

12. Italy in the G8

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The image of Italy at the G8 will forever be defined by the pictures of protest, violence, injury, destruction and death at the summit hosted by Italy in Genoa in July 2001. The violence was so great that it diverted the leaders from their set agenda and led the host, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, to question whether G8 summits were worth having at all. It is hardly surprising that many labelled the Genoa Summit a clear failure and, by implication, Italy's performance in the G8 a failure as well (Zupi 2001, Bullard 2002).

Yet by looking at what was accomplished inside the Genoa Summit meeting, the master grader of summits, Sir Nicholas Bayne, came to a very different conclusion. He wrote as the summit ended: "In fact the G8 heads of government marked a series of important achievements at their meeting in Genoa ... If all these agreements are carried out, Genoa will prove one of the most productive of the entire series of G7 and G8 Summits, stretching back to 1975" (Bayne 2001, 69). One year later, Bayne awarded the Genoa Summit the impressive grade of B+. These judgements suggest that even under the most difficult circumstances, Italy might be a highly skilled practitioner of summit diplomacy. It might even be highly successful at shaping the institution as an effective centre of global governance, as a reinforcement and replacement for the [United Nations](#) and Atlantic system from whose inner management cores Italy has long been shut out.

The Great Debate Over Italy's G8 Summit Diplomacy

In the great debate over Italy's G8 Summit diplomacy, few share this optimistic view. Rather, the leading school of thought portrays Italy as a constrained status seeker that needs the G8 far more than the G8 needs Italy. As Cesare Merlini (1994) puts it: "For Italy ...

participation in the Summits is above all a status symbol, but it is also a recognition of their international role, all the more important in that the Summits deal with both economic and political issues [and] provides a constraint for domestic political developments" (see also Silvestri 1994, 37).

A second school sees Italy as a strong supporter of the United States. It emphasizes the Americans' decisive role in keeping the Christian Democrats in — and the Communists out of — power within Italy from the late 1940s to the Eurcommunist 1970s, above all at the Puerto Rico G7 Summit of 1976. It points to the key U.S. role in getting Italy admitted to the G7 at Rambouillet in 1975 and to the new G7 finance ministers forum in 1986. It highlights Italy's support for the U.S. at the 1983 G7 Summit over intermediate nuclear force deployments and, in 1994, in selecting a review of international institutions as the priority theme for the G7 summit the next year. True to form, at Kananaskis in 2002, Prime Minister Berlusconi emphasized the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) issue that preoccupied George Bush.

A third school presents Italy primarily as a European, mediatory multilateralist (Franchini-Sherifis and Astraldi 2001, Vattani 2001, Richards 1995). In this view, Italy's G8 membership conferred a "more European dimension onto the interests upheld by the other three big European countries," gave international prominence to Italy's "consolidated role of mediation in seeking consensus (Franchini-Sherifis and Astraldi 2001), and helped "maintain and reinforce the G7/G8's links with the United Nations, OECD [[Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)] and [World Trade Organization](#) [WTO] on the one hand, and with civil society and non-governmental organizations on the other" (Vattani 2001). Indeed, Italy's fundamental

multilateralism has been furthered by Italy's full insertion into G7/G8 institutions and the "progressive broadening" of its agenda into political security and subsequently global-transnational affairs (Franchini-Sheriffs and Astraldi 2001).

A fourth school portrays Italy as an emerging principal power, successfully shaping summit outcomes and thus global order on the basis of its national interests and distinctive national values (Dimock 1989, de Guttry 1994, Garavoglia and Padoan 1994, Amato 2001). Since the start, the summits have been a cornerstone of Italian foreign policy, as Italy has made strong and successful efforts to secure an equal role in the G7's endeavours to manage an increasingly complex international political economy. The summit has given Italy an important voice on major issues, and been an important source of legitimation for pursuing necessary policy reforms. Italy has become a more important player in the summit due to its effectiveness as a team player in a world demanding policy co-ordination, based on its domestic experience with coalition governments. Moreover, de Guttry argues, "since Italy is not a permanent member of the [UN Security Council](#) and since no reform giving it a more important role seems imminent, the country has a specific interest in strengthening the G7. The G7 is the only authoritative forum in which Italy can influence directly and in collaboration with its traditional Western partners some of the decisions regarding the international community" (de Guttry 1994, 80).

I argue, even more ambitiously, a fifth position — that Italy behaves in the G8 as an established, equal principal power, as the concert equality model of G8 governance suggests. Since the start, Italy has strongly and increasingly successfully sought, in alignment with a fluid array of issue-specific partners, to build the G7 as the effective centre of global governance. It has done so by broadening its agenda to political-security and transnational-global issues, by deepening its institutions to include more do-

mestic ministerial and political-security official forums, and by mobilizing it to deal with Italy's distinctive concerns with terrorism and crime, weapons proliferation, regional security in the Mediterranean (including the Middle East, North Africa and the Persian Gulf), migration, the marine environment and employment. Italy's success has flowed from its rising relative capabilities, Italy's acute and increasing internal and external vulnerabilities, the failure of the UN and Atlantic institutions to admit Italy to their inner management cores and to deal effectively with globalizing issues as well as with Italy's particular commitment to democratic values in the face of past fascist, recent communist and current terrorist and criminal threats, and the skill and continuity of its stable coalition governments in summit diplomacy.

An Overview of Italy's G8 Performance

Italy's G8 performance over the past 30 years largely confirms this portrait of Italy's success as an established equal principal power in the Summit club. In the first instance, Italy has been an increasingly successful summit host. Sir Nicholas Bayne has awarded Italian hosted summits grades of C+ for Venice I in 1980, for its accomplishments on Afghanistan and energy, D for Venice II in 1987, C for Naples in 1994 for getting Russia into the new Political Eight (P8) and B+ for Genoa in 2001 for launching the WTO's Doha Development Agenda round of multilateral trade liberalization negotiations, and for its accomplishments on Africa, and infectious disease such as HIV/AIDS.

Italy's average hosting grade of C+ makes it an average member of the G8 club in this regard. Its performance as host has risen in recent years, with Genoa at B+ securing the third highest grade in the 30-year history of the G8. Italian hosting success has come largely in the political-security and G8 institution-building sphere, but extends to the economic and newer global issues of energy, trade, development and health.

Italian-hosted summits put in a consistently strong performance in the number of collec-

tive commitments they produce. Venice I in 1980 generated 55 specific commitments, by far the highest of any summit in the first cycle. Venice II in 1987 produced 54, the second highest in the second cycle. Naples 1994 yielded 53, for a tie for fourth in the third cycle. Genoa 2001 with 58 came in second last place, but still beat Germany's Cologne 1999 with 46. In all, Italy's average of 55 commitments across the four cycles places it fifth, after Canada with 84, and France and Japan with 67 each and the U.S. with 59, but ahead of Britain with 47 and Germany with 36.

Since 1996, at each annual summit Italy has performed at an average grade of B, according to the annual G8 Research Group Performance Assessments. At the most recent summits, Italy's score has risen into the A range. In complying with its summit commitments, Italy has put in a solid performance as well.

Italy is notably strong in institutionalizing the G8 at the ministerial and officials levels. It was responsible for the creation of the G7 finance ministers forum at the Tokyo II Summit in 1986. It also led the third cycle's proliferation of ministerial forums embracing domestic affairs. As host in 1994, Italy gave birth to the G7 environment ministers meeting as an institutionalized annual forum, following the one-time meetings in Germany and at Rio prompted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Italy was similarly responsible for the G7 ministerial forum on employment and labour, which began with the Detroit jobs conference in the spring of Italy's year as host in 1994. The Genoa 2001 Summit alone generated the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#), the special G8 African Personal Representative (APR) process and the decision to hold an energy ministers meeting the following year.

Italy has also done well at outreach, by involving others in the summits it hosts. In both 1987 and 2001, Italy brought in Belgium as the outside presidency of the European Union. In Naples in 1994, as mentioned, it inte-

grated Russia into the new P8. And at Genoa it brought in five African leaders, UN secretary general Kofi Annan and the heads of several other multilateral bodies such as the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

Italy's Priorities for Sea Island

For the 2004 Sea Island Summit, Italy will arrive as a strong supporter of America. It joins Britain and Japan in having combat capable troops alongside America's in Iraq, and it has provided strong support for the involvement of the U.S.-led coalition there. But there is much more to Italy's Sea Island Summit diplomacy than this appearance as an American ally suggests.

Italy's Berlusconi has been one of the strongest voices, along with his European partners in calling for the United States to hand over sovereignty to a new UN-approved Iraqi government after June 30, 2004. Italy also has a substantial stake in providing Iraq with the debt relief and new funds it needs so its now democratic reconstruction can begin. With its Mediterranean location, Italy has long been the G8's frontline state in North Africa and the Middle East. It thus has a strong interest in ensuring that the G8's Sea Island dialogue session with the six invited African leaders, and the several invited Middle Eastern leaders, goes well.

Emblematic of Italy's strong interest in Africa — and in post-conflict peacebuilding more generally — is its leadership on the Sea Island's prospective initiative on peace support, primarily in Africa. In the preparatory process, Italy co-authored the paper on this topic, along with host United States. It has encouraged the United States to commit close to US\$1 billion to this task. And it has joined other G8 partners in ensuring that the new money reinforces existing programs, including Italy's own centre for training carabinieri.

Throughout the summit preparatory process, Italy has been a full-strength player. At the working level, it has been highly active, weighing in across the board on technical concerns. It is also

promising to bring to the Sea Island Summit table its particular domestic and European priorities, notably in regard to food security and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

It is thus hardly surprising that President Bush has chosen to begin his summit voyage to Sea

Island with a trip to meet his strong ally Silvio Berlusconi in Rome. It is a sign not so much of Italy's strong support for America in Iraq or elsewhere, but of how much the United States needs Italy's strong, distinctive G8 contribution for the Sea Island Summit to succeed. •

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Discussion Questions
To come

Quiz
To come