

The strategic stakes in Mattei's fight

by Nico Perrone

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I thank the more direct witnesses of the Mattei tragedy for having agreed to participate in our meeting. I think I should speak about a less known aspect of the Mattei affair, Mattei's international political activity. I want to deal explicitly with Mattei's overall contribution to the matters under discussion, but especially with his role in the practical political implementation of an attempt, if not to decouple Italy from the framework of the Atlantic Alliance, then to strongly shift Italy's orientation in a neutralist direction and toward a lessened involvement of Italy with respect to the policy of the United States, by which I refer not only to oil policy, but to the country's foreign policy.

Italy, we know, has been tied since 1949 to the United States in the Atlantic Alliance; and since 1949, there has been some strong resistance inside the Christian Democracy toward such a decisive, entangling, and suffocating involvement of our country with the United States. The most significant resistance to the Atlantic Alliance was perhaps not that of the great parliamentary protest mounted by the Communist and Socialist parties, but the subtler, more decisive, more pregnant, and more enduring resistance of certain sectors of the Christian Democracy who did not want to hitch Italy to the chariot of an unequal alliance, in which the scepter of command remained in the hands of the United States, but rather thought about the possibility of a neutralist policy for Italy.

The debate inside the parliamentary caucus of the Christian Democracy was suffocated by Alcide De Gasperi [historical leader of the postwar Christian Democracy in Italy]. There was no debate when adherence to the Atlantic pact came to be decided. Thus, the Christian Democracy found itself facing a virtual confidence vote in De Gasperi, who wanted to take the vote without first having a chance to probe more deeply into the reasons for this vote inside the party. Yet, anti-NATO ferment inside the party remained strong and determined, and it was personified by men very close to Enrico Mattei.

One of these was Amintore Fanfani, whom we find during the 1950s simultaneously as prime minister, foreign min-

ister, and party secretary of the Christian Democracy. Another was Giovanni Gronchi, who owed something to Mattei for his election to the presidency of the republic and would have owed him even more for his reelection as President, at which he aimed. There was Del Bo, the minister of state holdings, a lively exponent of the left wing of the Christian Democrats, who worried the U.S. embassy because of some of the positions he took in the Italian Parliament. And there were certainly many persons of a completely different extraction, not at all left-wing. . . . But behind all this there was Enrico Mattei: For reasons of his ideals, for reasons of trade policy, for reasons of diplomatic policy, in the sense that a country which wants to have its own diplomatic policy has to be able to create it day by day and must not line up with the policy of the most powerful.

In search of self-determination

Mattei pushed hard for a line of detachment, of critical participation in NATO and even of getting out of NATO and into a neutralist position. Mattei therefore not only annoyed the United States with his oil deals in the Middle East, which broke up the balance of the international oil cartel, and broke up the price equilibrium, but it was Mattei who pushed even harder for Italy's entire policy to take its distance from the United States and to open up toward the Third World countries, which were traveling in a certain way along a road similar to the painful and laborious road which Italy had had to travel. Mattei was very sensitive to these problems, because he had been a witness to this difficult road of Italy's and had had great difficulties at the beginning of his career. So he knew what it meant for a country to free itself from the colonial yoke and find its own way, its own balance, and a way of arranging its own economy which would not be an economy of pure exploitation by the great powers.

All of this ideal design of Mattei flowed into a political design which at the end of the 1950s was called neo-Atlanticism. But before discussing neo-Atlanticism, perhaps we should recall the heavy pressure which had been placed on the Italian government from the moment Mattei took the reins of the country's oil affairs.

Mattei was convinced that Italy, a poor and defeated country, nonetheless possessed notable energy deposits of petroleum in its subsoil, and he was also aware that the oil business, even if there were not really resources inside the country, was an important business which one could not stay out of and in which one could not be at the mercy of the big guys. So Mattei's program was to try to use all available means to exploit the country's energy resources, and if this were not possible, to seek international accords with countries which had these energy resources, so that they could be used by Italy in order to become a partner of the major powers, and not be at their mercy.

It would take a long time just to list the telegrams, the pressures, which the American ambassadors and others, in-



Enrico Mattei helps to lay the cornerstone of a petrochemical plant in Gela, Sicily, not far from where his fatal plane crash occurred later, in 1962.

cluding major American oil management figures, very crudely exerted on the Italian government and especially on De Gasperi. They started in 1945 and continued over the years until 1953, the year in which ENI, the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (National Hydrocarbons Corp.), was founded, and even continued afterward. They were especially intense in the mid-1950s, when Mrs. Clare Boothe Luce was ambassador to Italy. The pressures were heavy because they absolutely wanted to keep the Italian government from assuming petroleum interests. They wanted petroleum interests to be left to private initiative. It was stated very clearly that in private initiative the Americans should have a position if not of privilege, at least of parity with the other countries and of parity with the Italian government. Our government's right to enact any clauses to favor its own initiatives was not recognized, at it was claimed that such clauses should only be set up for certain private interests, American ones, and not for our government.

The strong pressures which were applied against Mattei's design, which later became De Gasperi's design and the design of the Italian government, for managing oil affairs, became especially heavy when the law enacting ENI was being discussed, which was the law which would allow ENI to have exclusive exploration and exploitation rights in an area of the Po Valley which was believed to be the richest area in hydrocarbons—oil and methane. There was not a huge amount of oil, but methane did come out in the end, although it was not known that there was no oil, because the Americans, who had explored there before the war, had

hypothesized that there were significant oil reserves in the Po Valley.

A new kind of contract

These pressures got very heavy. In 1953, when the law was approved, they became downright intolerable, in form and substance, when Mattei, having proved that the potential for finding very important oil deposits inside Italy did not exist, decided to shift his attention toward foreign countries known to be rich in oil. So Mattei began exploring in Somalia, Egypt, and, little by little, in Iran.

In 1953, the first preliminary accords were signed with Somalia to try to exploit oil reserves, and in 1957, a partnership was formed between ENI and Somalia, which still saw ENI in the majority position, with 61% of the shares in the enterprise. But in 1960, at the behest of Mattei, the partnership with Somalia became completely equal, at the point when the profits of the enterprise were becoming considerable.

Then it was Iran's turn, a country very rich in oil of the highest quality. The zone was contested between the British and the Americans, and the latter had succeeded in penetrating thanks to a series of very complicated maneuvers in which the CIA had a prominent role. In 1956, Mattei's ENI showed up in Iran in search of accords to drill oil, and proposed an extraordinary formula which definitively broke up the "fifty-fifty" rule, i.e., the condition under which the state possessing the oil reserves enjoyed 50% of the profits which were drawn from the exploitation of the oil. Mattei broke this rule and offered a well-articulated contract to Iran, which was financially very complex, but its substance was that the state possessing the oil reserves got 75%, instead of 50%, and Mattei's ENI got only 25%, hence 25% less than what the British and the other big oil companies had been getting. And here was where the break with the cartel and its conditions—colonialism and neo-colonialism—occurred, which had allowed the exploitation of the Third World countries.

Behind of Mattei's proposal there were, of course, very complicated motives. I would, however, give first place to the ideals which motivated him, because Mattei was strongly idealistic; he believed in what he said and he really believed that the Third World countries should be helped in an equal manner, associated with the process of development, and not indebted, as instead occurred and occurs now with different mechanisms, such as the International Monetary Fund. But there was also a practical, business motivation. Mattei had emerged from the big petroleum business, and the only way to get into the big international oil business was to break the monopolistic conditions of the cartel, by offering better conditions to the countries that had oil reserves. So he came up with the new 75% formula for the producing country.

This new formula did not remain limited to Iran. Mattei made a similar deal with Egypt, and he tried to make such deals with Libya and Iraq, but by then the U.S. intelligence services had stepped in and cut Mattei completely out.

Angry reactions

The balance had been upset and the reactions from the American press and intelligence services were enraged. In a secret American report recently found in the archives, we read that Mattei's power must be contained at all costs and his possibilities for influencing the government must be reduced. Mattei is not only a force in industry, oil, and politics by now, but he also has a hold on information, because in 1957, through ENI, he took control of *Il Giorno*, a Milanese daily, which at that time was much more important than it is today. It provided very lively coverage, had the best and brightest writers, it was present in every country in the world, and most of all, it had a policy of true support for the countries which were trying to free themselves from the colonial yoke, a policy of open support toward Algeria, for example, which was at the time a French colony. France was losing this colony, but there was a war, a savage repression from the French to hold onto their colony. Mattei sent Italo Pietra to Algeria, who later became the editor-in-chief of *Il Giorno*. He was the first, unofficial representative of Mattei who negotiated not with the French, but with the Algerians, the National Liberation Front.

After Italo Pietra had imposed the general lines which determined the future policy of liberated Algeria and hence also of oil policy, because it was necessary to make a pact with Algeria once it was free, another, more formal presence was established with the function of public relations, entrusted to Pirani, at present a writer for *La Repubblica*, the newspaper which has somewhat taken the place today that *Il Giorno* held 15 years ago. Thus, Mattei's spokesmen were on hand in Algeria from early on until the process of national liberation was completed.

A storm broke out in the American press, not just in the national newspapers, but even the local ones. I found local U.S. newspapers which ran ferocious attacks against Mattei, and these papers were then clipped and the articles were gathered in a dossier prepared for the President of the United States. This is not insignificant: There are not many provincial newspapers, on non-American matters, which end up being clipped for a dossier prepared for the U.S. President. The charges against Mattei were always very harsh. He was spoken of as a dangerous adventurer, a man who conditioned the Italian government with corruption and money. There are rather transparent hints of the need to "eliminate" him. They do not talk about physical elimination, but they do say eliminate him from the political scene, and there is talk of how to do that, and it is concluded that the means to do it are many.

Neo-Atlanticism

It is in 1958 that the discussion becomes, I believe, more complex and starts to get really dangerous. This is the time when Mattei begins, in addition to the attack on U.S. oil interests, an attack on traditional Italian foreign policy. He opens up a foreign policy of greater detachment from NATO,



Nico Perrone: Mattei wanted Italy to have its own national policy, independent of the United States.

greater opening toward the Third World, and potential neutralism.

This was the framework of the neo-Atlanticism in which Mattei, Fanfani, and Gronchi were involved, and oddly, also Christian Democratic right-wingers, for their own reasons, namely Guido Gonella and Giuseppe Pella. On neo-Atlanticism the U.S. intelligence services drew up an alarming document, which I found and published in my book.

A bothersome book

Speaking of the book, in which I published these documents, I wish to open a brief parenthesis here. Allow me to recall some events around my book, *Mattei, il nemico italiano (Mattei the Italian Enemy)*—the enemy, of course, of the United States. This book was published in 1989 by a publishing house in Milan and in it were gathered a number of secret, unpublished American documents, which I went to a lot of trouble to get. During the last period of research, a nice American kept company with me, although I never understood what he wanted. I saw him looking very curiously among the papers which I was pulling together, and then I had to definitively take my distance from him; but this is not important, just a little atmosphere. Well, the book was published by the Milanese publisher Leonardo Mondadori, in 1989, with a very low run of 7,000 copies. I was surprised because Mattei is constantly talked about, he is talked about on television, there had been a film by Rosi which is shown

Thirty years later: Who killed Mattei?

From the speech by Raffaele Morini, Association of Christian Partisans, Pavia, the promoter of recent initiatives to reopen the Mattei case.

It was Oct. 27, 1962 when the ENI twin-engine plane exploded in the sky, hurling fragments of the craft over the small territory of Bascapé, and causing the death of Enrico Mattei and his travel companions, the pilot Ernerio Bertuzzi, and William McHale, a *New York Times* journalist.

Of Enrico Mattei, of his genius and his spirit of sacrifice, much has been said in seminars, conferences, economic policy roundtables, via press organs, and on radio and television. But no political party, not even the one in which he was an activist, has ever committed itself to promote an investigation that could identify those responsible for the barbarous act of terrorism, and bring them to justice.

And for Enrico Mattei, who for highly idealistic motives, had refused the short-term well-being of an easy and peaceful life to join the Partisan Formations, becoming, because of his abilities and spirit of sacrifice, deputy commander general of the Corps of Volunteers of Freedom, April 25 [the day of liberation in World War II] was only the first victorious phase of his battle. The rest was yet to come.

Thus it was that, named Extraordinary Commissar of AGIP, with the precise task of liquidating the state oil company, Commander Mattei, supported and sustained by the Partisans, the Resistance, and the anti-fascist press, rebelled against the government's decision, and managed to guide the company to international levels of competitiveness and technical perfection.

He pulled ANIC and Nuova Pignone out of bankruptcy; constituted ENI, SEMI, SAIPEM, and SNAM; and set up vacation centers for workers and seaside and mountain camps for their children. At the entrance of Palazzo Uffici 1 in S. Donato Milanese, he had erected a huge plaque of semiprecious stone, representing in low relief the calvary of a partisan, suggesting that the industry he had created must not ever be separated from the purpose of elevating the living conditions of our people.

Enrico Mattei was not just the president of ENI, but also a parliamentary deputy and a master of politics and honesty.

On the eve of the great electoral contest of April 18, 1948, when the fate of democracy was at stake, Mattei organized a parade of 100,000 Catholic Partisans in Rome, to put the country on guard against the perils of communism, and also to attest that a dictatorship would not get past the Volunteers of Freedom. With all frankness, we must affirm that the Democratic Popular Front [the electoral alliance of Communists and Socialists in 1948], which also sought to install the dictatorship of the proletariat in Italy, lost not because of numerical inferiority of its electors, but because of the fear of winning. . . .

all the time, and a lot of live interest. I protested about the low print-run.

This was in October 1989. But to my surprise I found out that the actual distribution of the book was only half. The other 3,500 copies were kept in a warehouse: "You never know, they might come in handy later, it's good to hold onto them." All right, fine. One month and a half after the book came out in October, at the beginning of December, another strange thing happened. In December books sell like bars of soap, because everyone buys books as gifts, so this is the time when bookstores tend to stock up. Yet in December 1989, one month after the book came out, the publisher recalled some 20-25% of this small ratio of the books which had been distributed, so whoever had bought it, fine, and anyone else could no longer find it.

The next year, in 1990, more copies were called back by the publisher. I was being called on to hold forums all over the place, I was in Vicenza for a month, in Viareggio, all over the country, and all over there were people asking for the book, to see it. Nothing—it no longer existed. The answer

was: "There are none, it is not available, we cannot distribute it."

Mattei steps out of line

I return to our story. So there was this concern by the big oil companies to safeguard their business and this great worry by the United States over the policy of taking distance from the Atlantic Alliance which Mattei was very obviously advancing. This is unmistakably attested to by the documents which I published.

The most alarming document is that of Jan. 10, 1958 on neo-Atlanticism, in which there are 13 pages dedicated to the Mattei affair. Then there is a series of other reports, there are also other facts, which are verified, at the end of the 1950s, and there is the rapprochement, for business and also for political reasons, of Mattei with the Soviet Union at the end of the 1950s. The Soviets had been kept out of trade with western Europe. Mattei went to the Soviet Union. He signed accords to import oil from the Soviet Union, and in exchange for this oil he offered machinery and steel tubing which could

be used to build pipelines in eastern Europe. He even offered oil tankers. And then the Italian government stepped in and tried to limit Mattei's initiatives.

Italian President Gronchi went to the Soviet Union. Aleksei Kosygin, then Soviet vice president, came to Italy. From business deals things clearly passed into forms of political closeness and friendship which those times absolutely did not allow. But even in the business realm it was no joke, because Mattei's ENI had succeeded in obtaining 22% of Italy's oil needs from the Soviet Union. Then there was the opening to China, with the meeting with the Chinese deputy prime minister.

In 1961, important figures started to show up. On March 3, 1961, Averell Harriman shows up, the ambassador at-large of President Kennedy. He comes to meet Mattei, with whom he has a long and not easy conversation. He wants Mattei to account for his political initiatives toward the Soviet Union and China. Mattei defends them emphatically—but that is the key which Harriman is pressing on, that is the U.S. concern.

Then on May 22, 1962 another American boss turns up, George Ball. He also demands a secret meeting with Mattei, and he too demands an account of what Mattei is doing, his foreign policy initiatives. He uses great tact, perhaps with a glass of vermouth and hors d'oeuvres, but the substance is tough.

I found the minutes of these talks, both from the Italian and the American side, and it is clear that these were tense conversations, in which Mattei defends his reasons but the United States does not back down. Yet a kind of accommodation was reached. The United States appreciates that the oil business is such that Mattei cannot continue to stay outside of it, and therefore some kind of accommodation must be reached. Standard Oil, which is Mattei's biggest enemy, also accedes to a kind of accord, and thus the conflict on the business level begins at a certain point to move toward resolution.

There is even a plan for a trip by Mattei to the United States and a future meeting with the president of Standard Oil. There had been a meeting years earlier, but it had been extremely tense and Mattei had nearly been thrown out the door. Now the talk was of a new meeting and trying to reach an agreement. Thus, Mattei was being assured of some kind of participation in international business. At the end of his visit to the United States there was even planned a meeting with President Kennedy. So this was, shall we say, the official side, the business side.

But the worries about Mattei's politics remained very strong. They might have even been softened and reabsorbed in the framework of the conversations and agreements which could have been concluded in the United States, with the oilmen and with President Kennedy.

The U-2 incident in Cuba

However, something very serious occurred which has perhaps been forgotten: the downing of the U-2 on Oct. 27, 1962, an American spy plane which was surveilling Cuba.

In the previous days, American spy planes had discovered that the Soviets were setting up missile bases in Cuba. Immediately, an emergency committee was set up, which was called EXCOM. This EXCOM met in President John F. Kennedy's office sometimes even twice a day.

After the U-2 was downed on Oct. 27, the decisions which EXCOM talked about were war decisions. There was talk of retaliating against Cuba, an aerial bombardment which was supposed to occur on Oct. 28 or 30. On Oct. 27, there was a good deal of talk within EXCOM about the possibility that the Soviet Union, upon having its bases bombed in Cuba, with Cuba already an ally of the U. S. S. R., might also carry out reprisals. There was shouting in EXCOM. The man doing the shouting was [then Defense Secretary Robert] McNamara. I have written to McNamara and he answered that he doesn't have a good memory. Yet there are other documents which demonstrate this, and it was McNamara and another voice shouting: The reprisals will take place in Turkey, where there are American bases, and in Italy, where there were American bases, in the region around Bari. The picture of the Alliance was very uncertain.

The Atlantic Alliance had a compactness, it had the participation of many nations, among them Italy, but Italy was recalcitrant. Information had been arriving over the course of years, of heavy pressure by Mattei for Italy to put distance between itself and NATO, as we have seen. So when they began to outline the risk that Italy could be the target of a reprisal by the Soviet Union if it were decided to bomb Cuba, it was obvious that this was the time when there was the greatest fear that Italy might distance itself from Atlantic solidarity.

In the documents which I published, all the possible frameworks are described of Italy's decoupling from NATO, which I have not listed here. In those years, covert CIA actions were very much in fashion. Cuba was at the center of attention for covert actions. There was talk, as official documents have come out to show, of assassinating Castro, but not just Castro. There were politicians assassinated in that era by the CIA. The CIA had a free hand for covert actions; it was not held back by having to report in advance to the President or even to its own director, because there was a completely separate sector for these actions.

There is a mystery surrounding Mattei's end. It was certainly a convenient moment, because the plane in which he was traveling fell on Oct. 27, 1962. These were terrifying times in which there was a risk of going to war and Italy risked being bombed by the Soviet Union. There could also have been an initiative to prevent a danger of this kind. Certainly, what is very serious, what is enormous, what is unpardonable—even if this hypothesis should prove to be too daring—is that there has never yet been a serious inquiry into the incident of Mattei's plane. For example, there has never been an investigation to determine if there were, or were not, traces of explosives.