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## A NEVER-ENDING STORY: THE ITALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO FIG

On November 28, 1957, the Defense Ministers of France, Italy and Germany (FIG) signed a far-reaching secret protocol which contemplated the possibility of atomic military cooperation. This episode has been studied, above all, by Georges-Henri Soutou and Leopoldo Nuti.<sup>1</sup> By building on their works, and with the aid of new sources, this chapter investigates Italy's involvement in this ambitious trilateral project. At the same time, this analysis sets forth certain information not strictly pertaining to the nuclear dimension of the endeavor. This narrative attempts to show that the established historiography may have over-estimated the atomic component of this story, by overlooking substantial forms of conventional military cooperation. Surprisingly, these attempts at conventional cooperation also reveal other hidden nuclear angles of this strangely polyhedral triangle.

### ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

Since 1954, proposals for establishing a European atomic force, centered around Franco-German scientific and financial cooperation, were advanced by certain high-ranking French military officers, like Army General Clément Blanc.<sup>2</sup> In this early phase of European nuclear dialogue, no role whatsoever was attributed to Italy. However,

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1 While both scholars have written extensively on the topic, their most significant publications are, respectively, Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'alliance incertaine. Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954-1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996) and Leopoldo Nuti, *La sfida nucleare. La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche, 1945-1991* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007). An important contribution on Italy's position in FIG is Paolo Cacace, *L'atomica europea. I progetti della guerra fredda, il ruolo dell'Italia, le domande del futuro* (Roma: Fazi, 2004).

2 Pierre Guillen, "La France et la négociation du traité d'Euratom", in *L'énergie nucléaire en Europe. Des origines à Euratom*, ed. Michel Dumoulin, Pierre Guillen, and Maurice Vaisse (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 1994), 111-29, see 111.

in December 1954, advisers to Pierre Mendès-France confided to Ambassador Pietro Quaroni that “France, Germany and Italy” would form the core of Paris’ proposal for creating a European Armaments Pool, which might be restricted to “three sectors: atomic, electronic, aviation”. Quaroni was told brutally that Italy, notwithstanding her limitations, had to be included because a purely Franco-German dialogue was inconceivable. Nonetheless, Mendès must have valued Italy’s potential contribution, since he wished to bring Enrico Fermi back to Europe. It remains to be established when this desire was expressed, since the Italian Ambassador put pen to paper only after the Italian physicist had already passed away.<sup>3</sup> In the following months, Quaroni devoted himself to trying to interpret the grand design behind this plan: apparently, the French Prime Minister’s lodestar was to create an “embryonic [European] Third Force” by reviving the European Defence Community (EDC) through a “Franco-Italo-German agreement”; by uniting their efforts, the Three could be equipped with “the essential weapons of today: atomic and thermonuclear, the electronic part strictly connected to them [and] aircrafts or missiles to deploy the A- or H-bombs”. Quaroni condemned this project as “terribly illusory”, since it would be unfeasible for at least another twenty years. Nonetheless, the Italian Ambassador believed that some results could perhaps be obtained by pooling together “the resources and the brains of the three countries”.<sup>4</sup>

During the Euratom negotiations, Quaroni continued to be involved in backchannel conversations, which revealed the frustration of certain European policymakers. In fact, secret and parallel military discussions might have helped to accept the ambiguously pacifist nature of Euratom.<sup>5</sup> In November 1956, France finally agreed on the Euratom-Common Market package deal after the Suez crisis publicly displayed her weakness. However, almost simultaneously, the desire of Paris to be tied to Bonn was privately set down in a memorandum, which called for the creation of a bilateral Technical Committee in charge of military research and development. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had only one doubt about this document: “what are we going to do for Italy?”.<sup>6</sup> Franco-German military cooperation took off with the signing of the Colomb-Béchar and Baden-Baden protocols, respectively on January 17 and June 6, 1957. Both agreements

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3 Letter from Pietro Quaroni to Enrico Martino, Ris. 1654, December 10, 1954, Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma (hereafter ASMAE), Ambasciata di Parigi (hereafter APA), 1955, busta (box, hereafter b.) 55, 1° sottofascicolo (sub-folder, hereafter sf.) Pool degli Armamenti.

4 Letter from Quaroni to Martino, 0023, January 6, 1955, ASMAE, APA, 1955, b. 55, 1° sf. Pool degli Armamenti; Letter from Quaroni to Giuseppe Mancinelli, ris. 0242, February 12, 1955, ASMAE, APA, 1955, b. 47, fascicolo (folder, hereafter f.) R 4/7, Forze armate italiane.

5 Grégoire Mallard, *Fallout: Nuclear Diplomacy in an Age of Global Fracture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 135.

6 Gunnar Skogmar, *The United States and the Nuclear Dimension of European Integration* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 210-11.

obliquely implied possible forms of nuclear military cooperation.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, German officials informed Italian diplomats that the French government was “especially” interested in carrying out “research in the field of nuclear weapons”. Since the Bonn government appeared anxious to see other nations participate,<sup>8</sup> everything was in place for the unfolding of a more complex endeavor; Italy was not going to be left behind.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

The Sputnik shock drew the final straw: in mid-November 1957, a closed Cabinet meeting of the Félix Gaillard government envisaged that, if the United States and the United Kingdom continued to discriminate against their partners, France would consider producing nuclear weapons with the financial and scientific aid of Germany and Italy.<sup>9</sup> A few days later, Franz Josef Strauss and Jacques Chaban-Delmas reached a comprehensive agreement. Its purpose was to generate close cooperation for the joint production of aircrafts and missiles, and to establish a common approach in the field of nuclear research.<sup>10</sup> At last, on November 28, in Rome, the three Defense Ministers signed a secret protocol which incorporated these ideas.<sup>11</sup>

Since the inception of the project, discussing the nuclear aspect of the FIG agreement with the United States represented a sore point for the Italian government. For example, on December 6, only at Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ insistence did Italian Foreign Minister Giuseppe Pella confess, almost hat in hand, that the trilateral conversations on “modern weapons” had revolved around both missiles and atomic warheads. In response, the Secretary of State requested that there be no surprises in the Atlantic Council meeting in Paris.<sup>12</sup> Tellingly, Gaillard’s speech on December 18 did not denounce the unacceptability of the low-ranking position in which the FIG countries had been relegated.<sup>13</sup>

Just as things seemed to be settling down, on January 14, 1958, Italian Defense Minister Paolo Emilio Taviani rocked the boat by making a revelation which appeared

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7 Soutou, *L'alliance*, 75-77; Nassima Bougherara, *Les rapports franco-allemands à l'épreuve de la question algérienne, 1955-1963* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 42.

8 Unknown, Telespr. 47/0020, February 13, 1957, ASMAE, APA, b. 76, f. R-11/19, Patto di Bruxelles-UEO-Pool armamenti.

9 Soutou, *L'alliance*, 83.

10 Christian Pineau, *Ministre des Affaires Étrangères aux Ambassadeurs de France à Bonn et Rome, 20 Novembre 57*, *Documents Diplomatiques Françaises*, sous la direction du Maurice Vaisse (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1991) (hereafter DDF), 1957, tome II, document (hereafter d.) 359, 717.

11 Protocole, 25 Novembre 1957, DDF, 1957, tome II, d. 380, 762-63.

12 Manlio Brosio, *Diari di Washington, 1955-1961* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008), 302-04.

13 Nuti, *La sfida*, 139.

both puzzlingly candid and artificially calculated.<sup>14</sup> He declared to representatives of the American Embassy in Rome that, “following preliminary discussions by the chiefs of staff of the three countries”, the FIG group meant to “engage in joint production and procurement [of] modern arms including missiles, jet aircraft and nuclear energy”, in order to each have a “small stockpile [of] atomic warheads” by 1963.<sup>15</sup> This common urge apparently had its foundations in a feeling of unreliability toward the American security guarantee.<sup>16</sup> Washington wisely chose not to make a *démarche* which could have been counterproductive for its nonproliferation policy: the State Department deemed that an attempt to prevent the three countries from engaging in nuclear weapons production might unintentionally make them move forward along this path.<sup>17</sup>

When the three Defense Ministers met in Bonn on January 21 they agreed to temporarily interrupt the nuclear facet of the trilateral agreement.<sup>18</sup> However, during that important meeting, they also decided to set up the works of a Tripartite Military Committee, a topic historians have almost entirely overlooked. It remains to be ascertained whether this organ included a civilian Scientific Research Commission, that was “responsible for research and development [of] nuclear weapons”,<sup>19</sup> or tasked with studying atomic propulsion only.<sup>20</sup> In order to avoid misunderstandings, in March, the high-level Steering Committee agreed not to discuss the issue with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or Western European Union representatives.<sup>21</sup> This could prove that, in comparison with politicians and diplomats, military officers were, in general, less prone to mislead officials from other countries as to the actual implications of what, at the time, was likely to be very modest and primitive nuclear research.

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14 Nuti, *La sfida*, 143-45.

15 Despatch 878 from William P. Rogers to John Foster Dulles, January 17, 1958, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Washington, DC, Freedom of Information Act (hereafter FOIA), 740.56/1-1758.

16 (Sanitized) Tel. 2280 from James David Zellerbach to Dulles, January 16, 1958, NARA, Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, Central Decimal Files (hereafter CDF) 1955-59, box 3622, 765.5611/1-1658.

17 Tel. 2846 from the Department of State to Embassies in Rome and Paris, January 18, 1958, NARA, CDE, 1955-59, box 3622, 765.5611/1-1658.

18 Nuti, *La sfida*, 148-50.

19 Tel. 2276 from David Bruce to Dulles, January 25, 1958, NARA, CDF, 1955-59, box 3622, 765.5611/1-2558.

20 Umberto Grazi to Rome, Telespr. 2136/483, February 15, 1958, ASMAE, Direzione Generale Affari Politici (hereafter DGAP), Ufficio I, 1945-60, vers. I, b. 171, f. NATO, Germania, 1958, Sf. Accordo bilaterale italo-inglese per la produzione di armamenti.

21 Compte rendu de la réunion du Comité Directeur qui a eu lieu à Paris les 27 et 28 mars 1958, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma, Italy, (hereafter ACS), Ministero della Difesa-Aeronautica (hereafter MDA), Ufficio del Segretario Generale (hereafter USG), 1961, b. 3, f. 0.8.1/2 Allegati.

On April 8, however, the prospects for nuclear weapons production made a theoretical leap forward with the signing of yet another trilateral protocol.<sup>22</sup> By agreeing to co-finance a French isotope separation plant, the Defense Ministers reaffirmed their will to pursue nuclear military cooperation.<sup>23</sup> Even in late May, the French reassured the Italians and the Germans that the recently formed Pierre Pflimlin government intended to apply the November 1957 protocol in its entirety.<sup>24</sup> However, by the end of the month, the imminence of Charles de Gaulle's return to power started affecting the FIG project.

### THE "GRAND" FINALE

On June 17, 1958, a French restricted council meeting chaired by de Gaulle decided to suspend the trilateral nuclear cooperation, because atomic weapons should never be shared with others.<sup>25</sup> This apparently unquestionable explanation to the ending of the nuclear dimension of the FIG venture casts more than a shadow of a doubt. One must wonder why Chaban-Delmas, who was a Gaullist, had supported the project in the first place. Furthermore, de Gaulle, upon his return to power, had personally assured Quaroni that he was in favor of a "European atomic bomb".<sup>26</sup> The French General cunningly revealed to the Italian Ambassador that *he* had been the mastermind behind the project all along.<sup>27</sup> More importantly, the mystery of the British "strange account" of Italian Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani's meeting with de Gaulle remains to be solved. This particular version of the story is based on what Adenauer's private secretary referred to a British diplomat. According to this one document, found by Nuti in the Archives of the Foreign Office, Fanfani told Adenauer that the General had stressed the importance of cooperating in the field of military research, and even mentioned the possibility of developing a European atomic bomb. Nevertheless, Fanfani and Adenauer agreed that this option should be explored with extreme caution.<sup>28</sup> Although this convoluted dynamic may have led to a Chinese whispers effect, it is now possible to ascertain that Fanfani and de Gaulle did in fact speak of nuclear issues on August 7. The Italian Prime Minister

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22 Paolo Emilio Taviani, *Politica a memoria d'uomo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002), 215.

23 Nuti, *La sfida*, 162.

24 Grazzi to Rome, Tel. 12059/183, May 21, 1958, ASMAE, Telegrammi Segreti, NATO, Parigi, 1958, in arrivo.

25 Colette Barbier, "Les négociations franco-germano-italiennes en vue de l'établissement d'une coopération militaire nucléaire aux cours des années 1956-1958", *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 104 (1990): 81-113, see 112-13.

26 Taviani, *Politica*, 216.

27 Franz-Josef Strauss, *Mémoires* (Paris: Criterion, 1991), 411.

28 Nuti, *La sfida*, 167.

vaguely wrote in his diary that he brought peace between de Gaulle and Adenauer by starting their planned conversation on the atom.<sup>29</sup> No particular military significance can be deduced. Indeed, even if de Gaulle did explicitly mention the possibility of a European nuclear bomb, he may have simply been toying with Fanfani.

Meanwhile, talks on the final protocol signed by the Defense Ministers on April 8 continued. At the end of July, the French Commissariat à l'énergie atomique et aux énergies alternatives (CEA) invited representatives of the German Ministry of Defense to discuss technical and financial details of the French program for uranium enrichment.<sup>30</sup> A month later, the Italian General Defense Staff was still wondering whether or not to submit its evaluation of a June meeting to the Council of Ministers. On that occasion, representatives of the Italian Comitato Nazionale per le Ricerche Nucleari (CNRN) agreed to finance a yearly sum of about 10 billion lire to the French isotope separation plant. In exchange, the Rome government would be provided with "60 kilograms of uranium enriched at 95 per cent".<sup>31</sup> Whether it was due to a feeling of unrest toward de Gaulle's authoritative figure<sup>32</sup> or to a lack of resources,<sup>33</sup> Italy temporarily withdrew from this cooperative project. In light of this decision, the Fanfani government might be considered an accomplice in terminating the FIG nuclear effort.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the last mention of the Tripartite Scientific Research Commission is dated December 1958, when the three nations probably decided to put an end to its existence.<sup>35</sup> While it is very likely that the French General had a say in this matter, there is no basis for arguing that this agreement was not commonly reached by all three parties.

In short, although de Gaulle undeniably played an important role in torpedoing whatever plan may or may not have existed for the creation of a European atomic deterrent, it would be a mistake to consider him as the only person responsible for undermining the nuclear side of FIG. Other actors were involved and many issues were at stake. Counterfactual reasoning, with the aid of historical documents, can prove to be a useful tool to assess the true effects of de Gaulle's actions. Wondering what could have happened *if* de Gaulle had not opposed the nuclear project can help make interesting conjectures. First of all, American technological superiority was a limiting factor on the

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29 Amintore Fanfani, *Diari: 1956–1959*, vol. III (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2011), 389.

30 Soutou, *L'alliance*, 138.

31 Nuti, *La sfida*, 163.

32 Achille Albonetti, "Storia segreta della bomba italiana ed europea", *Limes* 2 (1998): 157-71, see 159.

33 Barbara Curli, *Il progetto nucleare italiano (1952-1964). Conversazioni con Felice Ippolito* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2000), 194.

34 Nuti, *La sfida*, 166.

35 Foglio 627/CMT, December 10, 1958, Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (hereafter AUSSME), Diario Storico di Stato Maggiore della Difesa, Roma, Italia (hereafter DSSMD), III Reparto, b. 26.

German will to accomplish military standardization on the continent. This was revealed to be a “big problem” for the French since mid January 1958.<sup>36</sup> It would indeed have been “illogical”,<sup>37</sup> if not impossible, to carry a French nuclear weapon on an American plane. Tellingly, the Germans opted for the Starfighter after the Americans insinuated that this aircraft would, in due course, receive a nuclear upgrade.<sup>38</sup> Finally, hypothetically extensive American technical and financial aid would not have induced Moscow to just stand idly by, quite the contrary.<sup>39</sup> Undermining the rules of peaceful coexistence by supporting this project would simply have been out of the question for Washington.<sup>40</sup>

These structural elements would appear to prove that de Gaulle could not have and did not singlehandedly decide the nuclear fate of FIG, one way or the other. By following this train of thought, it seems plausible to conclude, with a metaphor, that de Gaulle at best inflicted a final blow to a very sick or maybe incurable atomic body.

#### WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO FIG?

According to a widespread scholarly interpretation, after de Gaulle interrupted the atomic talks, the FIG story was history. Soutou, instead, stresses that there was more to the FIG affair than just its nuclear aspects. He also points out that, in the early 1960s, trilateral cooperation on conventional weapons was continuing quite well, but not enough to satisfy the great non-nuclear ambitions which France had had since the very beginning.<sup>41</sup> However, it was Bertrand Robineau’s work which, for the first time, defined the full life span of the Tripartite Military Committee: some trilateral Commissions continued to function until 1973, before Italy’s withdrawal the following year.<sup>42</sup> Thanks to uncataloged sources from the Italian Central State Archive,<sup>43</sup> an unprecedented analysis of the activities of the Air and Rockets and Missiles Commissions in the early 1960s

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36 Tel. 2207 from Bruce to Dulles, January 19, 1958, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955-59, box 3622, 765.5611/1-1858.

37 Strauss, *Mémoires*, 413.

38 Hubert Zimmermann, *Money and Security: Troops, Monetary Policy, and West Germany’s Relations with the United States and Britain, 1950-1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61.

39 Despatch 1498 from Max Isenbergh to Dulles, February 28, 1958, NARA, RG 59, CDF 1955-59, box 3165, 740.56/2-2858.

40 Ennio Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali. Dal 1918 ai nostri giorni* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2009), 1014.

41 Soutou, *L’alliance*, 121, 140, 143.

42 Bertrand Robineau, *L’Histoire de l’armement terrestre*, tome 5, *Relations Internationales* (Paris: Centre des hautes études de l’armement, 2003), 99.

43 I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Margherita Martelli, the director of the ACS, for helping me dig up these sources.

has disclosed unexpected trilateral nuclear details, although in the context of broader conventional military discussions.

At the meetings of the Air Commission held on May 11, 1960 in Rome, the Missiles working group was not able to draft a common “fiche-program” for air-to-surface missiles. Consequently, the technical specifications required by each delegation were listed in an annex. Curiously, four out of seven of these unidentified types of missiles were designed to carry a nuclear warhead: Italy and France were interested that a certain model would enter into service “as soon as possible”, while France and Germany planned for two other kinds of these missiles to be available between 1963 and 1964. However, the most revealing piece of information included in this chart may be that the only characteristics on which the representatives of all three countries could agree were those of a single conventional missile.<sup>44</sup>

Another theoretical possibility for trilateral nuclear cooperation arose at the end of 1960. The French and German Defense Ministers agreed in late November to jointly study and develop a fighter with a primary strike role. This would supposedly have become the only standardized aircraft of the two countries’ Air Forces. An examination commission was to select one out of two prototypes which would seem more appropriate for the military requirements of both countries. If the projects were to proceed in parallel, the two nations had to actively cooperate in selecting identical and interchangeable weapon accessories. The French “candidate” was the nuclear capable VTOL Mirage III.V. This proposal was submitted in mid-December to the Air Commission of the Tripartite Military Committee during which Italy was asked to participate.<sup>45</sup> No significant follow-up of this potential nuclear aspect of the FIG adventure has been found. However, it must be noted that this preliminary aeronautical Franco-German agreement was much more relevant and nuclear sensitive than the one reached in 1958, in which Bonn was only supposed to purchase a Mirage.

Finally, Germany and Italy became involved in discussions concerning the study and development of the French air-to-surface AS-30 missile and of its nuclear version, the AS-33. When the Italian Defense Minister, Giulio Andreotti, met his French counterpart, Pierre Messmer, in Paris on October 12 and 13, 1961, the latter proposed to co-produce missiles like the AS-30, along with other European countries such as Germany. Andreotti replied that Italy had been promised a better deal by the United States for the Bullpup missile.<sup>46</sup> However, in January 1962, the Italian Air Force still had not reached

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<sup>44</sup> Enrico Cigerza to Rome, Prot. n° 1247/CMT, May 23, 1960. ACS, MDA, USG, 1960, b. 13, f. Elicotteri.

<sup>45</sup> Cigerza to Rome, Prot. n° 2366/32.1/CMT, December 16, 1960, ACS, MDA, USG, 1960, b. 13, f. Trasporti.

<sup>46</sup> (Giuseppe Casero) to Rome, October 20, 1961, ACS, MDA, USG, 1962, b. 3, f. Velivoli da trasporto.



a final decision, which would have been determined above all by the chances of securing an atomic warhead for the chosen weapon.<sup>47</sup> These topics were discussed in a meeting of the Tripartite Steering Committee held in Munich the following month.<sup>48</sup> In April, even though American experts were helping France study how to adapt a nuclear warhead to the AS-30, the Italian Defense Staff was more interested in the Bullpup, which was ready to safely carry a nuclear warhead.<sup>49</sup> During the meeting of the Tripartite Steering Committee at the end of June, France solicited Italian financial aid to foster research on the nuclear upgrade of the AS-30. Curiously, from the Italian point of view, these atomic talks were less of a national priority than assuring that the country would not be excluded from Franco-German discussions on the development of a tank.<sup>50</sup> Eventually, at a meeting of the trilateral Rockets and Missiles Committee in January 1963, the Italian Air Force communicated that it was not interested in French nuclear capable missiles, since it preferred weapon systems which could certainly have been delivered by the F104G Starfighter.<sup>51</sup>

When evaluating the significance, if any, of this nuclear rebirth or endurance, one should, first of all, wonder whether these atomic talks would ever have taken place without the existence of an overarching military body, which was almost exclusively in charge of dealing with conventional issues. One can speculate therefore that there may even be other trilateral nuclear talks that are yet to be disclosed.

#### ASSESSING THE INSTRUMENTALITY THESIS

The FIG accord has been interpreted, by and large, as a means to an end. The thesis of the project's instrumentality has mainly been supported by the Europeans' positive reaction to the American proposal to deploy intermediate-range ballistic missiles on the continent. An analysis of Italy's choices has been considered one of the best ways of verifying the accuracy of the instrumentality theory, since the Rome government was indeed the only one simultaneously involved in both negotiations.<sup>52</sup> Most probably there was an instrumental motivation in Italy's involvement in the FIG project. Taviani even

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47 Foglio 3137370, February 2, 1962, AUSSME, DSSMD, III Reparto, b. 33.

48 February 17, 1962, AUSSME, DSSMD, III Reparto, b. 33.

49 Foglio 3139109, April 18, 1962, AUSSME, DSSMD, III Reparto, b. 33.

50 Promemoria, July 4, 1962, AUSSME, DSSMD, III Reparto, b. 33.

51 Foglio 132/5225/1, January 31, 1963, AUSSME, DSSMD, III Reparto, b. 35.

52 Leopoldo Nuti, "Le rôle de l'Italie dans les négociations trilatérales, 1957-1958", *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 104 (1990): 133-58, see 151.

admitted that Fanfani might have established a nexus between FIG and the Jupiters.<sup>53</sup> However, primary sources often give conflicting accounts of Italy's intentions. For example, a recently declassified American document, which unfortunately is still partially sanitized, cryptically states that in FIG "Italy [was] indifferent as to which country [got] those [nuclear] weapons provided that one of the three actually [would receive] them".<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, it must be stressed that an in-depth analysis has led me to the conclusion that, throughout the 1950s and beyond, Italy revealed an interest in European projects of military cooperation *per se*, and considered an eventual American counteroffer as a highly desirable but secondary consequence of each and every possible continental collaborative action.

The success of the instrumental narrative shows that historians have focused almost exclusively on the nuclear perspective of this story. Scholars have successfully identified the nuclear *arrière-pensées*, hidden in the back of the minds of European policymakers, but at a significant cost. In general, the historical literature has not given due weight to ever-present and always significant proposals for conventional military cooperation. Only a holistic approach, which embraces all facets of the FIG project, can reveal whether, when and to what extent the atomic dimension was more important than the conventional one. This hypothesis, however, is based on the disputable idea that the mostly conventional military discussions, which took place before<sup>55</sup> and after de Gaulle's return to power, can be ascribed to the same category of the political project to develop a European atomic bomb. This chapter supports this coexistence thesis: nuclear and non-nuclear elements were present from the start, and thus the continuation of trilateral discussions on conventional issues should not be regarded as a new or different FIG. The logical conclusion to these considerations is that European trilateral collaboration was on the whole too vast to simply be aimed at gaining American concessions. Moreover, in light of the fact that the Tripartite Military Committee lived on and functioned into the early 1970s, one must re-evaluate the trilateral collaboration as a far-reaching and long-lasting sincerely cooperative endeavor.

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53 Paolo Cacace, "Taviani, gli inglesi e la 'bomba europea'", *Nuova Storia Contemporanea* 2 (2002): 101-12, see 112.

54 (Sanitized) Airgram G-19 from Zellerbach to Dulles, January 31, 1958, NARA, FOIA, 765.5611/1-3158.

55 A line in Taviani's memoirs helps understand that, from the very beginning, discussions on conventional issues were numerically more significant and less vague than the nuclear talks: "*many* issues regarding conventional weapons were dealt with and a *possible* European atomic defense was also discussed", emphasis added; Taviani, *Politica*, 215.

## ITALY'S CONTRIBUTION

The Rome government was undoubtedly the “weakest link”<sup>56</sup> in a project which most probably would have gone on without her.<sup>57</sup> Paris and Bonn, however, preferred to include her.<sup>58</sup> The French, especially, were attracted by “Fermi’s heritage”, as Quaroni epitomized.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, Italy may have exercised a form of “soft power” through her scientific knowledge. However, Italy’s actions and ambitions were restrained by her economic backwardness. Especially in the cooperative efforts set up by the working groups of the Tripartite Military Committee, the Italian representatives could often only envisage an episodic contribution for their country. Nonetheless, they provided invaluable<sup>60</sup> recommendations for the realization of projects, such as the Transall transport aircraft, which so far have only been considered as a result of Franco-German ventures.<sup>61</sup>

Italian government officials constantly felt the need to reassure Washington that Rome did not intend to distance herself from the Atlantic partnership. Since December 1957, the Italian Chief of the Defense Staff, Giuseppe Mancinelli, argued to American Embassy officials that the FIG alignment could serve as a “stabilizing factor [for] French policy”.<sup>62</sup> For this reason, American Ambassador David Zellerbach deemed FIG to be “preferable to unilateral French achievement of independent strength”.<sup>63</sup> In time, this idea would become one of the essential components of the “Quaroni plan”. The Ambassador thought that Italy and Germany might help cure France’s illnesses by politicizing the trilateral agreement.<sup>64</sup> This suggestion received mixed feelings from other diplomats. Vittorio Zoppi was the most critical and probably the most realistic in doubting that France could be restrained by transforming the limited FIG accord into a trilateral alli-

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56 Leopoldo Nuti, “‘Me too, please’: Italy and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons, 1945-1975”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 4 (1993): 114-48, see 122.

57 Cacace, *L'atomica europea*, 60.

58 Georges-Henri Soutou, “L'Italie et la construction européenne, vue par les français”, *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali* 13, no. 2 (1998), 14, no. 1 (1999): 419-32, see 423.

59 Quaroni to Carlo Alberto Straneo, 11071, September 7, 1959, ASMAE, DGAP, Ufficio I, 1945-60, vers. I, b. 20, f. 5, Germania.

60 Cigerza to Rome, Prot. n° 2330/321/CMT, November 9, 1960, ACS, MDA, USG, 1960, b. 13, f. Trasporti.

61 Soutou, *L'alliance*, 142.

62 Tel. 1983 from Zellerbach to the Secretary of State, December 5, 1957, NARA, RG 84, Italy, U.S. Embassy, Rome, Classified General Records, 1946-1964, box 90, f. 320.1 – NATO.

63 Tel. 2368 from Zellerbach to Dulles, January 17, 1958, NARA, FOIA, 740.56/1-2758.

64 Quaroni to Giuseppe Pella, Ris. 0429, March 28, 1958, ASMAE, APA, b. 83, 1° sf. R.11/7-7 accordo a tre.

ance.<sup>65</sup> However, to a certain extent, a diluted version of the “Quaroni plan” was eventually incorporated in Italian foreign policy when Fanfani tried to re-launch the tripartite project as an instrument of political cooperation.<sup>66</sup> In mid-December, the Italian Prime Minister even told Adenauer that, if the three Defense Ministers had followed political directives all along, the whole mess of atomic weapons production could have been avoided.<sup>67</sup> In retrospect, Taviani would also recognize that the weakest aspect of this endeavor had been the lack of a “political supporting structure”.<sup>68</sup>

While the true intentions of Fanfani are still unclear, his Defense Minister, Antonio Segni, was a strong supporter of the trilateral agreement.<sup>69</sup> Ambassador to the United States Manlio Brosio continued to be one of the most determined champions of the project, to the point of almost becoming obsessed with the idea of a European atomic bomb. In February 1960, he explicitly recalled the 1957 protocol signed by Taviani, knowing that this would make him unpopular.<sup>70</sup> However, it was confided to him in late May 1962 that many in Rome, including Fanfani, thought that a European atomic weapon could be the utmost catalyst for continental integration.<sup>71</sup> This is why exactly a year later he opposed the Multilateral Force, which would have prejudiced “the European nuclear weapon and thus the political unity of Europe”.<sup>72</sup>

In September 1959, Quaroni believed that Italy could potentially still convince France to re-enlarge the trilateral cooperation to the atomic realm. This opinion was illusory. What is revealing though in Quaroni’s analysis is the impossibility for the Rome government to encourage such a development due to her domestic politics.<sup>73</sup> Further research is required to understand precisely what the Italian Ambassador meant when he referred to internal constraints on Rome’s foreign policy.

New evidence would seem to reveal that, even if “Italy was not really directly interested in this [nuclear arms] field”, Taviani was still willing to “help France with her nuclear program”.<sup>74</sup> The Italian Defense Minister even hoped that the “US would decide to assist France in such [a] manner that its nuclear capability could be shared with Germany

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65 Letter from Vittorio Zoppi to Pella, ris. 1981/1219, April 16, 1958, ASMAE, APA, b. 83, 1° sf. R.11/7-7 accordo a tre.

66 Adolfo Alessandrini to several Embassies, Telespr. 4/795/C, September 9, 1958, ASMAE, APA, b. 84, f. R-12/12.

67 Fanfani, *Diari*, 468.

68 Taviani, *Politica*, 217.

69 Brosio, *Diari di Washington*, 384.

70 Brosio, *Diari di Washington*, 493.

71 Manlio Brosio, *Diari di Parigi, 1961-1964* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2009), 200.

72 Brosio, *Diari di Parigi*, 348.

73 Quaroni to Straneo, September 7, 1959, ASMAE, DGAP.

74 Tel. 2839 from John D. Jernegan to Dulles, March 18, 1958, NARA, FOIA, 740.56/3-1858.

and Italy”, by arguing that the “importance of Italy in a Tripartite arrangement was primarily to provide political ‘ballast’”.<sup>75</sup> Notwithstanding all these sincere demonstrations of Atlantic loyalty, Ambassador Zellerbach believed that “the Italians ... did not wish ... to be excluded[,] were a FIG nuclear scheme developed”, even though they “could contribute neither substantial funds nor great technical talent to a nuclear program”.<sup>76</sup>

Even though Italy’s participation in the FIG project can fundamentally be considered as an exception in an otherwise linear path of bilateral atomic cooperation with the United States, Rome’s effort in this trilateral undertaking should, at the same time, be *exceptionally* revealing of her long-lasting attitude in atomic military affairs: by trying to combine conflicting policies and not fully accepting the consequences of her domestic misgivings, Italy could never fully contribute or achieve as much as she desired.

#### A NEVER-ENDING STORY

On the one hand, this chapter brings to light new aspects of the nuclear side of the FIG story. On the other hand, however, it unveils arguably more important non-nuclear elements. The far-reaching and labyrinthine activities of the Tripartite Military Committee could probably be much more significant for the history of European integration than for nuclear history. It is worth investigating whether an identity card<sup>77</sup> was released to some of the participants to the countless tripartite working groups.<sup>78</sup> If this were the case, the Tripartite Military Committee could have constituted an example of a “transnational network of scientists, engineers, military officers”, capable of favoring the “circulation of knowledge and skills”;<sup>79</sup> “the role of a culturally embraced idea of belonging together”<sup>80</sup> certainly influenced the actions of Italian Air Force General, Enrico Cigerza, whose ultimate goal was to promote the “spirit of the Tripartite Pact wanted by the three Defense Ministers for the best future of the union for the defense of Europe”.<sup>81</sup>

Discovering that the Tripartite Military Committee continued to exist until the early 1970s leads to a bitter conclusion. According to the fifty-year rule usually applied to

75 Tel. 2410 from Zellerbach to Dulles, January 30, 1958, NARA, FOIA, 740.56/1-3058.

76 Memorandum of Conversation, March 19, 1958, NARA, FOIA, 740.56/3-1958.

77 An interview with retired Italian Air Force General Domenico Spinelli, who participated in several meetings of the ‘Air’ Commission, has not been able to confirm this information.

78 Compte rendu de la réunion, 27 et 28 mars 1958, ACS, MDA, USG.

79 Helmuth Trischler and Hans Weinberger, “Engineering Europe: Big Technologies and Military Systems in the Making of the 20th Century Europe”, *History and Technology* 21, no. 1 (2005): 49-83, see 71-72.

80 Trischler and Weinberger, “Engineering Europe”, 74.

81 Cigerza to Rossi, Prot. 37/S, June 16, 1958, ACS, MDA, USG, 1961, b. 3, f. 0.8.1/2 Allegati.

military documents, many key facts of these important tripartite activities are still classified and may remain a mystery for approximately another decade. Although this chapter argues that the atomic side of FIG should be recast in its proper context, without overshadowing the conventional dimension of the project, it is possible that, in time, nuclear sensitive information from the late 1960s or early 1970s will be disclosed. Due to clear *lacunae* in the files currently accessible, it is also reasonable to assume that many significant aspects of the latent nuclear dimension from the late 1950s or early 1960s still could be revealed. However, there is cause for hope, as my numerous derogation requests to access files containing tripartite military documentation, stored at the Service Historique de la Defense in Vincennes, have been approved, with the notable exception of the records of the Nuclear Biological Chemical (NBC) protection working group. In conclusion, potentially withheld atomic sides of the FIG triangle could be dug out from international archives with a more permissive access policy than the restrictive one currently in place in Italy. Unfortunately, a complete investigation of Italy's contribution to FIG is currently almost impossible, and a full narrative of the country's role may prove to be a never-ending story.