

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the third cycle of the annual Seven Power Summit will begin with France's hosting of the 15th meeting of the leaders of the world's most powerful industrialized economies. Over the last fourteen years the summit has steadily evolved into one of the most important forums for the conduct of international economic policy coordination, occupying an increasingly vital place in the overall structure and management of the contemporary international political economy.

The Seven Power Summits emerged as a response by the western industrialized states to changing conditions in the international political economy. Declining U.S. hegemony, increasing interdependence, uneven capitalist development, and the growing domestication of foreign policy have produced both an increasing need and demand for policy coordination among all states, especially between the leading industrial states; and a greater difficulty in achieving it in the absence of either a new hegemon able to lead the way to a new consensus, or the shared perception of impending crisis necessary to shed the natural inertia and complacency of the world's most secure societies. Within this dynamic context of global change, the Seven Power Summit has been increasingly turned to by western leaders as a concert-like mechanism for coordinating a collective managerial response to the demands of a more complex and crisis-prone international political economy. To date, the summits have presented a mixed set of results contingent upon the complex interweaving of domestic economic and political imperatives and the growing effect upon them of international developments, as the following pages will chronicle.

Over the past fourteen years during which the summit has been the primary forum for responding to the demands of asymmetric interdependence, Italy has emerged as a central example of how to succeed in an increasingly complex, interconnected world. As outlined above, American hegemony has receded and a new international structure characterized by a concert of principal powers has emerged. Within that context of international system change, Italy has shown a consistent record of economic progress and increasing importance as its status in the international hierarchy of states has grown. That success story has been based in part on a unique and often perplexing domestic formula of coalition politics and decentralized production structures which together have created a political economy able to respond effectively to crisis conditions and forces of external penetration. Combined with a political culture accustomed to patience and stability in the midst of pressures towards chaos, these general attributes have made Italy one of the most durable survivors in an era of rapid change and general turmoil in the international political economy.

More specifically, the secret to Italy's success internationally has been the suitability of its domestic political practices to the demands of contemporary international concert diplomacy, especially as characterized in the annual meetings of the Seven Power Summits. The priority placed domestically on political survival within the context of party-dominated, coalition politics is perfectly suited to the requirements of concert summitry internationally. Italian leaders know what it means to be a team player, how to be mandate sensitive, and ultimately how to master the politics of coordinated decision-making across jurisdictions. The record of Italian achievements over the period the summits have been meeting are

testimony to the extent to which concert summitry is a natural extension abroad of domestic Italian political practices, a reality which has enabled Italy to emerge as a leading survivor even when faced with the difficult obstacles of the contemporary international political economy, many of which would have beset countries less equipped politically to cope with them.

The story of Italy at the Seven Power Summits, therefore, is one of quiet but steady progress in the face of domestic political and economic constraints and an increasingly complex and volatile external environment. Recognizing the need for coordinated global management and the potential benefits of controlled integration in the international political economy, Italy has forged for itself an impressive record of performance within, and a permanent place at, the Seven Power Summits. Its leaders have successfully balanced the demands of domestic imperatives with those of concert coordination, to the great benefit of Italy, especially in comparative international terms.

This paper will document Italy's contribution in the fourteen summits held to date, emphasizing the successful record it has pieced together despite the obstacles facing it. It will do so by first locating the summit within Italian foreign policy, highlighting the significance of the summit for Italy. It will then proceed to discuss chronologically the significant features of each summit as they have pertained to Italy. The paper concludes with a look both back and ahead, linking the general patterns of Italian participation at the summits to her overall performance economically and politically, and offering out of that analysis suggestions for the future of Italy's role at and contribution to the Seven Power Summits. The study concludes on the note that while the summits have been very significant for Italy to date, Italy will be of increasing significance to the summits of the future.