

The Political Influence of the Military in Italy, 1945–93. Lessons Learned*

Generally speaking, Italy's military has a tradition of non-interference, at least directly, in politics. In terms of military ethics, this was long supported by the doctrine of the non-political nature of the armed forces themselves.¹

This does not of course mean that the military abstained from exercising any political influence, but this influence was exercised indirectly, by applying pressures in ways which were not usually made apparent. The means of applying these pressures would, of course, vary over time, depending on the political and social organization of the country and the position of the armed forces within it. Looked at from this point of view, the history of civil-military relations since the end of World War II can be divided into two periods.

The period from 1945 to 1989.

The first period runs from 1945 to 1989. During this period the military undergoes a certain sidelining and a sharp loss in its capacity to influence national politics. A great number of causes have contributed to this phenomenon, and they will be referred to here only summarily. The most obvious – though not perhaps the most important – has been the fact of losing the war, and losing it badly. There is an immediate comparison with Germany, which also lost the war but kept the Allied forces engaged for a very considerable length of time, so demonstrating a very different level of fighting efficiency. Although the responsibilities for military unpreparedness are actually largely to be attributed to the Fascist regime, the armed forces physically failed to achieve all their objectives. A less obvious but perhaps more potent cause has been the removal of the king, which has deprived the military of their direct, privileged – even if only nominal – relationship with the pinnacle of power. This makes it much more difficult, indeed less natural, for the military to act as moderator, guarantor and element of stability in times of crisis.

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¹ The doctrine of the non-political nature of the military is a concept that emerges immediately after the unity of Italy and is enshrined in the country's first constitution (the Statute of King Charles Albert of Piedmont). It derives from the purely electoral nature of the parties of the time and from the choice made by the military hierarchies to stay out of any political dispute and to take on the role of guarantor of power, as "party of the king". Some scholars (viz. Virgilio Ilari "*Potere militare e potere politico in Italia*", see bibliography) believe that this concept led to the transformation of the army of the Risorgimento "into a new type of professional army and not a national army, for this and only this is what apolitical status means". The position vis-à-vis politics seems to have endured as a constant factor for a great part of the history of Italy's military. It was also a constant imposed by the political powers themselves if it is true, as Virgilio Ilari (op. cit.) declares, that "immediately after the war (the second world war) the generals accused of attempting to 'fascistise' the army were tried... whereas those responsible for the much deeper 'fascistisation' of the economy and of the bureaucracy were not so treated... The feeling must be that together with its 'fascistisation' the desire was to strike also at the politicisation of the army." And again, apropos of the democratisation of the armed forces foreseen in the republican constitution: "for the other forces – the right, the Catholics, the liberal democrats and the bourgeois left – 'democratisation' was to be none other than the restoration of the old apolitical status, that is to say a stance of neutrality vis-à-vis the parties."

An equally important side-lining factor has been the country's new political framework, with overall influence in the hands of two mass parties, neither of which, for their different reasons, has any interest in supporting or strengthening the military.

The Christian Democrat Party, which, due to the impracticability, of alternating administrations was to be the permanent party of government during the period, is of Roman Catholic inspiration and therefore essentially pacifist. It has no tradition of government in the pre-Fascist period and is in some ways in its novitiate. It appears to be much more inclined to home policy than foreign policy (the "low profile" policy, as it has been defined for this period). The Christian Democrat top management feels no need for the military establishment except insofar as it helps guarantee internal security. (It has in fact favoured the development of the *Carabinieri*, a military force with responsibility for internal policing). Foreign defence is allotted to the American nuclear and conventional umbrella and Italy's defence structures are kept at the minimum level required of countries in the NATO pact. On the other hand, the mass opposition party – the Italian Communist Party – sees the armed forces as anti-communist in terms of internal politics and anti-Soviet in foreign policy terms. It was unlikely that this party would provide much room for any military leadership.²

In organizational terms the new scenario comes about immediately after the war, when the powers of the Chief of General Staff (also renamed Chief of Defence Staff) are cut and the three ministries of War, Navy and Air, are brought together as the Ministry of Defence.³ In effect the military profession undergoes an impoverishment in the country at large. Officer cadets are progressively drawn from lower and less privileged social levels and, although the entrance examinations always seem to provide sufficient numbers, this seems to be largely because of constant areas of unemployment in southern Italy, as is demonstrated by numerous studies of the phenomenon.⁴ For a statistical sample of the examination trend and the social background of the officers, see tables 1 and 2.

How was the political influence of the military exercised in Italy during this period?

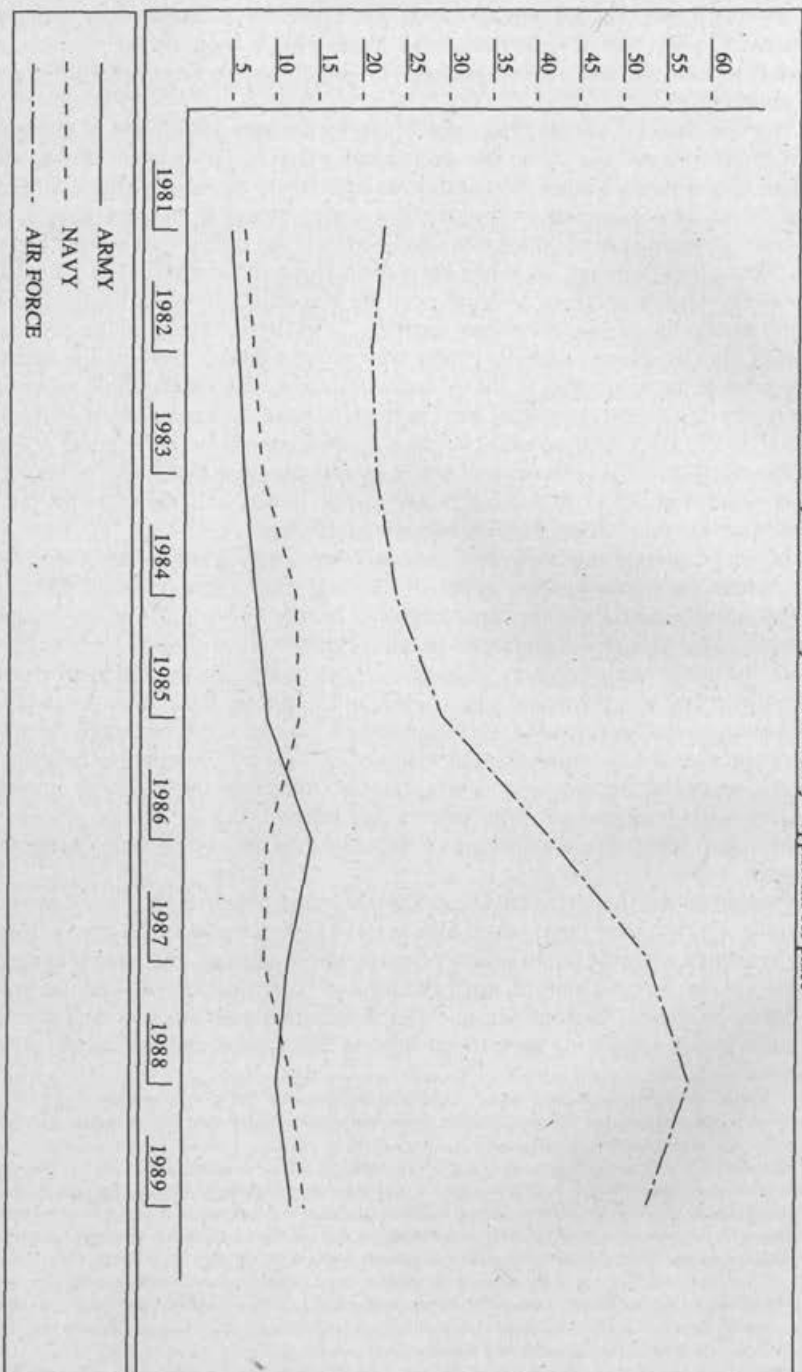
It seems to me that there are two principal lines of policy which are followed by the military hierarchy (lines which also involve part of the political class). These can be named after the major military figures who backed or implementing them. These are two Army Chiefs of Staff who were in charge during two very different historical moments: General Giorgio Liuzzi and General Giovanni de Lorenzo. Liuzzi's line is largely to seek to go beyond the rigid apolitical stance of the

² As Piero Visani observes, *Politici e militari...*, quoted in bibliography, p. 29: "Given their traditions and their gut hostility to all things military, the emergence during the post-war political struggle of the two ideologies, catholic and communist, should have left little room for doubt."

³ P. Ostellino and L. Caligaris write apropos in "*I nuovi militari*", Milan, Mondadori, 1983), p. 131: "The armed forces, which after the fall of Fascism were the only players left on the scene to take responsibility for what happened during the war, allowed themselves to be treated as guilty and sidelined themselves to concentrate on their traditional functions of organisation, operations and training. Inevitably, in the immediate post-war years the anti-Fascist coalition governments identified an objective which, while politically clear, was militarily confused: the reduction of the powers of the Chiefs of Staff and the simultaneous boosting of the military influence of the Council of Ministers, culminating in the institution of a single Ministry of Defence." Though this may have been generally the case, it should be borne in mind that some military leaders opposed the trend. The strongest opposition came consistently from Gen. Raffaele Cadorna, the then Army Chief of Staff, who eventually resigned in protest on 1 February 1947.

⁴ See Marina Nuciari: "*La professione militare in Italia: tra professionalizzazione e burocratizzazione*", in *Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale*, II/1981; Giampaolo Prandstraller: "*La professione militare in Italia*", Milan, Angeli, 1985; Giuseppe Caforio: "*La professione militare nell'indagine sociologica in Italia*", in *Rivista Marittima*, No 2/1988.

TABLE No.1 Entry into the military academies Italy – applicants for place



military leadership, regarded as no longer in line with changed political and social conditions. "Taking up the second question:" writes Liuzzi in a quite famous book he published after his retirement,⁵ "that is, whether career officers should utterly abstain from political activity, it seems to me that we cannot contemplate the very drastic guidelines normally laid down for the governance of military discipline . . ." As an individual progresses up the hierarchy, his detachment from political activity ". . . should lessen for officers: . . . those of the military in the upper command echelons and ranks should not only seek to maintain contact with their opposite numbers in the world of politics but should also seek to influence them in such a way and to such a degree as are in the interests of the military and of the nation as a whole". Liuzzi no longer thinks in terms of indirect influence exercised by various means of pressure but rather of direct and open involvement which takes part in the debates of interest. The military is no longer to be the "la grande muette" of a nineteenth century tradition which applied not only to Italy: it is now to become one of the actors on the political scene. For having spoken out on matters of military policy, General Liuzzi and his immediate superior, General Mancinelli (Defence Chief of Staff), were removed from their posts by the then Minister for Defence, Giulio Andreotti, in 1959. Liuzzi's idea was taken up much later, in 1981, by Socialist Minister for Defence Lelio Lagorio, who looked at the origin of the apolitical stance and tradition of silence of the military, "much-appreciated by nineteenth century parliamentarians", and considered these were no longer suitable in changed times, and indeed harmful to a democratic regime. "The silence imposed on the armed forces was not a prescription of discretion . . . of reserve . . . but rather a sanction which separated and isolated the military and caused its thinking to be unknown to the political powers themselves."⁶

Just as Liuzzi's line of policy seemed to have been put out of court by the removal of his supporters at the top of the military, another line for political conduct started to be brought forward. Through unconstitutional use of the military secret services, this gained the support of certain politicians in positions of power. The key person is General Giovanni de Lorenzo, wellknown to the point of becoming notorious in Italy. At the time he was in charge of the military intelligence services, subsequently becoming Commander of the *Carabinieri* and then Army Chief of Staff. This process took place while Hon. Giulio Andreotti was Minister of Defence (1959–1966).

To get an idea of the features of this line of political conduct, I think it if useful to quote a passage from the conclusions of the Beolchini Commission⁷ on the activities of Italy's secret services and of the *Carabinieri* under Giovanni de Lorenzo's command. "The Commission states that SIFAR (as the military secret service was entitled at the time) had built up a genuine power group to implement its own policy, with the assent of persons within the Defence Ministry and the General Staffs, and with the direct involvement of the *Carabinieri*."

⁵ Giorgio Liuzzi: "Italia difesa?", Roma, Volpe, 1963, pp. "Italia difesa?" appeared in 1963. Several years earlier (1959) the eminent military thinker, Paolo Supino, had already expressed the same idea, attacking the democratic legitimacy of the "apolitical" principle and suggesting it be replaced by the other concept of a "non-party" stance. (See "Il Ponte" review, November 1959). It is worth noting that in the following year (1960) it was published the famous book *The Professional Soldier*, where Morris Janowitz theorized the convergence of the military and civil society.

⁶ Speech to the Defence Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, 15 December 1981.

⁷ After the activities of Gen. de Lorenzo had been publicly denounced in Parliament, the government appointed a commission of enquiry in January 1966. It took its name from that of its chairman, three-star General Aldo Beolchini. As a result of the Beolchini Commission report Gen. de Lorenzo was dismissed as Chief of Staff of the Army and Gen. Giovanni Allavena, who was linked to the de Lorenzo policy, resigned as head of the military secret service.

There have been differing versions and interpretations of this line of action and its consequences, which have certainly damaged the public image of the military itself,⁸ and it is not yet easy to pronounce a definitive judgement. For the moment I would just quote the interpretation of an Italian military historian, *Virgilio Ilari*,⁹ with the caveat that it is a thesis still to be proved. Ilari holds that the actions of de Lorenzo – the opening of files on politicians, military figures and managers; removal from power of officers who supported the end of an apolitical military; arbitrary planning to deal with popular protest – were not aiming at a “golpe”, but featured “constant loyalty to the Head of State and the Minister of Defence (Hon. Giulio Andreotti), who are mainly responsible for making unconstitutional use of the security services and giving the wrong impression to the democratic forces of the left, in a manner which has led to the far-reaching decay of our political culture and customs”. In Ilari’s reading, therefore, this would have been an attempt to re-establish the privileged relationship between the military top brass and the Head of State, the highest political authority once represented by the king now being invested in the President of the Republic. Unfortunately the instruments used were not legitimate: unfortunately history cannot turn back. In any event, the “far-reaching decay of our political culture” has brought with it two extremely damaging results for the military and for a proper role of the military establishment within society. The first was the extreme distrust felt by politicians of the left (who were not alone in this) as regards the loyalty of the armed forces to the Constitution. The second was the tendency of minority groups within the officer corps to contemplate military intervention on the country’s political scene, a mental attitude which, as we have seen, is totally foreign to the Italian military tradition: this attitude caused a great stir in public opinion, despite the very small number of officers involved.

It should be apparent from this historical sketch that, over these 54 years, the military in Italy has lost some factors of influence. Besides the losses due to a lost war, to the fall of the monarchy and the change of political regime, there have also been a weakened influence on the industrial sector, lesser interest and indeed misinformation in the Italian public’s attitude regarding defence problems,¹⁰ and an overshadowed image within society on account of errors and departures from accepted standards by a part of the leadership of the institution itself.

The period from 1989 to 1993

Over the four-year period 1989–93 it seems that Time ran faster. The international arena witnessed a rapid succession of unexpected happenings (or not at least expected so soon), of such importance as to reshuffle all the cards and, consequently, to change many of the rules of the game. Looking specifically at Italy,

⁸ As Ambrogio Viviani observes, in “*Servizi segreti italiani, 1815–1895*”, Rome, ADN Kronos, 1985: “the lesser experience of the military, compared with the civilian authorities, their lesser capacity to manoeuvre, together with their very obvious military look, too often and too improperly put the SID (SIFAR’s successor as secret service) at the centre of every political row.” (p. 143).

⁹ Virgilio Ilari: “*Potere militare...*”, op. cit., pp 38–39.

¹⁰ For a comparison of Italian public opinion of defence problems with that existing in other western European countries, see G. Caforio and S. Malfe: “*Public opinion and security issues in Italy: a trend analysis 1980–1990*”, in P. Manigart (ed.): “*The future of security in Europe: a comparative analysis of European public opinion*”. Brussels, Defense Study Center, 1992.

the end of the East-West power-bloc confrontation has brought to an end a stance in international politics where decisions, to use a significant expression, were taken *above our heads*". This means that there is again room for an Italian foreign policy, but it also means that there must be something to put in that space. Paradoxically, the disappearance of the main military threat brings about an enhanced importance for the nation's armed forces, seen as the necessary instrument for a foreign policy which will no longer be "lowprofile". Italy's need to deploy military units, at first rather timidly (in the Gulf war) and subsequently, with greater conviction, in Iraqi Kurdistan, Albania, former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Mozambique, has brought attention to bear once again on the military, on the part of the politicians and of public opinion alike (something similar had happened, though as a single episode, during the intervention in Lebanon).

At the same time, the changed nature of the threat and of the scenarios for use of the armed forces have had two consequences which will certainly have important effects in the years to come. The first is the trend of thinking, including that of the politicians, away from all-conscript armed forces towards and towards a totally, or partially, volunteer force. The second is a considerable change in the relative importance accorded to the three armed forces. Whereas the army was far and away the most important of the forces when, under the NATO air umbrella, its task was to defend the plains of the Veneto from an attack from the east, it now sees its role considerably reduced to that of sending relatively small contingents overseas – contingents that will however be as independent as possible in terms of tactical air support and naval transport. In parallel, though apparently beginning before the key year of 1989,¹¹ the upper ranks of the armed forces seem decidedly to be thinking once again along what I have called the "Liuzzi line", which would overcome the dogma of the strictly apolitical stance of members of the military. This, as Virgilio Ilari says,¹² is "a very important development that introduces new responsibility and poses delicate tasks for the military's leadership. They are now not only authorised, but indeed invited reference to the then Minister of Defence, Lelio Lagorio, see note (6)) to use their discernment, prudence and sense of military and political usefulness, to take part in the technical and political debate...".

An other important feature of this period in Italy has been the political and moral upset which has been called *Tangentopoli*: 20% out of the members of Parliament, several public servants and some hundred of captains of industry investigated for bribery. It is worthwhile to underline that nobody among officers of the armed forces was prosecuted of this crime: the exemplary conduct of the military commanders creates respect for the values of military ethics in wide areas of society, particularly when compared with the average conduct of management in other areas of State's administration. Some areas of society have begun to see in the armed forces the *wholesome part* of the State itself.

Hence, generally speaking, we can talk about a return to a "convergence" (to use Janowitz's term)¹³ of military and civilian society.

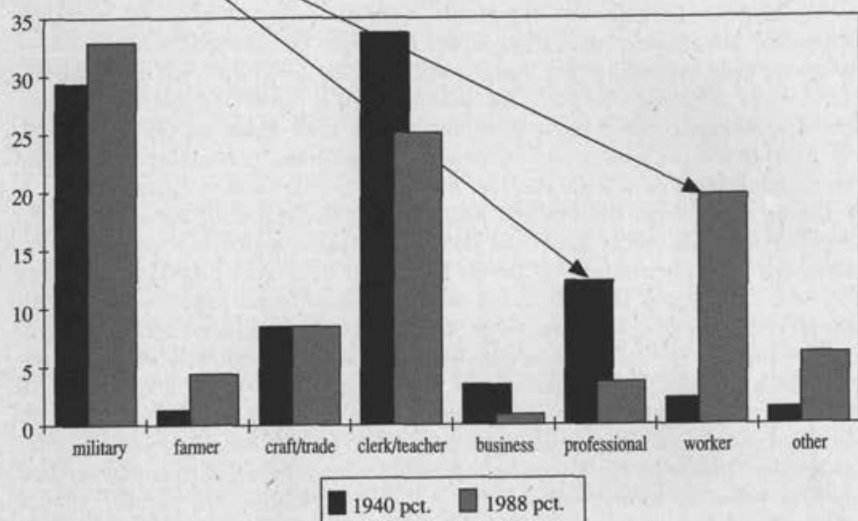
An aspect of this return is the military's preparedness in recent years to under-

¹¹ In 1979, ten years previously. Gen. Luigi Caligaris had already published an article in which he declared that the contribution of the military to the formation of defence policies is "conceptual: not, as is sometimes mistakenly thought, at a technical level, but at the level of military politics... and it is therefore necessary for the military to think, not politically, but in political terms". (from *Rivista Militare*, No 5/1979), p. 28).

¹² Virgilio Ilari: "Potere militare e potere politico in Italia", op. cit., p. 43.

¹³ Morris Janowitz: "The professional soldier: a social and political portrait", New York. The Free Press, 1960.

TABLE No. 2 – Social origin of entrants in Army academy according to the father's profession. 1988 percentages vs 1940 percentages.



take the sort of studies they were previously either unaware of a suspicious of. I refer particularly to the social sciences. This opening has led a greater number of serving officers to study the social sciences and apply them to research on the military institution; it has also led to the freedom for "lay" scholars to investigate the institution and its problems. In fact, over the last few years the military leadership itself has begun to request information from the social sciences and empirical research.

Processes and means used to exert political influence today: their results.

What roads to political and social influence remain open to the Italian armed forces today?

First, I would say that most people (with extreme pacifist and anti-militarist fingers set aside) retain a general, and positive, sense that the armed forces are a sort of status symbol of national sovereignty, and their continuing existence is widely understood as a natural consequence. This social acceptance itself obviously leads to an empowering of military leaders to exercise a certain influence, at least at the technical level, on questions of military policy. Besides, despite the above-mentioned errors of the military leadership, there also seems to have survived a potential for "moral persuasion" connected to the military tradition and the values it represents. In a society where values are changing (and where they are therefore in crisis), such values represent for many people a reference point and a possible "last stand" if certain given political and social experiments were to

fail. This moral reference point means that high-ranking officers are still listened to in fairly high social strata – a privilege not accorded to all professional classes.

Secondly, there is what might be called the bureaucratic area of pressure, by which I mean the overall capability of influencing government, parliament, public administration and electorate which can be and is wielded by every state administration insofar as it is an organised bureaucracy. Furthermore, there remain, though in somewhat weakened fashion, those relationships between the armed forces and industry which grew up in Italy at the time of the First World War and allow the military leadership to exercise influence in some sectors of industrial policy. Gen. Renzo Romano writes:¹⁴ "The defence budget is not one of the largest, but the portion of it assigned to discretionary expenditure, especially for modernisation and renewal, is remarkable; despite the restrictions." And in another passage from the same paper: "This attribution (defining provisioning programmes), as clearly specified by Presidential Decree No 1477 of 18. 11. 1965, gives the Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces practically complete freedom to choose the means to equip their respective armed force." Finally, the interaction today between military leadership and industrial management is thus defined by three-star General Luciano Meloni, National Director for Armaments: "... during debate on the finance law I worked, as National Director for Armaments, shoulder-to-shoulder with the chairman of RITAD (the association of industrialists operating in the defence sector), who represented the entire range of the defence industry. This was in order to feed correct information through the institutional channels used by each party: mine through my Ministry, and RITAD through lobbying activities, in the best sense of the term."¹⁵

Closely intertwined with the economic-industrial and the bureaucratic forms of pressure is the activity of lobbying. This makes use of additional procedures, however, and is worth special examination. The commonality of interests between the military and the world of industry of the other large organs of the State is implemented by the interaction of military personnel at various levels with the non-military environment surrounding them, as generally described in the theories of Moshe Lissak, to whose works I refer.¹⁶ But where the Italian situation seems to have features of its own is in the make-up and activities of the bodies of influence represented by associations of retired military personnel, whether grouped by service or by rank. They have always had, and still have, the function of spokesmen for the serving military, who, thanks to the doctrine of the non-political nature of the military, have largely been prevented from directly expressing their own opinion. But their activities are affected by the very fragmented nature of the associations themselves – a feature not found in other countries. The result is that the lines of force within the services or armed forces that make up the military institution are to some extent laid down by the size and vigour of the relevant associations of retired personnel. For example, a single area of specialization within the infantry, the "Alpini", can exert strong political influence because the association of the Alpini in retirement can make capital out of the traditional regional togetherness of mountain people to become the largest and most cohesive

¹⁴ Address by Gen. Renzo Romano, Head of Section III of the Defence Chiefs of Staff, to the "Difesa-Industria" seminar referred to in the bibliography.

¹⁵ Address by Gen. Luciano Meloni to the above seminar.

¹⁶ See Moshe Lissak: "Influsso dei modelli di relazioni forze armate-società sulla professione militare", in G. Caforio and P. Del Negro (eds.): "Ufficiali e società: interpretazioni e modelli", Milan, Angeli, 1988, pp. 99–114. See also: "Military roles in modernisation. Civil-military relations in Thailand and Burma", Beverly Hills and London, Sage, 1976.

of all the associations. No politician can fail to take note of the annual gathering of 300,000 retired Alpini in some Italian city.

Some conclusions.

Although the "de Lorenzo line"/"Liuzzi line" dichotomy cannot in any way be assimilated to the divergence/convergence debate¹⁷ conducted by American military sociologists, it would appear that both the Italian military leadership and that part of the political class that is beginning to look at these problems are tending towards a solution of the convergence type. If this is so, and if this line is successfully followed through, it is easy to foresee the future of civil-military relations in Italy.

Under a more general point of view, I can state that the political influence of the military and – the historical, political, institutional situation of each country. As far as a young South European democracy (like Italy) is concerned, the given experience seems to teach us that a convergent mood of civil-military relations is the best – or at least the less dangerous – way to solve the problem. In fact the most suitable solution in a democratic regime seems to make publicly conscious both politicians and military of their relative positions, and to acquaint also the public opinion with them.

¹⁷ Though at first sight there appear to be typical features of the divergent model in the "de Lorenzo line", there are in fact too many deviations from that model: on the other hand, the "line" offers numerous similarities with models of political interference of the South-American variety. By the same token, I have not up to now applied the term convergence to the "Liuzzi line" because this officer's overall thinking was anything but convergent (see *"Italia difesa?"*, op. cit.). Only those elements of the "Liuzzi line" which were taken up 25 years later, in the 1990s, can begin to be considered from the point of view of convergence with civilian society.