

The “Nouveau Right” in Italy: Notes on the Governance of Limitless Warfare

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Abstract: It is not at all coincidental that the rise of the “Nouveau Right” coincides with the prodromes of the coming world war. After the close of the Long Sixties, the end of previous perspectives beyond capitalism led to the end of the so-called parliamentary dialectic of left and right and, at the same time, prepared for a new era of war. The “Nouveau Right” in Italy now performs the functions of “proxy governance” of the war on behalf of the US government. After the decomposition of parliamentary parties and the end of the previous political conditions that limited the wars of the twentieth century, state power is in the hands of the war itself.

Keywords: “Nouveau Right”, war, “proxy governance”, capitalism

In *Crisis & Critique*'s issue on “Future of Europe,” I argued that the current “government of the euro” results from the crisis of the twentieth-century parties. Can the “New Right” be said to be a phenomenon of the same order? In part, it is, but compared to four years ago, when a dark future for Europe could already be predicted, the situation has worsened.

When the euro was created, the European parliamentary parties, those on the left in the lead, unanimously subordinated themselves to the new authority to receive in return a legitimacy they had lost, chanting in chorus, “Europe demands it of us.” For more than 30 years, the euro has been the actual government of Europe. Today, the remnants of those parties all kneel before the authority of what we can call the “government of war” and do so in the name of even more vacuous slogans such as “in defense of the West” or “democracy versus autocracy.” In the past two years, European states have been drawn into the prodromes of a new world war, in which the decomposition of the twentieth-century party system emerges even more nefariously. Europe's monetary unification has been replaced by a military unification in preparation for the next world war.

However, this is not just about subordination to US military supremacy, which is the most apparent aspect of the foreign policy of European states. What is taking place before our eyes is a profound change in the very nature of war. It is no longer the “continuation of politics by other means,” as in Clausewitz's classic formula, nor the Foucauldian inversion of politics as a continuation of war. The era of war as a continuation of itself, or “limitless war,” as military theorists call it, has begun.¹

An epochal change occurred in warfare as it has been constituted since the Neolithic period with the first state organizations and specialized military apparatuses. The new warfare is no longer that of all previous millennia; it does not have the conclusive goal of subduing an enemy but has as its essential strategic orientation the absence of any conclusion of hostilities. The current war is a war without end.

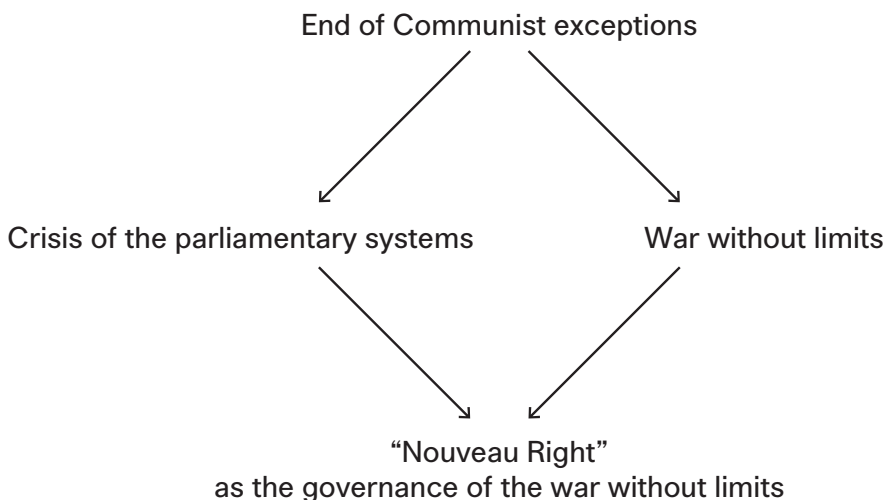
Upstream of this epochal change is the end of communist exceptions, which had been the main factor in limiting the wars of the

twentieth century.² The end of communist exceptions is also upstream of the twentieth-century party crisis and the end of the difference between left and right in parliamentary systems. In the era of limitless war, parties are no longer in government, but war rules the world.

The “Nouveau Right” in Italy is the name we can give to the undoing of the parties of the twentieth century and, at the same time, to the governance of unlimited war.

I propose a tentative map of the problem here.

Tentative map of the present-day government of war



The crisis of parliamentary systems

It is not at all coincidental that the rise of the “Nouveau Right” coincides with the prodromes of the coming world war. Ultimately, a decisive condition of the new war is the end of the parties. Of course, left and right constituted different positions, but the horizon for both was the existence of a beyond capitalism. After the close of the Long Sixties, the end of previous perspectives of an overcoming capital, sanctioned by the restoration of capitalism in China and the collapse of the Soviet Union, leads to the end of the so-called parliamentary dialectic of left and right, and at the same time prepares for a new era of war.

Right and left—beyond the far from negligible origins in the French Revolution—have existed in modern parliamentary systems in the era of capitalism “disrupted” by communist exceptions. There have been three eras of capitalism, which we might call respectively: original, disrupted, and restored. There was an original capitalism that Marx and Engels dissected with unparalleled analytical depth. Then, there was a long epoch

of capitalism disruption, produced by theories and political experiments pointing to beyond capital since the *Communist Party Manifesto*. Capitalism has been encircled for a century and a half by communist experiments. With the end of those experiments came the triumph of fully restored capitalism from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.

At the time of communist exceptions, the left, at least in words and with various distinctions, looked positively at these possibilities, the right did everything to avert them, and the center worked to make those disruptions compatible with capitalism.

Moreover, the original condition of the twentieth-century parliamentary systems, with the mass parties replacing the “parties of notables,” was the legalization of the workers’ parties and trade unions, that is, the “left”, with positions ranging from gradualist reformism to revolutionary path. At the end of the era of “disrupted” capitalism, the crisis of the parliamentary system began with the undoing of leftist parties.

The Italian situation illustrates critical aspects of restoring capitalism “purified” from the alterations suffered during the previous era. This process parallels the crisis of parliamentarism up to the current “governance of war.” Although the latter is embodied by the “Nouveau Right,” the left’s role in this restoration process has been decisive.

In Italy, the crisis of the party system that arose after World War II became apparent very early. The Communist Party began its self-dissolution, literally, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its collapse was followed closely by the collapse of Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party, leading in 1994 to the first right-wing government with neo-fascist ministers inside. Since then, there has been a succession of left- and right-wing governments with alternating facades but substantial continuity in foreign and domestic policy.

Reviewing the main “merits” of leftist parties and governments in dissolving any distinction with the right over the past decades may be helpful.

The “merits” of the left in foreign policy...

Since the 1990s, all parliamentary parties have manifested complete subservience to the US interventionist strategy in foreign policy. The US bombing of Serbia took place with the direct support of the D’Alema government, head of the former Communist Party. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the interventions in Syria and Libya all had the staunch support of both left and right governments, including the sending of troops.

One term of comparison can be Italy’s foreign policy on the Middle East, particularly on the contrast between Israel and the Palestinians. Until the 1980s, Italian governments (then hegemonized by a centrist party, the Christian Democrats) held a position of relative independence from US interventionist strategy and even diplomatic support for the PLO. In

October 1985, the Italian government even went so far as to refuse the US Air Force the use of the Sigonella base in Sicily for military operations in the Middle East. Last January, faced with the IDF's accusation, later revealed to be false, of Hamas' control of UNRWA, the Italian government did not wait a single day to cut off funding to the UN refugee organization, obeying the decisions of Israel and the US without a peep.

Today in Italy, there is a far-right government, yes, but on the war in Ukraine and the war in Gaza, the left has never said or done anything different from the right. It has approved all the military aid packages to Kyiv and has not made a single proposal for peace negotiations or armistice. On the Gaza massacres, the left is a masterpiece of obliviousness. The Democratic Party even prevents Palestinian flags from being brought to the demonstrations it organizes.

The left is fully organic to the right on the terrain of military policies and the arms industry. The current defense minister of the right-wing government was formerly the boss of Leonardo, Italy's top arms manufacturing company with a vast international business volume. The Democratic Party has an entire presence in Leonardo with leading figures. The former interior minister of the Democratic Party, Minniti, is directing the arms traffic to the Middle East. He is the same one who led the war against migrants from Africa and set the agreements with Libya for the strengthening of the coast guard, that is, patrol boats hunting for migrant barges, and the strengthening of detention centers in which migrants arrested at sea or in the desert are held and tortured. Other more or less famous names in the Democratic Party are full members of the governing bodies of Leonardo, which in turn is an integral part of the Italian government's foreign and military policy.

... and in domestic politics

In domestic politics, the dismantling of the welfare state and the war against nomadic proletarians have been conducted with equal conviction by all the governments of the past three decades and more.

Today, the left in opposition sometimes criticizes the decline of public health care, on which the right is particularly active, but this decline begins much earlier. To cite just one linguistic symptom, it was the left that, in order to manifest its "ideological modernity," renamed public hospitals "Aziende Sanitarie Locali," "Local Health Corporations." Corporations, it is understood, that are subject to profit and loss criteria like any other company. The current privatization of public health care bears a leftist stamp.

The same happened with schools and universities. It was the "reforms" of a Democratic Party minister, a former "left-wing" communist, who later felicitated that those of the Berlusconi government were in line with his. Today's result is a university and school inspired by disciplinary and meritocratic pedagogical criteria, research subservient to the

needs of the capitalist market, rigidly top-down governance, and the indiscriminate use of precarious teachers.

The area where the left has made its most significant contribution to the reestablishment of capitalist command has been dismantling previous legislation in defense of labor. Leftist governments desired and vigorously supported a series of laws implementing new forms of precarious work. The so-called “Treu package” in a leftist government inaugurated them in the mid-1990s, and the “Jobs Act” of the government led by Renzi brought them to fruition.

Harassment against proletarian nomads has been a constant endeavor of both the left and the right. The laws tightening them wanted by the left (the Turco-Napolitano law) have been essentially confirmed by right-wing governments (Bossi-Fini law). The war against migrants that the Meloni government is waging today is the same war that Interior Minister Minniti of the Democratic Party was waging.

For more than thirty years, the left, basically the products of the disintegration of the Italian Communist Party, has been doing the most essential work for the restoration of unchallenged capitalist rule. Today, the right is adding the finishing touches to a job already well done.

The rise to power of the right-wing

The rise of the right-wing to power in Italy today, in addition to modeling itself on the empty cast of the ruins of the left, is the result of long-term historical conditions dating back to World War II. Although “Fratelli d’Italia” is usually considered “neo-fascist,” it should be pointed out that its pedigree, far more than Mussolinian in origin, goes directly back to the Italian Social Republic, also known as the “Republic of Salò,” named after the town that was the seat of the puppet government installed by the German occupiers in northern Italy between 1943 and 1945.

At the origin of Fratelli d’Italia is the Italian Social Movement, which, from its name, traced that of the “Italian Social Republic,” a party founded after the war by figures directly responsible for the worst persecution of partisans and Jews in the service of the Nazi occupier. Continuity is explicitly claimed by the “tricolor flame” in the symbol of Fratelli d’Italia, the same flame that towered in the insignia of the Social Movement. The flame symbolizes the resurrection of the fighting spirit from the ashes of the Republic of Salò. It is as if the Democratic Party’s insignia still featured the “hammer and sickle,” which has been conveniently replaced here by the “tricolor” as well.

Paradoxically, despite being the result of the overt crisis of parliamentary parties, Fratelli d’Italia is the only one to claim filiation from a party of the previous era. It should be added that from its founding until the early 1990s, the Italian Social Movement was excluded from full recognition in the parliamentary framework, not so much because of its pro-Nazi past but mainly because it was not part of the “constitutional

arc” that is, of the parties that had drafted the new republican Constitution after World War II.

The whole institutional recognition of the Republic of Salò’s heirs thus occurs when the parliamentary party system unravels and the perimeter of the “constitutional arc” loses all value. This passage also consumes the inherent weakness of the vision of the anti-fascist partisan guerilla war that the Italian Communist Party had cultivated since the postwar period. In the narrative of Italian communists, the Resistance had essentially been the prelude to the reestablishment of the parliamentary system that Mussolini’s fascism had abolished. This view of the Resistance obscured two fundamental aspects.

First, the partisan war had been a mass mobilization aimed at a profound political and moral regeneration of Italy that was not limited to restoring the pre-fascist party system. For the standard Italian Communist Party narrative, what of the Resistance did not flow into the mainstream of the reconstitution of the parliamentary system was not worthy of political attention. They had been, at best, naive utopians unable to measure up to reality. Among them, the most significant example was the Action Party. This small formation significantly contributed to the partisan war but was crushed by the complete reestablishment of the parliamentary system.

Moreover, the party system after World War II is in no way the resurrection of the parties of the 1920s. The critical difference is that since the mid-1940s, parliamentarianism in Italy has been closely shaped by Cold War conditions. The two main parties, the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats represented the geopolitical interests of the “two blocs,” dominated by the USSR and the US. Italy was a buffer zone, and the Yalta Accords provided that neither of the two hegemonic powers would exercise supremacy there. This situation did not exclude intense contrasts, but parliamentary cohabitation was ultimately based on Cold War balances.

It is precisely the end of the Cold War and, in particular, the effects on the Italian Communist Party of the collapse of the USSR that led to dismantling the parliamentary system and allowed the neo-fascist party to enter the governmental framework. Gone is the reference to the existence of a beyond capitalism that structured the parliamentary dialectic overridden by the Cold War. At the same time, the rhetoric of the Resistance as a prelude to renewed parliamentarianism is emptied. Thus, any ideological obstacle to full institutional recognition of the descendants of the collaborators of the Republic of Salò also falls.

The government of endless war

The rise of Fratelli d’Italia resulted from a long process, the stages of which are not worth reconstructing here. However, it must be said that Giorgia Meloni’s coming to power was also very timely in today’s initial phase of the New World War, given Italy’s conditions of vassalage to

US strategies. Italy in 2024 “hosts” as many as 120 military bases with a US military presence (ten years ago, it was half) and officially over a hundred U.S.-owned nuclear bombs (so undoubtedly many more). This figure confirms how bipartisan the condescension to the demands of the US interventionist strategy has been for many years and how long the preparations for the ongoing war in Europe have been.

How is it that since the Russo-Ukrainian war, an explicitly right-wing apparatus has come to power in Italy, while the left, which also gave full assurance of supporting every US decision, as actually it has continued to do, is now in “opposition”?

In election rituals, which are, in fact, regulated by specialized marketing, the performance of the “left” is focused on “respect for differences,” with particular attention to sexual desire orientations, as well as a firm battle in favor of “assisted suicide.” The left promises freedom in sex and death.

In contrast, the “right” performance has two vital points. First, it presents itself as outside the “Palace.” It is a *trompe l’oeil* because Fratelli d’Italia has always had leading figures in the power system, but having been in parliamentary opposition throughout the previous legislature, it can play the character that flogs the discredit of the party system, those on the left in particular.³

The other atout of Fratelli d’Italia is the flag of “Italian identity.” Its name is the title of the national anthem, evoking the spirit of the Risorgimento, but it has now reshaped in terms of “sovereignty.” The Ministry of Agriculture is called the “Ministry of Food Sovereignty.” It is a relatively easy game because Italians love national cuisine.

If one descends from the electoral stage to the terrain of operational decisions, the “Nouveau Right” fully embodies the drive for unlimited war. “National sovereignty” actually means full compliance with US decisions. Hence, unconditional support for Ukraine with constant sending of arms “until the recapture of Crimea.” In the Middle East, military supplies and strict diplomatic support for Israel, of course, in the timeframe and manner determined in Washington. Italian military missions in the Red Sea and even the South China Sea follow American ones. Fratelli d’Italia’s collaborationist vocation, inherited from the Republic of Salò, manifests itself vis-à-vis the US imperial power, of which Italy is a *de facto* protectorate.

The left on this ground has no chance to compete with the right. It shares the line with the Meloni government and supports its military and diplomatic decisions in parliament. However, it is in a subordinate position because it cannot directly command an endless state of war, mainly for reason of electoral image. This is a dead-end path that will mark the further decline of the left and the enslavement of Italy to US decisions.

Thus, we have a “Nouveau Right” in Italy that now performs the functions of “proxy governance” of the war on behalf of the US

government. After the decomposition of parliamentary parties and the end of the previous political conditions that limited the wars of the twentieth century, state power is in the hands of the war itself.

How can new political conditions be invented to stop an interminable war like this? The urgency of the question is great, the space of possibilities is narrow.

- 1 I refer mainly to Fabio Mini's enlightening analyses in dialogue with the two well-known Chinese military theorists, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiaoshui. See his afterword to Qiao Liang, *L'arco dell'impero*, Gorizia, Leg Editions, 2021.
- 2 The October Revolution stopped World War I, partisan guerrilla warfare and the USSR's Patriotic Warfare were decisive actors in bringing World War II to a conclusion, and communist experimentations prevented the Cold War from becoming an actual generalized military confrontation. With Claudia Pozzana, we argued this theme in "Facing WW4," *Continental Thought and Theory*, vol. 4, 2023, No. 1.
- 3 The ruling coalition comprises three formations outside the parliamentary system established after World War II. Fratelli d'Italia represents the previous situation, the final phase of fascism. The other two, Forza Italia and Lega, represent the post-Cold War situation. One is the corporate party created by Berlusconi, and the other emerged in the 1990s as a secessionist movement in northern Italy.

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