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First published in Great Britain 1995 by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

ISBN 0-333-57932-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96 95

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd
Chippenham, Wiltshire

First published in the United States of America 1995 by
Scholarly and Reference Division,
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,
175 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 0-312-12308-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Europe, 1945-1990s : The end of an era? / edited by Antonio Varsovi.
p. cm.

Papers presented at a conference held Nov. 1989, Florence, Italy.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-312-12308-6

1. Europe—Politics and government—1945—Congresses.
2. Europe—Politics and government—1989—Congresses.
I. Varsovi, Antonio, 1951— II. University of Southampton.
Mounbatten Centre for International Studies.
D1050.5.E63 1995
940.55—dc20

94-24884
CIP

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The Mounbatten Centre for International Studies

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14 The Decline of the Imperial Role of the European Powers: France, Italy and the Future of Northern Africa

Bruna Bagnato

Italy and France both emerged from the war weak, shattered, and utterly exhausted. But the resemblance between their positions ends here.

ITALY 1945-9: FROM POST-COLONIALISM TO ANTI-COLONIALISM

Former enemy, former pariah, Italy emerged from the war conscious of the strenuous effort she needed to make to create for herself the image of a country for which the suicidal Fascist experience had been nothing but a temporary aberration.¹ Painful but pregnant with salutary lessons for the future. Conscious of having to expiate her political past in the hope of ridding herself of the stigma of dictatorship and re-entering as rapidly as possible the international political arena,² Italy was, albeit disingenuously, willing to implement the clauses of a peace treaty she considered excessively punitive and humiliating for a people who had in the end rejected Fascism and had combatted it at enormous cost and with enormous sacrifice. She was ready therefore to 'suppress rightful indignation and suffer salutary affliction while contributing to a non-isolationist formulation' of her foreign policy.³

Italy's need for the reconstruction of a lively political fabric, but one often incapable, amid the headiness of re-found freedom, of translating its political intentions from the level of enunciation of principles to that of practical proposals;⁴ the concomitant needs for rapid economic rebirth; and for a solution to be found to a complicated institutional question – all these pressing problems failed to reduce the bitterness caused by the high price that the allies intended to exact from the country that had stabbed France in the back and, more especially, had dared to challenge British

hegemony in the Mediterranean. Nor was it by chance that, in the discussions on the future of Italy's 'Mediterranean policy', that is the future of the pre-Fascist colonies, Great Britain should have had the inglorious role of *bête noire* of Italian aspirations.⁵

Italy's colonial problem, confronted with initial unease by the country's political leaders and public opinion, was already being taken into consideration by the victorious powers at the time of the Potsdam Conference in July 1945.⁶ A decision was taken at Potsdam to set up the Council of Foreign Ministers which was given the task of drafting the peace treaties with Germany's satellite countries. This was undoubtedly the most suitable forum for tackling the questions connected with the political destiny of Libya, Eritrea and Somalia. In September-October 1945, the problem of the Italian colonies was referred to the examination of the deputies of the Foreign Ministers, who met together from January 1946 onwards to deal with the question of the peace treaty with Italy. Signed in February 1947, this treaty, however, made no provision for a solution to the problem of the pre-Fascist colonies, which was once again deferred. In October 1947 the conference of deputies decided to set up a four-power commission on the colonies. Between November 1947 and June 1948 this commission completed a fact-finding tour in Libya, Eritrea and Somalia. And in July 1948 it presented a report on each of the countries visited to the Foreign Ministers gathered at Lancaster House. It was the Commission's unanimous opinion that the granting of independence to the three Italian colonies was premature, in view of the political backwardness of the indigenous populations and the inadequacy of the economic structures to support the possible shock of immediate self-government. These arguments provided useful ammunition for Italian claims and were not slow in being seized on and used by the government in Rome.⁷

Such, in short, was the institutional framework within which the slow and laborious process of the search for a solution of Italy's 'African' problem was pursued. It was a process bedevilled by the sudden deterioration in the relations between the Americans and the Soviets; by the open British hostility to supporting Italian aspirations; by the embarrassing and delicate situation of the United States, anticolonialist by tradition, but often colonialist in practice; by the isolation of the French, who alone were disposed to support the government of Rome *toio corde*; and by the manifest intention of both the Western powers and the Soviets to use the colonial problem as a means of influencing an Italian public opinion deafened and confused by contradictory signals, and hence particularly vulnerable.⁸

Public opinion, government authorities and opposition parties seemed unanimous, up until the political watershed represented by the elections of 18 April 1948, in their intention to defend the colonial argument, even though conspicuous personal exceptions were not lacking.⁹ The 'expulsion'

from Africa, it was felt throughout the peninsula, would be unjust for a number of reasons. These included the labour and skills that the Italians had exported to Africa, the needs for an organic migratory policy, and the 'universalist' vocation of the heirs of the Roman Empire.¹⁰ Why should the Allies deprive Italy of her territories in Africa, 'even the poorest and most onerous',¹¹ when the government in Rome did not have any covert intention of colonial conservation as this was commonly understood, but was animated by the sole objective of permitting mainland Italy to contribute to the proper development of the material resources of those regions and the political preparation of their inhabitants, whom even the victors had recognised as still too inexperienced for political life to be able to govern alone?

These were the considerations that Palazzo Chigi urged on its diplomatic representatives stationed in the capitals of the West. Yet there were those who lost little time in putting the government on its guard against the inadequacy of the arguments which were supposed to support and explain the Italian requests.

Thus, in October 1947 the Italian ambassador in Paris, Pietro Quaroni, one of the most attentive and acute observers of the international situation, and a man whose analytical skills often aroused admiration, wrote to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Sforza:

I fear we are placing too much emphasis on the question of the colonization – or *valorizzazione*, however we care to call it – of our colonies, especially in North Africa. . . First of all, are the French and the English, . . . really so enthusiastic about the idea of seeing a powerful Italian demographic base established in North Africa? I doubt it. . . I would like to explain myself better: Tripolitania and Libya, after having been for decades a wilderness of sand, an expanse of desert, have now suddenly become for us a kind and promised land, which could by itself resolve, or almost, our demographic problem. These are pindaric flights of propaganda, I'll be told, but here a lot of people believe in them.

Not to mention, added the ambassador, the reactions of the Arabs to the Italian designs: 'I would really like to see', he wrote 'what pandemonium will break out the day on which our plan for the europeanisation of North Africa reaches the ears of the Arabs'. 'For heavens's sake' Quaroni urged, 'let's not speak of these plans, neither in our press nor in our foreign chanceries: let us by all means think about them, but let's keep them to ourselves'. More generally, the diplomat noted that the battle for the colonies was 'from the propagandistic point of view being shaped in forms and with formulae that no longer corresponded to the times'. 'It is all too clear that we understand the mandate of the UNO as a mandate of the SDN, that is a fig-leaf to cover the word colony. . . Today one must speak of independence, of self-government, one must speak of indigenous peoples

and not of Italians: in other words exactly the opposite from what we are doing.¹²

Neither in Palazzo Chigi, nor in the government and parliament, did Quaroni's heartfelt and disenchanted appeal meet with a responsive audience. Still less could it be easily digested by public opinion, which continued to be subjected to a short-sighted and deafening *barage*, whose themes remained the defence of the colonies and the maintenance of national dignity, inseparably linked in a dangerous symbiosis.¹³ Nor did Quaroni meet with any more of a receptive audience at the talk he gave at the Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) in 1948. In the course of his address the ambassador emphasized:

We need to recognise one fact, whether it's a good thing or not I don't know. The colonial period, which existed over the last century has ended. England has lost India; Holland has lost Indonesia; France is losing Indochina and the situation of her colonies in North Africa is very grave. England is abandoning Egypt, France is leaving Syria and Iraq. Now, in response to this colonial world in ferment, it is very doubtful whether, even if these colonies were to be restored to us, we would have the strength and the ability to maintain them. Would it not be more suitable [Quaroni wondered] to put a brave face on it and renounce everything that has been taken away from us, profiting from it to establish our political and economic relations with the Arab world – which are very important – on a completely different footing?¹⁴

This innovative view of the future of the relations between Italy and her colonies only became of relevance when the international debate on the future of Libya, Eritrea and Somalia was reaching its epilogue. On 13 September 1948 the deputies presented their report to the Council of Foreign Ministers, but the diversity of the Western positions, combined with the accentuation of contrasts between the Western nations and the Soviets, prevented the adoption of a joint resolution. In conformity with the declaration issued on 10 February 1947, at the time of the signature of the Italian peace treaty, the Foreign Ministers deferred a solution of the problem to the United Nations, where the question was not examined until April 1949. The Italian government gave a positive response to the decision to defer the matter. For it gave a brief respite to Italy's manoeuvres, permitting her not only to exploit the tension with Moscow to ensure Western support for her requests, but also, simultaneously, to exert pressure on the Latin American delegations at the UNO to ensure they looked favourably on her African aspirations. Storza undertook intense diplomatic activity. At the Cannes meeting, the Italian Foreign Minister presented a plan to his French counterpart Schuman. This met with the support of Paris but, on being presented to the UN General Assembly on 11 April, was vetoed by the Anglo-Saxon group.¹⁵ The Italian Foreign Minister

understood that 'the only way out was represented by a direct agreement with London'.¹⁶ But the 'Bevin-Sforza compromise', which provided for Italy's trusteeship administration over Somalia and Tripolitania, met with no success. Put to the vote in the General Assembly on 17 May 1949, it was rejected.¹⁷

The last attempt to maintain a presence in North Africa as a mandatory of the UNO having failed, Italy now subjected her foreign policy to a complete *volte face*: 'shedding all reservation and uncertainty', she became 'the champion of the principle of full autonomy for the peoples of Africa'.¹⁸ Italy, an ex-colonial power not by conviction but by the repudiation of her colonial role by her victors in the war, thus translated this position of weakness into a source of potential strength by transforming herself from a post-colonial into an anti-colonial nation. The declaration of her anti-colonial persuasion was calculated to strengthen Italy's rapprochement with the Arab states and to enable her, in this way, not to lose contact with the African situation. The reflection on the tasks and needs of the Italian presence in Africa only changed route, maintaining unaltered its basic objective – that of confirming the Italian presence in the continent – which could now be pursued thanks to the 'unfortunate but providential'¹⁹ events which had excluded Italy from the group of colonial powers.

The signals of this radically different approach are clear and unambiguous. In an undated note, but presumably dating to June 1949, the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome pointed out that 'the failure the London agreement had led Italy to reconsider her position':

We had to do so [it was explained] if we wished to remain abreast of the situation and take due account of the developments that had taken place both in the international field and in the local situations, and if we wished to make our contribution to a concrete solution which can be delayed no longer, since the deferment of the solution of the problem of the colonies from one Assembly to the next is beginning to become a dangerous game and disturbs the atmosphere of international relations... It is thus necessary to surmount this impasse and reach a decision which... may eliminate a serious source of friction and contrasts in international relations.²⁰

Though forced to abandon her request for trusteeship administration over Tripolitania, Italy was unwilling to renounce the safeguarding of her interests in the region. Indeed, the decision to grant independence to unified Libya was also explicable by taking this need into account. 'For self-evident reasons', in fact, the government of Rome:

could not renounce the opportunity [which she believes she has] of exerting her own influence in a region of Africa's Mediterranean littoral,

all the more so in a region in which her economic interests are prevalent. And this influence cannot be limited to the 'mere material interests' of the Italian community. Nor can the safeguarding of these interests, if it is to be effective and lasting, disassociate itself from the exercise of a certain political interest, which it both postulates and determines. As things stand at the moment... it seems to us that our interests in Tripolitania, as enunciated above... may be effectively safeguarded only through the territory's independence.²¹

Were not these the concepts, besides, that Mario Toscano, head of the Office of Studies and Documentation at Palazzo Chigi, felt bound to reiterate when he wrote:

Great Britain needs to recognise that a country in Italy's present-day condition will never be able to resign itself to having a door shut in her face on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, and will always tend to consider... the central Mediterranean as her own zone of influence, whatever promises to the contrary are made by her rulers and however sincere their intentions may be.²²

Italy's decision to pronounce herself in favour of the independence of unified Libya thus indicated the formulation of a Mediterranean strategy, which was given the task of pursuing a number of short- and medium-term objectives: thwarting British plans, favouring a better protection of 'Italian rights'; revamping Italy's image among the Arab peoples. The conversion to anti-colonialism thus opened up hitherto unsuspected and interesting perspectives, 'providing the salutary premises... for Italy's larger involvement in the African and Asiatic sectors'.²³ As Sforza maintained, 'Italy's new attitude to the peoples of her former colonies' opened up 'opportunities for fruitful collaboration with the Arab and Asian countries'.²⁴

In his speech at Lake Success on 1st October Sforza said:

The Italian people is convinced it must ever more actively pursue the friendship of those States that will surely emerge in those territories to which it [the Italian people], with such great abnegation, had brought the benefits of civilisation. Of this friendship Italy could be sure, based as it was on the contribution of thousands and thousands of Italians with whom the indigeneous populations have always lived in perfect harmony, even in the most difficult times.²⁵

This sudden opening up of new horizons was regarded in Italy with great optimism, but also with the caution suggested by a disenchanting observation of the limits of political action in the Mediterranean. The lack of the human and financial resources necessary to make such a 'regional' policy concrete and effective,²⁶ the need to use European and Atlantic terms in the slogans which were supposed to accompany and explain Italy's

'African' strategy; the difficulty of suppressing the recurrent defect of flouting, in the form of public speeches, a policy which had not yet been officially formulated, and which, to be successful, needed on the contrary to be conducted 'in extreme silence' with a view to not arousing the reactions of the allies.²⁷ For it was undeniable that the decision of the United Nations 'had removed the barrier which for so many years had hampered the establishment of friendly relations between Italy and the Arab countries'.²⁸ Yet it was all too clear that Italy's new Mediterranean policy would hardly be to the liking of her European partners: not only to Great Britain, but even to France, a country which had never hidden her violent distaste for the prospect of the independence of a unified Libya on the very borders of her turbulent North African colonies.²⁹ For the government in Rome it was therefore a case of choosing between the risk of arousing the rancour of her European allies, and the chances offered and the potential held out by a philo-Arab policy. This choice had to be made; or the existence of any alternative denied, while at the same time holding onto the Arab 'card' which had so unexpectedly dropped into the hands of Italian diplomacy.³⁰

FRANCE 1944-54: THE TRANSITION TO THE UNION FRANÇAISE AND THE SURRENDER IN NORTH AFRICA

While the Italian response to the crisis of colonialism was one of ambiguous anti-colonialism, full of promises and potentialities, France, with a far older and more solidly entrenched imperial tradition, reacted by attempting an operation of simple *maquillage*. Having emerged from the war nominally as a victor country, but only thanks to the benevolence of the real victors, France adopted a posture of national pride in refusing to accept her decline from big power status: if there was a decline, it was a contingent phenomenon, a sad but necessary stage in a process of growth; the malaise was due to a weakness of a temporary character, which could be overcome by an appeal to the country's great reservoir of human and moral resources, and by the rapid reconstruction of the material resources reclaimed from wartime use.³¹

In the eyes of the French, the empire represented not just, and not so much, an emblem to be regarded with the nostalgia with which a past greatness was remembered, but as an ace up the sleeve, a pledge for a better future.³² It was only thanks to the empire – it was stressed – that France had been able to be considered not a liberated but a victor country.³³ The empire had remained a happy enclave during the war; the overseas territories did not have to suffer, with the exception of Indochina, the humiliation of an enemy occupation; the joint effort expended in vanquishing the Axis had reinforced the feeling of belonging to a political unity: it had created an unbroken *union sacrée*.³⁴

But this political and psychological lifeline to which the French government and the public opinion of France continued to cling to avoid drowning in the turbulent seas caused by the war, which was now redefining the roles and balance of forces of the post-war period, hardly offered a safe anchor. It was threatened by turmoil and the ever stronger winds of change fomented by the claims for national autonomy. The signals emerging from the overseas territories immediately after 1945 were hardly encouraging. The uprising in eastern Algeria on 8 May 1945, the very day marking the end of the war in Europe – held by some historians to be the premonitory sign and dress rehearsal for the revolt in 1954, and to which the government in Paris responded with the classical 'colonial' instruments of draconian repression,³⁵ the hardly more edifying cases of Syria and Lebanon, which tarnished the image of imperial France; the difficulties which the government in Paris encountered in a Morocco where the sultan had placed himself at the head of the anti-French revolt: all these were episodes which required some response from Paris which would restore order to a situation of dangerous confusion. But this response, which translated itself into the transformation of the empire into the 'Union Française', was so ambiguous, so full of undeclared aims, unspoken assumptions, so replete with rigidities and fears, as to give rise to hardly encouraging omens about France's future 'imperial' role.

The transition to the 'Union Française' occurred in fact in the wake of a necessary renewal of the interpretative co-ordinates of the colonial 'phenomenon': necessary, but not by the same token desired. The reticence and hesitation in continuing along the road of an effective revolution in the perception of the problems of the overseas colonies were testified to by the inability to make a clear choice between the two main tendencies of colonial ideology and praxis: that is the tendency to assimilation, the traditional framework of French colonialism; or the antithetical tendency to autonomy, inseparably linked with the British imperial system.³⁶

The Brazzaville Conference in 1944, while it 'indicated the willingness of Free France to undertake reforms',³⁵ proved of little use in shedding light on the new colonial policy which was labouriously gaining ground in the minds of French politicians. It was only the heads of the French colonial administration, and not the representatives of the indigenous groups, who had taken part in the Brazzaville meeting. Moreover, its discussions had been mainly focused on the problems of black Africa; the strategic problems of Mediterranean Africa and Indochina had not been addressed. Nor were the import and significance of the notion of autonomy clarified; the term itself was used inopportunistly and with alarming casualness. The contents and potential application of the federal principle also remained obscure, though it could have represented a winning card. Nonetheless, despite these shortcomings, the Brazzaville Conference had a profound impact on the colonial debate that developed in France, for

its recommendations were accepted by the constituents of the Fourth Republic.³⁸

A prey to the contradiction implicit in the failure to choose between the alternatives of assimilation and autonomy, the constituents of 1946 embraced both principles which, however valid in themselves, produced conflicting results if simultaneously applied in practice.³⁹ In the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, the 'Union Française' is mentioned in general terms in the preamble and, at greater length, in title VIII. If the Preamble had the character of a declaration of intent, and hence a degree of vagueness was inevitable and excusable, the interpretational doubts it aroused were not removed in title VIII. Here, by contrast, some degree of clarity was necessary: it was indispensable, in other words, to grasp the horns of the dilemma, and take a clear stance. But no such stance was taken. The federal idea of equality between national communities, and the assimilatory idea of equality between human beings, were enunciated simultaneously and with equal conviction, and were forced into a difficult cohabitation. The principle of hierarchy between the different forms of civilisation was nominally abandoned but, at the same time, the validity of the old adage about the 'traditional mission' of France was reaffirmed. The system of representation in the Federal Assembly, the most important organ of the 'Union Française', seemed unduly complicated and artificial, and that was precisely the intention of the motherland, fearful lest the voting arithmetic might erode its political supremacy.

The simultaneous rejection of the idea of autonomy, considered inadmissible, and that of assimilation, considered impossible, had the effect of making the provisions of art. 75 of the Constitution largely inapplicable. And yet this article represented the only safety valve for the expression of the aspirations to emancipation of the overseas territories. Provision was in fact made in it for the possible evolution of the conditions of members of the 'Union Française', but it was an evolution which was supposed to occur within the constitutional framework provided, and in conformity with the principle of the perpetuity of the link between France and the territories of her former empire. It was a framework devoid of the flexibility which would have permitted a painless readjustment of the system, and permitted the transformations, whose premonitory signals had already emerged before 1946, to have developed within it, and not outside it.

The rigidity of the new structure given to the empire, now the 'Union Française', was in fact motivated by deep-seated political reasons. France was weak. She was forced to conduct a foreign policy within the restrictive coordinates established by the new equilibria of the post-war world. She accepted only reluctantly, and at some inconvenience, the *de facto* curtailment of her ability to influence the international scenario in an effective way. The government in Paris could only play a losing game. It was obliged to acquiesce impotently in the loss of Eastern Europe as a traditional

area of influence of its policy, and to accept that the German problem, the recurrent sword of Damocles, the nightmare that disturbed the dreams of the French from Sedan on, were discussed as an international and not as a French problem. Only the 'Union Française', it was thought, could save the image of France as a great power and so permit the recovery of the prestige she had lost in the war.

A close link of cause and effect was thus established between the reaffirmation of France's colonial and imperial vocation, and the ability to regain her great-power status and reassert it at the political and diplomatic level. The recognition of this simple proposition was full of consequences. If the coherence of the empire and the country's status were so intimately bound up, all those elements, all those international forces, that were hindering, more or less deliberately, the success of the 'Union' were, in reality, attempting to prevent the French renaissance, and to confirm France's position in a secondary role in the global diplomacy stakes.⁴⁰ The two blocs, it was argued in France, had reinforced their anti-colonial positions either with the intention – in the Soviet Union – of weakening the French position in the Atlantic Alliance, or with the hope – in the United States – of substituting a France considered incapable of maintaining her status as a colonial power.⁴¹

The rancour and resentment that these considerations aroused were an indication of the complexity and difficulty of the task that France had to fulfil: reinforcing her links with the territories of her former empire was tantamount to reaffirming her own decision-making autonomy in establishing the confines of her national interests. Yet these confines, which delimited the fluctuating margins of French foreign policy, had been drawn by other international protagonists who could have expanded or restricted them at will and according to circumstance, varying the pressure of their own anti-colonialism on the infinite spatio-temporal combinations.

Bearing in mind this underlying political and psychological situation, the tenacity with which France defended the proposed partition of Libya and the subjection of a part of it to a French trusteeship administration, and the dismay of the government in Paris at the decision to grant it independence, are fully understandable. The consciousness of the 'instrumental' role which French support for the colonial theses of Palazzo Chigi was supposed to provide, was strongly felt in the government circles in Rome. France will continue to provide us with her support not for us but for herself [wrote the *Corriere della Sera* in December 1947]. 'An independent Libya, or a Libya entrusted to the protection of the Arab League, would be for France the decisive blow to the decline of her power in the Maghreb'.⁴² In effect, Quaroni wrote to Palazzo Chigi in September 1949, the independence of Libya had seriously endangered the French positions in Morocco. The political advantages of the Libyans, the ambassador noted, would have been intolerable for the Moroccans who made no bones about

their disdain for those 'Arab brothers'.⁴³ The Italian consul in Tunis, Eugenio Prato, in November of the same year, reported the slow but progressive transformation of Italy's image in the Regency:

Last September, [he wrote] when our attitude to the Libyans clearly emerged, the local press called us the weakest point of the colonial front which had given way under the Indo-Arab-American pressure. . . for the liberation of peoples. At a later stage, that is during these last few weeks, the press has no longer spoken of Italy in an explicit way, but here and there some very cautious, and I would say marginal, phrases of recognition of the 'liberal' Italian attitude are apparent in the anti-French polemic.⁴⁴

In Morocco, where, 'albeit in the most absolute calm, the nationalist idea and the cause of independence had conquered the majority, if not virtually the totality, of the population. . . one strand of the nationalist propaganda was that the new Italy, with the renunciation of her colonies, had been the most understanding and clear-sighted of the colonialist nations'.⁴⁵

These were two major successes for Italian diplomacy, which sowed the seed for a more actively involved policy in the Mediterranean. Palazzo Chigi was conscious that 'the Italian desire to conduct a philo-Arab policy would certainly have damaged the French positions in North Africa',⁴⁶ but this was not considered a sufficient reason for renouncing or abjuring it. On the other hand, wrote Sforza, 'the French government might regret' the repercussions produced by Libyan independence in Morocco and Tunisia, but Paris 'had the delicacy not to complain to us about it, and understood that the responsibility for what had happened was in large part due to the few who in England had precluded even a minimum accord with Italy'.⁴⁷

The decision of the United Nations on Libya, in effect, could only make more difficult France's control over her North African protectorates. For not only was that decision potentially explosive, but the message it sent was clear, unequivocal and, more especially, of universal application. In Morocco and Tunisia the invitation of Paris to modify the institutional framework of bilateral relations, and base it on the new formula of the 'Union Française', met with a decidedly negative reception. On 9 August 1947, in a statement issued in Cairo, where he had been living in exile since 1945, Habib Bourguiba, leader of the Tunisian 'Néo-Destour', after maintaining the need to abolish the protectorate, explained that, in Tunisia's case, accepting forced integration in the 'Union Française' would be tantamount to renouncing her 'international status as a sovereign state'.⁴⁸ The Moroccan nationalist movement expressed similar views.⁴⁹ This predictable failure of the 'Union Française' in North Africa is explicable bearing in mind the transitory character of the régime, in contrast to the permanent character of the bond of association established in the 'Union

Française': a bond which entailed the important corollary of the impossibility for members of the Union to secede from the association by any unilateral act contrary to the general will. To the vague and illusory advantages offered by the entry into the new union, the nationalists preferred the certainty of not having to relinquish precise competences. As Borella clearly explains:

the colonized peoples, until they have achieved total independence, often prefer the most unfavourable régime to an improved one, in the hope that the former may prove temporary whereas the latter, if accepted, would become definitive. It is astonishing to see young indigenous nationalist movements vindicating their status as colonized peoples, so long as the colonial period still persists; the fact is that their strength derives from the dependent position of their country. . . The total subjection of the protectorate permitted the hope of one day achieving total independence; whereas the improved situation accepted in the association seemed to preclude such a prospect. . . The situation of the protectorates *vis-à-vis* the Union Française had therefore to be dominated by mutual ignorance.⁵⁰

The relations between Paris and Rabat and Tunisia continued therefore to be conducted outside the scheme delineated by the French constituents. Morocco and Tunisia did not participate in the meetings of the Supreme Council, nor in those of the Assembly, in which eighteen seats had been reserved for their representatives. France, however, was incapable of proposing an alternative to the institutional framework of the 'Union Française'. Her policy in North Africa was characterised by a lack of consistency, confusion, a dangerous superimposition of different decision-making authorities, the government's inability to ensure the implementation of its decisions by those who were delegated to do so at the local administrative level,⁵¹ and by the pressures that the beleaguered French minorities in the two protectorates successfully exerted on an executive constantly dithering over the alternative options of reform and repression. Only the arrival of Mendes France in power, in June 1954, could open the way to negotiations which would lead the two North African countries to independence. An inevitable decision, taken in a climate charged with tension, with the sinister image of Dien Bien Phu before people's eyes.

France was thus forced to surrender in North Africa, due to the pressure of events, and due to the intrinsic weakness of an internal system subjected to increasingly insuperable challenges. For, so it was argued in Italy, it had proved impossible for France 'to reconcile her ancient colonialist spirit with the granting of independence to the countries belonging to her former colonial empire'.⁵² She had failed to understand that the definitive collapse of traditional imperialism represented a 'democratic evolution

that was undoubtedly in the logic of history'.⁵³ How could France have believed she could have withstood the iron laws of History?

NOTES

1. As is well known, the interpretation of Fascism as a 'loss of consciousness, a civil depression, an intoxication produced by war' and a 'parenthesis' due to the erosion of the 'consciousness of liberty', was propounded in Italy by Benedetto Croce. Cf. B. Croce, *Scritti e discorsi politici 1943-1947*, Laterza, 1963.
2. Cf. B. Vigezzi, 'Italy: the End of a Great Power and the Birth of a Democratic Power', in J. Becker and F. Knipping (eds), *Power in Europe? Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany in a Post-War World 1945-50*, de Gruyter, 1986, pp. 67-88; 'La politica estera dell'Italia', *Esteri*, I, no. 1, 15 Jan. 1950, p. 3.
3. C. Sforza, *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi. La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*, Atlante, 1952, p. 22. C. Sforza, Italian Foreign Minister, used these expressions in the speech he addressed to the Constituent Assembly on 24 July 1947 to recommend the ratification of the peace treaty.
On the Italian peace treaty cf. G. Vedovato, 'L'elaborazione del trattato di pace con l'Italia', *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, XIII-XIV, nos. 1-4, July-October 1946, pp. 243-72; V. Pollce, 'Osservazioni sul modo di formazione del trattato di pace con l'Italia', *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, XXI, no. 4, October-December 1954, pp. 582-8; G. Vedovato, *Il trattato di pace con l'Italia. Documenti e carte*, Leonardo, 1947; B. Cialdea and M. Visnara (eds), *Documenti della pace italiana*, 1947; B. Cialdea e il trattato di pace', in M. Bonanni (ed.), *La politica estera della repubblica italiana*, Comunità, 1967, pp. 349-418; E. Di Nolfo, 'Problemi della politica estera italiana: 1943-1950', *Storia e Politica*, XVI (1985) no. 1/2, pp. 295-317. Cf. further P. Pastorelli, *La politica estera italiana del dopoguerra*, il Mulino, 1987, and I. Poggolini, *Diplomazia della transizione. Gli alleati e il trattato di pace italiano 1945-1947*, il Ponte alle Grazie, 1990.
4. E. Di Nolfo, *Le paure e le speranze degli italiani 1943-1953*, Mondadori, 1986, p. 194.
5. Sforza, *Cinque anni*, pp. 126-49.
6. For a detailed analysis of the domestic and international debate on the future of the pre-Fascist colonies, cf. the documented volume of G. Rossi, *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza (1941-49)*, Giuffrè, 1980, to whose comprehensive bibliography we refer for further indications.
7. Rossi, *L'Africa italiana*, pp. 373-4.
8. See G. Rossi, 'Trieste e colonie alla vigilia delle elezioni del 18 aprile 1948', *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, LXVI (1979) no. 2, pp. 205-31; A. Varsori, 'La Gran Bretagna e le elezioni politiche italiane del 18 aprile 1948', *Storia contemporanea*, XIII (1982) no. 1, pp. 5-70; J. E. Miller, 'Taking off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948', *Diplomatic History*, VIII (1983) no. 4, pp. 35-55. On the eve of the elections of 1948, the Soviet Union, in a note delivered to the Italian ambassador in Moscow, Manlio Brosio, declared itself favourable to Italian trusteeship administration

- over the pre-Fascist colonies. The text of the note is in *Relazioni internazionali*, 1948, p. 91.
9. Like Gaetano Salvemini and Egidio Reale.
10. See the reports presented to the Conference: *Aspetti dell'azione italiana in Africa, Atti del convegno di studi coloniali, Firenze, 29-31 gennaio 1946*, Florence: 1946, and the final motion approved at the end of the proceedings, pp. 189-91.
11. A. Tarchiani, *Dieci anni tra Roma e Washington*, Mondadori, 1955, p. 192, footnote 1.
12. Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (henceforth ASMAE), Paris Embassy (henceforth APa), box 378, P. Quaroni to C. Sforza, letter no. 892/11736/3090, Paris, 6 October 1947.
13. See L. Wollenborg, *L'Italia al rallentatore. Cronache politiche 1949-1966*, il Mulino, 1966, pp. 30-1.
14. Text of the Conference of the 'Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale', in ASMAE, APa, box 418.
15. On the Italo-French meeting at Cannes see Sforza, *Cinque anni*, pp. 98-103.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
17. The Italian Foreign Minister devoted the whole of Chapter VII in his volume of memoirs to the 'Bevin-Sforza compromise'.
18. Sforza, *Cinque anni*, p. 171.
19. E. Insabato, 'Iniziativa mediterranea dell'Italia', *Civitas*, II, no. 9, September 1951.
20. ASMAE, 'Direzione Generale Affari Politici' (henceforth DGAP), 'Italia ex-possedimenti 1946-50', box 30, 1949, 'Rapporti politici' file.
21. ASMAE, DGAP, 'Italia ex-possedimenti 1946-50', box 29, 1949, General Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Italian Embassy (Paris), telex. no. 3/5593, secret, Rome, 7 December 1949.
22. M. Toscano, *Corsivi di politica estera 1949-1968*, Giuffrè, 1981, p. 15.
23. ASMAE, DGAP, 'Italia ex-possedimenti', box 29, telex. no. 119/944, secret, A. Tarchiani to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Washington, 5 January 1950.
24. Sforza, *Cinque anni*, p. 185.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
26. ASMAE, DGAP, 'Ufficio III', Italia 1953, box 863, General Part I, 8 March 1952, unsigned, ASMAE, APa, box 433, letter no. 973/3148, P. Quaroni to V. Zoppi, Paris, 8 August 1949.
27. ASMAE, APa, box 439, confidential-personal letter no. 1275/4597, P. Quaroni to V. Zoppi, Paris, 9 December 1949.
28. ASMAE, DGAP, 'Italia ex-possedimenti 1946-50', telex. no. 3/5593, 7 December 1949, already quoted.
29. See P. Guillen, 'Une menace pour l'Afrique Française: le débat international sur le statut des anciennes colonies italiennes 1943-1949', in *Les chemins de la décolonisation de l'Empire Français*, Editions du CRNS, 1986, pp. 69-81.
30. ASMAE, APa, box 438, confidential-personal letter no. 3/5505, V. Zoppi to P. Quaroni, Rome, 2 December 1949.
31. R. Girault, 'The French Decision-Makers and their Perception of French Power in 1948', in Becker and Knipping (eds), *Power in Europe?*, pp. 47-64.
32. 'At a time when the idea of Europe had not even been formulated, the role of France as a great power could not be based on an economy sapped by war, nor on ravaged finances, or a defence potential supplied by American equipment. The only basis of "grandeur" and power resided outside France, in the Empire and in the colonial territories'. A. Nouschi, 'France, the Empire

- and Power', in Becker and Knipping (eds), *Power in Europe?*, pp. 475-82, here p. 477.
33. See R. Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France 1871-1962*, La Table Ronde, 1972, p. 196.
34. See P. Boyer de La Tour, *Le drame français. Au fil d'Ariane*, Le Presse du Mail, 1963, pp. 70 ff.
35. See B. Droz and E. Lever, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie 1954-1962*, Edition du Seuil, 1982, pp. 32 ff.; A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace. Algeria 1954-1962*, Macmillan, 1977.
36. On the 'Union Française' see B. Lavergne, *Une révolution dans la politique coloniale de la France*, Editions Librairie Mercure, 1948; P. F. Goudec, *Evolution des territoires d'outremer depuis 1946*, Librairie Générale de Droit et Jurisprudence, 1958.
37. R. von Albertini, *La decolonizzazione*, Società Editrice internazionale, 1971, p. 614.
38. P. Lamoué, *L'Union Française d'après la Constitution*, Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1947.
39. A. Grosser, *La IV République et sa politique extérieure*, 3rd ed., A. Colin, 1972; J. Fauvet, *La IV République*, Fayard, 1959; J. Julliard, *La IV République... Naissance et mort*, Calmann-Lévy, 1968.
40. H. Labouret, *Colonisation, colonialisme, décolonisation*, Larose, 1952, p. 15. See Institut Pierre Mendès France (henceforth PMF), 'Territoires d'Outre-Mer (TOM) - Union Française (UF)', file no. 2; Institut des Hautes Etudes de Defense Nationale, Direction des Etudes, no. 0136/DE, Paris, 13 February 1956, 'L'évolution de l'Union Française'.
41. In December 1955 prof. Lajugie, of the Faculty of Law of the University of Bordeaux, attempted in a lecture given in Paris, a summation of the 'Union Française' nine years after its creation. After recalling the 'grave and dramatic difficulties' that had characterized the time of the birth of the Union and the immediately subsequent period (with reference to the Indochinese question), Lajugie, reflecting on the deep-seated motives for the difficulties that the institution was constantly encountering, mentioned only as a final instance the failure to apply the constitutional provision which specified a precise definition of the powers of the Union's Assembly and the circumstance that the Supreme Council 'hardly ever met'. In his view, the reasons for the failure of the institution to develop lay elsewhere: namely, in the 'loss of prestige of the Europeans in the eyes of the Africans; the action of the Arab League; and, especially, the "forcerré" anticolonialism of certain peoples such as the Soviet Union, the United States and other member states of the United Nations'. See PMF, 'TOM-UF', file no. 2, Institut des Hautes Etudes de Defense Nationale, Direction des Etudes, no. 0070/DE, 25 January 1956, 'Les problèmes politiques et économiques de l'Union Française', 17 December 1955.
42. V. G. Rossi, 'Momento sfavorevole per la questione delle colonie', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 December 1947, p. 1.
43. ASMAE, 'Italia ex-possedimenti 1946-50', box 29, telex. no. 211/18661/c of 1st October 1949, by which telex. no. 1084/3689 of 22 September 1949 coming from Paris was transmitted.
44. ASMAE, 'Italia ex-possedimenti 1946-50', box 29, telex. no. 64/23297/2943, E. Prato to MAE, Tunis, 29 September 1949.
45. ASMAE, DGAP, 'Ufficio III', Morocco 1951, box 768, confidential telex. no. 24, 13 June 1951.

46. ASMAE, 'Italia ex-possedimenti 1946-50', box 29, General Secretariat - Briefing for the Secretary General, 10 December 1949.
47. Storza, *Cinque anni*, p. 188.
48. H. Bourguiba, *La Tunisie et la France. Vingt-cinq ans de lutte pour une coopération libre*, Julliard, 1954, pp. 208-9.
49. S. Bekkai, 'Où va l'Union Française?', *La Nef*, June 1955.
50. F. Borella, *Evolution politique et juridique de l'Union Française depuis 1946*, Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1958, pp. 398-9.
51. See R. Schuman, 'Nécessité d'une politique' *La Nef*, X, no. 2, March 1953. 'Maroc et Tunisie. Le problème du protectorat', pp. 7-9.
52. 'L'arduo compito di Mendès France', *Esteri*, no. 12, 30 June 1954.
53. 'Solidarietà mediterranea', *Esteri*, no. 20, 31 October 1951.