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Hybrid Diplomacy with NGOs

The Italian Formula

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Raffaele Marchetti
Dept of Political Science
LUISS
Roma, Italy

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Hybrid Diplomacy Beyond Classical Diplomacy

A STORY TO TELL

In 1992, the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined the peace process that took place between the Government of Mozambique and the guerrilla rebels as an “Italian Peace”, expressing admiration for the special way of combining governmental and non-governmental activities flexibly and informally deployed by the Italian actors involved on that occasion. Following that experience, the so-called Italian formula has been applied repeatedly in other diplomatic situations with significant success. This book is about that formula and how that formula can more generally sustain middle powers in influencing international affairs through soft and hybrid moves.

The traditional government-to-government (G2G) diplomacy carried out exclusively by diplomats has been recently integrated with a more encompassing way of interacting with foreign counterparts. Private companies, experts, local authorities, trusts, media and of course civil society organizations (CSOs) have all collaborated in different forms with national governments and international organizations to pursue political goals that would have otherwise been harder to achieve. The broadening of the exercise of diplomacy goes in parallel with the pluralization of international affairs. The phase of global transformations (Held et al., 1999) allowed for the proliferation of a plethora of organizations beyond the Westphalian states that are actively shaping the dynamics of global governance. Today’s

global politics is characterized by the increasing number of relevant actors operating alone and often in partnership with each other. The field of foreign policy and diplomacy has been significantly reshaped by this pluralization.

Hybrid diplomacy refers to the synergy that occurs between governments and non-governmental organizations in the international ambition of a certain country. It combines traditional with innovative diplomacy and is centred on the collaboration in network diplomacy that involves, along traditional diplomats and governments, civil society and NGOs, businesses, international organizations and other players. By relying on each other's strengths, both governments and NGOs enhance their capabilities to make a significant impact on international affairs. Such synergy can be either top-down, namely when the action is promoted by governments, or bottom-up, when instead NGOs take the lead, or levelled, when the action is promoted equally by both. In fact, it can be both ways.

At times, civil society organizations need institutional support from governments in order to secure funding, gain access to international fora or simply acquire international credibility. Other times governments seek partnerships with civil society organizations if they need popular support, local know-how, credibility and soft avenues for their international projects, or because they are socialized from below, at times even "infiltrated" by activists who obtain ruling positions through the *revolving door* practice.

Partnerships between governmental and non-governmental actors are hence becoming frequent. Hybrid diplomacy is especially suitable for those liberal middle powers which on the one hand have no significant military power and, on the other, are open to the inputs of their proactive civil society. Canada, for instance, has frequently used such type of diplomacy (A. Cooper, 1997, 1999, 2001; A. F. Cooper & Hocking, 2000), alongside countries like the Holy See (Troy, 2018), whose distinctive style will be analysed in this study and Qatar (A. F. Cooper & Momani, 2011), with its extraordinary *sui generis* resources. In 2014, Germany launched a project of open diplomacy through a significant engagement with civil society counterparts in order to define a new toolbox to deal with the global challenges: this led to the setting up of a number of "open situation rooms" for co-generation of policy solutions (Kaiser & Ringler, 2016).

As a liberal middle power with an intense tradition of civil activism, Italy represents a remarkable case of hybrid diplomacy. In recent decades, Italian actors have repeatedly and successfully enacted international actions by combining governmental and non-governmental efforts on several

different issues. Renowned for its social activism, soft power and reluctance to use its military tools, Italy, a middle power, has learned to deploy hybrid diplomacy to a very sophisticated level. In the Italian case, hybrid diplomacy has worked as a multiplier of force, in which the government has, at times, played the role of integrative power or system orchestrator, while at other times, it has rather followed inputs from below. Such hybrid synergy has indeed helped to increase the competitiveness of the national ecosystem, as well as its ability to adapt to new circumstances and calibrate the operational speed. In the international arena, Italy has generally been a follower within leading groups. It is a founding member of the European Union and a member of the G7, G20, NATO and other groups that strongly affect international dynamics. Within these groups, Italy plays an active role, especially in the European and Mediterranean areas, albeit it is often unable to express real leadership. Yet, in the past forty years, there have been cases in which Italy has managed to establish itself as a reference point in the international community. This study analyses such instances, with the aim of better understanding the conditions and mechanisms through which a country can make significant contributions to the international community.

The study examines the dimension of synergy between the action of Italian public institutions (mostly the government, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation—MAECI) and the non-governmental action of the Italian Civil Society Organizations that operate internationally. In recent decades there have been cases of positive collaboration between these two actors that have made the country attain a leading role at an international level, that is, from being a subject that follows the rules (rule-taker) to becoming a subject that writes the rules (rule-maker). Despite not being an international great power, Italy has thus made up for its lack of power with a combination of strategy and tactics drawn from public-private partnerships.

In the last decades, the Italian contributions to a series of transnational campaigns have had a significant impact on an international level. The cases of freedom of religion, peace in Mozambique, the International Criminal Court, the moratorium on the death penalty, the ban on female genital mutilation, the cancellation of debt, the confiscation of criminal assets and humanitarian corridors illustrate Italy's role in the policy of change of the international norms that regulate the field of human rights. These mobilizations are the result of the combination of factors that will be investigated in this book. Among the most important distinguishing

traits of these political actions is the intense synergy that has been established during these campaigns between the action of the Italian government and Italian civil society organizations. Sometimes leadership was held by civil society organizations, other times it was the government to have a proactive role. In all cases, by working together these actors have indeed set out innovative strategies of hybrid diplomacy. The results in terms of regulatory institutional change at the global level are evident. Not only do these results have a clear value in themselves, but they have also strengthened an overall positive governmental and non-governmental image of Italy.

Undeniably Italian hybrid diplomacy is broader than the interaction between government and civil society organizations, as cooperation with businesses has a strategic role of great importance, too. On the one hand, the widespread presence of small and medium-sized companies contributes to defining the political image of the country, on the other hand, the action of large companies such as ENI, ENEL or Leonardo crucially sustain the Italian strategic positioning in the global realm.

Yet, hybrid diplomacy is not carried out exclusively with NGOs and businesses. Local authorities are also increasingly important: autonomous regions (as per constitutional law), as well as large metropolitan cities, through their relevant diplomatic tools, can affect international processes (Marchetti, 2021). Furthermore, there is a series of different actors, ranging from think tanks to football clubs that with the so-called sports diplomacy manage to develop synergy with government action. Of all these other forms of hybrid diplomacy, this book will focus on the relationship between government and civil society organizations.

A note on the boundaries of the present study is necessary at this stage. Hybrid diplomacy should not be confused with a number of other phenomena that may at times overlap with it, but remain conceptually different. Hybrid diplomacy is not activist advocacy (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Prakash & Gugerty, 2010; Price, 2003) or NGO diplomacy, that is the actions carried out in global politics by NGOs or other civil society organizations independently from governmental actors (Betsill & Corell, 2008; Winter Roeder & Simard, 2013). Activism advocacy, especially in its transnational forms, is centred on the agency of non-governmental actors. They frame issues, raise awareness, mobilize, coalesce and carry out a wide repertoire of action mainly in autonomous ways (Tarrow, 2005). At times, they engage and develop partnerships with national and international public institutions, but only marginally. Activists indeed try to lobby

governments to pursue their agendas, but typically such actions are perceived as centred on the agency of activism with the government remaining a passive receiver of external inputs and pressures. Hybrid diplomacy is instead entirely centred on the governmental/non-governmental partnership, as viewed from the national foreign policy perspective. In this case, governments are strategically proactive, if not at times on the lead itself.

Hybrid diplomacy is not public diplomacy, though the two overlap at times. While public diplomacy refers to the target audience of a diplomatic action often originated by a government (e.g. the use of social media to engage a foreign population), hybrid diplomacy refers to the actors involved as agents, not as targets, and points to the engagement with non-governmental actors. In between public and hybrid diplomacy there is also cultural diplomacy, an action developed through the political use of museums (Grincheva, 2019) or pop artists (Jang & Paik, 2012), and sport diplomacy (Murray, 2012), which relies on sport events to enhance the international projection of a country.

Hybrid diplomacy should not be confused with digital diplomacy either (Adesina, 2017; The Economist, 2021). While digital diplomacy refers to the new usage by foreign ministries of the different digital platforms and social media, though hybrid diplomacy may at times take advantage of digital opportunities, it remains a distinctive form of action. The intersection of digital and physical diplomacy occurs in different ways. From the most visible instances of web meetings and use of platforms such as Facebook to the most sophisticated deployment of media influencing and cyberweapons by proxies, digital diplomacy is becoming an integral component of the governmental international strategy. However, it remains conceptually different from hybrid diplomacy, with the former focusing more on the tools, the latter more on the actors.

Hybrid diplomacy is not hybrid warfare either (Wither, 2016), though the two might collide under specific conflict-related circumstances. Hybrid warfare refers to a military strategy that deploys actors not linked to official armies for the purpose of weakening their counterpart's security. Notable cases involve the use of private or semi-private hackers to attack and damage critical infrastructure or specific targets of other countries, as an extreme case of digital diplomacy. Hybrid diplomacy looks at the engagement with non-governmental actors for public initiatives for political and peaceful purposes and, hence, it differs from hybrid warfare. However, in an escalating conflict phase civil society actors can at times be used by a government for violent purposes (Marchetti & Tocci, 2009,

2011a, 2011b). Ultimately, the same logic underpins both hybrid warfare and hybrid diplomacy: in a pluralized world, political effectiveness is achieved only through the use of multiple actors in synergy. This book aims to explore the multiplying effect with the synergy between governmental and non-governmental actors from civil society in mostly human rights-related activities.

This book is structured in three parts. The first part analyses the structural changes in international politics over the last decades. Within such framework, the pluralization of global politics and the growing role of private and non-governmental actors in it can be highlighted. Along these lines, the Italian case finds its meaning within global dynamics.

The second part of the book collates and examines the eight most important Italian foreign policy actions of the last decades which bear a significant cooperation component between the government and civil society organization. Finally, the third part develops a comparative analysis of these cases to draw conclusions that may stimulate better levels of public-private synergies and their effectiveness in terms of international impact.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study analyses eight cases of interaction between Italian public institutions and civil society organizations in which such positive synergy has helped to generate a significant impact on international politics. These eight cases are only a subset of many other cases of interaction between institutions and civil society. If we look at them on the whole, the level of cooperation has at times been high, at times limited or even sought but not obtained. In some cases, mobilization has been successful on an international level; in other cases it has failed; in some others, the process is still ongoing.

The book focuses on a “single country/multiple cases” study. The choice for the single country-approach is due to the need to analyse the actions carried out in a country that has been particularly effective and acknowledged (see the aforementioned quote from Boutros Boutros-Ghali) in such cases of hybrid diplomacy. While it is by no means the only country deploying such type of diplomacy, Italy somehow stands out for the variety of actions (i.e. the eight different campaigns), the timing of deployment (more than four decades), the diverse nature of the actors involved (catholic, liberal, communist ones, etc.) and the level of

socialization of the approach at both government and civil society levels. Furthermore, a qualitative choice was made to deepen the analysis by having a range number of cases and a significant amount of direct interviews with top stakeholders from both government and civil society alike, which would have not been feasible in a multiple country research design.

This is a study on political mobilization actions for changing norms, on what is generally called advocacy, namely a study on one of the political dimensions of external action. The study examines how various interest groups influence a country's foreign policy (Risse et al., 1999) and assesses how civil society actors increasingly contribute to foreign policy. Such actions should not be confused with the provision of humanitarian aid (service delivery), hence with the classic development cooperation, even if intended in a more political sense in line with the new Italian cooperation laws. Nonetheless, development aid will be referred to in several parts of the study as a tool for political penetration, creating alliances, consolidating a local presence, but also as a crucial economic tool for securing partnerships between the government and the world of civil society in Italy.

The time span of the study runs for four decades, from the 1980s to 2019. It is precisely from the 1980s that the first public-private partnerships in Italian foreign policy began to be observed. This is in line with the transformations of the international system that, propelled by globalization, pluralizes and supports the inclusion of new non-governmental actors in international political dynamics. Case selection criterion follows the most similar, positive cases model. In this sense, the cases examined are all successful cases. By contrast, some cases on which research has also been carried out were excluded either because they are still in their initial phases, such as the mobilization on early marriages or the one on slow food (Grossi, 2010), or because they have failed, such as the mobilization for the democratic reform of the United Nations' Reclaim Our UN (Marchetti, 2007; Papisca & Mascia, 2004). The successful mobilizations considered in this study are the following eight cases:

- Religious freedom (1978–2012)
- Peace in Mozambique (1983–1992)
- Abolition of the death penalty (1987–2007)
- International Criminal Court (1994–1998)
- Debt cancellation (1997–2000)
- Ban Female Genital Mutilations (2000–2012)
- Confiscation of criminal goods (1997–2014)