

Conversations with Francesco Cossiga

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The article is an extract from five exclusive interviews, recorded over several months in 2009, with former Italian president, Francesco Cossiga, who died on 17 August 2010. Born in 1928 in Sardinia, Cossiga was a life Senator in the Italian parliament, to which he was first elected for the Christian Democratic Party in 1958. His second cousin, Enrico Berlinguer, was secretary of the Italian Communist party from 1972 until his death in 1984. Cossiga held the offices of interior minister, prime minister, speaker of the Senate and president of the republic. He resigned as interior minister on 9 May 1978 after the murder of Aldo Moro, but returned as prime minister from August 1979 till October 1980. Considered a specialist in the areas of intelligence and security, Cossiga was proud of his association with the secret Stay Behind network known as Gladio, and took credit for setting up Italy's anti-terrorist rapid response units.

Church and State

The first of five recorded conversations with President Cossiga occurred on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the divorce referendum. I began by asking him about the political significance of the vote, which had returned a large majority in favour of retaining divorce.

The victories of the Christian Democratic party in 1947 and 1948 were erroneously seen as those of the Catholic Church and of Catholicism. The victories were due to a more complex series of factors: many non-believers voted DC, most Italian Jews voted DC while the others voted for the Republican Party. The referendum was the first proof, not that Italian society wasn't Catholic, but that it had acquired a certain degree of liberty as regards the Catholic Church. The second proof was the abortion law. But that didn't really influence the political situation in Italy either, because the DC continued to win elections afterwards. And since the DC recognised that the lay parties were of greater importance, it didn't make the fact of being for or against divorce or abortion a condition of entering government. Remember too that these laws were promulgated and signed into law by

DC presidents. Unlike in Belgium and Luxembourg, where heads of state have refused to countersign such laws.

After the war De Gasperi's idea was not to recreate the *Partito Popolare* but to create a broad spectrum of non-Communists. Italy faced two urgent problems: first, the choice of whether to remain neutral or to opt for the Atlantic Pact. Second, there was the decision - opposite to that taken in Germany - not to outlaw the Communist party because, as Togliatti said, the PCI was the second strongest Catholic party in Italy. The choice to go with the West and join the Atlantic Pact was shared in part by the DC, but Pope Pius XII was suspicious, he would have preferred a neutral Italy. But De Gasperi and Giovanni Battista Montini [later Pope Paul VI], who had become deputy secretary of state to the Holy See, persuaded him to go with the West to guarantee Italy's independence because this likewise ensured the independence of the Holy See.

Post war politics to the *compromesso storico*

The post-war political situation was notable for the participation in government of the Italian Communist Party. You have called the agreement on the Constitution the first historic compromise.

That first historic compromise came directly from the conference at Yalta and it was ordered by Stalin. There are parts of the Constitution that are identifiably of Soviet Marxist-Leninist inspiration and parts that are of liberal inspiration. As we learned from the Soviet archives, it wasn't Togliatti's decision. What happened was that Stalin told Togliatti he didn't want any problems. He said, "The way to defend my empire is to respect other people's empires. Be quite clear about this - don't even think about revolution, you won't win."

Did Togliatti have revolutionary ambitions before the Stalin diktat?

Oh yes, but Togliatti was a pragmatic and highly intelligent man. He understood that Italy's situation had to be linked to the European and world situation and to relations between the great powers. There was a little faction led by Secchia which was in favour of insurrection and of seizing power by force. He didn't know that Togliatti's policy was inspired by Stalin. Secchia went to see Stalin; he said Togliatti had made a mistake in choosing the parliamentary road to socialism because they were capable of winning the country. But Stalin thought he was mad. He had to reconstruct his country; he didn't want a third world war.

Did Togliatti see the democratic process as a way to bring about hegemony in Gramsci's terms?

Yes absolutely. Togliatti, like Berlinguer, believed that this would happen naturally thanks to the ever-growing strength of the working class and to the contradictions inherent in capitalism, and because of the cultural hegemony of the Communists in Italy. And it's still true today, more or less: our top newspaper editors, our best university professors, our greatest cinema directors are all on the left. Togliatti believed that, under a formal bourgeois democracy, with the increasing power of the working class and because of the Gramscian principles of the war of position and the war of manoeuvre, Italy would inevitably become socially and culturally Communist. And Togliatti's vision was right because only in Italy has the phenomenon of catho-communism evolved.

And did Berlinguer have a similar vision?

Berlinguer believed that national Communist parties might one day achieve hegemony without having organic links with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He envisaged that through autonomous Communist parties – that is, not dependent upon the Soviet Union or upon the foreign policy of the Soviet Union – there could develop different forms of socialism according to conditions in each country. He had the same utopian vision that the Czechoslovakian party had – socialism with a human face. For Togliatti, on the other hand, the national Communist parties were only sections of a vast guiding party which was itself great because it was at the helm of one of the two great world powers. That was Cossuta's idea too, and he opposed Berlinguer.

Then of course there was Enrico Berlinguer's famous 'turning point'. Did you read the interview he gave to *Corriere della Sera's* Giampaolo Pansa just before the 1976 general election? He said that if the Communists got into power they wouldn't take Italy out of the Atlantic Pact. Then he added that the PCI felt protected by NATO because thanks to NATO it felt it had more liberty and more independence from the Soviet Union. I had gone out early for a coffee and bumped into Pansa. I said, "Are you sure Berlinguer said that?" He said Berlinguer had been given the transcript of the interview and it had been sent back without changes. And you know the next day *l'Unità* published the entire interview but omitted that sentence because the Soviets had protested! We never knew whether he said it because he meant it or whether he wanted to win the election.

Which do you think, given that he was your cousin?

Well, we were never really that close, but in my view he just let the words slip out. And the more determined some people were to have the historic compromise the more others put the idea into Berlinguer's head that the Soviet Union wanted him dead. Remember the car crash episode in Sofia? [*in 1973*] Berlinguer's wife Letizia always believed this was an attempt on

his life. When she talked about it I said, "Don't you think if the KGB had wanted to get rid of your husband they would have done it in Italy rather than in Bulgaria, the most faithful Soviet ally?" Still, he believed it.

What did the PCI materially gain from that first historic compromise, given that after 1948 they were excluded from executive power?

There was a second compromise - when the regions were constituted. That was Mariano Rumor's idea: he thought we couldn't keep the Communists too far from power, so he told them that as they could not come into government he would ensure they had power in some areas of the country.

In the summer of 1960 the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement party (MSI), tried to hold its party conference in Genoa, PCI and former partisan stronghold. Rioting began in Genoa and spread throughout the country. Were the riots in Genoa the starting point for the Solo plan?

[President] Antonio Segni was very afraid of street demonstrations; he didn't trust the chief of police and feared that the Communist party would seize power. I remember De Lorenzo coming out after a meeting with Segni; De Lorenzo said, "Tell him not to worry, nothing will happen." But all the same he had a transmitter-receiver put in the room next to his bedroom in the Quirinal palace and turned it into a Carabinieri post. When the commission of enquiry reported on the Solo plan, I was entrusted with a parallel administrative investigation. When I read it through I told the commander of the Carabinieri, General Forlenza, to make sure that the entire manuscript was covered by state secrecy. I said, "If we let the public read this they'll have no faith whatsoever in the Carabinieri - this wouldn't stop a strike in a primary school!" The Solo plan was partly covered by two other plans which were known as E1 and E2 - Emergency 1 and 2. E1 was for the case that power remained in civil hands, whereas E2 was for the eventuality that power was transferred to the military. They were properly drawn up and certified and in the possession of the most important military chiefs, whereas the Solo Plan was written in longhand in a squared exercise book! Yes, in plans E1 and E2 it was intended that a series of people should be removed and transferred to Sardinia. But that was all part of a plan for a hypothetical invasion by a Warsaw Pact country. Sardinia was chosen because if Italy was invaded and Rome had to be abandoned all the institutions of government were to be transferred to Sardinia.

So Plans E1 and 2 were not actually intended to be part of the Solo Plan?

Absolutely not.

What were the aims of the so-called strategy of tension, how would you define it?

Well, it was a very difficult period with the division of the world, Europe and Italy into two, so you could certainly say that it was a case of dual state and dual loyalties, on the one hand to the Soviet Union, on the other to the Atlantic Alliance. But the era of terrorism really began after the street demonstrations in the late 1960s. The one ascertained fact is that the members of the neo-fascist groups, all of whom were later acquitted for Piazza Fontana, were in contact not with the CIA but with an officer who was head of military counter-espionage for the American forces in West Germany. And you know no one has ever been convicted for that attack.

Aldo Moro talked to the Red Brigades of 'connivances and indulgences' by a part of the Italian political establishment and of the West.

The indulgences referred to the tolerance given by the West to the Greek colonels.

For many years you were Moro's confidant and friend. Did you also share his political philosophy?

Completely.

Were there no policy differences between you?

After he was kidnapped he said in a letter to Zaccagnini that he knew I was in favour of the line of rigour and that I was doing this, first because I was Sardinian like Enrico Berlinguer, second because I was cousin to Enrico Berlinguer and third because I believed much more than he [Moro] did in the historic compromise.

How did the later historic compromise emerge?

Moro and Berlinguer had different views; I talked to Moro at length about this. His thinking was, we have this great problem of terrorism. We cannot beat terrorism from the right, we must fight it from the left and for that we need the PCI on our side, even if the terrorists are their 'errant companions'. Then we have the economic crisis. We have the unions on one side, the industrialists on the other. Moro, who was a conservative, said, "We'll govern for a long time together, first they will support us from the outside then they will enter government. Then, when the national situation stabilizes we'll move to a two party system."

So Moro saw the historic compromise essentially as a way of conserving and consolidating the power of the DC?

Exactly, and only as a transitory phase. Though some said that Moro had devised this as a way to crush the Communist party. Berlinguer's concept was different; he thought: I have confidence as a Marxist-Leninist and a Gramscian that since we are better, more cultured, more intelligent and have a stronger morality, if we govern together we will have a popular national government in which the Catholics will play their part. Then cultural and political hegemony will follow. You know Berlinguer never talked about an agreement between Communists and Christian Democrats, he always talked about an agreement between Communists and Catholics.

The two churches?

Exactly.

Was it realistic to think the PCI could have won the 1976 election?

Oh yes, the *sorpasso* was certainly a possibility because we were taking the pulse of the liveliest sectors of the country – the students, universities, schools, cultural centres and so on. Moro was very frightened because the *sorpasso* would have prevented him from implementing the historic compromise. He said, "I'll only make a historic compromise from a position of strength."

And if the PCI had won? Would it have made an alliance with the Socialist party?

No, the DC would have been overtaken, but not the centrist coalition. Even if they had won it wouldn't have been a dictatorship. I'm sure Berlinguer would at least have asked the DC to enter government.

Foreign policy and the Middle East

You once said that Italy never really had space for its own foreign policy. Yet in the Middle East it pursued a national agenda.

Let's say that Italy took certain liberties towards the Arab world and Israel. People forget that the DC was always a pro-Arab party; Moro and Andreotti were always pro-Arab. Neither ever had any sympathy for Italian Judaism and even less for Israeli Jews. Andreotti has always believed – though he's never said it – that the United States was behind all his judicial problems because he followed a pro-Arab policy.

It wasn't just the DC, Bettino Craxi was also extremely pro-Arab.

Yes indeed. You remember the money in the famous trial known as All Iberian? This was money that was given to Craxi and that Craxi passed on to the PLO. Before Arafat died he wanted to erect a statue to Craxi. I remember the size of the PLO delegation at Craxi's funeral, and the speech made by the Tunisian president.

What was the expected return for the Socialist party from this?

To extend its influence and to expand Italian capabilities in the Arab countries. The same reason that induced Enrico Mattei to finance the Algerian rebels against France - to have the oil concessions. If you visit the museum of the revolution you'll see that all the arms are Italian.

Perhaps Craxi's pro-Arab policy was more open? Still, there was a major row with the US in 1985 when Craxi refused to hand over the Palestinian hijackers of the Achille Lauro cruise liner.

Craxi was certainly more open. Yet the US never bore him a grudge for that because they were grateful to him and to the PSI for allowing me to align Italy with Germany for the Cruise and Pershing missiles.

Was that a difficult choice?

During the debate for the vote of confidence in the Senate [*on the Cossiga government in August 1979*] the US ambassador Gardner came to me. He said, "Now Prime Minister, we have to tackle the problem of the missiles." I said, "What missiles?" There had been the agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union on nuclear disarmament, but the treaty only involved intercontinental long-range missiles. Helmut Schmidt realised this and in a speech in London he said that while the US and the Soviet Union had made themselves safe, we in Europe had become hostages. Then the Soviet Union made a mistake - which Gorbachev told me later was the start of their misfortunes - they decided to deploy their SS20 theatre missiles aimed at Western Europe. We needed to have Cruise and Pershing missiles, and Schmidt made it a condition that another continental country should have them. With considerable difficulty I managed to get Italy alongside Schmidt thanks to the Socialist vote. Let me tell you an anecdote, because history is made of anecdotes too. Before the vote, Enrico Berlinguer and I met at the house of Tonino Tatò [*Berlinguer's press spokesman*] for a snack. I brought some Sardinian sausage and he brought some Sardinian wine. We discussed strategy, and I remember saying, "Enri, if our grandfathers could see us sitting here discussing strategy they would burst out laughing." Because you know our maternal grandfathers were brothers. So I proposed the agreement: I said, "Do as much obstruction as you like in Parliament but no street demonstrations." And that's what happened.

But there were demonstrations and strong opposition to the deployment in Sicily, especially from the Sicilian PCI. The Mitrokhin archive showed that the KGB had financed the demonstrations.

Yes, that was later on. The KGB financed the pacifists in Sicily, but not the PCI. I've known members of the KGB – fascinating people! Once when Yeltsin was president I had a courtesy visit in the Quirinal palace from [Yevgeny] Primakov, the historian who later became foreign minister, with three of their officers. What a contrast with the CIA! The Russians spoke perfect Italian and were immaculately dressed, just like Italians!

Cossiga is the first Italian politician to acknowledge the existence of the so-called Lodo Moro, an unwritten agreement introduced by Aldo Moro while foreign minister, which permitted the Palestinian resistance movement to move personnel, arms and explosives through Italy on condition that Italy was spared attacks. Were the Americans aware of this?

Of course. But remember throughout all this period the main problem for the Americans was the Soviet Union.

You said this was begun by Aldo Moro. But many authorities must have been involved in applying it and in covering it up. How could it remain a secret for so long?

I've often wondered that. Moro used our diplomatic service, our intelligence services and the military. But it was never written down. When I was prime minister the police in Ortona intercepted a car, driven by a member of the extra parliamentary left, Pifano, and a truck in which a surface to air missile was discovered.¹ Then I was told about a telegram addressed to me which had been sent by the leader of the PFLP [George Habbash]. This note said: first, that the missile was his, second that the missile was not intended for use in Italy, third that we had to give back the missile and fourth that we had to release Pifano and the driver of the truck. Lastly he added – and I only understood this many years later – that if we didn't comply we would be violating the agreement. No one could tell me what this part meant. Andreotti said he knew nothing because I telephoned him. There was a theory that the missile might have been destined for the IRA and used to bring down a plane which was to carry Margaret Thatcher from Belfast to London. I remember very clearly that we gave this piece of information to the British, there were some journalistic leaks and then there was an official denial.

The significance of the missile seizure and of the Lodo Moro are elements in the re-opened investigation into the Bologna station massacre of 2 August 1980, for which members of a neo-fascist group, NAR, were convicted. One theory holds that

the attack was a reprisal by the Palestinians for the non-restitution of the missiles and for the subsequent detention of a PFLP representative. Another that the attack was Libyan-inspired, while others believe it was carried out by the US or Israel to punish Italy for its pro-Arab stance. Cossiga believes that the explosion occurred accidentally while Palestinians were transporting explosives through Italy in accordance with the Lodo Moro. You have said that you think the massacre was an accident. Others suggest that it was a revenge attack.

When I was interior minister I made an agreement with Arafat's PLO. The PLO were present secretly in Italy but we knew the PLO representative in Italy, Nemer Hamad, who was here officially as a representative of the Arab League. We reached an agreement with him – he was Al Fatah, remember – not just that they would carry out no actions in Italy, but Al Fatah refused to undertake any actions at all outside the Middle East. The PFLP never made a similar commitment. The other theory, held by my former collaborator Zamberletti and by the then chief of police, Parisi, is that there is a connection between the downing of the civil airliner over Ustica [27 June 1980] and the attack in Bologna, and that the link is Gheddafi. For a while the Libyans had bases in Malta. At a certain point the Socialist leader, Mintoff, told us secretly that if we would guarantee Malta's neutrality then he would send Gheddafi's men packing. The agreement was signed in Malta by Zamberletti when I was prime minister and interim foreign minister. Obviously Gheddafi didn't like this at all because from one day to the next the Libyans were kicked out of Malta. Not only that: when the Libyans tried to say that an oil research platform used by ENI off the coast of Malta was in Libyan waters and began to interfere with the research, we sent the Navy to fly over the platform for two or three days. After that there was the warning when the aircraft was shot down, and then Bologna.

Do you think the Libyan theory is credible?

No, I've always opted for the accident theory.

But Mambro and Fioravanti [members of NAR] were convicted.

Nowadays not a soul believes that those two are guilty.

Left wing terrorism and the Moro kidnap

Kidnaps were very frequent in Italy during the 1970s, both for ransom and for political concessions. Yet you've always said that Italy was unprepared to deal with a crisis like the Moro kidnap.

Exactly. When I resigned as interior minister I presented my resignation to Prime Minister Andreotti, who took over the interior ministry temporarily. There was a brilliant cartoon by Forattini that shows me resigning. Do you know what I'm handing over to Andreotti? – a catapult! Good isn't it! That shows how unprepared we were.

But the BR had done a series of kidnaps. There had been a demand for an exchange of prisoners in the Sossi case.

Yes the Appeal Court had granted the release of the prisoners but then judge Coco intervened and prevented it. You know I always believed that unless by some miracle we managed to free Moro then he wouldn't get out of that prison alive. The BR knew that we couldn't possibly have agreed. I remember some of the Socialists and part of the DC wanted to send someone to Algeria, Libya or Yemen but when they were contacted informally they said they would have nothing to do with it.

You think they were never serious about an exchange of prisoners?

What they wanted was political recognition. They wanted to break up the national solidarity government and punish the PCI because they saw them as traitors. They wanted to present themselves as the true and proper political party to the left of the PCI because the PCI had abandoned its revolutionary aspirations and had allied itself with the enemy. And you can understand this because the PCI's enemy had indeed been the DC: "*schiavi d'America, servi dei padroni*", that's what they said.

In its technique, the Moro kidnap looked like a replica of the 1977 kidnap of Hanns-Martin Schleyer by the Red Army Faction. Did you think the RAF might have been involved?

We knew there had been contacts, but I was always convinced that the BR were entirely a domestic phenomenon.

So you didn't believe the BR had outside help?

We knew that East Germany was a terrorist haven.

You mean for training?

Yes, though Czechoslovakia was used especially for that. Some said they took their orders from Czechoslovakia as well. Once, Amendola went to ask the Soviet Ambassador to intercede with the Czech government so that if they were still providing training they would stop because it could seriously compromise the PCI and its chances of getting into government.

Did you think they were given orders from outside?

I never thought that for a moment. I've never believed in the involvement of the Soviet Union or of the CIA, anything like that.

Did you have a plan in the interior ministry for the eventuality that either you or Andreotti or Moro....

No.

Wasn't there a Plan Paters?

Ah that famous plan, well perhaps I shouldn't say it but when I presented it to the Prime Minister, since it involved the use of the armed forces and the Finance Police, he didn't want to sign it. He was afraid it would raise the level of the conflict.

What did the plan involve – use of special services along SAS lines?

At the time of the Moro kidnap the only specialist anti-terrorist force that I had had trained by the SAS was a part of the Navy – the Comsubin. One evening we received information that Moro might be in a certain place. The unit was mobilised, as was the doctor who was to be the medical officer in the team conducting the raid. He was to throw himself over Moro if there was a shootout.² And do you know this doctor – Decimo Garau – was my classmate at school and later became the effective commander of Gladio! We tried everything: we had air patrols going over the Lazio coastline fitted with infrared sensors that would pick up heat from human bodies or if houses were heated, because they told us Moro might be in one of the summer houses or villas in that area. But you know when I visited Gallinari [*one of Moro's BR captors*] in prison he told me that if, instead of using all these sophisticated means, we had just used the local police we would probably have found him. Because they kept Moro in an ordinary apartment in a block of flats.

Do you think he was kept in the same apartment all the time?

Yes, definitely: after getting him there they wouldn't have been so stupid as to move him. But it's not true that he was kept in that tiny, windowless box room. The post mortem showed quite clearly that he had not been kept in a confined space. Another question I have asked myself – perhaps you have too – is if they said to Moro, when they told him to take a shower and put on clean ironed clothes and a shirt and tie, that they were preparing to free him, or whether Moro understood that they were going to kill him.

Did you use contacts in the criminal underworld to pick up information?

I refused. I remember a certain Cazora [*Benito Cazora, Calabrian deputy*] invited me to use information from the 'ndrangheta and the mafia, and I remember saying we cannot fight illegality with illegality. Anyway the BR would never have confided in the mafia or the camorra, they considered themselves an elite, the *puri e duri*. But we collected information from the most unlikely places. For example, the DC asked me if they could consult a famous clairvoyant in Amsterdam and I had an ENI plane sent over. Berlinguer's spokesman Tatò sent us a tape of the revelations of another seer. I still have the tape recording in a safe.

How did Moro receive news – did they give him newspapers?

There is no doubt that they gave him newspapers. And then there was the photograph of Moro with a copy of *Il Messaggero*, which was the proof that he was alive.

There was a priest, Don Antonello Mennini....

No one knew about him at the time, only later. It was said that he took Moro that famous bag [*which disappeared on the morning of his kidnap*]. We tapped the phones of everyone close to Moro – his friends, family and his priest. I was a friend of Mennini's father, who was a Vatican banker, but this Mennini was unknown. People say that it was he who went to hear Moro's confession before they killed him.

Do you believe that?

I don't believe they would have run the risk, no. The strange thing is that the day after Moro's death this young man disappeared. He was a deputy parish priest, he hadn't done the Vatican diplomatic academy in Rome, but he was sent out to Uganda to be secretary in the papal nunciature. And he was never questioned because after that he acquired diplomatic immunity, so he could not be forced to testify.³

Did the bag that disappeared contain medicines, or documents?

I don't know. When Moro was kidnapped we went through our ambassador to NATO to ask for a risk evaluation, that is, if he were tortured or otherwise ill-treated whether he could reveal information potentially damaging to the Alliance. And we were told that he knew very little and that the only secret he knew about was Gladio, but that it wasn't very harmful to the Atlantic Alliance. Moro managed to get round their question with regard to Gladio. When they asked him if there was an agreement among the NATO powers to set up joint organisations to fight

terrorism he said three things: first, that it wasn't true; second, that perhaps – and this may have been his reference to Gladio – there may have been secret organisations to fight a Soviet invasion or Soviet occupation; and third, that if such an agreement did exist within NATO, Cossiga – who had created a model for counterterrorism within Europe – would have told him about it. So only someone who knew about the existence of Gladio could understand that part. I remember once I had the opportunity to speak to Marcus Wolf [*head of the East German security service, Stasi*] during a television programme some years ago. I had Vespa [*the presenter*] ask him if they knew about the existence of Gladio. And he said, "Of course, yes we knew all about it." If you remember, the PCI was outraged over Gladio but in fact they also knew about it. Taviani was one of the founders of Stay Behind, and he told Longo [*PCI secretary*] when he was interior minister. He said, "This isn't an organisation against you but against the eventuality of a Soviet invasion of Italy."

Don't you think Moro could have revealed other military secrets?

What secrets do you think he would have? I've been prime minister and never learned any military secrets! I knew for example, that there were bases for nuclear weapons in Italy, which exist even now.

Was Gladio activated during the Moro kidnap?

No, at least not to my knowledge. Stay Behind didn't belong to the interior ministry but to the ministry of defence. And of course there was terrible competition between the ministries.

In October 1978, a raid on a BR base in Milan led to the arrest of nine brigatisti and the discovery of material relating to the kidnap. Although the apartment was searched for several days in 1978, twelve years later casual building work led to the discovery behind a plywood panel of a much larger quantity of documents, including transcripts of Moro's responses to questions put by his captors. This is known as the Moro memoriale. There are still some doubts about the 'rediscovery' of the Moro papers.

I was President when they found the *memoriale* that they said at the time had been lost [*chuckles*]. I'm sorry to say this because he was my friend and he's dead but in my opinion when Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa raided that apartment in 1978 he took away the part that concerned Andreotti and Craxi because he thought it contained details that were dangerous for them. I think they both read the part that was lost. You know Craxi's real friend was not Andreotti, it was Dalla Chiesa. I learned later that Craxi had promised to propose him as a candidate to the Senate and then, in a future coalition government, to propose him as interior minister.

Do you think there exists another part of the memoriale that Dalla Chiesa took that was not put back?

Another part that has never been made public, that was never replaced? I don't know, but with us, heads of state know much less than undersecretaries.

Have you any idea where the tapes of Moro's interrogations might be?

In my view one of the BR still has them. Someone whose identity has never been discovered. Remember we still don't know the identity of the two men on a motorcycle who were in Via Fani on the morning of the kidnap.

And photographs taken that morning of the ambush scene that were given to the judiciary disappeared. Is that not strange?

No, it's not strange. Not with the confusion that exists in all judicial offices.

It's said that a well known exponent of the 'ndrangheta, Antonio Nirta, was in Via Fani on 16 March.

Yes and someone else said they recognised the famous conductor Igor Markevitch. And that there was a connection with the fact that the Red Brigades brought Moro's body to via Caetani. [*Palazzo Caetani, the family residence of Markevitch's second wife, Topazia Caetani, is located in the street of the same name.*] Whereas this was done exclusively because it's exactly equidistant between the DC headquarters and the PCI headquarters.

You don't think there's any other connection?

Well we did learn later that Markevitch was on the extreme left. And there was a rumour – which may be true – that he hosted the leading members of the BR in his villa near Florence for the meeting that decreed Moro's death. It's logical that the decision could not have been taken just by the group that kidnapped him.

Did you have any assistance during the kidnap from colleagues abroad?

We had a secret meeting in Bern of the interior ministers of the so-called *Quadrilatero*, that is, Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

Did they offer any advice or help?

They all helped, as did the Americans, but they didn't send anyone from the CIA or the FBI because President Carter had issued a directive that US

intelligence and law enforcement could only help another state's anti-terrorism efforts if American national interests were directly threatened.

During the kidnap you chaired several different committees. One was a formal committee of intelligence and police chiefs and the other...

The other included D'Addario, professor of the philosophy of science, also a famous Milan psychiatrist [*Augusto Ermentini*] who had studied the Stockholm syndrome. Another was [*Franco*] Ferracuti who was not then in the P2, he joined later.

Was Licio Gelli a member of this group?

Noooo. I didn't even know him then.

Ferracuti was convinced that Moro was suffering from the Stockholm syndrome, yet to me the letters don't give that impression.

They were all convinced, Ferracuti, the Milan psychiatrist and a graphologist. They said that Moro's psychological state was worsening and that his handwriting showed he was sedated by some particular drug. To begin with I didn't think the letters were authentic either. In fact Moro wanted to be interrogated, he was trying to negotiate with them himself to the point that he said they were not a terrorist organisation but a political subject

Steve Piczenik was also a member of this committee, was he sent by Carter?

The group met very few times, his relationship was with me. He was the deputy head of the State Department's counterterrorism section. He said we had made a big mistake in saying right at the beginning that we would not negotiate. You have to say you're prepared to negotiate and then use the negotiations to try to trap them.

He said later that he and Ferracuti tried to diminish the importance of Moro's letters and to show they were the result of the Stockholm syndrome.

Exactly. But remember that diminishing the importance of the victim has always been an anti-terrorist tactic.

Piczenik says in his book that he was in touch with the Vatican secret service, whom he trusted more than the Italian intelligence services because the BR had infiltrated them.

There is no such thing! And the BR hadn't infiltrated anything!

Was it Pieczenik who suggested writing the false Communiqué no. 7?

Certainly not.

Who did write it then?

Well there are two schools of thought. The first - and I belong to it - says it was authentic. The second says it was made up. I called in three experts - from the police, from the Carabinieri and a legal expert from the Rome courthouse, and they all said it was authentic. Then we realised, because a growing number of DC members were favourable to the idea of negotiations, that the BR must have found out about this and would have written it to upset or stir things up in the DC and push them into negotiating. To test out what would happen inside the DC in the event of Moro's death.

The BR have always denied writing it.

The BR have only ever confirmed facts that were ascertained in judicial investigations. After all these years they've never wanted to say who the two *brigatisti* were on a motorcycle at the scene of the ambush. They denied the existence of 'Engineer Altobelli' until the judiciary had proved that it was not Gallinari who materially killed Moro. He always accepted responsibility so that no one would go looking for Engineer Altobelli.

Who was in fact Germano Maccari.

Yes, Maccari. Gallinari was supposed to have shot Moro but he couldn't because he started to cry.

A Soviet student called Sergey Sokholov attended Moro's lectures at Rome University. It seems he was already under surveillance from the Italian intelligence services.

No.⁴ Moro had an intuition about him, but the proof came with the Mitrokhin archive.

Did the KGB play any part in the Moro kidnap, given that they had an agent close to Moro?

His purpose was merely to understand what Moro's thoughts were on the Italian political situation and on international relations, including the Soviet Union.

Did you ever talk to Marcus Wolf, head of the Stasi, during the kidnap?

No, only afterwards.

It's said that you had received an assurance from him during the kidnap that Moro would be released in the Vatican.

No, we never turned to the Stasi for help.

Secret societies, secret services

The secret Propaganda 2 masonic lodge, headed by Grandmaster Licio Gelli, included among its members all the most senior Italian intelligence officials, many high ranking military figures and leading industrialists, bankers and businessmen. You have said that the P2 was the response, in mistaken and occult form, to the fear that an alliance between the DC and the PCI could imperil the Atlantic Alliance. Was the P2 afraid of the Communists coming to power democratically?

They wanted to block the advance of the Communists in any way possible and they wanted to block any attempt to damage our relationship with the Atlantic Alliance.

Does this mean that the loyalty of its members was greater towards the Atlantic Alliance than to Italy?

They believed that our country's interests coincided with those of the Atlantic Alliance. All the top members of the P2 were notoriously Amerikan with a k. Among them were the General Secretary of the ministry of foreign affairs, the chiefs of the three intelligence services, the commander of the Carabinieri and numerous officials from the army, the Carabinieri and the navy. It's hard to imagine them obeying Gelli or that they needed Gelli to advance their careers because they were already at the peak of their careers. I've never believed that Licio Gelli was the head of the P2. I wish you knew Gelli in the way that I know him. The idea of him being head of anything except a company in Frosinone that makes mattresses! He counts for nothing, what counts is the great masonic movement.

If Gelli wasn't the head of the P2 who was it?

We don't know who the head was.

So was it American freemasonry who were giving Gelli orders?

It's said that the decision to revive the P2 was taken at the residence of the commander of the American Naval Forces in the Mediterranean.

Remember that when the Americans wanted to recreate an association of this type they thought of a way which was normal for them, and that was freemasonry. If you think that the Knights of Columbus, the Association of American Catholics, has a structure similar to freemasonry it was quite normal for them to revive something that had been in existence since 1870.

Cossiga has always been proud of his association with the Stay Behind organisation, known in Italy as Gladio. He also takes credit for the creation of anti-terrorist rapid response units in Italy.

It was me who invented the special services here but they didn't come into being for two years after I had created them. It all began with a secret meeting of interior ministers in Luxembourg. The UK Home Secretary Roy Jenkins said we could expect a wave of terrorism and he talked to us about the SAS. After that I went around Europe to study the different models. I went to see the GSG9 in Germany, the anti-terrorist team of the Royal Marines in the Netherlands and then the SAS in Hereford, on the border between Wales and England. I went to Hereford twice. They showed me two mock-up villages which were used, not for SAS training, but for training ordinary forces before they were sent to Northern Ireland to keep order. Our people trained there too.

Why did you opt for the British model?

Well, to tell you the truth the meanest of all were the British. Also, I could always defend myself by saying I had chosen the model used in the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world.

And Comsubin were trained by the SAS?

Yes they were. They supplied special armaments, and two officials came over to train the Comsubin assault team called GOI [*Gruppo Operativi Incursori*].

Gladio was a structure intended to combat subversion...

No, to resist invasion. In the founding documents Stay Behind had the function of an anti- invasion structure. It existed in the UK, France, the Benelux countries, Norway and Denmark, and there were four similar but independent organisations in Switzerland, Austria, Sweden and Finland. The headquarters of all the Stay Behind organisations was in the UK.

In the UK Stay Behind wasn't intended as an anti-invasion structure but to fight the occupation of certain centres of power by the far left and Communists.

Yes that's true. But there were hardly any Communists in the UK and the intelligent ones looked to the KGB for orders.

Were the men and women of Gladio trained at the base of Capo Marrargiu [in Sardinia] with individuals of other nationalities?

No, only Italians. They were volunteers; most of them were ex-partisans. But the base was made available to the CIA and to other intelligence services for their training. The British gave us a hand. The HQ of all the Stay Behind networks was in Cornwall, at the training school of the Intelligence Service.

And were Italians sent to Cornwall to train alongside the British?

Yes, certainly.

Is it possible in your view for the security services of a country to act without the implicit or explicit approval of a government?

Yes it is. A certain autonomy exists, and it's not as if an intelligence service has to tell its government what it does. The government sets objectives but it doesn't have to know the means by which the service goes about achieving those objectives. Nor does it want to know. An intelligence service that respects the rules doesn't exist. It's a contradiction in terms. If MI5 had to obey the law it might as well use Scotland Yard's Special Branch.

Do you agree that intelligence services have to follow certain rules?

In a democracy, yes I think so.

And they shouldn't collude in torture?

No they should not do that.

Some members of the Italian intelligence services and of the CIA were recently convicted by a Milan court [for the special rendition to Egypt of a Milan-based Egyptian imam, Abu Omar].

Yes but that was a conviction for kidnapping.

Abu Omar was also subjected to torture.
I have my doubts about that.

The “second Republic”

During the latter part of his presidency Cossiga broke his habitual reserve to launch attacks against what he saw as the unjustified defence of corporate interests within the judiciary and political class. The group most reluctant to accept the reforms he urged was his old party, the DC.

One day poor old Gava came to me and said, “Why do you want all these reforms when we’ve governed fine for 50 years with the same rules?” But I realised that the system had already entered a state of crisis.

What were the principal reforms you wished to see?

What I wanted was eventually contained in the conclusions of D’Alema’s bicameral commission: a strengthening of the role of prime minister; stronger powers of guarantee for the role of president who would be elected by popular vote; a differentiation of the functions of Chamber of Deputies and Senate; and a separation of the roles of prosecutor and judge. Silvio Berlusconi’s greatest mistake is that he made the bicameral commission fail. The other great mistake Berlusconi made – and I reproached him for this – is that he introduced a draft law to reform the state which was later rejected by referendum, when he should have presented the conclusions of the bicameral commission.

Will these reforms ever happen?

Well, I think for Italians the most congenial way to go forward is just to *tirare a campare* (make do somehow).

Just after the general election of April 1992, two months before your term of office ended, you resigned as President. Why at that particular moment?

I couldn’t dissolve parliament during the last six months of my presidency. The threat of dissolving parliament is a weapon one can use in a political crisis, and realised I couldn’t begin to resolve the crisis in the time left of my mandate.

When in May the mafia murdered judge Giovanni Falcone, his wife and three bodyguards in Sicily there was a total vacuum – no head of state, no government, no nothing...

Nothing at all. I remember, I was out of Italy, in Toulouse, with my son.

You said that you felt sick watching the funeral.

Yes because the judges who had all fought against him were standing round his coffin. They had blamed him for accepting the post of Director General of Criminal Affairs and for having dirtied his hands with politics.

Before Falcone there was the killing of Salvo Lima.

That was a warning to the political class: if you make promises that you don't keep, this is what happens.

The Andreotti government had passed many laws against the mafia.

Some of them were on the fringes of constitutional legality, you know.

Andreotti didn't stand for the presidency of the republic. Why not?

He would never have been elected. The DC wouldn't have wanted him, nor would the Communists, they would never have voted for him.

Because of his friendship with Lima?

Because of that too. But they wouldn't have voted for him.

Thanks to your support, in October 1998 President Scalfaro invited an ex-Communist, Massimo D'Alema, to form a government. What prompted that support?

I thought that, given the new situation – the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany – the needs of international politics no longer required our country to be divided into two, and we could become a normal democracy.

Did you consult with anyone beforehand?

Oh yes. The British ambassador and the American political counsellor came to see me. They were interested in two things: first, the Berlin Wall had fallen and they wanted Italy to support the enlargement of the Atlantic Pact. And second, they were keen that we backed the Clinton administration's intended intervention in Kosovo.

So you sought an assurance from D'Alema on this?

I explained these things and told him what was expected, and he was immediately sympathetic.

Who will be the next Italian prime minister?

Gianni Letta!

In the case of Berlusconi having to resign?

If he has to resign, then no. The one who wants to be next Prime Minister is Gianfranco Fini. He hopes that the court verdict in Milan for the Mills case will go against Berlusconi. Or that he'll be found guilty of fraudulent accounting and fiscal fraud over television rights and is forced to resign. He thinks because at the moment there is no other candidate ready, that the President will set up a 'constitutional government' presided over by him. Otherwise Fini's non-stop battering of Berlusconi just doesn't make sense.

How do you see the immediate political future?

Un pasticcio!

Notes

¹ Judicial enquiries relating to the seizure in November 1979 refer to two missiles, however Cossiga insisted there was only one.

² Although mobilised on this occasion, Comsubin did not conduct any raids during the kidnap.

³ Tape recordings of calls to and from Don Mennini's telephone were in fact wiped clean.

⁴ Documents provided to the Mitrokhin Committee showed that Sokholov had in fact been under surveillance from the time of his arrival in Italy in 1977.