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Article by Giovanni Maria Pace: "Italy is a Missile Launching Pad"

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POLITICAL

ITALY

NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS IN ITALY

Rome L'ESPRESSO in Italian 28 Jul 81 pp 4-8

[Article by Giovanni Maria Pace: "Italy is a Missile Launching Pad"]

[Text:] While the politicians talk of disarmament and rearmament, the people ask: where are the arms? Here for the first time is a complete map of the atomic and missile bases in our country.

Rome. The F104's arc through the skies of Ghedi, near Brescia. They carry nuclear bombs under their fuselages. The Orion P3's of the anti-submarine squadron which patrols the Mediterranean go in and out of Sigonella in Sicily. They carry nuclear depth-charges on board. In the fields of Polesine, sharp-toothed outlines rise suddenly in the sky from the cane-swamps: they are the Nike Hercules missiles with atomic warheads. The top military commands, the high political leaders have never said it officially, but the reality is that in the Atlantic Alliance, after Germany, Italy is the European country with the highest number of nuclear bases. There are about 1000 atomic weapons in our country, each one with a destructive capacity that is often 100 times that of the Hiroshima

bomb. Where are they? Who controls them? What advantages and what dangers do they bring? For the first time, L'ESPRESSO lifts the veil over the atomic arsenal in our country.

Nuclear Arms Deposits

Let us begin with the deposits: Longare is a small town 10 kilometers from Vicenza; there is nothing famous about it. But it is very important to the military. Carved out of the hills that stand above the town, there is, in fact, a superprotected base called, in code, "Side Pluto." Here the American Army guards the major part of the nuclear arms destined for the Italian theater. Outside one sees only barbed wire, watch-towers and checkpoints with insignias of the 28th Field Artillery and the 69th Ordnance Company: this is the company responsible for the maintenance of nuclear weapons in Italy. The arms are inside, but no one can enter, unless he wears a US uniform. The city of Longare does not have maps of the top-secret zone. "When something has to be done inside the hill," says a local administrator, "the Americans call for our workers, but they watch over them very carefully." The hilltop above the base is held by an Italian unit whose job is to protect the back lines of Site Pluto. Certain nights, the inhabitants of Longare are awakened by the passing of heavy equipment. They prefer to carry on the comings and goings of arms away from indiscrete gazes.

Air Bases

Another American enclave (we shall speak later about the various types of military installations) is the Air Force Base at Aviano,

13 kilometers above Pordenone, seat of the 40th Tactical Group of the United States Air Force and pillar of the NATO strategic defense plan in the Southern theater. The "strike missions" would be launched from Aviano ("strike" in military language means "nuclear attack") in case of war. Favored by good meteorological conditions good for flying, the Friulian base does not permanently host airborne contingents, but serves as a backup base to which about 300 planes a month fly, for the most part, from Spain. The atomic bomb deposit is in "Area G" of Aviano, slightly to one side on the runway. In case of war, the squadrons of guest airplanes, or "additive forces," can refuel or obtain any other type of assistance. A general test of military emergency procedure took place one year ago, when the 60th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, a squadron composed of 72 F4 Phantoms, arrived from Bergstrom Texas. Refueled over the Atlantic by Boeing 707 KC135's of the Strategic Air Command, transformed into flying tankers, the Phantoms arrived at Aviano after 11 hours in flight, and were serviced in record time. After that, they were involved in a series of missions, 140 takeoffs and landings in three days, in conjunction with a vaster, important maneuver called "Down Patrol '80."

The bases of Ghedi, Rimini and other non-nuclear installations are commanded by the base at Aviano, which extends over 380 hectares and employs 2400 persons. There are two types of nuclear bases in Italy: those belonging totally to the United States, with American personnel, arms, offensive and command apparatus, such as Aviano,

Longare, La Maddalena, Sigonella, and the bases held by the Italian military which has both airplanes and missiles to bring a nuclear payload to its target, but on which atomic weapons are trusted to special American units, the "custodial units." The custodial units give to and activate nuclear arms for the Italians only if and when they receive the order from their commands. In other words, even when the Americans use Italian launch units, they are the only ones to make decisions concerning the use of nuclear arms. To activate a nuclear weapon, it is necessary, as far as we know, to make a combination of six numbers, three of which the commander of the custodial unit knows, and three of which must come from the American high commands. In theory, the President of the United States in person decides to use nuclear weapons, and in the case of interrupted communications, the various commands, in descending order.

The second type of bases, that is, those under limited Italian command, such as Ghedi or Rimini, are generally supposed to pass under NATO command in case of conflict. There are also, in Italy and Europe, American bases which, in wartime, could be integrated with NATO. All of them, integrated or not, would receive reinforcements directly from the United States during the first days of conflict.

Let us go back to Ghedi, in the province of Brescia, and the other Air Force base dependent on Aviano: Rimini-Miramare. At each base there are 36 F104 airplanes of the Italian Air Force, the famous

Starfighters, a bit old, and waiting to be replaced by the Tornados^c, but still able to transport nuclear bombs, probably the B43 type, weighing 1500 kilograms. These bombs, too, will gradually be substituted by a newer type, the B61's, free-fall bombs with braking parachutes, whose potential can be over one megaton, that is, one million tons of TNT, enough to wipe out an urban area the size of New York City. Near the Italian Air Force personnel, Ghedi and Rimini host the Americans of the MUNSS, or Munition Support Squadron, as those in the Air Force call the custodial units. At both Rimini and Ghedi, some airplanes are in a constant state of alert, that is with nuclear bombs aboard and ready for takeoff. They sit in a special area of the base and are protected by guards under order to shoot anyone who crosses the security line marked around the airplanes. The American squadrons which support Italian squadrons are each composed of 86 men, including eight officers.

Naval-Air Bases

Italy has, as well, an important naval role in the Atlantic Alliance. It increases the capability for surveillance over the Mediterranean and the effective conduct of submarine warfare. The American Navy has easy access to the heart of the Mediterranean from Gaeta, base for the 6th Fleet, and Naples; the nuclear submarines get arms and supplies from Maddalena; Sigonella, near Catania, is the base for air operations connected with the Navy. In fact, the new Lockheed P3 Orion turboprops that patrol the Mediterranean depart from Sigonella. They have torpedoes, missiles and nuclear depth-charges aboard, destined for Soviet submarines. Aside from the Orions on

rotating shifts from the United States, Sigonella is inhabited by the Hercules C130's of the Tactical Air Transport Squadron, an important transport unit which insures the transport of nuclear arms from the aircraft carriers navigating along the Mediterranean coasts.

Maddalina Island, in Sardinia, is the base for the US Naval Support Office which assists nuclear propelled and armed submarines in service in the Mediterranean. These "hunter-killer" or attack submarines are part of the Los Angeles class, come directly from the United States, and stop at Maddalena, or ^{rather} better, at Santo Stefano Island, for supplies and maintenance. They are equipped with ten or so rocket-torpedoes with nuclear warheads, a one or two kiloton potential which are launched under water, fly to the surface and hit the target, that is the enemy submarine, even if submerged. For assistance, the United States submarines go alongside the support ship Orion which substituted the Gilmore in June.

The base at Maddalena is serviced by 200 sailors, while another 1000 or so are in service on the support ship. On the island of Tavolara, at the mouth of the Gulf of Olbia, there is a station for very low frequency radiotransmissions, essential in communications between submarines.

Naples is generally considered the Italian city with the most important American military presence. The General Headquarters for

Southern Europe of the Allied Forces in NATO is at Bagnoli. There is also the largest NATO and US communications center for naval operations in the Mediterranean, as well as the commands--these too for the entire basin--of the Naval Air Force, aircraft carriers, and submarines: they thus make up the craft with ballistic missiles aboard destined to hit the heart of the Soviet Union. On the Ionian chessboard, at Gioia del Colle (Bari), there is also a non-nuclear peacetime Air Force base that can be used in case of war. In May 1979, the 507th Tactical Fighter Group of the American Air Force, equipped with F105's, completed an exercise with the 36th Italian Squadron at this base.

The American Army also uses Camp Darby, a vast deposit of arms and material near Livorno, and Fort Ederle at Vicenza, a complex that employs 2460 persons and hosts the General Headquarters of the American Land Forces in Italy, the Southern European Task Force (setaf). At Vicenza too, is the command of the Italian and American NATO Air Force (to which Aviano, dependent as it is on Spain, does not belong). The 62nd Engineers Company is also quartered in this city; it is responsible for demolitions with nuclear explosives. Atomic mines, easily transportable by jeep or helicopter, have potentials varying from less than one up to five kilotons, and can be used to block the mountain passes ^{in the face of} to a possible invader from the east. At Vicenza as well, are the 559th Artillery Group, responsible for the various nuclear custodial units present in Italy, the Command of the 69th Ordnance Company, responsible for the

maintenance of nuclear arms (already met at Longfere), and the 54th Signal Company, responsible, among other things, for the communications system among nuclear arms deposits in Europe.

The nuclear arsenal in Italy thus includes a wide variety of arms. We have already spoken of the atomic mines. We add here that they are probably stored in the caves of Site Pluto. Figuring too in the panoply are 203 millimeter artillery shells, the largest now in stock, destined for the 14th and 15th Heavy Artillery Battalions of the Italian Army. The potential of the shells, which can be shot from a distance of up to 17 kilometers, varies from one to five kilotons. Their prevalent use is in antitank defense. Soon the M55 canⁿons will be replaced by the most modern FH70 and M109 cannons, capable of shooting 155 millimeter shells, the smallest nuclear arms in the American arsenal, and the first--some experts maintain--whose use on the battlefield will signal the passage from conventional to nuclear warfare.

Missile Bases

Going from the least to the most destructive in the nuclear arsenal, we find the warheads of the Lance missiles, with a potential of from one to 30 kilotons, a range of action from 40 to 100 kilometers. The Lances were acquired in Italy in 1964-65. These missiles and the nuclear cannons have substituted the old Honest John missiles on the bases of Portogruaro, Codogné and Oderzo, near Treviso, and Sciàves, above Bressanone. While the Lances, "manageable" missiles,

Nike

are adapted to frontline operations, the larger ~~NIKE~~ Hercules are deployed on fixed bases in Italy, on the northeastern part of the Po River plain, with the aim of heading off a Warsaw Pact missile or air attack. Their potential is about one kiloton, the range of action is over 140 kilometers, and the maximum altitude over 45.

Nike

The ~~NIKE~~ Hercules are divided into three groups--the 7th, 16th, and 17th--of our military Air Force, each one consisting of three squadrons which are supported by the American custodial units, for a total of nine "nuclear capable" squadrons, each one with more launchers. The principle bases for the ~~NIKE~~ Hercules are at: Bovolone, 24 kilometers from Verona, Ca Tron, near Treviso, Ceggia, near San Donà di Piave, Chioggia at Ca' Bianca, Conselve, 21 kilometers from Padova, Cordovado, above Portogruaro, the base closest to the Yugoslav border, Monte Calvarina near Verona, Zelo near Rovigo. These bases are all fairly ^{similar.} ~~much alike~~. Half hidden in the land like shelters, surrounded by a strip of no man's land, they are guarded by Italian Air Force personnel in battle readiness. Around them, the slow comings and goings of the military with "US Army" on their jackets. No one would say that the grass-covered bunkers hide missiles until the olive-green bodies rise above the land at an 85 degree angle, as happens frequently in the launching simulations. The farmers who work the land barely raise their eyes. For them, their appearance is by now familiar. But not reassuring. "If war comes," says one resident of Zelo, "It's best to get out of here fast." The missile bases are the primary targets for a possible Warsaw Pact attack.

Centers for Detection

Finally, if the criterion for the list is not strictly that of the presence of atomic weapons, but also that of the the condition of being a potential target, the list can be lengthened to radio and radar stations connected in various ways to the NATO nuclear strategy. An essential communications center, from this viewpoint, is Coltano, 12 kilometers from Camp Darby (Livorno), where the 56th Signal Company keeps active, 24 hours a day, the communications network between Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey and Germany. Communications with Germany take place through Site 046, that is, the station at Finale Ligure on the Riviera di Ponente. Near these and other important centers ar the large Air or Naval bases such as Aviano, there is an entire series of minor relays, indicated as "Unknown Remote Sites" by the United States Army or Navy, which dot the map of Italy, from Bressanone to Gambàrie (Reggio Calabria), from Monte Grappa to Piacenza, from Piano di Corsi (Trieste) to Tavolara, already mentioned above in reference to submarines.







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[Explanation of map, p. 5: "Where they are, what they are like"]

^{Nike}
The NIKE, Hercules and Lance missile bases and the nuclear artillery are concentrated in the northeastern part of the Po River plain. Air Force bases with nuclear weapons are at Aviano, Ghedi (Brescia), and Rimini. Antisubmarine aircraft are located at Sigonella (Cata-
nia), refueling of nuclear submarines takes place at Maddalena (Sardinia). The most important atomic weapons for the Italian

theater are at Longare, near Vicenza. Other sites are commands, installations, radio centers connected with the NATO nuclear strategy.

Key:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Location |  Nuclear Arms Deposit |
|  Naval Base |  Radio Station |
|  Air Force Base |  Fort |
|  Missile Base | |

[Insert, p 7 "This Document"]

How have we been able to make up the map of nuclear bases in Italy? The constitution of these bases is the fruit of a myriad of accords between the Italian and American governments, or simply of officials responsible for particular territories. These were signed and never made public in the 1950's and 1960's. It was useless, therefore, to ask the military authorities to see them: nuclear material is "classified," that is reserved. But the bases can be observed from the outside, and by certain indications--the presence of certain American military, for example, indicates the nuclear nature of the site--it is possible to understand, to reconstruct. Various pieces fit into the mosaic, and the picture is slowly completed. L'ESPRESSO, however, has not followed only this laborious method. It spoke with *someone* who had already constructed the framework with painstaking attention and yearlong comparison of texts. The specialist in European military affairs whom we contacted is an American, Willian M. Arkin, researcher at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, (the same man who helped STERN to complete the map of atomic bases in

Germany). Arkin is writing a book titled, Nuclear War in Europe. He permitted us to read the chapter concerning Italy. Other information and confirmations came from consultation of the voluminous Inventory of Goods of the American Army. In short, for anyone who knows how to read, everything is written in the sources.

[Insert, p8 "what does the Socialist Internationale Say?"]

^{Bonn,}
~~Bonn~~. Last week in Bonn the work of the socialist Internationale took place. Willy Brandt, secretary of the Internationale, tried to convince his European companions of the willingness of the Soviets to open negotiations immediately on the delicate question of nuclear warheads. From here, (the word of order) ^{he} launched: the SALT talks must be reopened as soon as possible.

The Secretary of the PSI, Bettino Craxi, said he was in favor of this stand. He maintained the necessity for participation by European representatives in the USA-USSR talks. The French Socialists, ^{since} as they, like the British, already have national nuclear deterrents, were concerned with the tutelage of their "force for nuclear dissuasion."

The Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, instead, was polemical. He demonstrated a certain perplexity concerning the American willingness to negotiate. German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt brought up the same doubts: he declared "to not yet see any real direction in the foreign policy of the United States."

The Scandinavian countries expressed a particular position. In particular, Danish Prime Minister Anker Jurgensen was the most open to the Soviet suggestion concerning the possibility of the creation of a denuclearized zone in North Europe; in exchange, the Soviet Union would commit itself to dismantl^{ing} atomic installations on the Scandinavian front.

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