward Corse, *A battle for Neutral Europe, British Cultural Propaganda during the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 41.

[132] Ibid., p. 49.

[133] Ibid., p. 41.

[134] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[135] For a detailed chronology of the British propaganda machine see: Brooks, *British Propaganda,* pp. 13-19. And: Cruickshank, *The fourth arm*, pp.16-27.

[136] Garnett, *The secret history,* p. IX.

guidance.[137] As the PWE director-general, R.H. Bruce Lockhart, pointed out the multiple offices with unclear competence overlapping one on top of the other caused confusion and general slowness in tackling problems. In his opinion, for example, there was 'no point in regular meetings between members of the Foreign Office, M. of I. and PWE. Our work is already being reduced almost to a standstill by a plethora of meetings'. In his mind the best solution was for the people on the field to meet regularly and act accordingly to the situation at hand, cutting the slow process of meetings in London and more meetings in Rome. According to Lockhart, the main problem was the unclear boundaries of competence between different offices: 'the M. of I. will not go into PWB, expects PWE to do their work, and at the same time criticises and obstructs'.[138] Moreover, on top of all the squabbles internal to the British propaganda machine, the PWE had also to deal with the semi-independence of the BBC, over which the PWE had 'only partial and intermittent control'.[139] This independence allowed the BBC to enjoy a great degree of flexibility in its approach to propaganda, however, it also caused conflicts inside the propaganda machine and exposed British propaganda to the risk of disseminating a contradictory message as there was no unified 'speaker'.[140] And, of course, propaganda 'that contradicts itself immediately raises doubts among its recipients about its reliability'.[141] As the Sermon II liaison mission reported, propaganda was successful at first in disseminating rumours, however, those had little effect 'owing to apparent lack of agreement between PWB and BBC broadcasts, e.g. rumours of HITLER's death clashed with reports of speeches subsequently made by him'.[142]

Perhaps this lack of coordination and the damage that it caused can be best explained with the example of the, apparently minor, request by Sir Noel Charles for a representative of the MOI to be attached to his staff in Rome, during June 1944. Not

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[137] Cruickshank, *The fourth arm*, p. 31.
[138] TNA, FO 371/43842, Letter from R.H. Bruce Lockhart, 15 November 1944.
[139] Garnett, *The secret history,* p. XXIII.
[140] Brooks, *British Propaganda*, p. 20.
[141] Ibid., p. 21.
[142] CASREC, WO 204/7301 99920, Sermon II Mission History.

only was the final agreement on this topic reached after prolonged discussions but the issue became again a source of trouble a few months after, because of an endemic problem of lack of coordination. First of all, the proposal was problematic in its own right, as it could open a fracture with the Americans on the delicate issue of shared control over the PWB in Italy. As was pointed out to Sir Orme Sergent, the deputy under-secretary of the Foreign Office, 'the present propaganda authority for Italy is […] Anglo-American: it is in fact PWB'. PWE was 'a co-sponsor of this organisation with OWI and we are now taking steps to add one or two people of our own to it'. This meant adopting a position that was 'inconsistent with this set up' as it would have meant for the British to have 'separate staff working on propaganda of information in Italy' while the joint Anglo-American PWB was still operative. The expansion of Noel Charles's staff would have thus surely caused 'a row with the Americans and, it may be, the Supreme Commander. There was the same trouble in French North Africa and it is only in quite recent months that we have been able to get a separate office going there'. A possible solution was to adopt the expedient of attaching a single man as a press attaché to Noel Charles. After all:

> We did have, in Dupree, a single man attached […] to Macmillan […] who was working for us without belonging to PWB and nobody objected: so it looks as if a single attaché who merely deals in personal relations with Press correspondents is acceptable but a separate information service with distribution of books, films, pamphlets etc. (which is what Noel Charles wants) is in a different category.

Thus, the question was simply how willing were the British to possibly cause a fight with their American counterparts. As was clearly laid out:

> […] do you think that we ought to meet Charles's request and try to set up an information office and service for Italy, attached to the

> High Commissioner, regardless of the possible protests that I have mentioned? Or, alternatively, should we for the time being confine ourselves to appointing an individual to be attached to Charles for personal contacts […]?[143]

The reply was firm in tone: 'we have already considered the possibility of offending American susceptibilities and have decided that we should not let it deter us. I do not think we are obliged to obtain permission from SACMED to do our own propaganda in his theatre, and we might, therefore, tell Sir C. Radcliffe that our minds are made up'.[144] After a meeting held on 3 July 1944, it was agreed that the best solution to avoid American irritation was to appoint a single press attaché. The meeting found Sir Noel Charles' request for an attaché to be on point, however, it was decided not to 'raise the issue directly with AFHQ [Alled Forward Headquarter] Algiers' in the hope that, without doing so, 'the change will come about gradually and without friction. […] We do not, however, wish to exclude the possibility of our taking up the question direct with AFHQ Algiers if and as soon as it appears that there is no hope of a solution ambulando'. The better solution for the moment was resorting to a 'Press Attaché whose functions were merely to report on the Italian press'. This figure 'could be appointed without risk of a clash with PWB or with the Allied military authorities. This official would report to us in greater detail than it has been necessary for you to do on the forms which our propaganda should take when the time comes for us to conduct it ourselves […]'.[145]

Thus, a press attaché, a Mr Stewart, was assigned to Sir Noel Charles. However, after only a few months, things got chaotic again as Sir Cyril Radcliffe, director-general of the Minister of Information, wrote a letter to Sir Orme Sargent on 17 October 1944 lamenting the fact that apparently no-one was informed of the decision to remove the attaché. Radcliffe reminded the FO that 'it was at Charles's request and the prompting

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[143] TNA, FO 371/43906, Letter to Sir Orme Sergent, Foreign Office, 24 June 1944.
[144] TNA, FO 371/43906, Proposed appointment of a Press Attaché at Naples, 28 June 1944.
[145] TNA, FO 371/43906, British propaganda to Italy, 3 July 1944.

of the Foreign Office that the Ministry of Information selected an appointee of high quality to be attached to Charles in Rome as our representative'[146] and that he had already warned both the FO and Sir Charles that this move would have caused friction with the PWB people who were operating in Italy. However, 'it was with the full support of the Foreign Office that Stewart was sent off to Rome with the intention that he should study the Italian publicity field, read the press etc'. That being the state of affairs, Radcliffe could not understand the decision to remove the attaché from Rome. A decision that he pointed out 'appears to have been come to without preliminary discussion with any member of this Ministry, who are certainly as much interested in it as anyone else'. Not only that, but the decision was taken 'on the basis of a report made by Colonel Sutton, I believe of PWE, the content of which, however convincing, remains undisclosed to us'. What was worrying Radcliffe so much was not the decision itself[147], but rather the implications which concerned the coordination between the different offices in charge of propaganda and administration in Italy and the repercussions of such a lack of coordination on the day-to-day activities in the field. As he stated:

> We cannot hope to achieve much effective co-ordination if on a matter, admittedly, of common interest the Foreign Office, having agreed one policy with us, announces a different one to someone else without any prior agreement on our part; and […] that the result of all this seems to be that a very able officer in the person of Stewart is becalmed in Italy with no worthwhile duties to perform in the present or to prepare himself for the future.

This letter provoked a discussion inside the FO about the issue of coordination between the PWE and the Ministry of Information. A minute was produced on 22

[146] TNA, FO 371/43842, Letter from Sir Cyril Radcliffe to Sir Orme Sargent, 17 October 1944.

[147] As he says: 'I daresay that if we had the information which led you to write your letter we should come to the same conclusions as you did. For all I know it is the only possible one'.

October 1944 concerning the matter to be addressed to both Sir Radcliffe and Sir Bruce Lockhart.[148] First of all, it was pointed out, 'Sir Cyril Radcliffe is not correct in thinking that the Ministry of Information has not been consulted on these questions'. On the contrary, they were well aware of them. However, one of Radcliffe's observations stood true, as 'it would appear from this letter that such collaboration [between the MoI and the PWE] is more or less non-existent'. To improve the situation it was proposed to add to the 'plethora of meetings' 'a weekly or fortnightly meeting between the members of the Ministry of Information, PWE and the Foreign Office particularly concerned with Italian affairs'. This measure was considered urgent, because of the fact that 'until this week the Foreign Office has not been consulted by [the] PWE concerning the weekly directive which they issue and which has not always been quite on the right lines so far as we are concerned'. The letter to Sir Cyril was approved and signed by Sir Alexander Cadogan, permanent under-secretary of the FO, on 27 October 1944. Cadogan claimed that the FO was 'under the impression that the Ministry of Information were fully informed of the arrangements for the reorganisation of the Psychological Warfare Board in Italy' as Macmillan had written a telegram to inform them.[149] He also asked the Ministry of Information not to recall Mr Stewart as there was still work for him to do in Italy and Sir Noel Charles wanted to keep him there to help 'even if the establishment of an Embassy Press Office is to be delayed a little longer than we originally anticipated'. Finally, the problem drew to a close on 3 November 1944 when the Ministry of Information wrote back to Cadogan to inform him that they agreed to let Mr Stewart prolong his stay in Italy.[150] They also claimed, however, that they were 'in the dark' about the issue, despite the telegram sent by Macmillan. Apparently, the telegram was sent to the Minister of Information himself, Mr Bracken, who, however, did not know about the position of Mr Steward and the previous arrangements made for him and, as such, did not think about informing Sir Cyril about it. The lesson learned from all of this was clear: 'in

[148] TNA, FO 371/43842, Minute on the work of the press attaché in Rome, 22 October 1944.
[149] TNA, FO 371/43842, Letter from Sir. Alexander Cadogan to Sir Cyril Radcliffe, 27 October 1944.
[150] TNA, FO 371/43842, Letter from Sir Cyril Radcliffe to Sir. Alexander Cadogan, 3 November 1944.

these new European territories the concerns of the Foreign Office, PWE and ourselves in overseas publicity are sometimes more closely interconnected than they have been hitherto'. For this reason, the hope was that 'they will be vigilant to see that we are kept abreast of all that goes on that is relevant to our work'.

This lack of coordination in propaganda[151] was a key factor in creating the conditions for dissent and suspicion in Italy, which would later condition the whole representation of the Italo-Allied relationship in the following years and, to an extent, still influence it today. Moreover, this example enlightens also the lack of recognition that the PWB enjoyed in London, which stifled at birth any possibility for more open coordination between London and the men in the field in the Mediterranean theatre. In fact, the reason it was deemed necessary for an independent propaganda officer to be present in Italy was tied to the conviction that 'joint Anglo-American propaganda bodies' could not 'get very far in achieving either 'united Nations propaganda' or individual national publicity'.[152] And even the simple capacity of PWB to conduct propaganda in liberated Italy was put into question as it was claimed that PWB was 'equipped and organised for political warfare against enemy and enemy-occupied territory. It is questionable whether it is a suitable organ for Allied propaganda in liberated Italy'. Moreover, 'being a joint Anglo-American organisation it cannot be expected to conduct purely British propaganda to the extent which our interests demand. It is for consideration whether British propaganda in liberated Italy should not now be taken over by the Ministry of Information. […] Whether a Ministry of Information official is appointed to Sir N. Charles' staff or not, steps must be taken to speed up the production of British propaganda material'.[153] This shows that the problems of coordination between the PWB and London were not superficial incomprehension, but stemmed from a deep distrust in London of the PWB and its

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[151] This brief exchange of letters, in fact, did not solve the problem for good. For example, in the last letter reported here there are mentioned two more issues on which the Ministry of Information advocated competency but that, they claim, were not brought before them. See: TNA, FO 371/43842, Letter from Sir Cyril Radcliffe to Sir. Alexander Cadogan, 3 November 1944.

[152] TNA, FO 371/43906, Letter to Sir Orme Sargent, Foreign Office, 24 June 1944.

[153] TNA, FO 371/43906, Foreign Office Preliminary Views on British Propaganda to Italy, 30 June 1944.

capacity of spreading a good image of Great Britain in Italy. Ironically, it was this lack of coordination that contributed to the decay of the British image in Italy as it caused slowness in planning for the future and an inability to quickly respond to crisis.

Multiple solutions to multiple problems

British propaganda officers were not deaf to the problems which afflicted their propaganda. As already stated, they were aware that their propaganda had lost its 'clarity' and did not have a grand scope with which to impress the Italians after the Autumn of 1943. However, lack of coordination and resistance from within the London elite prevented a speedy solution. The No.1 SF tried to develop its own solution and guidelines to the problems of propaganda in Italy by mid-December 1944, as still at this late point in the Italian campaign plenty of mistakes were made by British propaganda. As they stated: 'The BBC is the most effective instrument of propaganda as most of the population and the patriots of occupied Italy listen to it'. [154] However, there was still a margin for improvement and 'with a view to making this form of propaganda still more effective' it was 'necessary to improve the composition of broadcasts and to correct the mistakes'. The first problem was that broadcasts on partisan activities, which were 'the best means of stimulating and emulating the spirit of resistance', contained too many inaccuracies and seldom mentioned the CLNAI and other partisan central bodies.

> Broadcasts are made which contain inaccuracies of detail and refer to minor events, while major events are ignored. Sometimes news appears improbable, or based on improbable details as if it were being related at third hand without sufficient knowledge of the real military situation in Occupied Italy. [155]

[154] TNA, WO 204/7296, Memorandum on BBC Italian Transmissions, 16 December 1944.
[155] Ibid.

This meant that instead of encouraging Resistance they simply pushed the population into believing the more accurate Fascist accounts. Secondly, too little was being done to contrast Fascist propaganda about the presumed horrors that the Allies were committing in liberated Italy.[156] As for the present moment, German occupied Italy only knew 'Liberated Italy by the news, with all its travesties and alterations as given by the Fascist press'. This was a wasted opportunity for the BBC because, 'BBC commentary which answers or refutes reports put out by the Fascist radio are often most effective', for this reason, it was advisable 'that they should be given more continuously'. Finally, as far as accuracy, propaganda about Occupied Italy in particular, needed urgently to be fixed as news brought to the population 'has often been false and sometimes ridiculous, obviously obtained at third or fourth hand and broadcasted without a reliable check'. The problem was that

> the population which can easily ascertain the falsity or exaggeration of such items, naturally ends up by not believing even things which are true. In this way such propaganda finishes by being to the detriment of the originator. Fascist propaganda makes great play with such items in newspapers and posters and creates in people who are politically unstable and confused feelings against the Allies, with great harm to the resistance movement.[157]

Another problem was the lack of precision when news was announced: 'it is also advisable always to give the dates of events. If facts are broadcast after a lapse of time in which they may have been forgotten, this causes doubts as to their veracity'.[158] Major Temple of the Flap liaison mission sarcastically remarked how the PWB announced the news of the, at first, victorious defence of the town of Alba from a Nazi-Fascist attack, a week after the fact, when the town had already been recaptured

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[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

by the enemy. As he commented: 'nice work, only about one week after it was captured'.[159]

The British did not only try to work out solutions 'in house' but actively sought the opinion of Italians on the matter of propaganda efficiency as well. Seldom did these investigations respect strict statistical criteria, however, they were a good way to get a feeling of what the common opinion in Italy was regarding British propaganda and they clearly show that the British took seriously their efforts to explain the situation to the Italian population. Generally, these suggestions gathered from Italian sources tend to focus on two main directives: firstly, the need to acknowledge the Italian contribution to the war, whether with a recognition of the partisans, of the Rome Government or with the end of the ambiguity surrounding Italy's international condition. Secondly, the need for propaganda to stop being full of idealistic appeals to responsibility and other abstract concepts and focus more on more apparently mundane topics.

However, these two kinds of suggestions were by no means the only ones. A PWB informer, for example, stressed the need to 'inculcate the idea that the present Italian government, is a good government'. And this, he warned, was to be done by 'the actual Italian authorities, otherwise, the impression is obtained that in liberated Italy there is only a phantom government'. It was 'essential that the Italian population get the idea that a real Italian Government exists, […] otherwise the only reality for them is the Fascist Government'.[160] Emilio Lussu told the PWB in June 1944 that he believed that 'the BBC should concentrate more and more on straight news'. This was what the Italians in German territory needed most to understand their situation. 'Political commentaries were now of less value' according to him. 'He asked that more emphasis should be laid on patriot activity, as references to the resistance front acted

[159] TNA, WO 204/7305, Copy of Letter from Major Temple Head of Flap Mission Operating in the Cuneo Area, 12 November 1944.

[160] TNA, FO 371/43943, PWB Report No.3 on conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 7 April 1944.

as an encouragement to the patriots'.[161] Another informer pointed out that 'Allied propaganda to the Italians of the liberated areas should develop the "remembrance" theme. For instance, the people of Rome should be reminded of the harshness of the German occupation', in order to counter the apathy and the dissent rising among the people because of the hard-living conditions in liberated Italy. The informer considered that 'by working silently the Allies miss the opportunity of bringing these truths home to the population, who will easily forget the reasons why conditions do not return at once to easier and a more normal state'.[162] In other words, propaganda should focus on explaining everyday life and how the Allies were working on improving it, with reference to practical issues, rather than focusing on rhetorical announcements.

A young Italian journalist claimed that propaganda was 'practically useless' in September 1944. The reason was that propaganda was 'too obviously propaganda' and reminded the people too much of 'the stuff the people have had to take for too long'. It was thus ineffective, as 'they refuse to take it any longer'.[163] Even more direct was another Italian informer who bluntly stated that it was 'difficult to express a positive opinion regarding Allied propaganda' as it was hardly noticeable at all. According to him, propaganda should rely more upon facts, as that was 'the best propaganda. They speak for themselves and ought to be played up the utmost'. It was paramount to make the people realise that the Allies were working on solving problems in liberated Italy, because the current belief was the opposite: 'no one stops to think what it means for the Allies to attend to these problems while the war is at full tide' and too many were instead impressed by Russia and its presumed ability to act, while the united nations waited. Allied propaganda ought to more to accommodate Italian psychology and provide hard facts rather than rhetoric.[164]

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[161] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.23 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 19 June 1944.
[162] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.27 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 22 July 1944.
[163] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.33 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 9 September 1944.
[164] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.34 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 16 September 1944.

This trend of complaints about Allied propaganda in liberated Italy was only strengthened over time. By the beginning of 1945, the PWB noted that 'Reaction to present Allied propaganda is practically the same in all groups and classes. Everybody says frankly that in liberated Italy propaganda is not only no longer necessary, but may have harmful repercussions'. All the suggestions gathered had 'one common denominator; 'The effort and expense involved in propaganda could be better put to use within the field of publications itself''. There was apparently a high request for technical, scientific and similar publications in order to pave the way for the academic and industrial rebirth of Italy. Another point made was that there was a 'danger' in the 'continued propaganda of Anglo-American war production', as it not only contradicted the low supplies provided to the Italian army, but it could also be interpreted as a confirmation of the lasting suspicion that the Anglo-Americans were planning to impose the peace terms to Italy through military superiority, and German counter-propaganda exploiting this fear.[165]

These documents summarise many of the issues already mentioned in this chapter and show how they remained a constant unresolved matter during the war. British men in the field proposed multiple solutions but these were seldom implemented. London did not put much trust into the PWB and pursued its own goals dictated by the British political class often hostile to Italy (as shown by the Sforza crisis), while the officers in the field were more concerned with explaining the situation to the Italian people and show some sympathy for the unfortunate conditions of Italy. The attempt to balance these two views on propaganda towards Italy, combined with the lack of coordination between the offices, produced a confusing propaganda which, as a result, was not able to convince the Italians and left them full of doubts, disillusion and resentment. The American side was also not immune to squabbles between the propaganda officers and the political administration.[166] However, those events did not seem to undermine the American image as they did with the British one. Overall,

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[165] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.50 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 11 January 1945.

[166] Garnett, *The secret history of PWE*, p. 278.

it appears that the American message managed to remain more coherent and appealing for the duration of the war.

British propaganda in Italy: an evaluation

The task of projecting a coherent image of Great Britain as a liberator in Italy proved to be arduous and was met with variable degrees of success. Besides the issues which have been examined in this chapter, there were also myriad of different, smaller, problems which compromised the British ability to represent themselves in the way they wanted. Allied personnel, for example, was often chastised for frequenting carelessly, out of ignorance of the Italian situation, former Fascists and other figures compromised with the regime.[167] They were even accused of replacing democratically elected mayors with filo-Fascist elements in liberated towns.[168] These accusations reached such a level that they were debated in the House of Commons at the end of May 1944.[169] However, these kinds of accusations were commonly hurled at the Allies in general, meaning that both the British and the Americans were influenced by them. Thus, while affecting the British image in Italy, they were not a problem exclusive to it. For this reason, they have not been examined in this chapter.

Propaganda was used and misused by the British, but what is clear from this short summary of its shortcomings is that the British were never able to fill the gap between what they were promising and what they were actually able to deliver. And this is

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[167] On this topic see for example: TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.24 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 1 July 1944 were it was reported that 'the general impression in all walks of life is that far too many people who were notoriously friends with the Germans are now in the best of terms with the Allies'. See similar remarks also in: TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.29 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 5 August 1944: 'Referring to the Fascists [...] many of them are said to be on very intimate terms with Allied officers [...] who do not realise that their Anti-Fascist declarations are insincere and merely a subterfuge'. Also: TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.35 on the conditions in Enemy occupied Italy, 28 January 1945: 'He thought [...] that the Allies were not cautious enough regarding the persons with whom they mixed in Liberated Italy'. The AMGOT itself was wary of this problem, however it did not have the human resources to properly fix it. It was only after the Avalanche operation that they were able to enjoy the help of local Italians to better purge the administration from Fascists (see: Garnett, *The secret history of PWE*, pp.297-298.).

[168] See, for example, TNA, FO 371/43929, 'Daily Worker' Italians Elect Mayors and AMGOT Sacks Them, 26 January 1944. This sparked a question in the House of Common, see: TNA, FO 371/43929, AMGOT Election of Officials in Italy, 1 February 1944.

[169] TNA, FO 371/43929, Criticism of AMGOT by Sir R. Acland, 24 May 1944.

not to say that the British did not solve many of the problems they faced when administering Italy, on the contrary. The problem appears to be that the propaganda they disseminated in enemy occupied Italy worked even too well, creating expectations that could have never been met. While this fostered Resistance it also sowed the seeds for future problems. 'Italians', wrote the PWB, 'tend to judge the Allies by their deeds, and if we implement many of our promises - as we have done - our prestige will rise'.[170] However, many of those promises were too bombastic to be upheld. We already mentioned the case of Rome, but in Naples too, the PWB made similar considerations.[171] Moreover, they were often made without informing personnel in the field, the very people who could have made a judgement call on their feasibility.[172] As the men from the army lamented, propaganda sections should have at least informed them of what was being promised so that they could, at least, 'extemporise in advance as to why anything may not be available' instead of having to flat-out refuse the partisans' requests.[173] And promises which were fulfilled often were not publicised enough.

British propaganda was regarded by Italians as 'unrealistic and too theoretical'[174]; with more and more Italians asking for propaganda tailored to 'Italian psychology', that is to say, giving more space to the everyday occurrences and small successes.[175] This weakness was combined on a more practical level by the contradictions between Occupied Italy propaganda and liberated Italy propaganda. Many Italians, weary of the war, 'regarded an Allied invasion of Italy as the only and most speedy solution to the war, to Fascism and to most difficulties'.[176] 'The people of Italy […] want to be

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[170] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.23 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 8 July 1944.

[171] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.37 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 9 October 1944.

[172] See for example the opinion of Alexander on the two-front directive of Summer 1944 which put the Italian front on par with the Balkans. According to Alexander, this was a mistake as it caused British propaganda to the enemy to 'materially damage the morale of our own [the Allied] troops'. Moreover, it could have boosted German morale as well as it was inconsistent with previous propaganda which had pushed the idea of encirclement of Germany by three fronts. In: TNA, FO 371/43842, Telegram from Rome to FO, 22 July 1944. Alexander opinion was, however, ignored.

[173] TNA, WO 204/7309, Discussion on 15/16 Nov. AMG Fifth Army SCAO IV Crops and Patriots Rep (Adv), 15 November 1944.

[174] TNA, FO 371/43942, PWB Report No.11 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 29 March 1944.

[175] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.47 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 19 December 1944.

[176] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.37 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 9 October 1944.

shown that liberty and democracy bring white bread and security where there was once none'.[177] The Allies, at an early stage, were really able to convince the Italians that they were friends and not invaders, that they had no other aim in Italy than the destruction of Fascism and the end of the German occupation.[178] However, as the war dragged on, promises materialised only partially and the new propaganda aimed at liberated Italy caused disillusion. In these conditions it is not difficult to understand how 'disappointed the people became within a few weeks after their liberation'. After a while public opinion ascribed 'to the Allies a portion of responsibility for the present frightful economic conditions'.[179] As Piero Calamadrei told the PWB, it could not be denied that 'Allied warfare in and occupation of Italy have gave rise to complaints'. The mistakes made by the Allies comprised: 'lack of knowledge of local conditions on the part of AMG and of co-ordination between their civil affair officers and operating Commands'. This led to a situation where 'the real friends of the Allies feel, with reason, that what is most lacking, especially in the English, is a psychological and political understanding of the Italian situation'. According to the PWB's informers, many British officers treated Italians with disdain and did not distinguish between Fascists and Anti-Fascists.[180]

These major problems were also combined with the fact that Italy was, in some sense, a hostile environment for British propaganda. It was true that British propaganda was listened to and believed, however it was also true that it encountered some obstacles on its way. The fact that Italy had lived in the previous twenty years under a repressive regime which controlled all media and had formed an entire generation of Italians in that time played a role in making British propaganda less effective. It is a point that has been largely underestimated by scholars. The PWB noted, in fact, how there was 'throughout the country, particularly among students, a lack of

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[177] TNA, WO 204/7282, Morale and Propaganda North Italy, 23 June 1944.
[178] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.37 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 9 October 1944.
[179] Ibid.
[180] TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.15 on the conditions in Liberated Italy North of Army Control Line, 26 April 1945.

understanding of democracy'.[181] Students were 'confused and sceptical' as a result of Fascism. This meant that they very quickly lost faith in the new democratic order heralded by British propaganda and became 'increasingly critical of the Allies'.[182] This exposure to Fascist propaganda did not influence only British propaganda directly, but also indirectly. The PWB reported that their contacts in touch with 'the ordinary working class districts of Rome' had reported an alarming fact: that the recent reports made by the Allied agencies about some minor successful German counter-attack had the 'curious effect' on the Italians of convincing them that the Germans were winning. In fact, Fascist propaganda, which was 'always striving for effect' had left an 'undoubted mark on the Italian mind'. It was noted how this meant that if the Allies were to 'frankly' admit 'a temporary enemy gain' there was a 'tendency for the old habit of mind among Italians to produce the impression that things are far more serious than the sources will admit'.[183] The problem of a 'lingering' Fascist mentality in Rome was pointed out in 1944 by the Italians as well.[184]

Another problem which made British propaganda less effective was the war exhaustion of the Italian population. By 1943, in fact, Italy had been involved in wars for almost a decade: the Ethiopian conquest of 1935-1936, the intervention in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, the occupation of Albania in 1939, and finally the declaration of war on France and the United Kingdom in 1940. By that point, the Italian population was already exhausted by war and the following years only strengthened these feelings. This sentiment was magnified by the apparently contemptuous attitude of the Allies towards Italy, especially regarding the publication of the armistice clauses.[185] Fascist provocateurs exploited this situation of

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[181] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.52 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 January 1945.

[182] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.53 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 1 February 1945.

[183] TNA, FO 371/49689, PWB Report No.49 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 5 January 1945.

[184] Crainz, *L'ombra*, p. 39.

[185] See, for example: TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.52 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 25 January 1945, where the PWB reported that 'there is a widely diffused feeling of was weariness among Italians as a whole in Liberated Italy. [...] A group of students gathered together at the University and the leaders of the group asked why they should be expected to fight if they did not know the conditions of the armistice'.

general weariness and discontent, targeting especially the more economically vulnerable strata of the Southern Italian population.[186]

Moreover, the Allies had also to face the problem of the low literacy rates in Italy. This was particularly true for the regions of the South, the same that experienced for longer the British propaganda aimed at liberated Italy, with all its contradictions, setbacks and changes of heart, which were doubly difficult to explain to a population afflicted by low literacy.[187] Connected to these conditions of ignorance and remnants of the old Fascist propaganda mentality was the problem of the unrealistic rumours that were spread in liberated Italy and of which the PWB kept track, without being able to properly counter them. It is difficult to assess what was the reaction to the news that 'all ports and railways will be controlled for 99 years by the Allies', to the fact that 'Hitler will destroy the world in July [1944]' with an array of fantastic weapons, including 'pilotless planes'[188], or to the rumour that the naval base of Taranto was to be ceded to the USSR.[189] It is, however, important to point out that those rumours existed and enjoyed some level of credence among the Italian population.

Finally, the most problematic condition that the British propaganda was battling in Italy was the, apparently nonsensical, refusal by the Italians of considering themselves as a conquered people. As stated in this chapter this was not a prerogative of the die-hard Fascists present in Southern Italy but was a widespread sentiment throughout the whole Italian political spectrum.[190] This is a core point in the clash of representation that happened in Italy between 1943 and 1945. Partisans and Anti-

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[186] See, for example, the agitations erupted in Sicily where a number of Fascists infiltrated the demonstrations launched to protest against the military drafts of the Bonomi Government. TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.51 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 18 January 1945.

[187] In 1941 literacy in Italy was at 86.2% (against the 97% of the UK and the 99% of Germany), cfr. Ester de Fort, *Scuola e analfabetismo nell'Italia del'900* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995). In the South of Italy the illiteracy rate was between 39.2% and 24.4% (according to the census of 1931 and 1951), similar percentages were also recorded for Sicily and Sardinia, cfr. *150 Anni di statistiche italiane: nord e sud 1861-2011* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011).

[188] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.27 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 22 July 1944.

[189] TNA, FO 371/43943, PWB Report No.13 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 4 April 1944.

[190] It was noted that Italians in general reacted unfavourably to propaganda depicting them as defeated and conquered. See, for example: TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.19 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 16 May 1944.

Fascists, in fact, were pushing a representation of themselves as winning the war. And, in many ways, this representation was entirely justified. Italian Anti-fascism was, indeed, winning its war against Fascism. For many Anti-Fascists, this was a war started more than twenty years before, with the *biennio rosso*, in 1919-1921. This was a war that had been fought with the help of the Allies, but in a parallel way and for much longer. Finally, this war was coming to a close and their intolerance for propaganda which constantly reminded them of Italy's faults during the Fascist regime is thus very understandable, as they thought of themselves as the representatives of a new Italy, redeemed from the faults of the Fascist regime.[191]

British entirely failed to understand this point, to the point that they incautiously reinforced this view in their propaganda. In December 1940, Winston Churchill launched the distinction between the Fascist regime (and Mussolini) and the rest of the Italian people. Mussolini, he argued, had betrayed Italy, dragging it into an unnatural alliance with a historical enemy such as Germany, and in a disastrous war.[192] This line was followed during the war and was put to use during the Husky operation, with the claim that 'the fate of Italy will not […] be the fate of Fascism'.[193] In the long run, this caused the war of representation to sway in favour of the Italians, if for no other reason that the Allied occupation eventually ended and Italians were left to their own devices, undisputed in their way of self-representing their history. This was also the reason that the double binary of war propaganda and liberated Italy propaganda worked so poorly. War propaganda created expectations not only among the people but in the more firm adherents of Anti-fascism as well, and when those expectations were let down they created not only disappointment in the material conditions in which Italians found themselves, but also in the political ones. In other words, the British managed to progressively lose their ability to influence

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[191] Saonara, *Le missioni militari alleate*, p. 14.

[192] Isabella Insolvibile, 'Autoassoluzione di una nazione. Il racconto egemonico dell'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale', *Italia contemporanea*, 276 (2014), 548-553 (pp. 549-550).

[193] Garnett, *The secret history of PWE*, p. 291.

both the ordinary people and the intellectual and political elites who, for a long time, had been their best agents of propaganda in Italy.

International politics was another source of disappointment for the Italians. Time over time they saw their position not being clarified by the Allies. Hopes were raised 'of a greater understanding on the part of the United Nations, which has now [January 1945] vanished'.[194] International politics for Italians were little short of a rollercoaster of emotions, with hopes being raised and shattered over and over. The meeting between Churchill and Bonomi was seen as the possible beginning of a new Italo-British relationship and the end of the Italian isolation.[195] The Yalta Conference confused the Italians as there was no mention of Italy's future.[196] The result was a general apathy and diffidence by the end of the war. Italians grew even more interested in internal affairs and became 'quite sceptical […] of public declarations by [the] world's leaders'.[197] Arguably, the final blow was delivered by the San Francisco Conference where Italian hopes were frustrated once more, with the additional let-down of seeing countries which were not considered by the Italian public to be as engaged in the fight against Fascism as Italy (like Turkey or Argentina) being awarded better treatment.[198] International politics, thus, contributed in creating a climate of frustration in Italy and contributed (also thanks to the idea that the British wanted to punish Italy, while the Americans were better disposed towards it) to a hostile environment for British representation in Italy. The lack of coordination inside the British propaganda machine put an additional burden on the whole operation,

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[194] TNA, FO 371/49869, PWB Report No.52 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 21 January 1945.

[195] TNA, FO 371/43946, PWB Report No.32 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 2 September 1944.

[196] TNA, FO 371/49870, PWB Report No.56 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 22 February 1945.

[197] TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.9 on the conditions in Tuscany and adjoining territory of Liberated Italy, 14 March 1945.

[198] On this topic see: TNA, FO 371/49871, PWB Report No.62 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 11 April 1945. And the complaints made by Benedetto Croce on the fact that Italy has not been invited to San Francisco. As the PWB reported: 'Croce gives expression to a feeling widespread among Italians'. TNA, FO371/49871, PWB Report No.63 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 19 April 1945.

making the search for solutions more tiresome and complicated than what it needed to be.[199]

The end result of this mixture of causes was the incomplete realisation of the aims of British propaganda: to build up the image of the British as liberators. This image was unable to be deeply engraved into the Italian minds and proved to be a far too easy target, being attacked and partially demolished in the postwar period. In fact, reading the PWB reports it is difficult to assess if it was even built up at all.[200] British propaganda in liberated Italy encountered little credence because it remained tied to the arguments of the past misdeeds of Italy, without proposing an escape route for the future of Italians. In this context, it got overshadowed by the more optimistic American propaganda and by the Italian Anti-Fascist narrative which made of the refusal of being lumped together with the defeated Fascists a pivotal point of the Italian redemption. While in German Occupied Italy the bombastic and often contradictory propaganda led especially by the BBC proved to be even too effective. On one hand, it built an everlasting, almost mythological image for *Radio Londra* and the characters involved in the radio programs, like Colonel Stevens.[201] On the other, it built up expectations impossible to upheld and, consequentially, caused disillusion and dissatisfaction when these expectations were rebutted for apparently arbitrary reasons by the Allied military.

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[199] However, it must be pointed out that some Italians understood the difficult position of the Allies and the British. In a letter by Professor Balladore, the future European human rights judge sadly remarked how it was typical of the Italian nature to await liberation from its problems (in this case Fascism) from the outside, instead of fighting for it. Moreover, it was also typical to request this help from the outside to be 'given quickly, whatever the cost may be for the forces engaged'. Balladore was convinced that it was paramount to make Italian understand that there was a bigger picture than the Italian campaign to be looked at. TNA, FO 371/43878, Translation of a letter sent by Professor Belladore to Matinuzzi, 30 August 1944.

[200] See, for example: TNA, FO 371/43943, PWB Report No.13 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 4 April 1944. And TNA, FO 371/43944, PWB Report No.16 on the conditions in Liberated Italy, 24 April 1944.

[201] As pointed out by Lo Biundo, analysing the letters sent by Italian listeners to Col. Stevens, which continued even after the end of the war. Lo Biundo, 'Radio Londra', pp. 45-46.

Ch4: Partisan disarmament

Arguably, the main issue that the Allies had to face when dealing with the Italian partisans was that of their disarmament and safe rehabilitation to civilian life. Starting with the Spring offensive in 1944 to the last push on the Gothic Line one year later, the Allies encountered bands of partisans large and small who had fought the Germans for long or short periods of time, had been exposed to Anglo-American and Fascist propaganda and had matured a set of expectations and aspirations as to what their role was in the overall theatre of the war. How to handle the disarmament of the Italian partisans was a topic feverishly debated amongst the British military authorities. However, while a common policy was agreed several times, the lack of a coordinated effort to put this policy into practice caused the disarmament process to have uneven results across Italy. This, together with the often trivial mistakes made by the British officers in the field, led to a general failure to project a positive image of Britain as a friend of the Italian people. This, in turn, led to serious cases of resentment, disgruntlement and general wariness amongst the partisans. These sentiments were a driving force in cementing the notion of the United Kingdom as a force hostile to Italy, bent on controlling and weakening the Resistance movement. This was caused by the fact that the Italian prejudices towards the UK apparently found support in the traumatic experience of contact between the partisans and the Anglo-American troops. Thus, when mishandling happened during the disarmament of partisans, it became another component of the bedrock which granted the idea of a cold and distant UK such a long life in historiography.

The strategies deployed by the British Commands to deal with the 'partisan problem' varied and were often based on unrealistic expectations of either the partisans' capacity of self-organisation or of the British availability of men and resources to manage the disarmament. Nevertheless, one thing is constant in the approach towards the partisans' disbandment: the will not to impose it with force, safe for emergency situations. The British, in fact, realised well enough that happy partisans were much easier to disarm, and were less of a potential threat for order in Italy. The

policies proposed, therefore, almost always aimed at appeasing at least partly the partisans' requests, whether they were of a political nature, like purging the Fascists from the administration, or more mundane, like the distribution of cigarettes. However, rarely did these plans enjoy a large degree of success. The reasons these plans failed or were left on paper were not tied to a political will to dominate and control the partisans, rather they were caused by lack of organisation, lack of understanding of the magnitude of the issue, or, in some cases, sheer incompetence. For decades Italian historiography seems to have seen political malice where more mundane explanations were in order to illustrate the disarmament of the Italian partisans by the Allies. Italian scholars have focused on the cases of rushed disarmament (which were in open contrast, as it will be shown, with the Army's directives) and on the promises the British failed to deliver, rather than on the causes of these things.[1] They did not consider the enormous organisational burden that the British military and civilian authorities had to face when dealing with a problem that had, essentially, never been tackled before in history. These issues were also compounded by the ever-looming spectre of the catastrophic situation that had been created in Greece by mishandling the local Resistance. Moreover, they also had to stretch their resources to the maximum, limited by the fact that Italy was considered a secondary front, useful only to distract and bog down German divisions for as long as possible, and not the main directive for advance.[2] Therefore, the resources allocated to the Italian front were relatively scarce and surely insufficient to allow for smooth handling of such a large problem as the one posed by the partisans already during the Summer of 1944.

Organisation, or the lack thereof, on a practical level is thus a fundamental angle to better understand the difficulties that the British Commands faced when dealing with partisans that had been overrun by the advancing Allied Armies. Those men were now in liberated Italy, while still retaining their weapons and, in some cases, while still in a state of excitement even after the end of their fight against the Germans. The

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[1] Dondi, *La Resistenza*, p. 83.

[2] Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta*, p. 201.

lack of an organised strategy to deal with these people until the very last offensive during the Spring of 1945 had serious repercussions on the image that the British were trying to project in Italy. Far from being able to represent themselves as friendly liberators the British soon made a name for themselves as the enemy of the partisans. They were accused of broken promises, of being tolerant (if not openly friendly) to known former Fascists[3] and, in general, of being eager to control and repress the partisans, too preoccupied to preserve law and order to be able to exercise a minimum of mental flexibility.[4]

What this chapter aims to demonstrate, instead, is that the British were not only well aware of the problems that they were facing but that they tackled them with a surprisingly large degree of mental flexibility. The Military authorities had to improvise and find solutions to new problems, to manage the scarcity of resources at their disposal and to do so while keeping the people in London happy and pleased. Military officers on the field had to improvise on the fly, while they were waiting for the Commands to elaborate solutions. They often had to find *escamotages* and loopholes to accommodate their necessities as well as those of the partisans. However, the lack of an organised and unified policy meant also the impossibility to control and correct the behaviour of the more obtuse or inept elements inside the machine which was supposed to handle the partisans. Unfortunately, on more than one occasion Allied officers proved they lacked 'imagination' in handling the veterans.[5] And every time a band was mishandled the news spread like fire both behind and across the Allied frontline and, as a result, the morale of all the bands in the region was affected, even those that were well-treated.[6] Moreover, the lack of a unified vision was especially critical when it came to propaganda. I have already touched on the topic of propaganda and on the problems of trying to project two different images in the two

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[3] For example: Istoreto, B15a, Relazione Telefonica da Ivrea, 11 May 1945. Benedetto Croce also commented on the fact that at the Anglo-American parties were invited 'ladies and families which are Fascists or former Fascists'. Croce, *Quando l'Italia,* p. 41.

[4] Sessi, 'Amgot', pp. 302-302.

[5] Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies*, p. 552.

[6] TNA, WO 204/7288, Eight Army Partisan Summary NO.3 based on information received up to 11 Nov 1944, 11 November 1944.

parts of Italy (LI and EOI). This line of conduct caused confusion and a sense of bewilderment in the partisans who were reached by the advance of the Allies and found themselves exposed to a completely different kind of propaganda from one day to another. Moreover, the British propaganda aimed at partisans in German occupied Italy was often bombastic, detached from reality and had a tendency to make completely ungrounded promises. The Military authorities lamented these practices as they made their job even harder and forced them to play the 'bad guys' who had to break the partisans' illusions.

The picture that, therefore, emerges is that the British were well aware of the challenge posed by their strange ally hiding in the mountains of Italy and were not deaf to the request of recognition made by the partisan leaders to acknowledge their effort in fighting the Germans and help the advance of the Allies in Italy. Already during the Spring of 1944, it was apparent that the partisans encountered by the Allied Armies on their way to the North of Italy were an issue that needed to be addressed. And the British military authorities restlessly tried to find a suitable solution, despite all the difficulties they encountered. This constant effort to improve the situation on behalf of the British authorities was surely motivated by considerations of public order; after all, an unemployed partisan was 'not only a disgrace to the community but a menace'.[7] However, it is worth pointing out how the approach, almost always appeasing, of the British authorities towards the partisans was a constant in the way they dealt with the issue of disarmament and how this was barely registered by Italian historiography and has a fragmented place in Italian collective memory.

The situation in Italy also provided a training ground for the eventual administration of other areas in Europe, as they were liberated or occupied by the advancing Allied forces. For this reason, the lessons learnt in Italy acquired a special value in the eyes of the British commands and Italy became a subject of special observation to learn

[7] TNA, FO 371/43877, General Instructions on the Administration of Patriots in Military Government Territory, 18 July 1944.

what could work and what could not work. Already at the end of May 1944, the 21st Army Group drafted a report concerning the lessons learnt in the Italian theatre to be applied to the countries liberated after the Normandy landings. The report's aim was to help the eventual administration of other areas of Europe, despite the fact that, of course, Italy, as an occupied country, presented a fundamentally different case from liberated countries like France or the Netherlands for example. In fact, 'the Italians had surrendered unconditionally' and as such Allied authority was not limited in any form. Moreover, the frontline in Italy was essentially static, exploiting 'the peculiar geographic features of the country', again, underlying the contrast with other countries like France where the commands were planning to use a more mobile offensive strategy.

However, 'in spite of these differences', the 21st Army Group considered the 'nature of the problems' for which policy had to be devised similar enough to warrant the effort of comparing the two situations. Moreover, the influence these problems had 'on operations' was 'likely to be even more considerable' in France.[8] The Italian theatre presented a perfect case because, as of the moment when the report was being drafted, the situation could be best described as hazy and fluid. The CI (Counter-Intelligence service), for example, was in shambles and had shown all its inefficiency during the Sicily and Anzio landings. Moreover, the CI and the AMG actions were often in open conflict with one another, with the only result being an increase in confusion and inefficiency. The 21st Army Group noted: 'reports from ITALY have disclosed inharmonious working between CI Staffs and the AMG Staffs and personnel in the past'. In this chaotic situation accusations were bounced from one side to the other as CI complained against AMG 'that they arrived late on the scene, that they expected CI personnel to perform CA tasks, that they maintained notorious Fascists in office with a resulting bad effect on the civilian population and that they failed to impose security restrictions required by CI Staffs'. On the other hand, 'AMG complained that the disposition of CI personnel was uncoordinated, that the constant

[8] TNA, WO 106/3976, Lessons from the Italian Theatre, 25 May 1944.

changing of the CI Section responsible for the security of a particular town resulted in confusion and conflicting instructions and that CI personnel arbitrarily interned and imprisoned civilians without submitting proper arrest reports or otherwise keeping AMG officers informed'. A critical issue tied to the lack of coordination between CI and AMG was the purge of Fascist officers and personnel from their positions of power. The lack of a determined, in fact, led to discontent and disillusion among the local population.[9] Even if, by the end of the war, as pointed out by Nicola Gallerano, the results of epuration carried on by the Allies would be much greater than those of the Italian Government.[10]

Another problem which was aroused by the lack of coordination between personnel in charge of Italian affairs was the slowness with which every problem was tackled. As the report lamented, for example, the regulations on civilian movement in Italy was defined only on 9 April 1944, 'prior to this directive no coordinated plan for the control of civilian movement had existed, although various restrictions had been imposed in different areas', contributing to the general confusion. Restriction of movement for civilians was not only 'a practical possibility', but also was 'found to be essential' to handle refugees and avoid infiltration of enemy spies. In Italy, 'considerable difficulties and confusion' were caused 'by the numerous and varied passes, many of them in most unsatisfactory form', which were issued 'by various authorities to civilians and others'. Many such forms were nothing more than '"scraps of paper"' which could be easily 'transferred or forged', and could not 'easily be recognised as genuine'. Once again, it was essentially an issue of cooperation between the various offices in charge of administering the Italian theatre: the report is clear in stressing that, 'in view of the number of authorities and the extent of the areas involved, the co-operation of all is essential'.[11] The number of refugees fleeing from German-occupied territory as well constituted a problem as they far exceeded any

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[9] Hans Woller, *I conti con il fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia 1943-1948* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), pp. 84-85.

[10] Nicola Gallerano, 'L'influenza dell'amministrazione militare alleata sulla riogranizzazione dello stato italiano (1943/1945)', *Italia contemporanea*, 115 (1974), 4-22 (p. 8).

[11] TNA, WO106/3976, Lessons from the Italian Theatre, 25 May 1944.

prediction. Moreover, problems such as the risk of famine and the explosion of epidemics made things even harder for the un-coordinated Allied machine.[12]

The military and civilian Commands were aware of these problems and realised it was imperative to find a solution. Therefore, a number of measures were prepared by the personnel in charge of the Italian theatre. Achieving a better level of coordination was paramount, but it was also vital to avoid the creation of a structure that was too rigid, unable to deal with the particularities that might have been encountered in the Italian front. Moreover, there was also the somewhat strange juridical position of the Italian partisans which complicated the matter even further. Formally members of a defeated country they nevertheless became an important resource for the Allies, who came to respect them for their usefulness and bravery on the field. As such, in time, the British approach towards the Italian partisans shifted towards more sympathetic positions and the military authorities, at least informally, applied a strategy based around the appeasement of some of the partisans' requests, rather than on coercion.

Rome and beyond

Rome, which the Allied troops liberated on 4 June 1944, was a first 'test-case' to find out what was working and what needed improvement.[13] As the PWB noted, in the South, Italian Resistance had been but a 'small trickle'. Rome, and central Italy, on the other hand, saw the trickle became a 'stream' and there were many reasons to imagine that in the North the Resistance was a 'torrent'. The Italians were also interested in Allied plans for partisan disarmament. Rome was the first case where large numbers of partisans found themselves disillusioned with the Allied response to their request. The fact that they could not volunteer to fight the Germans as part of a regular Army apparently was the main point of complaint; they felt 'abandoned or ignored'.[14] However, in Rome, not everything went wrong and the Allies had the first

[12] Woller, *I conti con il fascismo*, p. 85.

[13] See: TNA, WO 204/7282, Disarmament and Policy towards Partisans, June 1944.

[14] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.25 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 23 July 1944. (Erroneously labelled No.23 in the records.)

confirmations that a pragmatic approach, rather than a rigid stance, was the best way to deal with the partisans. An open attitude, in fact, was sure to give the partisans a good impression and, in turn, make them more docile and easy to disarm after the fight was over.[15]

The report made by the 34th Infantry division of the American Army describes in details the experience of a 'first' 'first contact' between Allied troops and Italian partisans. Despite the lack of a plan from the higher commands or even much knowledge of the other party involved, it was reported that: 'very little was known of them [the partisans] at the time', an appreciable level of cooperation was reached. The Allied officers based their actions on the premise that 'the Partisans were a problem to be dealt with if security and law and order were to be maintained'. Partisans, in fact, 'were an overzealous group', which 'without proper handling might be a menace to our security, communications or supply as well as a source of terror to civilians'. However, the approach taken to solve this problem was conciliatory and bore fruit; so much so that the 34th Infantry division kept using the same method for the entire time it was involved in operations in Italy along the Tyrrhenian coastline. The principal aim of the 34th Infantry division was to convince the local partisans that they were appreciated and that their help was requested in important matters. 'As soon as a commune' was 'taken by our infantry' the commands held 'a meeting with all remaining officials as well as professional men and other leading citizens'. Moreover, 'the leaders of the Partisans and the CLN' were also included in the meeting. The goal was to explain to the Italians the situation and 'solicit their cooperation'. Instead of demanding obedience and brushing the partisans aside their role was recognised and strategies were devised according to the needs of the Army. Disarmament was not a priority *tout court* and the 34th Infantry division took 'a practical view of the problem'. This meant that partisans who were still considered useful, 'for tactical and military reasons' had permission 'to retain their arms until our CP moves beyond their town'. Disarmament, thus, was not simply tied to the

[15] TNA, WO 204/7309, Lessons Learnt in Combat by 34th Infantry Division, from 7-8 November 1942 to September 1944, September 1944.

arrival of Allied troops, but to the end of military operations in a certain area. This choice meant also that the Italian partisans had a chance to fight alongside the Allies on the frontline and feel their efforts recognised by the military authorities. The results obtained by this policy were deemed satisfactory. As was described in the report, during July 1944 the situation in their zone was quiet: 'on the 9 July we inspected the entire rear boundary of the LIVORNO Province accompanied by the leader of the Partisans and have found the Partisans in the rear areas disarmed and without insignia, leading normal lives'. Even when the partisans had not been disarmed as was the case 'in communes closer to our forward CP', in spite of the proclamations to do so, this was no reason for alarm, since 'many of these Partisans are called upon for tactical missions without combat troops or to make security arrests'. The necessity of a conciliatory attitude towards the partisans was dictated by the contingent situation that the Allied officers found during their advance. In fact, 'the only government we [the Allies] meet as we enter newly fallen communes is the government created by the Partisans and the CLN'. Far from generating some kind of 'suspect and diffidence' in the Allies as some authors claim,[16] partisans were praised for their organisation. The only criticisms raised by the report's author are the lack of a proper chain of command and the partisans' inexperience in administration; however 'they successfully perform the services we ask'.[17]

In the same tone as this was another report, this time by the Eight Army Commands, dated 22 June 1944, that shows a keen awareness of how the handling of the partisans would have repercussions on the British image in Italy. According to the report, as more and more partisans were overrun by the Allied advance the issues of clothing and accommodation became evident and 'the treatment which these forces receive at our hands will soon spread Northwards and may have repercussions on the actions of the more powerful bands deeper behind enemy lines'.[18] It was thus necessary for

[16] See for example: Sessi, 'Amgot', pp. 301-302.

[17] TNA, WO 204/7309, Lessons Learnt in Combat by 34th Infantry Division, from 7-8 November 1942 to September 1944, September 1944.

[18] TNA, WO 204/7282, Partisan Forces, 22 June 1944.

'their treatment' to 'be correct and tactful'. The main issue was not to irk partisan leaders who were convinced they had gained the right to be taken into consideration in the decision-making process to administer their former area of operations. As the Eighth Army report states, partisan leaders were 'anxious and willing to co-operate with the Allied Military Authorities'. However, 'in some cases having seized control of the area and elected their own representatives they consider that they should continue in full control'. It was thus necessary to 'explain to them that once they are behind the Allied lines their military function ceases and that in order to assist the work of their comrades further North their arms are required to supply the latter'.[19] As for disarmament, it was clearly stated that partisans 'should not be forcibly disarmed unless it is operationally necessary to do so', as the surrender of their arms was a delicate matter. During the disarmament, process partisans were also supposed to be questioned about any relevant information on their area, as well as any of their 'exploits' so that this information could be passed to the AAI and AMG.[20] The fact that the treatment reserved to the partisans south of the Allied lines would have an effect on the morale and attitude of the partisans still fighting in the Northern provinces was underlined several times. This issue in particular soon became paramount in the whole British approach towards the disbandment of the Italian partisans. The British realised that the partisans still beyond their lines were indeed affected by the treatment reserved to their comrades who had been overrun by the Allied armies. Because of this, the British started to focus their efforts on making the disbandment the least traumatic as possible for the partisans.

The moment of disarmament, thus, became a priority in dealing with the overrun partisans to avoid animosity and resentment. Unfortunately, handling this issue proved to be too much of a task for the local personnel who often had to improvise solutions, being left without clear indications from the military authorities and without a complete and clear picture of the situation. The simple issue of storing the collected weapons became an issue, as the British propaganda in Italy claimed that

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

the arms which had been surrendered by partisans to them were going to be shipped North to help the partisans still fighting the Germans.[21] This was done with the intention of making it easier for the overrun partisans to surrender their weapons and surely bore some fruit, as in June 1944 it was stated that arms were 'being returned in some areas in appreciable numbers'.[22] However, the issue that arose was how to keep faith in the promise of shipping them to the North. The supply lines destined to the Italian partisans were already overburdened considering the scarcity of resources available to carry out consistent airdrops. This promise made by British propaganda, thus, opened the way to serious damage being made to the British image amongst the Italian partisans. It was noted correctly that if the British were not able to 'guarantee' the shipment to the North 'in the case of each rifle' they would incur two major problems. First, the broken promise would lower Italian trust in the British and make 'a perfectly good reason for not handling in arms later elsewhere'. Second, it would provide the Germans with a golden opportunity for 'good propaganda' against the Allied forces.[23] The scarce airdrops later delivered during the autumn and winter of 1944, surely did not help in dispelling the idea that the British had broken their promise about the shipment of surrendered arms to the North.

As emerges from these early considerations a significant issue appears to be the scarce coordination between bodies responsible for dealing with the disarmed partisans. Indeed very little had changed from the situation described by the 21 Army Group in May. And this lack of coordination was not only a problem between the propaganda office and more 'operative' offices but also amongst the men directly deployed on the field to deal with the Italian partisans. If the aforementioned reports present a conciliatory tone towards the Italian partisans, this point of view was not always shared by all British personnel. The AMG, in particular, seemed to approach the

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[21] TNA, WO 204/7282, Patriots in the Battle Zone military problems, June 1944. See also, for example, the aforementioned poster by Alexander to the Italian partisans: TNA, FO 371/43877, Gen. Alexander's poster call to liberated Italy; as published in the Manchester Guardian, 18 August 1944. And the above quoted TNA, WO 204/7282, Partisan Forces, 22 June 1944.

[22] TNA, WO 204/7282, Disarmament and Policy towards Partisans, June 1944.

[23] TNA, WO 204/7282, Patriots in the Battle Zone military problems, June 1944.

problem from a very different angle, treating the partisans as a simple issue of public order, as would be later reflected in the official historical series written after the war.[24] The partisans were considered to be a problem of the Italian Government, as Italian civilians and not part of the armed forces. Moreover, they were still to be treated as citizens of a defeated country. As was stated by AMG in June 1944 it was 'Post War Italy' which had the responsibility to take over 'Patriot Boys as soon as they have handled over their arms'. Because of that, after the disarmament, AMG ceased 'to have much interest - unless the Patriot Boys cause unrest in the army area when they will be put down - […]'. It was thus obvious that 'ACC must therefore insist that the Italian Government look after the minds and bodies of those Patriots'. The responsibility of handling the disarmed partisans was ideally placed on the shoulders of the new Bonomi Government which was supposed to provide them with food and clothes, as well as to produce a political manifesto for the partisans to rally to. Such a manifesto should, they argued, be 'produced quickly so that AMG and ACC know what to tell Partisans but more important so that future Ops in the north are not prejudiced by lack of action in this respect'. As for the partisans' protests about representation or shortages of goods 'one of our answers is to reiterate that the Italians helped to start this war'.[25] This response was similar to the one proposed by MacMillan to deal with Italian protests towards propaganda and similarly produced poor results.

The AMG position on the issue at this point not only shows how divided the British front was when it came to dealing with the Italian partisans but also how, because of this lack of unity and coordination, the British were unable to project a coherent image of themselves in Italy. This lack of coordination and unified vision prevented them from acting rapidly and coherently, especially if we combine this issue with the problem of propaganda, as mentioned before. Here the AMG was basically refuting much of the British propaganda in German Occupied Italy which was centred around the idea that Italian partisans were fighting to free their country and their efforts

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[24] Harris, *Allied Military Administration*, p. 274.

[25] TNA, WO 204/7282, Disarmament and Policy towards Partisans, June 1944.

would be taken into consideration by the Allies. Not only that, but AMG was also brusque in its methods of refuting of such propaganda. This attitude did not help the British image in Italy, for sure. Even if the AMG position was not the official one, as there was no official position, it nevertheless funnelled not only the spread of chaos but also the anti-Allied propaganda made by both the Nazi-Fascists and by the more left-wing parts of Italian society.

To try and solve the partisan demobilisation problem, the AAI HQ wrote a memo to the ACC on 16 June 1944 reminding them that Italian partisans and resistance groups which were now 'in our line' because of the Allied advance in Italy were 'presenting a problem'. This problem was only going to 'magnify as time goes on' and thus it was 'essential' to devise a 'policy' regarding the partisans' treatment in order to assure a smooth transition to civilian life.[26] The AAI HQ proposed radio broadcasts from Radio Roma to explain the situation to the partisans and present the AMG, its role and how the Italians could help. Second, they proposed the production of posters congratulating the partisans for their work so that the surrender of arms could be done without resorting to coercive measures. They also called for all agencies which supported and organised the partisans to produce lists of known bands and leaders in order to easily approach them and gain their support early during the advance. The document from AAI HQ was largely based upon the goodwill and good sense, however, it rested its assumptions on the fact that a list of partisans and bands could be produced in a short time and that partisan leaders could be contacted and their activities coordinated in a timely fashion. This, considering the lack of coordination between agencies involved and the material condition of guerrilla warfare, would prove to be impossible. Thus, any effort made in the direction indicated by the AAI HQ would be compromised. Interestingly enough, the first issue with this programme was signalled by the PWB, concerned with its possible effects on Allied propaganda in Italy. In fact, the PWB stated how a pro-AMG broadcast by Radio Roma could have been misinterpreted by the partisans as an order imposed on them

[26] TNA, WO 204/7282, AAI Chief of General Staff to ACC, 16 June 1944.

and 'damp[en] the enthusiasm of patriots'. The PWB was well aware, it claimed, that there was the risk of post-war disillusion if the partisans were not told that they would be placed under the tutelage of AMG once reached by the advancing Allied armies, and thus relieved from the task of administering the areas they had liberated. However, they also claimed that the risk of 'having to straighten out misunderstandings' was worth taking over the risk of having the partisans demoralised in the short period. Moreover, according to PWB, the easiest and fastest way to solve the problem of rehabilitating partisans was that 'a patriot brigade of the Italian Army should be formed at once, recruited from the patriots liberated by the advancing armies, and that full publicity should be given to this at once'. This course of action had the advantage, it was claimed by the PWB, of canalising 'patriots eager for action' into productive employment, rather than having them join 'political parties' or 'organis[ing] into small groups'[27] with the risk of increasing political unrest.

After more than a month of debates and with a definitive solution to the problem was still not in sight, the issue of handling the partisans had become a central point of discussion amongst the British personnel, military and civilian alike. As the Allied Control Commission stated in mid-July 1944:

> The handling of patriots is a difficult problem which will increase in complexity as the advance continues and the patriots increase in numbers and achieve more successes. Their rehabilitation in liberated territory is an added burden to CAO's in Armies and Provincial staffs, but is a duty which must be carried out with firmness and sympathy and with the knowledge that success or failure in this matter may have wide repercussion […].[28]

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[27] TNA, WO 204/7282, PWB message on Resistance Groups to AAI, 18 June 1944.

[28] TNA, FO 371/43877, General Instructions on the Administration of Patriots in Military Government Territory, 18 July 1944.

It is worth once more underlining how 'sympathy' together with 'firmness' was a required condition to handle the Italian partisans, and how the British appear to be fully aware that their representation was at stake in this delicate matter. This point, in particular, is made clear and expanded upon a few lines below: when partisans were reached by the advancing Allied armies they 'come under the aegis of AMG officers whose duty is to see that the metamorphosis from military to civilian status takes place with the minimum of disillusionment'.[29] Already it was noted how there were really no difficulties in disarming partisans, except 'when mishandled by tactical troops'.[30]

To facilitate the peaceful transition from armed fighters to civilians, the ACC was willing to include partisans in the local administrations. In order to attain this objective, 'representatives of patriot organisations have been sent to Army AMG's and Italian committees with strong patriot representations will be set up in the local governments of liberated territory'. Moreover, it was also pointed out how disarmament was more than simply policing the territory and collecting firearms from former partisans. It was 'extremely important' that while the order was to be maintained and arms had to be surrendered, patriots 'should be treated with great tact and sympathy'. This was necessary 'in order to avoid antagonism and discouragement which would become known and have an adverse effect upon patriots still operating against the enemy'. To avoid friction with the partisans 'leaders of patriot groups should be thanked by AMG officers for the assistance which they have rendered to the Allies and told to convey to their groups the Allied appreciation of their efforts'.[31] Even if 'patriots are not a political organisation and must be dissuaded from setting up purely patriot local governments'; on the topic of Italian self-government it was recognised that partisans had gained 'by virtue of their

[29] Ibid.

[30] TNA, WO 204/7282, AMG Fifth Army to HQ, ACC advanced, 29 June 1944.

[31] TNA, FO 371/43877, General Instructions on the Administration of Patriots in Military Government Territory, 18 July 1944.

military aid' the 'right to strong representation in the local government'. Moreover, partisans did not only have the right to be part of local governments but 'Italian local government officials must be made to realise and show appreciation of their value and their right to be represented in government'.[32]

Here, another key myth of the Italo-Allied relationship shows its weakness and is arguably overturned. The British directives on whom to control and point to the 'right' direction did not target the partisans, but rather the Italian government officers, in stark contrast with the idea that the British favoured the administrators on their payroll (or trusted because of their conservative tendencies) and distrusted the partisans, curbing away their agency as soon as possible. It was also recognised how rehabilitation was no easy task not only for the AMG officers but for the partisans themselves. After all, they had lived for a significant amount of time on the run and engaged in a bloody conflict with the Nazi-Fascist forces. 'After months of guerrilla warfare, it will be hard for patriots to settle down to normal life. To encourage rapid return to their ordinary vocations will be one of the most difficult duties of the local committees'.[33] These local committees were supposed to be formed as soon as an area was liberated and were composed by Italian personnel. Their role was to help AMG and Italian officers in dealing with the patriots 'not as a nuisance but with sympathy and gratitude'. Once more, political control is exerted on the Italian civilian officers rather than on the partisans. This need to exert control over the Italian civilian personnel was stated one more time as it was specified that even if it was 'desirable to leave the rehabilitation of patriots to the Italians themselves, in the form of local committees, CAO's and especially Provincial Officers in the later period of occupation',[34] nevertheless, because of the debt of gratitude that the Allies had towards the Italian Partisans, the Allies had the duty to 'ensure that they [the partisans] are given a square deal'.

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

These considerations on the partisans' treatment were driven by reasons of public order, for sure, as it is stated that: 'it should at all times be remembered that an unemployed patriot is not only a disgrace to the community but a menace'; but the fact that the proposed solutions revolved around 'sympathy and gratitude' rather than coercion should put in doubt the narrative concerning the almost obsessive British will to control and cut down to size the partisans at any available occasion. Patriot leaders were also to be involved in the process of disarmament and rehabilitation. Not only by granting them their right to be represented in local governments but also by seeking their active advice. On the topic of prizes and certificates to be awarded to partisans, for example, their knowledge was considered crucial: 'the advice of patriot leaders should be sought before the issue of any certificate in order to avoid possession of them by bogus patriots'. Of course, the Allied commands were well-aware of the difficulties in dealing with the partisans, especially as far as the surrender of firearms was concerned. On this point, there could not be any negotiations or yielding. It was clearly stated that: 'Patriots must hand in their arms (including hand grenades and bombs). No other reason need to be invoked except that the law requires the surrender of arms', as 'the preservation of law and order precludes the existence of irregular armed bands in liberated territory'. However, the display of firmness on this topic that the AMG officers were supposed to show was not confined to simply putting up a fierce face in front of the Italians. The demand to surrender their arms was to be made 'tactfully' and 'peremptory orders in the first instance should be avoided'. Once again sympathy and not control or repression was the key directive to handle the partisans. If we compare for a moment the attitude advocated by this document with that of the AMG the contrast between the two positions is apparent. The ACC was pushing forward a much softer approach to handle the partisans, while still considering that the partisans had expectations about the post-war period and to completely dismiss these expectations could be dangerous. This softer approach could also count on the positive Italian

response, both from the partisans themselves and from the Italian political parties;[35] which further proved that the partisans were not a problem *per se*.

Partisan disarmament, as an issue tied to public order, remained the main motive of concern for the British throughout all of the Italian campaign. The risks of having armed bands dispersed on the Italian territory, in fact, was ever-present in the minds of the British elites, especially after the fiasco of the management of the partisans in Greece. On the 25 July 1944, the ACC noted that if ''private armies' of Patriots' were allowed 'to usurp the functions of the existing official Italian Army' it would store up 'great trouble for the future' as the partisan bands would eventually claim some sort of 'official recognition' from a position of strength and could possibly refuse to surrender their arms when requested. Moreover, internal strife could arise as the bands, which were 'of different political colour', could start to 'fight among themselves'. Finally, letting the partisans retain their weapons would also represent a blow to the Allies' prestige as their policy would be 'rightly' seen as 'vacillating'.[36] Therefore, according to the ACC Army sub-commission, 'only one policy' could be implemented: that of sympathy and firmness. The Allies were 'very grateful to the Patriots. They have done a good job'. As such they were awarded 'certificates of merit' and the maximum effort was carried on by the Allied 'to settle them in civil life' and as many partisans as was possible were free to join the Italian Army. However, 'There must be only one official Italian Army and so the Patriots must be *patrioti* enough to hand in their arms and not upset the Allied war effort by jibbing at what we order in full knowledge of all the factors'.[37] To at least alleviate the problem, the ACC laid down proposals to re-employ those partisans who could not be organised locally, by having them join the regular Army, the Carabinieri and other police forces, or even enlisting them as military engineers.[38] The plan was to have a Screening Agency run by the Ministry of War attached to the HQ of the 5th Army, the 8th Army and the

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[35] TNA, FO 371/43945, PWB Report No.28 on conditions in Liberated Italy, 29 July 1944.
[36] TNA, WO 204/7315, Army Sub-commission ACC, Patriots, 25 July 1944.
[37] Ibid.
[38] TNA, FO 371/43877, Re-employment of Patriots, 24 July 1944.

Polish Corps to help the AMG re-settle the partisans. Three more of these agencies were deemed necessary to assist with the partisans already overrun in the South who were still waiting for an assignment.[39]

Meanwhile, as the Allied Army advanced in Italy, more and more partisan bands were encountered as had been foreseen, and it became apparent that 'first contact' was a delicate moment. As a memorandum by liaison officer Major Mott-Radclyffe dated 5 August 1944 stated, when meeting a partisan band for the first time, the Allies were eager to know about 'enemy troop movements, mines, booby traps, and demolitions'.[40] Unfortunately, it seems that this kind of information was 'singularly difficult to come by', because 'if the Patriot leader himself does not immediately come forward, time cannot be wasted in trying to find him, and in his absence, one is faced with a crowd of excited Patriots, each overflowing with contradictory information, whose immediate ambition appears to be to talk louder than his neighbour'. Moreover, there was 'the further problem of what proportion of this surging crowd' were 'genuine patriots and can therefore be trusted'. To circumvent this problem, Major Mott-Radclyffe also proposed that the partisan leaders should prepare lists of military targets and trustworthy fighters before the arrival of the Allied armies to speed up the process. Another proposal was to send 'Patriot liaison officers' as forward envoys before the arrival of regular troops. All of this is a hint to how the already quoted plan devised by the ACC in July 1944 was still on paper. Moreover, it can be seen here how agents in the field and Commands both largely shared the same outlook on how to solve the issue. In this document, like in the ACC one, the approach to the problem of disarmament and rehabilitation was collaborative with the partisans rather than adversarial. 'Patriot representatives' were to be sent to newly liberated regions to assist with the handling of certificates of merits, while communal committees for re-employment were to be created with the participation of partisan representatives. In the meantime, the partisans were supposed to be assisted in 'patriot camps'. It was pointed out that 'for psychological reasons,' it was '[…]

[39] TNA, FO 371/43877, Italian Military Personnel from Enemy Occupied Italy, 23 July 1944.
[40] TNA, FO 371/43877, Memorandum on Partisans, 5 August 1944.

advisable that these camps should be separate from the refugee camps' even though 'this places an added burden upon the already strained resources of the AMG officers'. The issue of the patriot camps would constitute one of the main reasons for disillusionment amongst the partisans. Patriots' camps, in fact, would turn into something very similar to refugee camps.[41] Moreover, the partisans would see even their right to be medicated in military hospitals negated for a long time. Piffer very soundly suggests that this was one major issue which compromised the relationship between British forces and the partisans.[42] The long duration of this unpleasant situation, in fact, mainly caused by the slowness and lack of coordination between the Allied offices who were supposed to manage it, delivered a significant blow to British prestige and integrity in the eyes of the Italians.

Major Mott-Radclyffe was aware that the partisan problem was 'a very difficult one, requiring careful handling', and that the problem would only increase 'in magnitude' as partisans were encountered 'in greater numbers in the North'. As the British policy had been to support these groups, it was 'clearly desirable for operational reasons that their continued resistance should be stimulated' to better harass the German forces in Italy. However, they also posed a problem. A way to solve this issue was through political action, by making them more privy to the actions of the Italian Government in Rome. This would increase the prestige of the Italian Government 'in the eyes of the Patriots in the North'[43] and thus make them more docile and obedient towards it. However, achieving this result was no easy task. A first possible way could have been to report more frequently about the actions of the Royal Italian Army that was fighting alongside the Allies in the South. In this regard, propaganda was to

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[41] The British, moreover, underestimated at the beginning the problem of partisan camps. See, for example, TNA, WO 204/7282, AMG Fifth Army to HQ, ACC advanced, 29 June 1944, where is stated that: 'camps will hardly be necessary to judge from experience so far, as the ex-partisans always have friends with whom they can live', even if it was recognised that if camps were to be created they should have been 'something better than the ordinary PW cage or refugee centre, which is probably all we can organise'. Unfortunately, these prevision would have been proved completely incorrect. Over the course of 1944 the British realised their mistake in underestimating the number of partisans in Italy, however, by that time it was considerably harder to steer things back on track and this caused even more confusion and bad management of the partisans.

[42] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 165.

[43] TNA, FO 371/43877, Memorandum on Partisans, 5 August 1944.

play a crucial role. Major Mott-Radclyffe pointed out how it was imperative to take 'care' in avoiding to boost 'the Patriots' achievements at the expense of those units of the Italian regular army who have been operating in the line with Allied troops'. Of course, the fastest way to make the partisans more aware and more obedient to the Rome Government would have been to 'transfer to the Italian Government the responsibility for providing funds for the rehabilitation of these Patriots as soon as they have crossed the Allied line'.[44] As was pointed out, the partisans would obviously show great gratitude to those who provided them with funds during the war. This, however, would generate a new array of problems and conflicts amongst British offices, as 'if the Italian Government were allowed to contribute any proportion of the funds required for operation purposes, it would give the Minister of War an excuse to demand some measure of control over the actual operations' and such a request 'would be quite unacceptable to General Alexander'. And to further complicate the problem there was the fact that often the partisans had sources of funds outside of Allied control. As Maj. Radclyffe reported in August 1944: 'I have not been successful in obtaining accurate information about the financial resources of the Patriot bands, but what I am quite certain about is that fairly large sums are collected from sources other than subscriptions among themselves'. This could have produced a situation where:

> unless we [the British] are very careful, political parties will subsequently claim that they have financed, by subterranean methods, individual bands of Patriots and that something akin to private armies may be constituted with all the inherent dangers of political banditry (which attracts the worst type) becoming once again the popular sport in Italy.[45]

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[44] Another possible way to promote the Italian Government's prestige would have been to report more frequently about the actions of the Royal Italian Army that was fighting alongside the Allies in the South. 'Care should be taken to avoid boosting the Patriots' achievements at the expense of those units of the Italian regular army who have been operating in the line with Allied troops'.

[45] TNA, FO 371/43877, Memorandum on Partisans, 5 August 1944. The partisans received found by the USSR as well. See, for example, TNA, FO 371/43878, Telegram from Bari to Resident Minister's Office Central Mediterranean Caserta, 16 November 1944.

Another reason why the first contact was such a challenge was because 'of the so-called Partisans who come through the lines and make contact with forward troops a large number have never been active Partisans and have merely adopted their guise and dress in order to gain benefit from us'. For that reason: 'The first and most important job' was 'to sort out this class from the true Partisan'. This sorting was recognised as an 'extremely difficult' task unless assistance was 'obtained from either the Italian Intelligence liaison officer or from someone with a good knowledge of the Italian people'. This called, therefore, for someone who was able to manage the sorting process to be 'at hand' for forward troops to help.[46] However, even after this first selection between 'genuine' and 'bogus' partisans, work was not over. In fact, it was still necessary to sort the partisans who were to be used as auxiliary troops from those to be disbanded. It was stated that: 'not all those of the true Partisans found by this means will be of use to forward troops' and thus forward troops would have to decide how many partisans were needed and what tasks to assign them (such as guides, messengers, patrols etc).[47] Once the required number was selected with the help of the Italian Intelligence liaison officer, 'the balance of the Partisans not so required should be sent back through normal channels, when they will be disarmed and dealt with by AMG'. It was reminded, once more, that 'as far as possible true Partisans whose services are not required should be tactfully handled'. The reason was not only gratitude for their efforts but also the awareness that 'news of how Partisans are treated by us soon gets back through enemy lines and had great effect on the attitude towards us of Partisans who are still operating'. This way of handling the partisans was, it was noted, the only way to solve the problem as 'any other course' was 'likely to lead to a confused rabble being maintained at the front who will

[46] TNA, WO 204/7315, Appendix 'B', Notes on Partisans, 5 August 1944.

[47] For example, see: TNA, FO 371/43946, Report No.18 on the conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 2 August 1944. And TNA, FO 371/43947, Report No.31 on the conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 20 November 1944. And TNA, WO 204/7288, Eighth Army Partisan Summary NO.3 based on information received up to 11 Nov 1944, 11 November 1944.

develop quarrels amongst themselves and who, like as not, will have enemy agents amongst them'.[48]

Beside the tactful approach of partisans on the frontline, the creation of committees was, as already mentioned, a key point to encourage the joint management of the disarmed partisans between the Allies and the Italians and to prevent friction or mishandling. These committees were planned to be formed by the local mayor (or prefect) as a president and have a minimum of six other members, four or more, directly chosen by and among the patriots; and two members of the city or town council, or 'well known and respected local residents'.[49] On an upper level, 'consistency of policy, co-ordination of the efforts of the Communal Committees and means of communication from AMG/ACC HQ should be effected at Provincial level and through the Prefect acting on the advice and under the supervision of the Provincial Commissioner'. The functions of such committees were also laid down clearly. Firstly, 'they will determine whether persons calling themselves patriots are in fact patriots' and allow in this way to sort out the 'bogus patriots' with the help of local leaders who were supposed to put together 'lists' of names and 'any other relevant information which may be required' to help the work of the committees. Secondly, and more importantly, the committees had the task of dealing with the genuine demobilised partisans. People who were locals were supposed to return to their homes and occupations and, accordingly, they 'will be dealt with as any other residents of the locality who had remained there'. People from other areas too could be included in this category, if they wished so. As for non-residents who wished to go back to their homes, 'their return will be arranged locally by the CAO to Provincial

[48] TNA, WO 204/7315, Appendix 'B', Notes on Partisans, 5 August 1944.

[49] TNA, WO 204/7315, Appendix 'A' Formation of communal committees for re-employment and dispersal of patriots dated 18th July 1944, 5 August 1944.

HQ thence by the Provincial Commissioner'.[50] A structure was also envisioned to deal with the partisans who were willing to join the Italian army immediately, without waiting for a 'call up', and for those who wished to keep fighting as partisans and help the Allies troops in combat and reconnaissance roles.[51]

Florence

However, after the summer of 1944 and after this prolonged discussion amongst the Allied and British personnel, at the beginning of September, the issue was still not resolved. This was largely due to a severe lack of coordination between the various offices and personnel who, in theory, were supposed to smoothly handle the disarmament or rehabilitation of the Italian partisans. And because of this lack of coordination problems inevitably surfaced. An emblematic case of such problems coalescing into an organisational nightmare was the liberation of the city of Florence. The liberation of Florence took from the 29 July to the 1 September 1944 to be completed and, from a military standpoint was another breakthrough for the Allies. The city, however, acquired also a symbolic value for the Italian Resistance as the first city where the local CLN refused any type of agreement with the withdrawing Germans or the local Republican Fascists and decided instead to lead an armed uprising, in order to present itself to the Allies as the legitimate local Government.[52] Unfortunately for the CLN the uprising quickly turned into a long-drawn-out direct confrontation with the Nazi-Fascist forces, which clearly hindered the partisans action, as they lacked in organisation and equipment compared to the Germans. The insurrection would have been repressed in blood by the Germans if not for the Allied offensive which reached the river Arno on the 3 August 1944. The battle lasted for

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[50] Here too, the number of non-resident wishing to go back home was underestimated, as it was stated that 'it is believed that this class will be very small in number'. This underestimation of the problem will later aggravate the already complicated situation, with the inability to create proper camps to assist the displaced partisans and fuelling their resentment towards the Allies. On the same topic see the aforementioned: TNA, WO 204/7282, AMG Fifth Army to HQ, ACC advanced, 29 June 1944.

[51] TNA, WO 204/7315, Appendix 'A' Formation of communal committees for re-employment and dispersal of patriots dated 18th July 1944, 5 August 1944.

[52] Carlo Francovitch, *La Resistenza a Firenze* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1975), p. 265.

almost a month and the Allies made good use of the Florentine partisan battalions. In Florence, in fact, the Allies decided not to disarm the partisans immediately as they encountered them on the south bank of the River Arno, but to allow them to continue the fight.[53]

Florence represented a turning point in the approach that the Allies had towards the local CLNs. For the first time, they encountered a well-organised CLN which had been able to fight the Germans coordinating its action with the advancing Allied armies and which was also well-determined to stand its ground on political matters.[54] On the 16 August, the CTLN (Tuscan Committee of National Liberation) transferred its powers as provisory Government to the AMG, maintaining, however, an 'advisory role' as the only legitimate representative of the people of Tuscany. Despite the prejudices that the Allies might have had towards the Italians, they recognized this advisory role, as a token of gratitude and goodwill.[55] It was indeed the Rome Government who would disregard the CTNL once Tuscany was restored to Italian sovereignty.[56]

However, the situation in Florence presented some issues, as far as the disarmament of the partisans after the end of the battle was concerned. After the final liberation of the city, on the 1 September, the Allied Armies HQ wrote a memorandum to summarise the situation and draw some conclusions. The memorandum stated: 'in the Florence area the situation as to control of partisans was not satisfactory'. This was due to the fact that 'there were no responsible officers specifically designated to coordinate all the diverse problems which arose'. In particular, they were unable to direct and control 'partisans as fighting troops on behalf of the tactical commander'.

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[53] Ibid., p. 272.

[54] Ibid., p. 287. And Roger Absalom, 'Il ruolo politico ed economico degli alleati a Firenze (1944-1945)', in *La ricostruzione in Toscana dal CLN ai partiti,* ed. by Ettore Rotelli, 3 vols (Bologna: il Mulino, 1980), I, 233-253 (p.233).

[55] Absalom, 'Il ruolo politico', pp. 252-253.

[56] *La ricostruzione in Toscana*, ed. by Ettore Rotelli, I, p. 73.

To do so, it would have been necessary to have at their disposal men whose capabilities extended to 'both liaison and leadership'. Unfortunately, such personnel were 'not provided for in a tactical HQ'. Thus, when the necessity was pressing there was no-one able to perform the tasks necessary to coordinate the Italian partisans with the regular troops. Moreover, the tactical HQ had to face the problem of feeding the partisans while they were engaged in fighting, as well as when they were overrun after the final German withdrawal. For both tasks, the tactical HQ had no experience, guidance nor personnel to handle them. The memorandum makes it clear that it was a problem of organisation and not of scarcity of resources such as food. 'AMG will provide the food, but is not equipped to settle all the details of strength reports, organisation, drawing and transport'. Another issue was 'the provision of ammunition of all sorts and description' which were scarce. Finally, and perhaps chiefly, 'the military control of partisans as they are overrun' was an unresolved issue. The problem, of course, was 'not easy', as partisans did not 'immediately become ordinary civilians capable of normal control by the AMG Police Officers'. Moreover, they remained, 'for a considerable period', 'semi-organised and battle excited'. Thus, 'they indulged in Fascists hunt to the discomfort of AMG and security personnel. They ran about in small groups frightening the civilian population and doing some looting, adding to a confused situation'. To make things even worse 'identification of partisans presented another serious problem, due mainly to the infiltration of numerous republican Fascists and some Germans with bogus brassards and identification cards'. These people added to the confusion by engaging in 'sniping, espionage […] and other harassing missions'.

What was pointed out as the main reason for the general confusion in Florence was 'the lack of a clear line of demarcation as to responsibility'. The partisans, in fact, occupied a sort of administrative vacuum as they stood at the intersection of various organisations' jurisdictions. They were 'fed by AMG, provide information to several agencies, are theoretically disarmed by proclamation, and still provide reconnaissance screens and liaison and rear area patrols for the tactical commander'

thus, 'no one quite knows when a partisan is such and when he is a civilian, or who should cope at any specific time'.[57]

The long Winter of 1944-1945

The liberation of Florence was by no means the last time when the Allies faced these kinds of problems and were unable to produce a coherent policy to solve them. On the contrary, as the Allied advance progressed and, as foreseen, the number of partisans encountered increased, disarmament posed an even greater task. As Lt. Col. Lazar of the Fifth Army HQ reminded the Advanced Allied HQ in Italy at the end of October 1944 disarmament, as a delicate task, was 'the responsibility of AMG (NOT the forward tps except in emergency) and should be carried out with the greatest possible tact (farewell parades, speeches, promises that the arms will be sent to partisans further North, etc.)'. Despite, these recommendations, however, 'cases have occurred in which premature disarming has led to a drop in morale, and refusal to co-operate among partisans being used by forward units or even still in enemy occupied ITALY'. These occurrences were even more frustrating as it was recognised that 'partisans are not normally a security danger and there is no need for them to be disarmed in such a hurry that this cannot [be done] in a tactful way'. The problem was, once more, that no-one seemed to be in charge of the whole organisation. In fact, on paper, 'AMG has instructions to give priority to partisans in employment etc., and at each Corps HQ there are 2 Italian officers responsible for giving certificates to genuine partisans and arranging enlistment in the Italian Army'. In practice, however, 'partisan liaison officers have found it difficult to make satisfactory arrangement for the dispersal of partisan bands no longer required'. This was caused by the fact that there was 'no organisation, apart from refugee camps' to which partisans, whose homes were still in enemy occupied Italy, could be sent.[58] Unfortunately, the over-optimistic estimations made at the beginning of the Summer of 1944 regarding the number of partisans who would need accommodation started

[57] TNA, WO 204/7309, Control of Partisans in the Florence area, 1 September 1944.
[58] TNA, WO 204/7309, Headquarters Fifth Army, Partisan control, 27 October 1944.

to show all their limitations in this phase of the Allied advance in Italy and produced a situation of chaos that was complicated to fix, especially on the fly.

The issues raised by Col. Lazar were by no means easy to solve, however, they were the same that had been discussed since the Spring of 1944 (partisan camps, disarmament, feeding the partisans, employment). The Allies were still, at this point, largely unprepared when it came to their interaction with the Italian partisans and much was still left to the personal initiative and good-will of the single officers on the field. All of this did not help create a coherent image of the Allies, and the British in particular, in Italy.

This unfortunate state lasted into November 1944, as Major Archie Colquhoun wrote to Colonel Riepe, on the 2 November 1944 describing the chaotic situation he was witnessing and how the whole organisation was in disarray. Maj. Colquhoun was especially concerned with the situation in the Cervia area where despite the AMG issuing an order not to disarm partisans on the front troubles had arisen nevertheless. He wrote that: 'AMG intentions are excellent […], but we continue to have cases of the premature or tactless disarming of partisans adversely affecting the morale of band operation with our troops or still in enemy territory'. Unfortunately, the makeshift organisation in place was unable to handle the issue, as 'representatives of the Patriot sub-commission are too few in number and have too little power to solve the question of the satisfactory disposal of partisan bands after they have been disarmed'. Their 'only function […]' was 'handling out certificates, taking the names of recruits for the Italian Army and collecting stories for a post-war history of the partisan movement'. In this sense, Maj. Colquhoun pointed out that 'the Porterforce front has now provided a test case' of what to improve, as the Allies' attitude towards the partisans was 'particularly important' because it affected 'the string of bands, […], around RAVENNA'. There, in fact, it was proved how 'a little tact, a few cigarettes and gas capes and [illegible]' could 'work wonders on partisans'. The problem was that the partisans' morale 'sank to zero on news of what occurred at CERVIA' where a rushed disarmament took place. The only reasonable course of action, 'if forward troops are going to use partisans,' was that 'partisans should not be disarmed without

previous reference to the formation commander' or resentment and dissent would spread not only among the members of the disarmed band but also through the whole frontline. Maj. Colquhoun pointed out how this was 'fundamentally' a problem 'of liaison'. Liaison work, in fact, could 'only be done by British officers who are responsible for co-ordinating and directing the work of our Italian L.Os with Bdes and Regts, relieving staffs and units of formations of problems of supply and tactical employment with which they are usually too busy to deal, and for treating with AMG'. However, while this was 'a strictly operational job', the 'British C.L. officers at Corps are all interrogation officers' and thus untrained to perform a liaison role. Maj. Colquhoun lamented this situation as he had available 'only two officers to cover the whole Army front on the operational side'. He envisioned a solution in the creation of a new 'organisation to provide a pool of British officers […] for organising partisans as auxiliaries for forward troops'. Not only would this have solved the immediate problem, but it also prevented further issues when 'we encounter your well-armed and well organised bands North of the PO'. Moreover, 'some kind of supply set-up will also be necessary within the framework of this organisation' to coordinate feeding the partisans, a problem already made apparent by other reports during 1944. Maj. Colquhoun's final remarks were blunt but a foregone conclusion: 'a modification is certainly necessary of the present instructions regarding partisans when they are over-run'. The problem was also compounded by the fact that orders were 'constantly being ignored by units and formations who have a little imagination'. It was not even a problem of 'if' forward troops were supposed to utilize partisans as 'they [the forward troops] use them whether we want them or not'. In fact, 'a very large number of British units' took partisans bands in tow, 'sometimes for a considerable time'. As

Maj. Colquhoun noted it was 'hardly possible to stop them when they find that partisans are instrumental in saving Allied lives'.[59]

The Eighth Army as well pointed out how overrun partisans in the Cervia area had suffered from a rushed disarmament, however, they were quickly re-employed as patrols and guides and supplied with goods like cigarettes, all of which helped in restoring their morale. The conclusion reached by the Eighth Army from this experience was clear: 'units in the line who come across useful bands of partisans will, as in the past, continue to employ them'. Moreover, they remarked how it was important to satisfy partisans' expectations by sharing supplies with them; even 'a token issue' had an immediate effect on their morale.[60] Once more, it was pointed out how:

> premature or hurried disarmament, without the formalities of a parade, congratulatory speeches, etc., will result in the immediate lowering of morale of partisans who have been selected to continue as guides and patrols for forward troops, and is also liable of effect partisans who are still operating on the other side of the lines. The same is true if partisans are discontent with the treatment they receive after disarming or if incidents with the civilian population are over-frequent.[61]

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[59] TNA, WO 204/7309, Letter from Major A. Colquhoun to Colonel Riepe, 4 November 1944. Partisans were in fact helpful as auxiliary troops for the Allied armies in Italy. They were able to collect and provide information on the enemy, its disposition, strongpoints and traps (like minefields). They were also useful guides because of their knowledge of the territory and were precious as patrols and reconnaissance forces to gather information on enemy positions. Moreover, they were the perfect messengers to contact other partisans still behind enemy lines. Finally, they were also useful in counter-espionage as their knowledge of the area and of its people would be precious in discovering enemy agents posing as civilians. On this topic see: TNA, WO 204/7315, Appendix 'B', Notes on Partisans, 5 October 1944.

[60] TNA, WO 204/7288, Eight Army Partisan Summary NO.3 based on information received up to 11 Nov 1944, 11 November 1944.

[61] Ibid.

As these documents show, improvisation by lower rank officers was still the only approach the Allied armies had in dealing with the partisans. There was no clear-cut policy, nor plan to solve the issue, and every day that passed in this state of disarray compromised more and more the British in the eyes of the Italians,[62] As the previous chapter demonstrated.

In the wake of such reports from the frontline Colonel Riepe[63] pushed forward to find a solution. He claimed that the problem was not 'provided with an adequate solution'. This was becoming more and more unacceptable since 'operations are now using patriots for important works and that even more important projects involving their cooperation are planned', therefore 'a great deal more active thought' was 'necessary'. First of all, the still unresolved matter of partisans' camps needed attention. He requested 'the establishment of centres for Patriots where they are treated as Patriots and not as Refugees or Displaced Persons' as well as a 'careful and considerate administration at these camps'. Moreover, coordination had to be improved as well to avoid wasting time and energy, as was the case for example of the patriots' branch representative in Florence which was doing duplicate work of the PWB instead of dealing with the issue of overrun partisans. The issue of hospitals for wounded partisans was raised too, as 'at the present time Patriots wounded in this area are treated when found at Evac Hospitals (military) for a period up to a week, then they are sent to Civilian hospitals. There, the difference in treatment and in rations […] causes much dissention'. Even food problems were pointed out as 'Col. WALKER [SCAO IV Corps] expressed the hope that written sanction and actual supplies be given to permit feeding Patriots on a ration at least equivalent to POW standard'. This needed an appropriate sanction as the whole machine was running essentially without any authorisation. What happened, in practice, was that 'in the forward areas the Patriots' were 'actually fed Army ration'. However, this was not

[62] See, for example, the PWB reporting the complaints made on Italian press about the 'poverty striking' conditions of the overrun partisans: TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.43 on the Conditions in Liberated Italy, 23 November 1944.

[63] Col. John Riepe was responsible of the special operations for the 15th Army group.

'authorised'. Col Walker was asking that, as long as the partisans were used by the army 'operationally', something was done 'to legalise the practice and standardize it'. The machine to handle overrun partisans, in other words, had no proper sanction by a higher authority and everything was left to the initiative and the tact of the single local commands.[64] As we saw, commanders had no particular hesitations in breaking or bending the rules, once they realised that partisans were 'instrumental in saving Allied lives', the situation had already de facto surpassed the directives on immediate disarmament of the partisans, as Maj. Colquhoun had pointed out before.

The issue of propaganda was also pointed out by the British personnel as a problem. I have already touched on the topic of propaganda, but I want to dwell now more in-depth on the specific problem of how propaganda influenced the critical moment of 'first contact' between Italian partisans and the Allies during the Italian campaign. Often, in fact, exaggerated promises were made to the partisans in German occupied Italy. It was left to the officers and other personnel on the field to dispel those promises when partisans bands were overrun and found themselves in Allied Administrated territory. Moreover, often the officers had no idea of what had been promised to the Italians by British propaganda. This led to a tense situation, where partisans felt defrauded of their rightfully earned rewards. During the meeting of the 15 November 1944 Col. Walker was very clear in stating that the situation as far as propaganda in Italy was concerned was not satisfactory. In particular, he moved criticism to the 'method of making baseless promises' by the British '"publicity"'. The Colonel pointed out how partisans were coming in 'asking for things they have been promised' while he personally 'had never been informed even as to what <u>is</u> being promised'. This, of course, led to a frustrating situation as local officers had to anger the Italians without really knowing why. Col Walker proposed that 'all concerned be given copies of any promises made either by pamphlet or broadcast'. In this way it would be possible to, at least, 'extemporise in advance as to why anything may *not* be

[64] TNA, WO 204/7309, Discussion on 15/16 Nov. AMG Fifth Army SCAO IV Corps and Patriots Rep (Adv), 15 November 1944.

available'[65] before simply refusing it to the partisans and producing thus the image of an obtuse military machinery unwilling to keep its promises, strengthening in this way the Italian suspicion that the British had only used them to further their own goals in Italy and had no interest in the well-being of the partisans.

This meeting was just one of the many initiatives promoted to improve the situation. However, practical limitations, lack of coordination and in some cases simple stupidity, made it difficult to find a suitable solution. Only a week after Col. Riepe's meeting, for example, the Advanced HQ, operating in north-west Italy, asked for directions from the AAI HQ on how to handle partisans and rehabilitate them, as it seemed 'most probable that the question of the treatment of Patriots is going to be a serious problem in NW Italy'. As far as the people of Adv. HQ could see, there were two possible ways to handle the Italian partisans, either to 'persuade the Patriots to lay down their arms', or to 'encourage the Patriot bands to continue to assist the Allies by becoming auxiliary military units'. The Adv. HQ was especially concerned because 'from reports from other countries as well as from Italy it seems probable that large numbers of patriots will not voluntarily lay down their arms' especially because it was 'possible that Fascist guerrilla groups may be found operating in the territory'. Thus, advanced HQ asked for guidance on how to handle possible armed conflict between partisans and the remaining Fascists as well as between different factions of the partisan movement 'as soon as possible'.[66] The reply from the Eighth Army HQ presented a scenario that was less than comforting. The HQ made no secret of the fact that 'at present [the] machinery to deal with partisans is makeshift' and that 'exploitation has been largely left to the initiative of individual units, or of Italian Intelligence Liaison Officers attached to formations and units' while 'problems of supply and administration have been dealt with on a hand to mouth basis'. To improve the situation they proposed to attach a British liaison officer to each unit in the army, responsible 'for contacting partisan leaders, explaining to formations and units the best use for partisans, distributing them among units and organising their

[65] Ibid.

[66] TNA, WO 204/7283, Adv. HQ No 2 to HQ AAI Treatment of Patriots, 23 November 1944.

activities in conjunction with the Italian Intelligence Liaison Officers'.[67] To treat the partisans well was paramount as they proved themselves useful as sources of valuable information on enemy movements and dispositions as well as in operative roles in 'mountainous and flooded sectors', where 'they had been instrumental in killing or capturing a considerable number of Germans'.

On the issue of the disarmament in the North of Italy, the PWB expressed its opinion in a memorandum on the 30 November 1944. As for the handling of arms, it was believed that 'few' would be surrendered as 'the bulk will be kept for the future defence of the various parties. The only consolation was that ammunition was 'likely to be scarce'. On the topic of violence and unrest in liberated Italy the approach was somewhat cynical (even if it appears to be realistic). It was considered that, firstly, 'very few Fascists will be still alive in the North by the time the Allies arrive'. And, even if large numbers were still present, there was 'every likelihood that the patriots will endeavour to exterminate them'. Secondly, as for possible conflict amongst different political factions inside the CLN, this was considered possible but only 'at a much later date, probably after the Allies have left Italy'. Finally, on the possibility of enrolling the partisans in the army it was noted that 'by the time the North is liberated, Italians would […] argue that there would then be no need to join the Army'. So much so that the difficulties foreseen were not 'that of patriots being willing or unwilling to join the Army, but of keeping in the ranks the soldiers who have already been conscripted'.[68]

Meanwhile, time passed and a solution was still to be found. It was again the advanced AAI HQ that lamented, at the beginning of December that the issue was yet to be solved, despite the fact that 'dealing with patriots as they pass into liberated territory is no new problem'. They were concerned that 'the rehabilitation of patriots in NW Italy will present considerable problems', but at the same time they were also sure that, 'if the Resistance Group movement is handled with tact and firmness, and

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[67] TNA, WO 204/7283, Main HQ Eight Army to Adv. HQ AAI Employment of partisans auxiliaries on EIGHTH ARMY front, 28 November 1944.

[68] TNA, WO 204/7283, Psychological Warfare Branch, Treatment of Patriots, 30 November 1944.

if their treatment is uniform, these difficulties can be overcome'.[69] In order to attain this result, it was necessary that 'everyone concerned with the administration of newly liberated territory should fully understand what has already been agreed on [for] the procedure to be adopted'. This formulation implies that, still, coordination had not been achieved on the matter of handling the disarmament and that six-month-old directives were still largely on paper. Another issue correctly pointed out by the AAI HQ was the contradictory nature of British propaganda in enemy occupied Italy, which could lead to discontent. As was stated the weak point in British propaganda was that:

> although all possible assistance and encouragement has been given to Italian citizens to take up arms and help to liberate their country, as soon as they pass into liberated territory Patriots are required to change their status from being armed citizens to peaceful citizens and to conform with the laws in force in liberated Italy.[70]

The idea of treating some groups as auxiliary troops to better absorb their fighting spirit was refused by the AAI HQ, as it would only brew trouble for the future: 'to recognise some patriot groups and not all as auxiliary fighting units in liberated territory would have political repercussions', as it could be seen that the British were playing favourites and lead to distrust and discontent. On the other hand, however, there was 'no objection to ex-patriots being employed under AMG in many different civil capacities'. This was not only to provide employment for the disarmed partisans but also as a token of gratitude and trust for their efforts. Thus, '[it] is to be encouraged as far as possible in recognition for their Patriot services'. The eventuality of internal conflict between partisans was also examined by the AAI HQ and their conclusion was in line with the policy later applied by the AMG:[71] infighting between Italians in

[69] TNA, WO 204/7283, AAI Adv HQ, Treatment of Patriots, 5 December 1944.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Harris, *Allied military administration,* p. 274.

Allied Administered Italy was to be 'treated as a civilian disturbance and dealt with accordingly'. The most pressing concern was, instead, that of coordination between British personnel. Treatment of partisans was indeed a 'complex problem' and, 'if avoidable mistakes' were 'to be prevented', 'close liaison' had to be 'maintained between HQ No2 District and the Regional Commissioners for North West Italy and the Patriot branch of the Allied Commission'.[72]

In the wake of these talks about the auxiliary role of partisans in military operations and their recognition, the issue of supplies for these partisans on the frontline was examined by the AAI HQ, under request from the Eighth Army. As we have already seen, partisans were largely utilised by Allied troops as *de facto* supporting units for reconnaissance and active fighting and the Eighth Army was pushing for a more organised approach to the issue and a sanction of the Italian partisans' role in the campaign. The AAI thus proposed a series of measures 'for the regularisation of partisan activity and for supplying them with necessary stores'. The upper limit for partisans to be employed was fixed at 1000, with rations, clothing and amenities (such as cigarettes) provided by the Allied Army. However, clothing was to be strictly civilian and military dress would be issued only in 'exceptional cases'. As for weaponry, the AAI HQ proposed that arms would not be provided to unarmed partisans. However, armed partisans could 'exchange their arms for better ones' taken from the Eighth Army stocks. To finally sanction the role of partisans as auxiliary troops it was also proposed for passes to be issued to them and, once again, it was stated that wounded partisans had the right to be treated in military hospitals and not 'normal civilian channels'.[73]

However, despite months of debating, the way to handle partisans when encountered remained a matter left to the sensibility of officers and AMG personnel. In December 1944, in fact, while efforts were put into explaining to the partisans the role and

[72] TNA, WO 204/7283, AAI Adv HQ, Treatment of Patriots, 5 December 1944.
[73] TNA, WO 204/7315, Appendix 'A' to M 1202/4 G, AAI Proposals for Partisans, 7 December 1944.

functions of the Allied Military Government,[74] the issue of disarming partisans was still far from settled and a uniform policy was yet to be achieved. It was again the AAI HQ which wrote to the ACC lamenting this problem. The AAI HQ produced this new document as it was 'desirable to have a uniform policy throughout the front'. The number of partisans encountered on the field, in fact, was 'increasing' and, because of this, 'the question regarding their treatment in the battle zone has been raised by Commander Eighth Army', and 'the whole matter needs review'.[75] The main problem was still constituted by the surrender of arms, which presented 'a big problem for AMG' if only for 'physical reasons' because of the time required to collect, catalogue and store all the arms. The easy solution envisioned by AAI HQ was to regularise the armed partisans already *de facto* present on the frontline and already employed by the Army Commanders in 'useful work as gaining information, leading patrols and operating in areas inaccessible to regular troops' with the designation of a 'battle zone' where the partisans were to retain their arms. They also asked for more supplies to be delivered to both armed and disarmed partisans, whether ammunition and equipment or amenities like cigarettes. Evidently, they were aware that good treatment of partisans was key to maintain high morale, which, in turn, was a key element to easily disarm satisfied partisans. Finally, they asked for the solution of the problem of wounded partisans, who 'have been evacuated through Army channels to Italian civil hospitals where the treatment is inferior to that provided in Italian Military Hospitals', causing the protests of many partisans.[76] The AAI HQ proposed the institution of a pass for 'genuine patriots' to allow them treatment in a military hospital; even 'in case of doubt'. They even considered the option of recognising the Italian partisans under the Geneva convention. This idea had already been raised during October 1944. The idea presented some complications as it was dubious whether partisan bands did satisfy the requirements to be considered as militia or

[74] Istoreto, B15e006, Radio Londra ore 9.1/2, 5 December 1944.
[75] TNA, WO204/7283, AAI to ACC Policy for Employment of Partisans, 9 December 1944.
[76] Ibid. On the topic of Hospitals, see also TNA, WO204/7283, Supply the Partisans, November 1944.

volunteer corps, as they lacked a fixed distinctive insignia, for example, and did not carry their arms openly in most cases.[77]

The Eighth Army HQ was pleased with the AAI HQ proposals of 9 December. On the 15 December, they wrote their reply. They wanted to push things even further, and they arrived at the point of suggesting that partisans, even when far behind Allied lines 'for purposes of rest and re-organisation before further employment', should have been allowed to retain their arms as in these cases disarmament was 'not feasible'.[78] As for recognition of the partisans under the Geneva Convention, they suggested that such a matter was far 'outside the scope of these Headquarters'. Moreover, the partisans appeared to be 'quite content to operate in their present status and to accept the risks of which they are fully aware'. Not only that, but the Eighth Army HQ correctly identified the problem in the adversion of the Italian partisans to being 'enrolled in an official organisation'.

The Advanced AAI HQ proposal of the 9 December and the support it gathered from the Eighth Army HQ, caused some discussion amongst the British personnel in Italy. On the 26 December, in fact, the Civil Affairs Section of the Allied Commission expressed their opinion on the proposed policy for the employment of partisans. According to them, the institution of a 'battle zone' where armed partisans were free to operate would lead to even more trouble. It was recognised that 'if patriots are to be used in operational roles a certain number' had to be maintained armed. However, 'your suggestion that a patriot battle zone should be recognized will inevitably result in difficulties in the disarming of patriots, especially those not required by the Armies in operational roles'. The risk of exposing the Allies to the accusation of wanting to demobilise some groups of partisans instead of others surely played a role in this consideration. There were already enough reasons for friction in the Italo-Allied relationship; adding another one surely did not seem appropriate. Instead of the

[77] TNA, WO 204/7309, HQ Allied Armies in Italy Partisan Forces, 9 October 1994.

[78] TNA, WO 204/7283, Main HQ Eight Army to AAI HQ Policy - Employment of Partisans, 15 December 1944.

solution proposed by Adv. AAI HQ the Allied Commission wanted to improve on the existing model. After all, the general direction was still that: 'from a political point of view and security in general […] all patriots should be disarmed as soon as possible'. This improvement was to be obtained, not only by maintaining the 'present policy of disarming all patriots' at the 'initial reception points and centres to which patriots are first directed, but also, as we will examine more in-depth later, through the creation of new 'reception centres' which were supposed to be 'mobile' and follow the Allied armies as they advanced through Italy to provide support for overrun partisans. The purpose of these centres was to 'register and screen patriots, arrange for their recruitment into the Italian Army […] and to accommodate them temporarily prior to dispersal'. In order to do so, food and clothing were to be provided by the Allied Army through the 'authorisation of a special ration and for the issue of clothing'. Finally, concerning the recognition of partisans under the Geneva Convention, the Civil Affair Section was not opposed, especially since the members of the German Volksstrum had been recently put under the Convention's tutelage. As Civil Affair Section wrote: 'if it is clear that this concession has been made for Germany, where it can only operate to the disadvantage of the Allies' then 'it should clearly be claimed for patriots in this country and should be claimed for them in whatever part of the country they are fighting'. The key element for this recognition was the presence of a 'distinctive emblem' to be worn by the partisans. However, the Civil Affair Section was confident that since the 'exact nature' of this emblem 'has never been decided' there was room to accommodate a simple mark or clothing into its definition and thus allow the partisans to easily fall under the Geneva Convention's protection.[79]

On the other hand, the Land Forces sub-commission of the Allied Commission was rather dismissive of the proposal made by the 15th army group on the 9 December. Their reply on the 27 December 1944 showed not only a fundamental

[79] TNA, WO 204/7315, Headquarters Allied Commission to Advance HQ 15 Army Group, Policy for Employment of Patriots, 26 December 1944.

incomprehension of the tactical situation on the frontline, where Allied officers had to make quick decisions in a hazy environment, but also showed an obtuse position on the matter of Italian affairs, as they were unable to comprehend the partisans' motivations, nor their hopes and ambitions. The sub-commission at first opened with the rather startling consideration that the policy adopted in July 1944 had since then, 'worked without undue friction or trouble', hence, a change would: 'throw the whole business into the melting pot once more'. What concerned the sub-commission was chiefly the creation of an ELAS-type situation with a 'semi-legal military private army, not subject to the authority of the Italian military Authorities'. 'Apart from the possibility, even probability, of the bands […] fighting each other' this would lay the seeds for 'very serious political trouble' in the future'. But mainly the issue seems to be a purely ideological one. Italian partisans were not to be recognised as legitimate peers because Italy was a defeated country. By recognising the partisans, in fact, 'we [the British] would be accepting partisans on their own terms NOT on ours - the conquerors and liberators'. To reaffirm this point it was pointed out how only 'a few hundred' partisans had enrolled into the Italian Army at that point, 'though there has been ample opportunity and facility for them to do so'. This proved the highly unpatriotic nature of the Italian partisans according to the sub-commission and was due to three factors. Firstly, 'partisans do not feel inclined to change their free and easy life for the circumscribed life of a soldier'. Secondly, many partisans simply wanted to go home. Finally, their leaders 'strongly discouraged' enlistment because they wanted to retain some form of local power, they wanted to remain 'reasonably important people', instead of being turned into 'nonentities'. Moreover, given the untrustworthiness of the partisans the creation of a 'battle zone' where they could keep their arms would create 'loopholes', opportunities for 'evasion' and general disorder to be exploited by the partisans. As for the treatment of wounded partisans in military hospitals, the sub-commission denied even that, as they affirmed that they had orders from Washington not to hospitalise anyone who 'is not a properly enlisted member of the Italian Army', nor to issue rations or clothing. The final two points made were so detached from reality that they are barely worth commenting upon.

The first concerned the risk of Fascist bands posing as 'pro-Ally' and passing behind the lines while retaining their arms to cause 'trouble' later. The second concerned the Germans: it was said that Allied support to the Resistance would justify similar support from the Germans to their own population once the Allied armies had entered Germany.[80] Beside these two last points (the latter completely unrelated to the issue that was being debated and the former already solved by the 9 December proposal with the institution of contacts with Resistance leaders in order to get rid of the infamous 'bogus partisans') this whole memorandum shows how incomprehensible the Italian Resistance as a phenomenon was for some parts of the British elite. For example, there is no effort made here to understand that it was patriotism and not the lack thereof that stopped Italians from enlisting in the Italian Army, an institution largely distrusted for its close ties with Fascism before and because of its pathetic performance after the Armistice of the 8 September 1943. Moreover, this was exactly the type of position (punitive, uncompromising) which would so badly harm the United Kingdom's reputation in Italy. Not only because of the immediate damages it caused by treating men who had fought hard for their freedom as defeated enemies, but also because it impeded the creation of more efficient and flexible criteria with which to deal with the Italian partisans, bogging down the initiatives of more sensitive and open British officers and personnel and making confusion grow even further.

The last months of war

The discussion regarding the Italian Partisans reached also the highest level of the British administration. At the end of January 1945, Oliver Harvey of the Foreign Office wrote to Macmillan, Sir Noel Charles and others, explaining the FO's fears on the situation in Italy and asking for clarification. The main fear of the FO was the 'likelihood of civil war arising' in Italy once the North had been finally liberated. Harvey recognised that their fears might have been 'exaggerated', but was still

[80] TNA, WO 204/7315, Land Forces Sub-Com AC to HQ 15 Army Group, Policy for Employment of Partisans, 27 December 1944.

willing to learn if any 'immediate steps' could be taken 'with a view to minimising the danger and helping to ensure a comparatively smooth change-over'. The letter, however, contrarily to what one could expect for an institution that has been depicted for so long as openly hostile to Italy, like the Foreign Office, is rather conciliatory and the solutions proposed are based on conciliation, rather than coercion. One possible solution to allow the partisans to 'exercise their martial ardour' was to increase the incentives to enlist in the Italian Army. Another important point was for the SACMED (Supreme Allied Command for the Mediterranean) to keep its links with the CLNAI in the form of liaison missions in Milan. Harvey even speculated on a CLNAI liaison mission to be attached to SACMED for guidance. On the topic of links, Harvey wanted also to know how well the CLNAI in Milan and the Italian Government in Rome were connected. He seemed to be especially concerned with the issue of the North getting its fair share of representation in the Rome cabinet, assuring in this way that the CLNAI felt that its interests were being kept in consideration in the South. The issue of the legitimacy of the Rome Government seemed to be especially crucial to Harvey, who saw in the collaboration between Rome and Milan the key to avoid needless struggles after the end of the Italian campaign. To make the transition even smoother Harvey was open to an agreement between the CLNAI, Rome and SACMED, modelled on the one reached with de Gaulle in France, for the designation of 'suitable personalities for the higher posts' in the Italian Civil Administration so that these men 'having been selected and approved, might either be infiltrated in advance or in any case ready to put in as soon as the areas are liberated'.[81]

The replies to Harvey's letter were all reassuring on the Italian situation. In Rome, the British Embassy, in the person of R.L. Nosworthy, and the Resident Minister, Sir Robert Charles, agreed on the fact that the situation was constantly improving and that few risks were expected in the immediate future. The 'political links' between Rome and Milan were believed to be good, and a CLNAI representative was already

[81] TNA, WO 106/3964, Letter from Oliver Harvey to Harold Macmillan, 27 January 1945.

in Rome to keep the contacts going. Moreover, the interests of the North were taken into consideration by the Rome cabinet, as 'a majority of the present Cabinet Ministers are northerners'. Not only that, but Nosworthy was eager to announce to Harvey that the Rome Government had been recognised as legitimate by the CLNAI and that the Italians were already working on a list of names for 'higher administrative posts in Northern Italy to be appointed immediately on liberation'. Nosworthy and Charles were also of the opinion that the current Cabinet was working much more efficiently than the previous one led by Marshal Badoglio. As far as the Communists were concerned, it was said that Togliatti was not optimistic on the issue of disarmament. According to the PCI leader, the Communist bands would not accept an order of disarmament, not even if it came from Togliatti himself. However, Nosworthy warned Harvey against taking Togliatti's words at face value, because 'Togliatti may have been establishing an alibi' for himself and his party, as, for sure, he was 'the king-pin in Italy'.[82] Nosworthy, in particular, explained in great detail the situation in a letter to Harvey where he dispelled all the preoccupations that the Foreign Office advanced in its letter of 27 January 1945. Nosworthy was happy to report the great degree of collaboration between the Ministers of the Italian Cabinet, even when they had 'locked horns' in the past with each other on the matter of politics.[83] Again, he reaffirmed that the CLNAI recognised the Cabinet in Rome as legitimate and in turn, the Government strongly supported the CLNAI existence and their actions. The only weak point was the absence of the Socialists from the Rome Government. This was due to the internal struggle inside the party between Nenni and Saragat. However, Nosworthy pointed out also how the Socialists were essentially loyal to Rome and they had made joint statements with the Communists, who were part of the Rome Government, before. On the topic of liaison Nosworthy pointed out how SACMED already had an SF mission in Milan, in contact with CLNAI; and he declared himself favourable to a CLNAI mission to be attached to SACMED. As for the Communists, Togliatti was the undisputed leader, the 'man we [the British] have to watch', the

[82] TNA, WO 106/3964, Letter from Rome to Foreign Office, 15 February 1945.
[83] TNA, WO 106/3964, Letter from R.L. Nosworthy to Oliver Harvey, 15 February 1945.

leader who 'will have more to say when the time comes than anyone else in Italy'. However, Nosworthy was sure of Togliatti's loyalty and did not foresee any trouble arising from the PCI. The problems Nosworthy foresaw were tied to the presence of a large number of Fascists 'still at large' after the end of the German occupation of Northern Italy. He explained how Togliatti declared to him that genuine partisans would not surrender their arms or join the regular Italian Army without a large epuration of the Italian society from Fascists. And indeed Nosworthy was far more preoccupied with the eventuality of a Fascist guerrilla strike at the Allied forces than by the menace of a Communist insurrection. Fascists, in fact, 'knowing that they have no future with their own people, that in effect their lives are forfeit' were likely to launch 'a particularly nasty sort of war', like animals with no way to run. Nosworthy also touched on the economic situation in Northern Italy, which was expected to be 'little short of chaotic'. Moreover, the German plans to destroy major factories and transport lines during their withdrawal could have delivered another blow to the North's economy. For this reason, Nosworthy considered it of supreme importance for the AMG to restore plants, factories and other structures in the North, as 'providing work in such conditions is even more important than providing food' and could have surely prevented civilian unrest.[84]

Meanwhile, further actions were envisioned in order to help the process of disarmament and peaceful rehabilitation of the Italian partisans. Even if the problem was still far from having a satisfactory solution, at last, the plans devised to solve it saw an increase in internal coherence. Already at the beginning of February 1945, the 15 Army Group was instructed to avoid 'indiscriminate expansion of patriot forces' and to concentrate their efforts in supplying the partisans with 'non-warlike stores'.[85] Anti-scorch operations became a priority to preserve the Northern industries and energy production, in order to avoid massive unemployment after the German

[84] Ibid.

[85] TNA, WO 106/3964, Interim report on measures to deal with patriot problems in Northern Italy, 18 February 1945.

withdrawal. The AFHQ envisioned also 'a special procedure, additional to the processes of establishing Allied Military Government' to deal with the Italian partisans. Firstly, they wanted to create 'regional and provincial patriot teams, each consisting of one AMG 'patriot' officer and one Italian military officer'. These two officers were to be joined by 'a local CLN representative', with the duty to 'contact local patriots' leaders'. This would lead to 'the establishment of patriot committees to help AMG officials to discriminate between genuine and bogus patriots' and quickly dispatch the genuine ones to 'patriot reception centres' where they could be directed to recruitment in the Italian Army or to suitable civil employment. Moreover, the idea of lists of suitable names for the highest administrative charges in liberated Italy was endorsed enthusiastically. As we can see, the structure envisioned was very similar to the projects of committees already discussed by the British commands in the summer of 1944 and, once more, was centred on the collaboration with local partisans and the CLN to attain disarmament and rehabilitation, rather than the use of the overwhelming Allied military power to bring the North of Italy under control. Finally, on the topic of violence, the idea that Fascist guerrilla could be a threat was discarded. The real danger came from 'strife among patriots of diverse political opinions'. However, there was no need for preoccupation as, according to AFHQ, 'the measures already taken, […] should deal with this contingency'.[86] However, the generous attitude of the 15th Army Group led to a grand total of 951 tons of supplies being airdropped behind enemy lines. A figure that was deemed excessive by the AFHQ, which tried to curtail it, causing the reaction of Col. Riepe and starting a disagreement that would last until the end of the war.[87]

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[86] The general conclusions reached in response to the FO's questioning was strongly favourable to a soft approach towards the partisans. Not only the FO was notified that all the actors involved in the Italian theatre were 'fully aware to the dangers of trouble in the North', but it was also pointed out that the preparations which were being made appeared 'to be the most adequate possible in the circumstances'. See: TNA, WO 106/3965A, Notes on the Committee of National Liberation in Northern Italy, and the situation likely to obtain after the withdrawal of the Germans from these areas, April 1945. And this plan seems to have seen some form of implementation, see: Istoreto, B15b061, Comando militare regionale piemontese; which reports the same structure in Italian.

[87] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 215.

Despite the protests of some parts British personnel, the line adopted by the commands was still a soft one. The FO was deemed scaremongers, they were 'taking counsel of their fear'.[88] As was noted by Col. Roseberry, the SOE was convinced that the risk of a Communist insurrection in Italy was minimal, that the CLNAI was perfectly trustworthy, especially after the treaty signed with SACMED, and that the FO was being unnecessarily alarmist on the issue.[89] The 'detailed pans' made by the AFHQ quoted in the document of the 15 February 1945, seems to endorse totally the appeasing line of the 15 Army Group Commands. Partisans were recognised to have given 'assistance of great value to operations' in the Italian front; the necessity was also recognised for these forces to be 'properly catered for when they are no longer operationally required' with supplies of food and clothes to be provided by the Allied Command. This was part of an effort to produce 'inducements' for the partisans to peacefully surrender their arms and to 'return to their peacetime ways of life' with the least struggle possible.[90] The idea of taking any means necessary to minimise the problems during the occupation of the North of Italy was largely shared. The Chief of Staff expressed the position that 'anything' that could be done to reduce the risk of troubles arising had their 'strong support'. Clothing and feeding the partisans appropriately was pointed as a desirable objective to induce 'the Partisans to return peaceably to civil life', even if the provision of battle dress was excluded.[91]

It was the 15th Army Group in February 1945 that provided yet another memorandum on the Italian situation and its possible developments. They had to admit that the situation was still uncertain and that no attempt could be made at the

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[88] TNA, WO 106/3964, Policy towards Committee on National Liberation in Northern Italy, 11 January 1945.

[89] TNA, WO 106/3954, Note on Discussion of C.L.N.A.I. with Lieut-Colonel Roseberry, 12 January 1945.

[90] TNA, WO 106/3956, Telegram from AFHQ, Food and clothing for partisans in North Italy, 15 February 1945.

[91] TNA, WO 106/3964, Draft telegram from AMSSO to JSM Washington, February 1945.

time 'to estimate the numbers of Partisans who will be encountered […] during the various stages of an enemy withdrawal'. This was due to the fact that the strength of the partisan formations had been reduced 'following the impact of severe weather, poor living and food conditions, strenuous enemy operations […] and Allied directives to reorganise on a winter economy basis'. However, 'this tendency to reduction will be reversed in the Spring' because of the better weather and because there was 'no doubt that the Partisans will receive a sudden influx of recruits' from various sources, 'as soon as the danger inherent in such a status has disappeared'. The main risk in the eventuality of a German withdrawal lay in the poor organisation of the partisans' chain of command. Even if the 'internal organisation of the Partisan Movement' was 'impressive on paper' it had already proved to be not very 'effective in practice'. This was due to two main factors: firstly the fact that the political unity of the CLNAI was tenuous and 'inter-party bickering' was well present, secondly, because the CLNAI lacked the physical means of control over many bands and territories, and thus its authority was often nominal. In the most remote regions of the Alps the CLNAI was contenting itself with 'broad general directives and tours of inspection' without being able to exert any real power on the partisans in these areas. Nevertheless, the 15th Army Group was satisfied to assess that while 'zone Commands vary tremendously in effectiveness', 'a number has succeeded in establishing real control over their territory'. In order to foster the CLNAI's authority, 'various steps' had been taken, from the recognition of the Allied Commands to the supply of money and materials to strengthen the CLNAI's position. Moreover, during the transitional period, the Allies could rely on their own liaison missions to keep an eye on the situation. All Allied missions were assigned 'certain standard tasks to perform immediately after the evacuation. They will attempt, for instance, to preserve order, transmit information and orders between the Allied Command and the local authorities and safeguard intelligence matter'. However, it was also pointed out how, in the case of North Italy, 'where complex problems will arise and the period before the arrival of Allied troops may be considerable', 'normal type of operating personnel could not be expected to handle the situation'. Because of this, a plan was required to

infiltrate a number of 'special missions led by experienced and capable officers who should be carefully briefed by the Allied Commission in the attitude they should adopt when faced with the various problems likely to arise'. The plan had to be centred around the No.1 SF, the AC and the PWB, as the OSS refused to take part in it. All things considered, however, the main resource to administer the newly occupied territories until the AMG's arrival were still the Italian partisans, whose good faith was not in doubt: 'the Partisans, with all their shortcomings, are at least sternly Anti-Fascist, and can be relied upon to attack all Fascists […] who attempt to resist after the Germans have left'. As for Fascist resistance, it was not considered a serious menace, except for some isolated and particularly desperate cases. Republican troops, in fact, were 'at least as likely to reinforce the Partisans as to oppose them', however, since 'the Fascists proper can expect little mercy' they would 'undoubtedly attempt to hold out until Allied troops arrive to "rescue" them'. After this first phase of immediate occupation 'the Partisans will set up provisional local governments, their enthusiasm kept in bounds, it is hoped, by the Allied Missions until AMG can take over'. The only possible actors to assume the leadership in this delicate moment were the local CLNs, and the 15th Army Groups was well aware of this. They were 'the only bodies which can possibly be considered representative of all factions of the resistance movement' and therefore should be 'looked to for the preservation of order in the interim period and be given all possible Allied support'. Lastly, the memorandum took into consideration the possibility of 'inter-factional strife breaking out in North ITALY'. The Communists were pointed out as the only group with the strength and organisation to attempt a coup; however, there were also a number of differences in Italy compared to the situation in Greece. First of all, the balance of power between the six major Italian parties was 'more equal' with each party at the head of a small or large number of armed bands, secondly, the strong Allied military presence in Italy would be a deterrent to any group who wanted to cause trouble, thirdly, the Communist were already present in liberated Italy and were also a respected and influential part of the Government, fourthly, the prestige and authority of the CLNAI (of which the Communists were also part) would ensure a smooth

transition to civil administration, finally, the lack of heavy arms would cause 'any revolutionary in embryo to pause before he precipitates open conflict with Allied troops'.[92]

The issue of the partisans became more and more pressing as the British were aware that the Italian campaign was approaching its close. In Tuscany, the situation was finally getting better, according to the PWB, however, as the frontline reached La Spezia in Liguria, disarmament was conducted with rushed methods. On making contact with Allied patrols the partisans were immediately disarmed and housed in 'a large room without furniture, heating or camp-beds. Some straw is provided on the stone floor'. After a day they were transported to Viareggio together with the refugees and the POW. There, they were divided between those who possessed useful information and those who did not. The former were housed in small rooms, without lighting or heating waiting for interrogation. The latter were sent to a refugee centre, where, at least, they received slightly better treatment than the refugees. Then, they were finally moved after a period that could vary from one to fourteen days to a Patriot Transit Camp in Pescia. Italian sources also lamented to the PWB the widespread thievery that Allied troops perpetrated on the partisans during this process. As the PWB noted, this was a very 'dismal way' of spending 'one's first days in liberated Italy'. The PWB reported how a number of Allied officers requested 'some sort of consideration' to be put into partisan disarmament, as they had fought the Germans for months in a state of great privation. The fact that they were transported together with German and Fascist POWs, in particular, appeared nonsense, as the partisans had matured a cold hatred for them and strongly resented being lumped together with their enemies. Moreover, German propaganda was exploiting the situation to a great degree, undermining the morale of the partisans behind enemy lines. Lack of resources, organization and even basic sympathy, thus, were still dragging down the Allied name in Italy. It seemed like every time an area's problems

[92] TNA, WO 204/7301, Special Operations under Rankin conditions in NW Italy, an estimate by C-3 Special operations, 15 Army Group, February 1945.

were solved, the advancement of the front created a new problematic situation somewhere else.

The 15th Army Group HQ held a meeting on the 9 Feb 1945 on the topic of disarming partisans and avoiding the growth of dissent following such disarmament. 'The first and chief problem' that needed to be solved was 'to determine whether, when, and how the Partisans should be required to hand in their arms, amn [ammunitions] and explosives after the arrival of the Allies'. The possession of arms by a large number of partisans, in fact, was considered to represent not only, 'a danger to Allied security', but could also foster 'armed clashes and disturbances between Italian elements politically opposed to one another' However, despite this, it was also stated that it would be 'tactless to include the immediate disarming of the Partisans among the very first acts of the Allied forces or AMG officials on their arrival in any given area' as 'such action would probably cause resentment and provoke unfavourable reactions'. On the other hand, it was 'equally undesirable to allow a long interval to elapse before they are disarmed', because the partisans often had 'high and usually unreasonable hopes' which could 'never be satisfied by the Allies, and thus their initial welcome' was 'liable to develop, through disillusionment, into apathy and then bitterness'.

The ideal timeframe, thus, was within 'approx one week' after the arrival of Allied troops. However, the disarmament itself had to be organised with great attention and tact. It was thought that disarmament could 'be best achieved by adopting a procedure which is based as far as circumstances permit on organised military lines, and by "sugaring the pill" with some compensation or counter-attraction'. These 'sugarings' should take the form of 'ceremonial stand-down parades. Such parades should be organised by AMG in all areas or centres where Partisan bands and units formerly operated'. The Allied Officers were recommended to contact the 'local Partisan leaders' to find a suitable time and place for the parade to be held, possibly coordinating their action with provincial CLNs through a whole province. Only after the parade and the recognition of the partisans' merits were arms to be collected. The 15 Army Group HQ, however, did not think this was a solution to all problems. As

they stated, there was always the chance that a small or large group of partisans would refuse to surrender their arms for whatever reason. Nevertheless, they felt confident that the solution proposed in this memorandum was the best possible practical approach to the issue. They were fully aware that 'the only real and fundamental method of countering the potential dangers inherent in the partisan situation' once the Allies reached the North would be to ensure that 'their treatment of the Partisans and of the Fascists, their handling of the food, housing and labour problems, and their efforts towards the general reconstruction of ITALY, were all such as to satisfy the hopes, expectations and impatience of the Partisans'. However, this was but a pipe dream, 'an ideal which we cannot hope to attain, and it would, therefore, be useless to rely on this solution to the problem'. Nevertheless, an attempt in this direction should be made, as it was 'evident that the degree of speed and thoroughness with which the Allied authorities tackle the problem of relief, reconstruction and epuration, will directly influence, for better or for worse, the likelihood of trouble arising out of this Partisan problem'.[93]

In this context, anti-scorch operations acquired a key role in preventing disorders and speeding up the return of Italy to a normal state. The widespread destruction of factories and power plants by the Germans, in fact, would have produced a situation of chaos, unemployment and misery where unrest, and possibly Communism, would have grown.[94] This problem was made more pressing by the experience the Allied had encountered in Southern and Central Italy, where the slow Allied advance allowed the Germans to cause havoc[95] and, in turn, made the Allied work in managing the liberated territory harder. To avoid inflaming the situation, the 15th Army Group also recommended that, with regards to cases of murder or beatings by the partisans in the interim period between the end of hostilities and the arrival of the Allies, no action was to be taken by the Allied authorities. Arrests were to be examined 'as

[93] TNA, WO 204/7301, Memorandum for AC of S. G-3, HQ 15t Army Group, February 1945.
[94] Peli, *Storia,* pp. 154..
[95] Ibid., p. 155.

quickly as possible', bearing in mind that 'border-line cases should be disposed by internment rather than by release'.[96]

SACMED also agreed on a softer line to be taken regarding the rehabilitation of partisans to civilian life. As stated in February 1945, they proposed a policy based 'on recognising assistance that [they] have rendered [to the] Allied cause' and the necessity of finding them a suitable place in civilian society. First of all, partisans were not to be treated as any of the 'existing categories of Italians unless and until they are absorbed in any such categories'. Secondly, they were to be assembled in specific areas, where they were supposed to be disarmed and be given assistance. Food and clothing were to be provided by the local Allied HQs , while the pay was to be provided by the Italian Government after a specific agreement with the Allied Commission. Finally, once more, it was reaffirmed how partisans had the right to be treated in military hospitals, with the Allies providing support for this to happen.[97]
The WO was also supportive of SACMED's recommendations concerning the disarmament of partisans 'on political grounds', in the interest of facilitating 'the absorption of the partisans into useful and honourable occupations'. Just like the FO, the WO was interested in minimising the risks during the transition period from German to Allied occupation. However, they opposed the issue of battle dress to the partisans, stating that it was not the best way to make the partisan return to their peaceful life, instead: 'civilian clothing would appear to be more suitable'.[98]

At the end of February 1945, the situation remained somewhat fluid. The War Office tried to summarise the main points about the treatment of partisans concerning food and clothing. They mainly drew their position on Field Marshal Alexander's actions undertaken in the past weeks. As they stated: 'I suggest that the proposal to issue

[96] TNA, WO 204/7301, Memorandum for AC of S. G-3, HQ 15t Army Group, February 1945.
[97] TNA, WO 204/7310, US cipher message from AFHQ signed SACMED to 15 Army Group, February 1945.
[98] TNA, WO 106/3964, Food and clothing for the partisans in Northern Italy, Note by the War Office, covering draft reply to NAF 864, 20 February 1945.

civilian clothing to the Partisans when once they are liberated, is likely to be more effective an inducement to return home quietly than the issue of battle dress'.[99]

The news from behind enemy lines seemed to strengthen the position of the more appeasing components of British personnel. On the 20 February 1945 a report from the Mount Angola (Liguria) area made by a British officer described the local CLN as 'serious people anxious to do their best' and that the CLN 'wished [to] send assurance to [the] Allied Command [that] they will do their utmost to give any help they could'. The CLN was a 'genuine organ of all aspects Anti-Fascist opinion' and thus fears did 'not appear justified'. Whilst the Communists were 'by far' the most efficient organisation among the partisans, nevertheless 'no evidence' could be found that 'they contemplate undemocratic action'. Moreover, there was 'no evidence [of] political friction obstructing work of CLN' either, even if, a 'great problem, was of course used by the 'prolonged nervous strain of clandestine work'. As for anti-scorch operations, things looked good and units were being formed and trained.

The only issue still open concerned the purge of Fascists after the liberation. The report states that: 'only measures taken in [the] first few days could allay [the] profound exasperation of [the] population'. In Liguria, in fact, 'Fascist provocation' had been grave and any perceived attempt to limit trials against Fascists would gravely damage the 'whole authority of CLN',[100] especially since news coming from liberated Italy told of a 'slow and ineffective' purges.

However, the agents on the field who had first-hand experience in dealing with the partisans were also able to point out a fatal flaw of these proposals: they were too generic to tackle properly the complex situation in Northern Italy. As Ldr. Brock, one of the officers of the No.1 SF wrote to Colonel Riepe at the end of February, while the proposals made represented 'a very realistic approach to the problems involved', they nevertheless had a tendency to 'underestimate the fact that these problems will vary from province to province and from formation to formation'. In fact, 'the motives

[99] TNA, WO 106/3964, Note on draft War Office paper on NAF 864, Food and clothing for the partisans in Northern Italy, February 1945.

[100] TNA, WO 204/7298, Copy of signal No.78 from M.12, 20 February 1945.

which inspire a partisan are many' and varied from idealistic reasons to more mundane ones. For one partisan, it could be 'love of country', for another its 'hatred of the Germans' or its 'political beliefs'.[101] Others were moved by much more 'simple' reasons such as 'the desire to escape the call up into the Republican Army or for forced labour', and, finally, there were even cases of partisans who chose to join a band attracted by the 'possibility of banditry and lawlessness that the partisan life offers'. All these factors influenced 'to a lesser or greater extent' each partisan band, with the band's leader in the position of greatly influencing the behaviour and beliefs of the whole band.

As for anti-Allied sentiments, there were 'a number of factors which tend to encourage anti-allied tendencies among certain elements of the partisans'. For example, there was the rumour that the Allies were 'using them [the partisans] purely to further their own military ends and are not concerned with their ultimate fate or wellbeing'. An important factor in creating and strengthening this belief was the 'adverse reports' a band might have received about conditions in liberated Italy, both from a political and an economic point of view. For example, partisans could believe that the Allies were 'supporting reactionary tendencies and are not pressing forward with epuration'. Or that the Allies were mistreating the partisans overrun by the Allied Army advance. As Ldr. Brock stated 'all these factors have been played up by the enemy propaganda' and were able to make a dent into the minds of the 'less thoughtful elements'. As a result of this combination of factors, the Allies were to expect 'certain individuals or bands to evade disarmament and dispersion' for a number of reasons. Firstly, 'to impose a political regime by force of arms' and conversely to 'counter-act any attempt to impose such a regime', secondly, to 'ensure that the Fascists are more vigorously eliminated', thirdly, to 'more effectively impose their will on the Allies' and 'express forcibly their dislike of certain Allied measures'. Finally, in some cases, 'to continue now or at some future date a life of banditry'. The obvious problem was that naturally, the partisans knew that the Allies intended to

[101] TNA, WO 204/7301, Partisan problems in North West Italy, from S/Ldr. Brock to Colonel Riepe, 22 February 1945.

disarm and disband them and 'to enforce this'. It was therefore considered 'probable' by Ldr. Brock that 'certain elements' would try to 'hide their arms and disperse their bands' before the Allies' arrival. To avoid possible complications and properly disarm and rehabilitate the Italian partisans a series of measures were to be taken by the Commands, without overlooking the aforementioned 'complex and often conflicting' motivations.

Firstly, as already proposed numerous times 'to have, before liberation, accurate and detailed intelligence for each area' on the partisans, their armaments and their 'feelings and intentions'. Secondly, to strive to convince the partisans 'by all means possible' that it was 'to the best interest of themselves, their political beliefs, their country and the Allied cause for them to disperse quietly and hand in their arms'. Thirdly, to 'break down any distrust of the Allies' and convince the partisans that 'their reasonable requirements will be fulfilled'. And finally, if everything were to fail: 'to plan beforehand the necessary measures to deal with those elements which do not carry out the Allied directives'. Ldr. Brock admitted that 'most of the measures to achieve the above' were already 'adequately dealt with' in the memoranda produced during the previous months.

However, he also recommended a number of 'additional measures'. Firstly, to use to a greater extent the influence and position of the liaison officers who were in contact with the local partisans. The liaison officers, in fact, due to their close contact with the partisans, were the 'persons best able to know the strength, armament and intentions of the bands, and by means of theirs personal prestige, to influence them along the right lines'. Thanks to the fact that in most cases they had won 'the trust and respect' of the partisans by fighting with them against the Nazi-Fascists, they were 'likely to be looked to for advice and guidance in dealing with the Allied military authorities'. This would have also allowed for a greater degree of flexibility in dealing with the various and different bands scattered around the North, as the liaison officers would have known 'best how to sugar the pill of disarmament and dispersion, which will differ from area to area and according to the political colour of the band'.

The liaison officers, thus, were to be invested with a number of tasks to perform both before and after the liberation. Before the liberation, each liaison officer was to be consulted concerning the partisans in his area and how to best deal with them, in order to produce a 'firm' plan to be applied during the Allies' advance and 'obviate a considerable amount of needless or misplaced effort'. The liaison officer was supposed to produce estimates of the number of partisans present, the location of the most troublesome ones and their needs in regards to clothing, food, and accommodation. Finally, the liaison officers were to prepare a 'black and white' list of personalities to simplify AMG's task of organising local governments. Moreover, after the liberation, the liaison officer should remain with the local partisans, 'to act as Liaison Officer with the local Allied Commanders and AMG'. In fact, thanks to 'his acquaintance with the methods and temper of both partisans and Allied soldiers, he will be able to interpret in a tactful manner to the partisans the wishes of the local military commander, and in turn, to warn the Allied Commanders the it would be advisable to adapt a measure to make it more palatable to the partisans'. This was essential to avoid 'a number of problems' resulting from 'lack of experience with partisans and local knowledge on the part of Allied Commanders'. It is worth noting how this policing to be undertaken by liaison officers was not intrinsically coercive towards the Italian partisans (Ldr. Brock mentions the possibility of coercive measures, but they are an *extrema ratio*) rather, the figure of the liaison officer was to be used as a mediator between the necessities and objectives of the partisans and of the Allies in order to solve problems through negotiation and persuasion. Moreover, the use of the liaison officers, who were already present in the field, would at least alleviate the issue of lack of personnel to manage the partisans. A second recommendation made by Ldr. Brock was to take great care in handling the partisans' leaders. According to him, since partisans were 'to a large extent influenced by their leaders' it was 'therefore important that these leaders' were to be treated with 'every attention and where possible accorded the respect due to an Officer'. The main way to do so was to consult them, or pretend to consult them at the very least, 'on the solution of any problem which arises in administering the Allied directives'. Finally,

Ldr. Brock's last recommendation was to exploit the authority and prestige of the Rome Government. The Rome Government, according to Ldr. Brock, enjoyed a large consensus in the North and should be persuaded to align itself to the Allied policy concerning disarmament and dispersion. Ldr. Brock also suggested that the single parties should also be invited to produce similar declarations concerning disarmament, in order to convince even the more quarrelsome partisans, as sometimes the partisans formations 'will feel that their allegiance is more to a political party than to the government'.[102]

Moreover, many of these plans accurately laid down by the British commands had to clash against the harsh reality and were only partially, if at all, implemented. The main problem was the plain scarcity of resources available to the partisans after liberation. A minute dated 24 February 1945 bluntly stated that, for example, clothing the overrun partisans was impossible. For every piece of clothing destined to the partisans, it would have meant that 'an equivalent number of Italian civilians will have to go without, since there is already insufficient clothing to meet SACMED's estimated minimum requirements due to non-availability [to?] a global shortage'. The only solution was either to decrease the quota destined to civilians or to increase the quota destined to Italy altogether.[103] The Americans too were concerned with the scarcity of clothing for the Italian partisans. To partially solve the problem Washington gave its assent to the distribution of military clothing 'from excess Theatre Stocks' and of 'Captured clothing', since 'additional military clothing cannot be provided from U.Kingdom or U.S.A'.[104]

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[102] TNA, WO 204/7301, Partisan problems in North West Italy, from S/Ldr. Brock to Colonel Riepe, 22 February 1945.

[103] TNA, WO 106/3964, Minute, 24 February 1945.

[104] TNA, WO 106/3964, Telegram from B.A.S. Washington to War Office, Draft telegram to SACMED, 7 March 1945.

The Americans were also concerned about the recognition of the Italian partisans under the Geneva Convention[105] as they feared this would lead to a sense of legitimation amongst the partisans which, in turn, would produce even more unrealistic demands and expectations from them. However, not only was the method devised by the 15 Army group (a system of shoulder patches) not judged 'a fixed distinctive sign within the meaning of article one of the Hague regulations respecting the laws and customs of war', but the psychological effect on the partisans could have been catastrophic as well. The partisans, in fact, would have interpreted their recognition under the Geneva Convention as 'a final indication' that the Allies intended 'to give them all the benefits of military forces such as hospitalization, rations and clothing', the Americans argued. This would have been a problem, because 'if such benefits are not forthcoming' then 'great difficulty' might have been 'experienced in dispersal of patriots'. Therefore, the recommendation was to avoid any steps to 'issue a statement or to send designations to patriots'.[106]

Already in February 1945, the first 'first contacts' between partisans and units of the regular army showed once more how a conciliatory approach was to bear fruit, particularly in regards to partisans who entered in contact with units of the Italian Real Army deployed in their area. As was reported by the Italian Chief of General Staff at the end of February when units were friendly to the partisans this led to a smooth transition and disarmament. Therefore, it was requested that 'intensive propaganda' was to be carried on amongst units to 'illustrate and increase awareness of the activity, the sacrifices and the dangers which the patriots have voluntarily faced and are still facing for the freedom of Italy', especially in those units who were 'subjected to Nazi-Fascist domination, and who, consequently, may not appreciate the difficulties of the fight undertaken by the patriots'. The objective was to 'arouse

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[105] The discussion around this issue, in fact, had continued for the previous months, see for example: TNA, WO 204/7310, Br. Cipher message from freedom signed SACMED cite FHGCT to Action 15 Army Group info, 17 March 1945.

[106] TNA, WO 204/7310, US. cipher message from ALCOM HQ cite ACCAS to AFHQ cite FHGEG info HQ 15 Army, 23 March 1945.

and develop a spirit of sympathy and comradeship' between soldiers and patriots as they both constituted 'the untied and living forces, fighting for the freedom of the country' to foster collaboration on the field and peaceful disarmament.[107]

Liberation

By the beginning of Spring 1945, the liberation of Italy was steadily approaching, and time started to run short for the Commands to implement their projects for a smooth takeover of the North of Italy. Plagued by a constant shortage of men and resources the Commands had to do their best with the very little they had at their disposals.[108] At the end of March 1945, the 15 Army Group HQ dispatched orders for the liaison officers behind enemy lines to organise the last weeks of the war in the Italian theatre. A series of tasks were given to agents on the dawn of liberation, clearly following some of the advice made by Ldr. Brock a month before. Firstly, liaison officers were to 'contact Patriot Leaders and advise them to report to the nearest Military Unit Commander of Military Government Officer upon arrival of the Allies in the area', they were also to 'instruct Patriot Leaders to prepare or have ready documents listing their followers (to facilitate awards)'. Of paramount importance was to 'obtain all possible information which will assist in determining the best method of disarming different Patriot groups' to be prepared and flexible for any possible situation. To attain this goal, 'an appreciation of the character and likely reactions of the different leaders will be invaluable'. Together with the Partisan leaders the liaison officers were also supposed to catalogue 'Patriot arsenals', 'ascertain numbers and locations of wounded Patriots who will require military hospitalisation' and 'predetermine […] buildings' that would be 'suitable for Centres' to administer the now-disbanded patriots as well as to find resources to keep these centres running. On the topic of

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[107] TNA, WO 204/7310, Translation of a letter from the Royal Army General Staff (Operation Branch) to various addressees, 22 February 1945. On the same topic see also another letter from the War Ministry Cabinet signed by Casati: TNA, WO 204/7310, Relations of Italian Armed Forces towards Patriots, 29 January 1945.

[108] However, this did not mean that they stopped dreaming big. A SOE officer envisioned a period of three months during with the partisans were supposed to be looked after by the Allied Command. Such commitment was of course impossible. See: CASREC, FO 898/173 99523, Copy of a letter on the Lombardy CLN from the Lombardy Liaison Officer to his sub-mission, 16 April 1945.

disarmament, the advice of partisan leaders was not requested as 'direct discussion of the subject with Patriot Leaders is to be avoided'. Of course, the 15 Army Group HQ was well aware that 'complete success will not result'. However, even partial success in performing the aforementioned tasks would have been 'of value in dealing with Patriot problems after the Allies arrived within any given area'.[109] A new and even more ambitious plan was drafted at the beginning of April 1945, at the dawn of liberation. The 15th Army Group reminded its officers that the partisans had gained their full respect and appreciation and, as such, had to be handled with tact. Whenever possible, disarmaments were to be conducted through partisan commanders and with a great deal of ceremony. Parades and the subsequent stand-down of partisans were not supposed to be presented as Allied orders to the partisans but as an expression of the partisans' own wishes. They were supposed to be as ceremonious as possible, with a salute from the local Allied Commanding Officer and, of course, 'flags, band and speakers'. The stand-down moment was also the perfect opportunity to distribute certificates of merit to the partisans to maximise the impact on morale. Once again, Allied officers were to ignore cases of murder, dismissal or beating made by the partisans before the Allies' arrival.[110]

These directives were implemented during April 1945, when the last Allied offensive in Italy took place coordinated with the general uprising of the Italian partisans proclaimed by the CLNAI on the 25 April. In a few days, all the major cities and centres in Northern Italy were liberated by Allied troops or insurgent partisans (Bologna on the 21 April, Genoa on the 23 April, Milan and Venice on the 28 April) putting an end to the war in Italy and to the Nazi-Fascist occupation of the North. The last pockets of Fascist resistance were rapidly overwhelmed and the local CLN proved to be perfectly able to maintain order in their areas (with the sole exception of the troublesome provinces on the border between Italy and Yugoslavia) until the

[109] TNA, WO 204/7301, Tasks for 'Agents' in connection with Patriot Activities in Northern Italy, 27 March 1945.

[110] CASREC, WO 204/7891 98799, Appendix 1 to 15 Army Group Operations Instructions No.5 Treatment of Partisans in Northern Italy, 12 April 1945.

arrival of the Allied troops who often had only to formally occupy towns already liberated by the partisans.

The commands were overjoyed by how well the Spring offensive went and how their predictions were confirmed by facts. The partisans proved to be a force largely loyal to the Rome Government and the CLNAI, there was no revolutionary strife and even personal vendettas and summary trials dwindled and ceased soon after the arrival of the Allied troops. Charles Delzell is particularly positive on point, claiming that:

> Mob "justice" is reprehensible under any circumstances. No doubt northern Italy was lucky to experience as little of it as it did, when one considers the stratification and tensions of Italian society and the great emotional release of insurrection, which spurred many to pay off their grudges freely.[111]

This was also due to the work of partisan commands who understood that an outbreak of general violence would be negative and took steps to prevent it, although the fluid nature of the resistance made it impossible to stop completely.[112]

Sir Noel Charles enthusiastically wrote to the Foreign Office that 'Field-Marshal Alexander's brilliant advance in Northern Italy has liberated an eager, self-respecting and docile population'. The Allies were positively impressed by the state of affairs in the North. Far from causing problems the Italian partisans were actively collaborating with the Allied troops 'in a body under direction of the Committee of national Liberation, who are handing over administration to Allied Military Government without demur'. The partisans had 'calmly accepted authority of the central Rome Government'. As for the Rome Government, it was 'showing sensible spirit of co-operation towards local leaders appointed by CLN' after 'a certain amount of pressure from Allied Commission'. Once again, it was the Southern Government and

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[111] Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies*, p. 544.

[112] Massimo Storchi, 'Post-war violence in Italy: a struggle for memory', *Modern Italy*, 2 (2007), 237-250 (p.239).

not the partisans in the North pressured by the British. As for disarmament, it was proceeding smoothly, following the directives which suggested some sort of ceremony to take place before the actual disarmament to honour the partisans. In Bologna, for example, 4000 partisans 'held a ceremonial parade in the presence of General Mark Clark and afterwards handed over their arms' without complaint.[113]

In Turin (which was liberated on the 27 April 1945) as well, the situation was calm, even if somewhat more complicated. According to Major F.J. Robertson, while the local partisans were well organised and capable, the political situation was more flammable due to the scarce prestige that the Rome Government enjoyed in the city and some fears about the AMG administrations, fuelled by Fascist propaganda. Major Robertson stated that the situation was promising, as 'any military operation against the city of Turin could count on the co-operation of well-organised and disciplined bands of partisans in the country around the city, and of local patriots organised by the CLN, which has laid plans, not only to help in driving out the Germans and mopping up the Fascists, but also to maintain order in the period between the enemy withdrawal and the arrival of Allied forces'. Fascists were organising 'small armed bands of fanatics and released criminals to carry on guerrilla activity' after the city's liberation, however, this was not regarded as a possible danger, as these bands would be mopped-up in a relative short time. The problem, if anything, was on a political level. In fact, 'the prestige of the present Italian Government' was 'not high' in Turin. Moreover, 'many of the workers' were 'hardly aware of its existence, as an independent authority, and certainly few' knew 'the names of its members and its nature as a coalition'. And even among 'the more politically conscious', the situation was not much better as there was a widespread 'feeling that the politicians in Rome have been too busy with party politics that they have forgotten the needs and sufferings of the north, and that that should have done more to obtain arms, supplies etc'.[114] Turin, far from the main directive of German withdrawal, in fact, was in the

[113] TNA, WO 106/3965A, Telegram from Rome to Foreign Office, 27 April 1945.
[114] TNA, WO 204/7293, Situation to arise on the liberation of Turin, April 1945.

area which received the largest amount of non-warlike supplies.[115] Resentment might have gone as far as to 'affect the standing of even such national figures as Togliatti'. Despite these problems, there was no doubt that liberation was 'anxiously awaited'. Major Robertson was certain that 'the Allied forces, when the first arrive, will receive an enthusiastic welcome and will find the population ready to co-operate'. However, it was also clear that 'subsequently cordiality will depend on the behaviour of the Allied troops and the exigencies of Military control' as the previous experience with liberated areas had already shown since the spring of 1944. On this topic, Major Robertson noted that there was a 'certain scepticism' which 'has become apparent among middle class and professional people' in regard to the AMG. However, far more dangerous than this was the 'widespread belief among the working classes that liberation will mean an immediate return of work and abundant food'. As we have seen so many times, once more propaganda proved to be a double-edged sword: keeping Italian morale high but laying the seeds for discontent at the same time.

As for the local CLN, there was 'no doubt' that they expected 'to be allowed a voice in the civil affairs of the city. It has already nominated certain individuals to the most important posts' and was clearly aiming for the mayor to 'hold real authority'. This stance was to be explained by the temperament of the people of Piedmont. In fact, 'the Piedmontese are independent' and because of that are jealous of their autonomy. As a result, they were 'likely to resent a prolonged and detailed interference in their local affairs'. However, this was not a problem as the people in charge of the CLN and the population of Turin presented a large number of capable men. Major Robertson was sure that: 'with regard to personnel, AMG should have no difficulty in finding politically sound, reliable technical Italian experts for every class of work'. The only two great problems for the Allies thus were transport, as the rail system had been destroyed, and secondly large scale unemployment, as a result of the destruction 'of the major part of the city's industries'. These were the problems to tackle to prevent 'major scale unrest', control over the local government or politics seemed to

[115] Berrettini, *La Resistenza italiana*, p. 12.

be unnecessary.[116] The British were reassured in their convictions by the words of Mr Longhi, the president of the CLNAI, who assured them that 'there was no need to worry about political disturbances in the big cities'.[117]

It was again Sir Noel Charles who gave an enthusiastic report of the situation in Northern Italy after the complete withdrawal of the Germans. At the beginning of May 1945 he wrote to the Foreign Office describing how 'reports of political adviser in the North' showed that 'after successful patriot insurrections in Milan, Turin, Genoa and other northern towns and withdrawal of German and Fascist troops, law and order were preserved to a remarkable degree'. The CLNAI's ordinances seemed to have been respected even in large cities like Turin and Milan, where, despite the presence of 'men armed to the teeth, little looting was reported'. Summary justice had been limited and, even if 'in a few cases personal vendettas may have been paid off' the majority of the executions after the liberation targeted *bona fide* Fascists. The British liaison officer in Turin was eager to report that 'no one had been shot who had not fully deserved it'. As for disarmament, it was well underway, with 'arrangements' being made in all major cities of the North. Following the directives of the February 1945: 'in each case, it was arranged that disarming should take place after a ceremonial parade held by the Allied general'. Sir Noel was fully aware that it was 'too much to hope that all arms held by the patriots will be turned in' however, he states how he was sure that 'a reasonable proportion' had been recovered.[118]

The aftermath

However, Sir Noel was less enthusiastic after a few weeks, stating that 'the difficult period in dealing with the Committees of liberation in the north is only now beginning'. The Italians, in fact, had found the principles of the AMG not 'as palatable' as they had hoped and the 'excitement of liberation has died down'. Still, Sir Noel was not expecting any violence and he was happy to report that partisans

[116] TNA, WO 204/7293, Situation to arise on the liberation of Turin, April 1945.
[117] CASREC, FO 371/49802 99731, Conversation with Mr. Longhi, 23 April 1945.
[118] TNA, WO 106/3965A, Telegram from Rome to Foreign Office, 10 May 1945.

were 'being disarmed'. However, he was also aware that future was uncertain, especially because 'it would be foolish' to expect the partisans to 'turn in all their weapons' for a variety of motives: from sentimentalism to revolutionary visions. These weapons could have been used by the left if the elections were to relegate them outside the Government.[119]

Despite these problems, Noel Charles' trust of the CLNAI did not dwindle in the following months. In June 1945 he again wrote to Churchill that the Italians had held all their promises regarding public order, anti-scorch operations and protection of private property from the Germans during their withdrawal. Occasional episodes of violence or problems with the disarmament of partisans were due to circumstances outside the reach of the CLNAI.[120] Such episodes were considered normal by the Allied officers in the days immediately following the liberation. Since the civil war in Italy had been particularly brutal, a number of summary trials were to be expected. They generally decided to ignore the murders of Fascists carried on before their arrival and kept a lenient attitude up until the 8 May 1945, which marked the end of the war in Europe.[121] Generally, the predictions of those who feared a situation similar to the one in Greece were disproved, and the AMG was more than happy to confirm the local administrators nominated by the CLNAI.[122]

Liberation, however, left a bitter aftertaste for many Italians and for partisans. Besides the usual problems with rushed disarmaments and the occasional tactless British officer who considered the Italians to be of an inferior race,[123] political strife was agitating under the apparently calm surface. On a wave of enthusiasm, Ferruccio Parri, member of the CLNAI and leader of the Action Party (Pd'A) was nominated prime minister, almost as the final sanction of the unity between the partisans in the North and the Government in Rome. However, such a state of affairs was hiding deep

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[119] TNA, WO 106/3965 A, Telegram from Rome to Foreign Office, 18 May 1945.
[120] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 230.
[121] Peli, *Storia,* p. 165.
[122] Harris, *Allied military administration*, p. 297.
[123] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 235.

contradictions. The tension between those who wanted a radical change of Italian society and institutions and those who wanted to maintain the traditional order had been muted by the pressing necessity of defeating the Nazi-Fascists but was now ready to explode again. On one hand, there was a request for justice for the crimes committed by the Nazi-Fascists during the war, on the other, the call for deep societal reforms. The agricultural workers especially asked for a more fair distribution of the land and better working contracts. In some places, this led to violent clashes with the authorities.[124] However, the Italian society was not united in these requests, some wanted simply to return to their 'normal' lives.[125] Edgardo Sogno, who played a prominent role in the Resistance, noted how he did not join the partisan war to 'rejuvenate the social structure of the Italian society, nor to fight in a class struggle, nor to abolish or preserve privileges, nor to push a particular political programme to victory. I took part in the Resistance for reasons of justice, not social justice, but for freedom and human dignity'.[126] The PCI especially found in the Resistance its legitimation as a mass party, but now had to face the problem of delivering on its revolutionary promises. Delzell points out how these issues were magnified by the Christian-Democratic governments that followed the end of the war in Italy. The Christian-Democrats, Delzell argues, were sincere democrats. However, 'in their accession to political power, […] [they] were to make it fairly easy for many of the social groups who had once been *finacheggiatori* of Fascism to reclaim influential positions in the economy and the government'.[127]

Moreover, the North-South divide, historically present in Italy, had been widened by the radically different experiences of the war, with the South experiencing the Allied occupation and the hesitant Italian Government administration, while the civil war was raging in the North.[128] It is not by chance that Eduardo de Filippo, one of the

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[124] Crainz, *L'ombra*, pp. 127-131.

[125] Ibid., p. 139.

[126] Edgardo Sogno, *Fuga da Brindisi e altri saggi, un'interpretazione del secolo XX* (Cuneo: l'Arciere, 1990), p. 136.

[127] Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies*, p. 555.

[128] Peli, *Storia,* pp. 167-168.

greatest Italian playwrights, felt the need to encapsulate this in his *Napoli milionaria!*, written in 1945.[129] In the play, after the liberation of Naples, de Filippo's character, Gennaro, is sent to the front to fight in the Italian army. He is able to go back home only two years later, when the war is over, only to find, to his dismay, that the war has been over for a while in Naples. For so long, in fact, that no-one wants to talk about it and his attempts at describing the horrors he witnessed are shunned by his family, who has moved on and wants to enjoy the prosperity brought by peace. His family is unable to understand what Gennaro sees clearly: the war is not over, Italy is in the midst of another war, that of the reconstruction of the social tissue and of the social norms, devastated by the war and its barbarism. Just like his little daughter, affected by a grave illness, Italy '*Adda passà 'a nuttata* [has to survive this night]'.[130] Similarly to Rossellini's *Paisà*, *Napoli milionaria!* represented almost a documentary, an expression, albeit in an artistic form, of the feelings of de Filippo and Rossellini's contemporaries.

Moreover, the troubled process of the purges was another source of disappointment in Italy. The purges under the Badoglio Government proceeded in a slow and ineffective way, as Marshal Badoglio and the elite of the Southern Kingdom opposed and tried to hinder a resolute process of purging, that would hit the Italian Army and its generals.[131] Under the second Badoglio Government, Count Carlo Sforza was appointed as High Commissary for purges in the Spring of 1944. Sforza had strong Anti-Fascist sentiments and quickly came into conflict with Badoglio on the issue of punishing army officers who were compromised with Fascism.[132] After the collapse of the Badoglio Government in June 1944, Sforza was reconfirmed as High Commissioner by the new Bonomi Government and hopes rose again for a firmer

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[129] Eduardo de Filippo, 'Napoli Milionaria!', *Cantata dei giorni dispari*, ed. by Anna Barsotti, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2014), I, pp. 5-98.

[130] Ibid., p.11.

[131] Andrea Lepore, *Carlo Sforza alto commissario per l'epurazione le sanzioni contro il fascismo* (Pisa: Pacini editore, 2017), p. 30

[132] Lamberto Mercuri, *L'epurazione in Italia (1943-1948)* (Cuneo: L'arciere, 1988), p. 37.

purge.[133] In the words of Sforza, he aimed to 'punish firmly the elite but granting oblivion to those who were Fascists due to their weakness or lack of understanding'.[134] This approach led to some results as at least Sforza and his colleague, the Communist Scoccimarro, were determined to purge the Italian administration from Fascism. Scoccomarro even managed to discharge and arrest several Generals for their inactivity during the collapse of the Italian Army after the armistice of the September 1943; he even attempted to put Marshal Badoglio on trial for the ruinous management of the armistice.[135] However, his appointment was cut short by the crisis of the Government six months later. Reflecting on his actions as High Commissary, when he was forced to 'distinguish between the bad ones (who often were not so bad) and the good ones (who often were not so good)',[136] Sforza appears to be frustrated by the meagre results he was able to attain:

> True epuration could not be achieved, it cannot be achieved, in Italy with laws. True epuration in Italy consists not in a negative work, but in a positive one: the rejuvenation of a ruling political class. After a dictatorship […] a country wakes up without new classes to guide it. This was Italy's problem, after the long Fascism of Mussolini, and the short neo-fascism of Brindisi.[137]

The Allies, and the British in particular, also played a part in the epuration process. As we saw in the previous chapters they took epuration very seriously. However, they soon were accused of being too lenient or even openly friendly with well-known Fascists. The British in particular were accused of this, as it fitted well with the narrative that depicted them as hard-line social conservatives. This accusation finds little ground in archival sources. Scholars like Romano Canosa have demonstrated

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[133] Ibid., p. 51.
[134] Carlo Sforza, *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi* (Rome: Mondadori, 1944), p. 209.
[135] Aga Rossi, *Una nazione*, p. 27.
[136] Sforza, *L'Italia*, p. 211.
[137] Ibid., p. 211.

that, after the initial missteps in Sicily, caused by their inexperience, the Allies pursued an epuration policy which was generally firmer than the one pursued in regions administered by the Italian Government.[138] In his work on Carlo Sforza, Andrea Lepore noted that in Sicily particularly, the difference between American and British approach to epuration was noticeable. However, despite what was commonly said of the British, they put a greater effort into purging the local administration from Fascists, compared to the Americans.[139] Moreover, in his capital work, *I conti col Fascismo*, Hans Woller, reconstructed how the Allies went further than simple epuration in the Italian administration. They attempted a reorganization of the school curricula and tried to empower the local administrations, after twenty years of Fascist centralism.[140] Remarkable in this sense, as analysed by another scholar, Herbert Reiter, was the proposed reorganization of the Italian Police, to purge it of Fascist elements and make it less military-like (despite Badoglio protesting that the Italian police and even the OVRA were not in any way related with the regime[141]), curbing also its enormous discretional powers.[142] The reform was proposed three times to three different Italian Governments (Bonomi, Parri and De Gasperi) and was dismissed every time,[143] showing that the accusation of social conservatism hurled against the British was maybe off-target.

Even after the end of the war, things did not improve significantly. The attempts made by the Socialist Pietro Nenni, who succeeded Sforza under the new Parri Government, were hindered and finally blocked by the Liberal Party (PLI) and the Christian-Democrats (DC), who accused Nenni of being too ruthless in his policy of epuration.[144] Eventually, the contrasts on epuration were one of the causes that led to the collapse of the Parri Government in December 1945. The final blow to an extensive

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[138] Romano Canosa, *Storia dell'epurazione in Italia. Le sanzioni contro il fascismo (1943-1948)* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1999), p. 27.

[139] Lepore, *Carlo Sforza*, p. 29.

[140] Woller, *I conti con il fascismo,* pp. 81-84.

[141] Herbert Reiter, 'I progetti degli alleati per una riforma della polizia in Italia (1943-1947)', *Passato e presente*, 42 (1997), 37-64 (p. 39).

[142] Ibid., p. 45.

[143] Ibid., p. 64.

[144] Canosa, *Storia*, pp. 301-309.

epuration was delivered by the amnesty that, in June 1946, effectively granted a pardon to almost anyone who had, in one way or another, collaborated with the Fascist regime. Even the PCI voted for the amnesty, on the grounds that, now that the war was over, Italy needed pacification and not further divisions.[145] As a result, the Italian administration remained largely untouched by purges. The data reported by Tony Judt leaves, indeed, little hope for the whole process: as late as 1960, in fact, 62 out of the 64 *Prefetti* of the Republic had been functionaries under Fascism, as well as all 135 police chiefs.[146]

Meanwhile, the *Corte di Cassazione*, the final step in the Italian judiciary process, had been systematically overturning the convictions inflicted against Fascist criminals and collaborators by the extraordinary courts set up in the days immediately following the liberation.[147] This was especially frustrating as Anti-Fascists saw well-known criminals walk out of jail after a few months, generating anger and discontent. As a former partisan, Carlo Galante Marrone, claimed the new climate of 'pacification' allowed the *Cassazione* to launch an operation of revision of the convictions that had as its only aim the liberation of war criminals by the use of juridical technicalities to apply an excess of clemency.[148] This excessive clemency was especially present in cases where the indicted were women who had collaborated with the Nazi-Fascists and, in some cases, even had taken active roles in guiding the *rastrellamenti* or torturing partisans.[149] Often, these acquittals were only mentioned briefly in the newspapers,[150] the aftermath of the war was not considered a topic worth debating in public in the general climate of 'pacification'.

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[145] Ibid., pp. 334.

[146] Tony Judt, 'The past is another country: myth and memory in postwar Europe', in *The politics of retribution in Europe, World War II and its aftermath*, ed. by István Deák and others (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 293-323 (p. 302).

[147] Canosa, *Storia*, p. 341.

[148] Sergio Luzzatto, *Partigia. Una storia della Resistenza* (Milan: Mondadori, 2013), pp. 257-8.

[149] On this topic see: Roberta Cairoli, *Dalla parte del nemico, ausiliarie, delatrici e spie nella Repubblica Sociale Italiana (1943-1945)* (Milan: Mimesis, 2013) where the scholar also analyse the choices and backgrounds of these women to restore their historical agency, for too long disregarded because of a sexist approach to their stories.

[150] Luzzatto, *Partigia*, p. 256.

Even worse, for the partisans, were the trials that were eventually opened against them. In the years following the liberation, in fact, partisans would have to face a number of accusations that often flipped their role with the Fascists, making the latter the innocent victims of the partisans. As Pietro Secchia wrote, two years from the Liberation, 'it is now allowed to traitors and profiteers […] to slander, to sully, to spit on the partisan movement, on its best men, on those who are alive and on those who are dead as well'.[151] This marked the beginning of the so-called 'trial on the Resistance'.[152] They also had to face the generalised accusation of being responsible, with their actions, of the German reprisals against the civilian population. The episode of the massacre of the *Fosse Ardeatine* near Rome became a staple of this kind of accusations, surviving to this day.[153]

Thus, many Italians felt betrayed by this ineffective epuration[154] violence continued, during 1945 and 1946,[155] in certain areas, such as the Emilia region where the infamous 'death triangle' was located, as the abundance of arms still present in Italy made easy for anyone who had a score to settle to take things in its own hands. However, it is difficult to make a proper distinction between partisan violence, neo-Fascist violence and ordinary violence carried on by criminal gangs.[156] Of course, this added to the general climate of political tension and general disgruntlement and, in the long run, provided plenty of ammunition to those interested in demolishing the myth of the Resistance for political reasons.

This difficult climate was exacerbated by the beginning of the Cold War, which led to the division of the Anti-Fascists in two blocks. The general elections of 1948 saw a brutal electoral campaign, marked by the DC promoting a 'red scare' against the

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[151] Secchia, *La Resistenza*, pp. 44-45.

[152] Storchi, 'Post-war Violence', p. 242. See also: Michela Ponzani, 'I processi ai partigiani nell'Italia repubblicana', *Italia contemporanea*, 237 (2004), 611-632.

[153] Carrattieri, *La Resistenza*, p. 6.

[154] Canosa, *Storia*, p. 375.

[155] Sarah Morgan, *Rappresaglie dopo la Resistenza. L'eccidio di Schio tra guerra civile e guerra fredda* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), p. 46.

[156] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Communist and Socialist parties, evoking graphic images of the horrors that would befall Italy if they won. The Catholic Church took an active role in this campaign as well. Moreover, the USA, concerned with the possibility of a Communist victory in Italy, launched an explicit and aggressive propaganda campaign, which was destined to last until 1953,[157] using the aid promised by the Marshall plan as a powerful catalyst for consent for the DC.[158] In the end, the DC came up on top, with 48% of the votes, while the PCI, federated with parts of the Socialist Party, managed to gather only the 31%.

From that moment onward, issues like epuration were definitively discarded, and thus many Italian were left with the bitter aftertaste of living in a country where nothing really ever changed. Ten years later this sentiment was encapsulated by *Il Gattopardo*, a novel by Tomasi da Lampedusa and the term *Gattopardismo* has entered the Italian language to define the seemingly immutable cycle of the Italian nation, as Italians 'change everything in order to keep everything as it is'. It is easy to see why, in the post-war period, ideas of a '*Resistenza tradita*' and a '*rivoluzione mancata*' gained traction; the Resistance became yet another occasion for Italy to change deeply but, it was argued, this occasion was wasted, like many others before.

The Allies were considered by Italian society to be among the culprits for this state of affairs, as they offered an easy scapegoat for the Italian shortcomings.[159] The British in particular suffered from this, as prejudices formed during the war resurfaced, in a vicious circle of self-confirmation. They were accused to have 'betrayed' the spirit of reform brought forward by the Resistance, neutering it with their support for the more moderate elements of Italian society. As we examined in the previous chapters, the British were only able to project a confused image of themselves, their propaganda had been contradictory, the way they handled disarmament was less than optimal and their support to the Resistance perceived as ambiguous. Thus, the

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[157] David W. Ellwood, 'La propaganda del Piano Marshall in Italia', *Passato e presente*, 9 (1985), 152-171 (p. 152).

[158] Pier Paolo D'Attorre, 'Il Piano Marshall. Politica, economia e relazioni internazionali nella ricostruzione italiana', *Passato e presente*, 7 (1985), 31-63 (p. 32).

[159] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 10.

idea of the United Kingdom as a force hostile to the Resistance and to Italy in general, united in this project on all levels of its military and administration, was finally cemented in historiography for the years to come. And it would prove to be extremely resistant to any and all attempt at revision, thanks to the scarcity of available archival documentation and the indifference shown by British and American official histories in approaching the topic of the Italo-British relationship during the war.

Conclusions

At the end of this analysis, it is clear that Italo-Allied relationships in the Second World War are in need of some further finessing. The historiography on the subject has been divided for a long time, with both interpretations seeming to exist and suffice on their own. The idea that the Allies, and especially the British, were generally hostile to the Italian Resistance and that they tried to hinder and control it is no longer tenable. There were indeed some sectors of the British administration and military who adopted a rigid stance towards Italy's future, however, it does not seem that these sectors had a particular influence over the decisions taken during the Italian campaign of 1943-1945, at least until the very last months. Even if we think that there was indeed a plot against the Italian Resistance then, experiences like those of the British liaison missions listed in chapter one, should bring us to the conclusion that such a plot was developed without the knowledge of part of the British forces and conducted with a ruthless disregard of not only partisans' lives but of British lives as well. The British military personnel, in particular, and the SOE supported the Resistance to a great extent. They allowed for requisitions to be carried out against former Fascists and understood the desire of justice of the partisans to the point of allowing them a 'period of grace' before the arrival of the Allied Armies during which the dismissal of officers, beatings and even murders were allowed without repercussions.[1] The killing of Fascists would have been the perfect occasion to crack down on the more left-wing elements of the Resistance if that was the plan. However, those were considered only details in the overall framework of the operations in Italy, and the Military personnel were open to concessions on these matters.[2] They even noted how the imposition of orders in a manner that was too direct could have dampened the morale of the partisans.[3] They often tried to protect the partisans from abuses, as their protests against the French habit of putting Italian partisans in

[1] For example: TNA, WO 204/7310, Comments on AFHQ draft paper "Local German Surrender in North ITALY", attached to cover letter SAC (?) (45) 19 of 3 April 1945, 9 April 1945.
[2] Peli, *Storia,* p. 155.
[3] TNA, WO 204/7282, PWB message on Resistance Groups to AAI, 18 June 1944.

concentration camps clearly shows.[4] They also monitored the groundless French attempts to annex the Italian North-Western region of Valle d'Aosta.[5] If indeed one of the Allies can be considered hostile *tout court* to Italy, it should be the often forgotten France, rather than the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, however, the historiography proposing the opposite interpretation of the events that unfolded between 1943 and 1945 seems to fail to deliver a satisfactory answer to an apparently simple question: if it is so easy to disprove the previous interpretation, why does it still survive in the modern-day, in what can be considered an exceptionally healthy state? If we accept, as we should, the conclusions of the revision process initiated in the 1970s by Elena Aga Rossi and Massimo de Leonardis, then we cannot escape the need to find a new interpretation as to how the idea of an ongoing hostility, on all levels, between the British and the Italians, survived for so long unchallenged or, even when it was finally challenged by some scholars, it still enjoyed a large degree of support and recognition, almost as if the challenge posed by the revisionist studies was not there. Scholars such as Tommaso Piffer put forward the idea that it was both the political climate of Italy, with the Italian Communist Party proudly advocating the centrality of the Resistance as the cornerstone of the new Italian State, as well as the international context, with the Cold War climate, that helped cement this idea and allowed for its survival. According to Piffer, the left-leaning historiography of the Resistance operated in a climate of general hostility towards the 'imperialistic' powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which led to an interpretation generally hostile to them, pointing at them as possible obstacles for deeper societal changes that the

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[4] For example: TNA, FO 371/43878, Telegram from Berne to Foreign Office, 2 November 1944. Also: TNA, FO 371/43976, Extract from the final Minutes of the Thirty-fifth Meeting of the Foreign Office-S. O. E. Committee held at the Foreign Office on Tuesday, 14 November 1944. And: TNA, FO 371/43976, Letter from col. Keswick to Peter Loxley, 20 November 1944. For a report on the conditions of Italian partisans in France, see: TNA, FO 371/43976, Translation of a memorandum from SIM on the treatment of Italian patriots by the French authorities, 11 December 1944.

[5] On Valle d'Aosta, see: TNA, FO 371/43838, Memorandum for the Secretary of State on matters of interest to the Italian Section which may came up during his visit to Paris, 9 November 1944. Also: TNA, FO 371/43877, Situation in the Aosta Valley, 27 September 1944. And, TNA, FO 371/43976, Telegram from our mission in S. Italy (paraphrase), 24 November 1944, which contains a translation of a letter by Gen. Cadorna, lamenting the growing tension in the area.

Resistance would have brought to Italy, which did not happen because of the 'conservative' intervention of the Allies.[6] On the other hand, non-Communist historiography had little reason to challenge this assumption, as the Allies presented themselves as a convenient scapegoat for Italy's lacklustre modernization. While this interpretation certainly offers some strong points and has some merit, it lacks, however, a comprehensive view of the matter. In this interpretation, for example, the role of the Allies themselves is very minor. They are, in fact, almost victims of the Italians, as if they had no control over their representation. Moreover, this interpretation seems to be rather static. While it is true that the political climate in Italy might have encouraged the birth of an interpretation of the Italo-British relationship based on the assumption of British hostility in the post-war, nevertheless the political situation in Italy changed many times during the past seventy years. The interpretation of the Resistance itself, as Filippo Focardi pointed out, had been disassembled and reshaped many times during this period, often following the earthquake-like movements of the Italian political world. All of this should pressure us to look forward and investigate more deeply thus, one of the few elements of the Resistance historiography which, albeit challenged, shows very little sign of modification, not only inside academia but in public memory as well. It was from this need for clarification and to provide a more coherent picture on the matter that this work was started. What this work aimed to do, thus, was to provide some sort of synthesis between those two historiographical schools, as both have their merits, albeit in different fields of interpretation.

Firstly, there was the need to recap the most recent developments in the research on the Italo-British relations, as presented in chapter two, while adding to them my own contribution in the form of some archival findings which strengthen the idea that, in fact, there was very little hostility towards the Italian Resistance. On the contrary, most of the time it was viewed by the military and other men-on-the-spot with a

[6] Piffer, *Gli alleati*, p. 10.

mixture of admiration and incredulity. And these men were the ones, when the elite in London expressed rose anxieties for the situation in Italy (as was the case after the dramatic events in Greece, for example), who spent time and energies to calm these anxieties down, and to protect the role of the Italian Resistance in the campaign. From the analysis in this work, it appears that the Italo-British relationship is a deep and multi-faceted issue and needs a corresponding level of deep and multi-faceted engagement to be fully interpreted and unravelled in all of its levels if we want to properly reinstate this level of complexity. This brings us to our first conclusion: we should not consider the 'British' as a monolithic actor. This is by no means an innovative idea, scholars like Aga Rossi already pointed this out more than forty years ago, however, it needs to be remarked once more, as it seems to me that it has been greatly overlooked in more recent research on the matter. Fragmentation of the British machine was a critical problem during the Italian campaign and it had a domino effect on the management of propaganda and partisan disarmament. The new focus on the 'practical' side of the Italian campaign, in fact, should not put the political side out of the picture, as it was still the cause for many headaches for the personnel on the field.

However, the centrepiece upon which this work rests is the recognition that the primary issue in the Italo-British relation was one of representation, or self-representation. British and Italian actions, in fact, had not only practical results but influenced also how each group perceived the other as well. While the relationship on the field proved to be good and productive, leading to an intense work of sabotage and underground operations, this wealth of good relationships failed to establish a narrative of good cooperation between the Italians and the British. As such, it was largely ignored by the early historiography, which simply did not bother dwelling on this topic, as it was assumed to be a marginal part of the overall relationship. What instead shaped the way the British were perceived in Italy, it appears, were propaganda and partisan disarmament; or, their mismanagement. As we saw in chapter three and four these two issues deeply affected the ability of the British to

self-represent themselves in Italy. Their schizophrenic propaganda, split between realism and optimism, confused the Italian population. Already in the Summer of 1942 Count Sforza pointed out how the Anglophone press was full of articles 'defaming' the Italian people, while at the same time Italians were called to rebel against Mussolini's regime: 'it is madness to agitate the Italian people for rebellion against Fascism and at the same time hurt it in its deepest feelings'.[7] This issue was made even worse by the presence of Soviet and American propaganda as well as Fascist counter-propaganda which often had a very easy job at picking upon British mistakes and *faux pas*. Disarmament also led to a large portion of the Italian partisans being disgruntled, as they had matured a set of expectations and aspirations, partially thanks to the over-bombastic British propaganda they had been exposed to while they were still fighting in German-occupied Italy. As we saw, from British documentation, rushed disarmament had a negative impact not only towards the single band being disarmed but the news spread like wild-fire along the frontline, leading to all the bands in an area suddenly becoming warier in their approach to the Allies. Moreover, the aforementioned issue of fragmentation should also be brought to its logical consequences: we should approach the study of the British side of the relationship taking this internal fragmentation as the basis for our analysis, which was my direction when enquiring into the British mistakes in chapter three and four.

When analysing the mistakes made by the British in administering their propaganda and the disarmament of the partisans, in fact, it clearly emerges how many of the problems that the British had to face could have been resolved easily had the British put more effort into coordinating the action of the various actors involved. Or even, in some cases, a better level of internal coordination would have prevented some problems from coming up at all. Coordination on the field was so bad that the British liaison officers sometimes ended up being bombarded by the Allied air force,[8] and even the Commands were unable to find acceptable explanations for such

[7] Sforza, *L'Italia*, p. 181.

[8] TNA, WO 204/7298, Partisans and Air Attack, 24 February 1945.

occurrences.[9] Of course, this is surely easier to say in retrospective, taking full advantage of the privileged point of view that only historians can have. The British in Italy had to face an incredible challenge, in a nation which they had all the reasons to believe was strongly hostile to them, having to battle both the adverse geographical nature of the country as well as the Germans, who were well prepared and determined to make the Allies pay dearly for every inch of Italy. All of this, while resources were continuously diverted to other fronts, both to the Balkans and later to France. Personnel, in particular, seems to have been a sore point for the whole duration of the campaign, as the lack of agents and officers to handle the relationship with the partisans hindered a smooth collaboration. A problem that Italy shared with many occupied countries such as Belgium or the Netherlands, and even France.[10] David Stafford has pointed out that lack of coordination and manpower shortage were two constant presences during the life of the SOE, sometimes they were caused by other departments and sometimes self-inflicted.[11]

Finally, we must also consider that many of the challenges the British had to face were unprecedented in history. How to deal with a country which was a member of the Axis and not a liberated state? How to re-educate the population? In many cases, the British were forced by circumstances to take a trial-and-error approach. Indeed, the task appears to be so daunting that we really should be surprised that things went as smoothly as they did, rather than expect some other, better, result which was unattainable with the scant resources that the British had at their disposal. As we saw, the British commands in Italy were the first to want to do things properly and they were not afraid of thinking big. Many times they envisioned coordinated and complex plans to deal with partisan disarmament, treatment and relocation. Many times they asked for more airdropped supplies or a better administration of

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[9] TNA, WO 204/7298, Air Attacks on LINGOTTO Electric Power Station, 27 February 1945. It reads: 'We [15th Army Group HQ] are at a loss to know what explanation to give to the mission for these repeated attacks on a protected objective, particularly after several messages of protest which have already been delivered to the Air Force'.

[10] Wieviorka, *Storia della Resistenza*, pp. 64-65.

[11] Stafford, *Britain*, p. 237

propaganda. However, all these efforts remained frustrated either for the fragmentation of the British administrative machine or for the simple lack of resources destined to the Italian theatre, which had quickly become a secondary front in the war, with France taking the 'lion's share'. The AMG itself, for example, had barely enough men to perform its tasks.[12] For the whole northern Tuscany, the AMG only had one officer with a General rank. And the management of the artistic treasures of the whole region was placed on the shoulders of a single officer.[13] It should not be a surprise, then, if with the advancement of the campaign, the Allies pursued an 'indirect rule' approach in Italy and decided to rely on the local CLNs to administer towns and cities during the transitional period after the liberation of one area. A choice that shows that there was no real hostility towards the CLNs and that the Allies did not come to regret.[14]

Moreover, the British had also to coordinate with the Americans, who had different aims and different priorities in the war.[15] The clash in propaganda was examined in chapter three, however, it was not the only one. Coordination between British liaison missions and American ones was also poor and often erupted into an open competition,[16] as we saw in chapter two. The lack of coordination between the SOE and the OSS meant also that it was impossible to crosscheck information.[17] The partisans, caught in between, sided with the missions that were able to better equip them, which often meant the Americans.[18] As Anita Azzari summed up, talking about the supplies provided to the Val d'Ossola area, the Americans helped the partisans 'more generously, but were disorganized', while the British were 'thrifty, but their organization was almost perfect'.[19] This lack of coordination created a situation where

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[12] De Marco, 'Il difficile esordio', p. 42.

[13] Absalom, *Gli alleati*, pp. 2-3.

[14] Ibid., p. 3.

[15] Gallerano, 'L'influenza dell'amministrazione', p. 5.

[16] Piffer, *Gli alleati,* pp. 130-132.

[17] Piffer, 'Office of Strategic Services', p. 49.

[18] See, for example, Istoreto, B16b, Al Signor Comandante PAT capo missione inglese (delegazione Piemonte-Biellese), 15 March 1945.

[19] Azzarri, 'I rapporti', p. 96.

a 'multiplicity of independent Allied Missions' gave widely diverse instructions to the bands, resulting in widespread confusion.[20] Moreover, it was a common occurrence that a British mission would reach its area only to discover that an American mission was already present there and vice versa; and often American missions preferred to leave an area in which a British mission was working, rather than to come to an agreement with it.[21]

This made coordinating guerrilla warfare in Italy a daunting task, complicating a situation that was already complex, because of the intrinsic nature of partisan warfare. Under guerrilla conditions, in fact, producing an order of battle for the partisans was impossible, but even apparently menial tasks like mapping the partisan formations or listing them proved to be extremely difficult or impossible.[22]

Thus, to take into consideration the British side of the matter means providing for a more comprehensive picture of the situation in Italy and, in turn, for a more coherent interpretation of the events. The British, in fact, emerge as often victims of their own mistakes, seldom caused by their ill-will towards the Italians and more often resulting from lack of resources or coordination, or, in some other cases, by sheer incompetence, which so commonly bogs down any human endeavour. To take these mistakes into account is paramount as simply confuting the idea that the British acted with hostility towards Italy only accomplishes half of the job: as it does not explain the long survival of the Historiographical interpretation centred around mutual distrust and animosity between the British and the Italians. However, by focusing on the British mistakes, their causes and, more importantly, their repercussions we can come to a better understanding of the problem as a whole. British mistakes, in fact, confirmed many of the Italians' worst fears and in many cases strengthened pre-existing prejudices. This was the case, for example, of the Alexander proclamation, announced in an untimely manner after the encouraging propaganda campaign of

[20] CASREC, WO 204/7298 98427, Message from M.11, 18 March 1945.
[21] Piffer, 'Office of Strategic Services' p. 53.
[22] For example, CASREC, WO204/10300 106481, Order of Battle CLNAI, 15 March 1945.

the summer of 1944, which led to the partisans feeling that they had been dropped 'like a hot potato', to quote the vivid expression used by the Minister of Economic Warfare, Roundell Palmer, in his letter to Winston Churchill.[23] Or the lack of coordination in handling airdrops, which led to the British policy on supply being regarded as completely arbitrary, if not illogical, by the BLOs themselves.

The issue of 'flattening' as well, as enunciated in the introduction has found confirmation in the archival documentation analysed, both Italian and British. First, the goodwill of part of the British personnel to collaborate with the Resistance has shown how the conflictual relations of some of the actors involved, like Anthony Eden, were taken for granted as representative of the British position, 'flattening' all the others under their weight.

Second, the decision to 'discriminate' between formations at the end of 1944 (still, not according to political colour, but merely between bands on the German withdrawal route and bands far from it) was taken as representative of the policy regarding airdrops for the whole duration of the war. A 'flattening' that appears to be even more problematic if we consider airdropped supplies from a European perspective. Until 1944, in fact, Resistance movements across Europe were supplied with the bare minimum to allow their survival. Between 1940 and 1943 France received only 6.5% of the total canisters delivered during the war. Similar statistics are valid for other countries like Belgium or Norway.[24] Italian partisans, thus, entered the fray right at the moment when aid to the various *maquis* became more generous and consistent. The contraction of the winter of 1944-1945, thus, was not something shocking to behold, it was just a normal fluctuation tied to the overall Allied strategy in Europe. It was its abysmal implementation that makes it noteworthy.

The politicization of the bands as well is a topic which suffered from a problem of 'flattening'. As Santo Peli noted, politicization should be post-dated to the 'second year' of the Resistance.[25] The Resistance, slowly, over the course of the summer of

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[23] TNA, FO 371/43838, SOE operations in Italy, 29 October 1944.

[24] Wieviorka, *Storia della Resistenza*, pp. 190-191.

[25] Santo Peli, *Il primo anno della Resistenza, Brescia 1943-1944* (Brescia: Micheletti, 1994).

1944 'became *also* political', once its chances of survival were not slender anymore. In the months before, the Resistance was limited to choices made by single individuals and its actions were limited to achieve its immediate survival: assaults and thefts against arms or fuel deposits, small propaganda action, the destruction of conscription lists, especially in the more remote villages[26]. And, as Mireno Berrettini pointed out, it represents how the reasons for adhesion to the partisan struggle were multiple and not always clear.[27] Partisan bands were not all politicised from the start, nor were all politicised to the same degree.[28] The situation of the spring of 1945, thus, with its CLNs and the political parties ready to start battling over the Resistance legacy, each claiming its crown, should not trample under its weight the wealth of different shades that politics in the Resistance took on. More so because it causes a distortion when approaching the topic of Italo-British collaboration and of liaison missions, as it is fundamentally different to assume that the BLOs had to deal with bands of cohesive, hard-line Communists, or with an amalgamation of different political creeds and opinions, often grouped together under a specific party banner out of convenience.

Can we say, in the end, like Massimo de Leonardis did, that 'it is nonsense to talk about a spirit, programs aspirations of the Resistance betrayed by the British politics'[29] when examining the Italo-British relation and its legacy? The answer is both a yes and a no. As de Leonardis and others correctly pointed out, the British (and the Allies in general) never promised to bring a new golden age in Italy, they never took upon themselves the responsibility to rejuvenate Italian politics, nor the crippled Italian economy. They had a myriad of other problems to tend to, Italy was but a part of Europe which, as a whole, was experiencing grim times. Moreover, such objectives

[26] Peli, *Storia*, pp. 35-36.
[27] Berrettini, *La Resistenza Italiana*, p. 13.
[28] Delzell, *Mussolini's enemies*, p. 290.
[29] De Leonardis, *La Gran Bretagna*, p. 402.

were never part of their plans, and rightfully so; Italians were to stand on their own legs.

However, if we cannot speak of betrayed expectations, to dismiss completely the concept of expectations itself is equally problematic. The British did indeed build Italian expectations in multiple ways. From food distributions to the promise of airdrops to partisans, to disarmament and dispersion, to the idea that partisans could 'hasten the redemption of Italy' in the eyes of the Allies, propaganda built a mosaic of small expectations which fell outside the grand scope of major political reforms but, nevertheless, created a general climate of expectancy that was, if not betrayed intentionally, at least let down. And even the liaison officers fell in the trap of expecting constant and increasing airdrops, reacting with anger when the requested supplies did not materialise. We saw how this was an issue that was identified by the British several times but was never corrected due to the poor coordination of their machine and the substantial independence of some of the actors involved, such as the BBC. Promising to the Italian people that the Italian fleet was to be used exclusively to escort cargo ships transporting food and medicines for Italy created an expectation, which was shattered almost immediately. The promise to ship to the partisans in the North the surrendered arms collected from other partisans overrun in 1944 never materialised.

The topic of airdrops and their evolution as well is an interesting one. As we saw, both partisans and BLOs often operated expecting a constant increase in airdropped supplies and were caught by surprise when this did not happen. The explanations provided by the Commands did not convince the partisans, who felt betrayed. Alfredo Pizzoni (chair of the CLNAI) recalled how 'the explanations provided by the English were not convincing, quite the opposite: they gave me a grave disappointment'.[30] Much of the 'revisionist' literature on the Italo-British relationship during the war points at the fact that, despite the Alexander proclamation, the volume of supplies delivered to the Italian Resistance actually grew after the initial drop in

[30] Pizzoni, *Alla guida*, p. 90.

November 1944.[31] Elena Aga Rossi underlined how 350 tons of materials were dropped in December, after the meagre 190 tons of November.[32] Mireno Berrettini as well underlines how, comparatively, the reduction of airdropped supplies to other countries, specifically Yugoslavia, had been bigger.[33] However, this interpretation of the events is somewhat distorted. The quality of the airdropped supplies delivered to the Italian partisans and the BLOs in the last phase of the conflict (early 1945 onwards), in fact, is seldom analysed properly. The increase in total tonnage for the airdropped supplies, in fact, corresponded to a minor 'quality' of the same supplies. The partisans complained that the wrong type of weapons was being delivered,[34] and the BLOs as well complained that they were receiving 'woollen underpants' rather than the much more needed ammunition.[35] The ratio of ammunition to arms received was deemed 'hopelessly inadequate'.[36] This was coherent with the decision to support the Resistance in a 'softer' way, maximising the amount of non-warlike stores dropped and hit partisans in the North-West (away from the German withdraw lines) harder than it did the ones in the North East. Put in a difficult position by the politicians in London, military personnel faced during the second part of 1944 the threat of seeing the supplies for the Resistance drastically reduced. They managed to interpret many directives in an expansive way, however, they also had to compromise on the quality of the stores delivered to the partisans. While they managed to win the confrontation as far as partisan disarmament was concerned, with the authorization to keep partisans armed even after the initial contact with Allied troops, it seems that on the issue of airdrops they had to concede, at least partially.

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[31] De leonerdis, *La Gran Bretagna*, p. 392. See also: Aga Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta,* pp. 205-228.

[32] Elena Aga Rossi, 'La politica Angloamericana verso la Resistenza Italiana', in *L'italia nella seconda guerra mondiale e nella Resistenza*, ed. by Francesca Ferratini Tosi and others (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1988), pp. 142-154 (p.153).

[33] Berrttini, *La Resistenza Italiana*, p. 51.

[34] TNA, FO 371/43947, PWB Report No.27 on the Conditions in Enemy Occupied Italy, 4 October 1944.

[35] TNA, WO 204/7296, Report on the activities and experiences of major V.R. Johnson of the Envelope Mission from 12th June to 24th December, 1944, 5 January 1945.

[36] TNA, WO 204/7298, Situation in the field in the CARNIA/FRIULI Zone by S/Ldr CZERNIN, 27 November 1944.

The quality of airdrops is also a prime example of how many points made by the historiography concerning the Italo-British relationship over the course of the years were not blatant inventions or exaggerations generated by the Italian political context in the years immediately following the war. On the contrary, they plunge their roots deeply in events that happened and saw their consequences amplified by the climate of uncertainty connected to the war. They are also tied to mistakes made by the British who were not aware or did not foresee the implications that their actions could have had on their image in Italy.

More than betrayed expectations, the issue seems to be of untamed expectations. Excessive promises were made disregarding the actual conditions on the field and often propaganda was ambiguous enough that the Italians could infer the best for them, while this was simply not true. The idea that Italian morale had to be boosted at all costs and that misunderstandings could have been 'straightened out' on a later date, as supported by the PWB,[37] proved to be misguided and harmful to the British image.

I would argue that this was another fatal mistake in the British way of self-representing themselves. The situation not only gave birth to a state of suspicion towards the real intentions of the British, but it also created a vicious circle where these suspicions were continuously strengthened. There was a severe lack of proper communication between the British and the partisans concerning the reality of the situation, and this resulted in a deterioration of the Italo-British relationship. Even more damning seems to be the fact that the BLOs, who were able to achieve such a good level of partnership with the partisans, in almost all cases were trampled by this situation and their image was established in historiography and common memory as the *longa manu* of the politicians in London.

The bedrock for the long survival of this historiographical interpretation should thus be located in the biennium 1943-1945. British mistakes stoked Italian prejudices in a

[37] TNA, WO 204/7282, PWB message on Resistance Groups to AAI, 18 June 1944.

vicious circle which cemented in Italian memory the idea of the United Kingdom as a conservative force, hostile to Italy. The issue of King Vittorio Emanuele III and of the future institutional structure of Italy, albeit not analysed in his work, is another example of a long-lasting prejudice against the British, where Italian scholars have seen political maliciousness where more mundane explanations, like the ill-advised idea that the King could be a rallying point for Italian patriotism, were in order. Greece and her tragic plight also created a vicious circle of confirmation bias which hurt the British image. While the political climate in Italy after the war surely contributed to the long life of this interpretation it is only if we take into account the complex and intertwining relation between British mistakes and Italian prejudices that we can fully explain the survival of such interpretations through all the political upheaval that Italy experienced and all the re-interpretations that the Resistance was subjected to over the course of the years.

As a direct consequence of what we have just said, this point is relevant as it is key to the unearthing of an element of *longue durée* in the history of the Italian Resistance. To see the Resistance in a perspective of *longue durée* has always proved to be difficult for the Italian historiography. Guido Quazza, in the mid-1970s, invited his fellow scholars to do so,[38] however, it seems that no-one truly listened to his advice. The study of the relation between Italians and British, thus, could help pave the way in this direction. As we saw, when analysing this relationship and its consequences, the traditional breakup point of 1945 seems far less important. It represents the final liberation of Italy, however, it is far from being the hard *caesurae* that it traditionally represents in Italian historiography.

This seems to be the most interesting future direction for research in the field of the Italian Resistance. To put the Resistance in a context of *longue durée* is surely a difficult task, but one that must nevertheless be confronted. There is a tendency, in fact, in Italian academia to consider the Resistance as a well-defined, circumscribed moment,

[38] Guido Quazza, *Resistenza e Storia d'Italia. Problemi e ipotesi di ricerca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), p. 19.

with a well-defined beginning and end. To look at the Resistance in a wider timeframe might help us uncover more about the events of the 1943-1945 biennium or see them under a different light. Together with a more transnational approach to the Resistance, this could lead to new interpretations. However, as mentioned, Quazza's appeal fell on deaf hears and even the transnational approach is somewhat struggling to be fully incorporated by Italian scholars. Olivier Wieviorka's *Storia della Resistenza nell'Europa occidentale*, now translated into Italian might provide a much-needed stimulus to pursue this direction of research. As Philip Cooke noted, Italians have difficulty in not considering the Resistance as something unique to them, intimately connected to Italy's history as a country, and as a result, Italy is a place where 'the past "matters" more […] than in other countries'.[39]

Italian memory, moreover, is also fragmented. The Resistance, in fact, presented itself as a different experience for those involved in it, according to their background and the zone of Italy in which they fought. As pointed out by a report at the end of 1944, 'one partisan zone must differ widely from another in all aspects. There is little in common except the hardships, dangers and internal disputes'.[40] That is why scholars like Filippo Focardi and Mario Isnenghi have correctly pointed out how the memory of the Resistance is extremely fragmented. This is merely a reflection of the fact that the memory of the Second World War in Europe presents itself as fragmented and has often been exploited for political, or otherwise partisan, reasons.[41] This fragmentation can, of course, be found in the way the Italians remember their interactions with the Allies, and the British, as well. It might very well be that, in some areas, some of the conclusions reached by this work, for example, the fact that the Americans managed to maintain a 'cleaner' image than the British, do not apply.

In conclusion, despite the fact that it appears that there is still much work to be done to extricate the Italian Resistance from its shackles and put it in a wider perspective,

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[39] Cooke, *The Legacy*, pp. 191-192.

[40] CASREC, WO204/7301 99920, Report on Coolant mission – June to November 1944, 1944.

[41] Cooke, *The Legacy*, p. 191.

both temporally and transnationally, my hope is that this work could be considered a starting block to do so, or at least could strengthen the positions of those who are already attempting this feat. As we saw, Italian partisans and British personnel operated in conditions of high duress, lack of resources, bogged down by ideological and political misunderstandings. Yet, despite all that, the final balance sheet of their interaction, as emerges from the archives, is rather positive; even surprisingly positive. It is fascinating to note how these people were able to cooperate and attain many of the goals that they set out to reach. The failures were mostly due to the lack of proper communication or organisation, however, I feel that this does not invalidate the efforts these people put in. As already said, for too long Italian, and to a lesser degree Anglophone, scholars have seen maliciousness in the British actions where more mundane explanations were in order. One of the aims of this work was to put 'mundanity' back in its rightful place, providing a coherent interpretation not only for the many failures which bogged down a more open cooperation between Italian partisans and British personnel, but also for the long survival of a disproved Historiographical interpretation such as the hostility, on all levels, that the British supposedly had towards the Italians. It was the lacklustre way in which the British managed their own self-representation that allowed this interpretation its long survival. Given the fragmented nature of the British machine and the apparent nonsensical nature of some of its decisions, scholars were drawn to examine and overvalue the positions of a few 'high poppies' like the Foreign Minister Anthony Eden and naturally concluded that hostility and diffidence was the base for British-Italo interactions, disregarding what happened on the field. On the other hand, those who contested this interpretation failed to account for its longevity. They failed to correctly identify in representation the core issue at play and focused too intensively on just one aspect of a multi-faceted relationship, made even more complicated by the fragmentation the two actors involved were subjected to. This work, thus, was conceived with the, admittedly, ambitious aim of bridging the gap between these two interpretations, in order to go beyond the stale debate of the last thirty-something years. Thanks to a careful examination of a large *corpus* of archival documents, we

can say with some confidence that, even if this task might not be considered concluded, we are now on the right path.

List of abbreviations

ACC: Allied Control Commission (also: AC)

AFHQ: Allied Forces Headquarter

AMG: Allied Military Government (also: AG)

CI: Counter-Intelligence

CLN: Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (National Liberation Committee)

CLNAI: Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale d'Alta Italia (National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy)

CG: Command Group

CVL: Corpo Volontari della Libertà (Voluntaries of Freedom Corp)

FO: Foreign Office

N°1 SF: Number 1 Special Forces

MoI: Ministry of Information

OSS: Office of Strategic Services

OWI: Office of War Information

PCI: Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)

PWB: Psychological Warfare Branch

PWE: Psychological Warfare Executive

SACMED: Supreme Allied Command for the Mediterranean

SIM: Servizio Informazioni Militari (Military Information Service)

SOE: Special Operations Executive

WO: War Office

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