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The Foreign Policy Position of the Meloni Government on the Israeli-Palestinian Question, 2022–2026

Abstract

This article examines the evolution of the Meloni government's position on the Israeli-Palestinian question between 2022 and 2026, with particular attention to the changes that followed the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023. Italy initially maintained a clear position of support for Israel, but the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza and the risk of a wider regional conflict gradually pushed Rome towards a more cautious line without producing a real break with the Netanyahu government. The analysis follows this evolution chronologically, comparing official statements and political decisions with the domestic debate that developed around them. Over time, Gaza became increasingly connected to the confrontation between the government, the opposition, and street movements, until the Palestinian question also entered the electoral agenda ahead of the 2027 general election. The article therefore shows how Italian foreign policy became progressively more difficult to separate from the political conflict developing inside the country.

Key words: Italian foreign policy, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Meloni government, Gaza war

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Introduction

The main question of this article is therefore simple: how did the Meloni government's position on the Israeli-Palestinian question evolve between 2022 and 2026, and what factors pushed Rome to modify its initial line after 7 October 2023? Italy remained close to Israel and continued to exclude Hamas from any form of political legitimacy, but as the war continued, that support gradually became more cautious.

The worsening situation in Gaza and the risk of a regional escalation forced the government to take greater account of both international pressure and Italy's direct interests, especially when the conflict began to affect national security more closely, to the point of altering Rome's relationship with the Netanyahu government.

This evolution also had consequences on the domestic level, because as the war continued Gaza entered more deeply into the Italian political debate and became increasingly intertwined with the conflict between the government, the opposition, street movements, and new political actors.

For this reason, the domestic dimension is not treated as a separate subject, but as part of the same process. The article's contribution is to show that the evolution of Rome's position on Gaza cannot be understood through diplomatic choices alone, because domestic political pressures increasingly shaped the context in which those choices were made.

Methodology and Sources

The study is based mainly on a qualitative and chronological reading of the sources, giving particular importance to government and parliamentary documents, since they make it possible to reconstruct the official Italian position and to compare public statements with the decisions taken as the conflict developed. Press sources are used to follow the political debate and the reactions produced by those decisions, especially when the consequences of the war began to affect the domestic political sphere as well. Academic literature is instead used to provide the historical framework necessary to understand the Israeli-Palestinian question and the developments that preceded 7 October. The sources were therefore selected according to their usefulness in reconstructing the changes in Rome's position and were read together in order to identify both the elements of continuity and the moments in which the government gradually modified its initial line.

The "Two-State" Paradigm: Historical Evolution, Actors, and Negotiating Asymmetries

To understand how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reached the breaking point of 7 October, it is necessary to look at the developments that preceded it. The starting point is one of the central formulas of the dispute: "two peoples, two states".

The formula first found a legal basis in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, adopted on 29 November 1947 (Monzali et al. 2022, p. 263).

Thereafter, territorial partition remained a cornerstone of international diplomacy, although it found only partial political expression in the 1993 Oslo Accords. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), led by Yasser Arafat and influenced in part by the effects of the First Intifada, formally accepted the compromise: recognition of the State of Israel in exchange for the prospect of a future Palestinian state in the territories occupied after the 1967 Six-Day War (Del Sarto, Klein 2023).

Over the following years, the failure to turn that compromise into a lasting settlement contributed to a sharp escalation of the conflict. Operation Cast Lead, launched by Israel against the Gaza Strip on 27 December 2008, took place amid political and military deadlock. The truce between Hamas and Israel had already expired, rocket attacks against southern Israeli cities had resumed, and attempts at reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah had also failed. In this context, Defence Minister Ehud Barak authorized an air campaign against about 150 targets in Gaza. The operation continued until 18 January 2009 and marked another failure of political mediation, as armed conflict once again replaced negotiation (Napolitano 2026, pp. 62–64).

A new escalation followed in November 2012 with Operation Pillar of Defense, also known as Operation Pillar of Cloud. The campaign began on 14 November with the targeted killing of Ahmed Jabari, Hamas's military commander, and ended on 21 November with a truce mediated by Mohamed Morsi's Egypt and supported by American diplomacy. Israel presented the operation as a response to rocket fire against its territory. Hamas nevertheless demonstrated greater offensive capacity, with its rockets reaching deeper into Israeli territory. The confrontation was shorter than Operation Cast Lead, but it revealed a new factor: the growing importance of military technology and the protection of the Israeli home front, most clearly reflected in the first major wartime use of the Iron Dome missile defence system (*Human rights violations*... 2013; *Operation Pillar of Defense* 2012; Khan et al. 2022).

Between 2014 and 2023, Gaza remained trapped in recurring crises. These were increasingly connected to the collapse of the Oslo framework, the

weakening of the two-state solution, and the transformation of the Strip into a besieged territory politically detached from the broader Palestinian question[1].

Operation Protective Edge, launched in the summer of 2014, was the most devastating escalation before 7 October. It began after the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank and after the resumption of rocket fire from Gaza. Israel responded with a prolonged air and ground offensive that also targeted Hamas's tunnel network. The human cost was severe: more than two thousand Palestinians were killed, while seventy-two Israelis died, most of them soldiers (*2014 Gaza conflict*... 2014; *Key figures*... 2015).

In 2018–2019, tension shifted along the barrier between Gaza and Israel with the Great March of Return. The demonstrations demanded the right of return for Palestinian refugees and the end of the blockade of the Strip. Israel's response was extremely harsh, causing deaths, thousands of injuries, and a further deterioration of Gaza's already fragile healthcare system (Abusalim 2018; *Report of the Independent*... 2019).

In May 2021, a new crisis began in East Jerusalem, focused on Sheikh Jarrah and the al-Aqsa Mosque, before spreading to Gaza. Hamas launched rockets against Israel, and the IDF began Operation Guardian of the Walls. After eleven days, Egyptian mediation led to a truce, not to a solution. The conflict also renewed the legal debate over the distinction between military targets and civilian structures in the Strip (Daniele, Mariniello 2021a, 2021b).

In 2022 and 2023, Israel carried out more limited operations against Palestinian Islamic Jihad, including Operation Breaking Dawn and Operation Shield and Arrow. Hamas remained partly outside the direct confrontation, but precisely this position strengthened its political role in the Strip (Dekel 2023; Samaan 2022).

On 7 October 2023, Hamas attacked Israel, killing about 1,400 people and taking 251 hostages. The assault opened a new phase of the conflict. Israel subsequently declared itself at war with Hamas. The Netanyahu government formed an emergency cabinet and launched an extremely harsh military response against the Gaza Strip, involving thousands of air strikes, a siege of the territory, and the cutting off of essential supplies. The crisis immediately spread beyond Gaza: the West Bank and East Jerusalem were isolated, while clashes between the Israeli army and Hezbollah began along the Lebanese border. Hamas's attack was military, political, and media-driven at the same time.

[1] For the broader political background, see Anziska 2018; Del Sarto, Klein 2023; Lustick 2019; Procter 2024.

It involved Hezbollah, brought Iran into play as an indirect actor, and sought to disrupt any further normalization between Israel and the Arab countries (Napolitano 2026, pp. 65–66).

The Foreign Policy of the Meloni Government before 7 October (2022–2023)

Giorgia Meloni's government was formed in October 2022 following the electoral victory of the centre-right. The coalition consisted of Brothers of Italy, the League, and Forza Italia. Matteo Salvini, leader of the League, retained an important role within the majority and took control of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, while Antonio Tajani (who later became secretary of Forza Italia after the death of Silvio Berlusconi) was entrusted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (*Governo Meloni* 2022).

Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Rome on 10 March 2023 is central to understanding the Meloni government's approach to the Middle East. At Palazzo Chigi, Meloni and Netanyahu discussed strategic cooperation, energy, and security. Against the background of the war in Ukraine and Italy's attempt to reduce its energy dependence on Russia, gas from the Eastern Mediterranean became a major priority. Netanyahu proposed strengthening energy supplies to Italy and presented Rome as a possible European energy hub (*Netanyahu: 'Più gas verso l'Italia'*... 2023; *President Meloni meets*... 2023).

The meeting confirmed Italy's full support for the Abraham Accords and for the normalization process between Israel and several Arab countries. Meloni also offered Italy as a possible facilitator of de-escalation in the occupied territories (*Meloni a Netanyahu*... 2023).

From the Hamas Attack to January 2024: Italy's Initial Response

The Italian government's condemnation of Hamas's actions on 7 October was unequivocal. Palazzo Chigi and the Farnesina presented the attack as a terrorist assault against civilians, reaffirming Israel's right to defend itself. In this initial phase, Italy's priority was therefore clear: solidarity with Tel Aviv and full recognition of Hamas's terrorist nature[2].

[2] On the first official reaction of the Italian government after the attacks of 7 October, see *Tajani ricorda il 7 ottobre*... 2024; *Dichiarazione del Presidente Meloni*... 2024.

This line was also confirmed by Giorgia Meloni's visit to Israel on 21 October 2023. The Prime Minister reiterated Israel's right to self-defence but formally tied it to respect for international law. This already revealed the twofold position of Italian policy: support for Israel after 7 October did not imply full acceptance of the Netanyahu government's military strategy. The right to self-defence still had to remain within the limits of international humanitarian law (*Visita del Presidente Meloni*... 2023).

Foreign Minister Tajani drew a clear distinction between Hamas and the Palestinian people and confirmed Italy's support for the Palestinian National Authority, recognizing it as the only legitimate institutional interlocutor. This distinction was intended to prevent the condemnation of the terrorist attack from turning into a broader delegitimization of the Palestinian cause[3].

Rome did not support calls for an immediate ceasefire, which it considered too favourable to Hamas unless accompanied by an explicit condemnation of the attacks of 7 October and by the release of the hostages. For this reason, on 27 October 2023, Italy abstained on the United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian truce in Gaza. Meloni defended the decision as a balanced position, close to that adopted by several European countries and members of the G7[4].

Despite this firm public position, signs of caution soon emerged, particularly in the military-industrial sphere. After the outbreak of the war, the government declared that it had suspended new authorizations for arms exports to Israel, invoking Law 185/90, which restricts the sale of military equipment to countries involved in armed conflicts. This decision allowed the executive to present itself as respectful of international law while maintaining a pro-Israel political line[5].

Between November and December 2023, Italy's position became less linear as the humanitarian situation in Gaza worsened and the risk of a regional escalation increased. The Lebanese front, in particular, imposed caution: the presence of Italian troops in the UNIFIL mission turned every clash between Israel and Hezbollah into a direct matter of national security, not merely a Middle Eastern diplomatic issue[6].

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3 On Tajani's distinction between Hamas and the Palestinian people and on Italy's support for the legitimate Palestinian Authority, see *Partecipazione del Vice Presidente*... 2023.

4 On the Italian abstention at the United Nations General Assembly, see *Italy Abstains*... 2023; *Meloni Defends Italy*... 2023.

5 On the suspension of new arms export licences to Israel and the debate over pre-existing contracts, see *The Ongoing Reform*... 2025; *Nuovo record*... 2026.

6 On the broader Italian parliamentary and institutional documentation concerning the Middle Eastern crisis, see *Attività parlamentare*... 2025.

At the multilateral level, Italy therefore adopted an intermediate line. It did not embrace the harsher language used by the opposition parties and pro-Palestinian movements, but began to insist on humanitarian pauses, the entry of aid, the release of the hostages, and the need not to compromise the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue definitively.

The Evolution of the Italian Position between 2024 and 2026

Between 2024 and 2026, the Meloni government's position on the war in Gaza changed but never took the form of a rupture. Italy did not abandon its support for Israel, nor did it question its condemnation of Hamas. However, the initial line, based on solidarity with Tel Aviv and Atlantic alignment, was gradually tempered by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

In February 2024, during the vote on parliamentary motions concerning the Middle Eastern crisis, Parliament approved a provision committing the government to support an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The governing majority did not vote against it but chose to abstain[7].

This caution found its first concrete expression on 11 March 2024, when Antonio Tajani launched the "Food for Gaza" initiative, developed together with the FAO, the World Food Programme, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Its objective was to create a more stable humanitarian channel through which food and medical aid could reach the civilian population of the Strip. The initiative also had a political purpose. Through "Food for Gaza," Italy sought to present itself as a credible humanitarian actor in the Mediterranean while preserving its relationship with Israel and avoiding the unilateral recognition of Palestine[8].

In the spring of 2024, Tajani also began to use more explicit language towards the Netanyahu government. Following the Iranian attack against Israel and within the framework of the G7, the Foreign Minister argued that Israel had to listen to its allies and could not ignore their calls for moderation (*Tajani: Netanyahu has to listen to us*... 2024).

The real point of rupture, however, came in October 2024 with the UNIFIL crisis in Lebanon. Israeli attacks against positions held by the United Nations mission directly affected Italy's national interest, since Italy was one of the mission's main troop contributors. From that point onward, the conflict no

[7] On the parliamentary vote of February 13, 2024, and the approval of the provision calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, see *Seduta*... 2024.

[8] On the launch of "Food for Gaza," see *Presentazione dell'iniziativa*... 2024.

longer concerned only Gaza or Italy's diplomatic position towards Netanyahu: it touched the security of Italian soldiers. Meloni declared the attack against UNIFIL unacceptable, and the government summoned the Israeli ambassador. Crosetto used even harsher words, going so far as to speak of possible war crimes and to insist that Rome took no orders from Tel Aviv (see *Crosetto: 'L'attacco di Israele*... 2024; *Missione UNIFIL*... 2024).

During the same autumn, the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Fiuggi-Anagni exposed Italy's difficulty in reconciling its commitment to international law with its relationship with Israel. Following the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court against Netanyahu and Gallant, Tajani attempted to establish a common position among the G7 partners[9].

In June 2025, Tajani authorized two allocations of €5 million each, one for UNICEF and the other for the World Health Organization, to support healthcare assistance for the Palestinian population affected by the war. The Farnesina increasingly placed humanitarian action at the centre of its public position: aid, wounded children, healthcare, logistical channels, and cooperation with international organizations. This did not erase the initial pro-Israel line but made it less absolute[10].

The most important diplomatic step, however, was Italy's vote at the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September 2025. Rome voted in favour of the resolution supporting the two-state solution and the "New York Declaration," promoted by France and Saudi Arabia. The plan envisaged a Palestinian state free from Hamas (*L'Italia alle Nazioni*... 2025).

By October 2025, two years after 7 October, the Italian position had become more complex. Meloni continued to reiterate her condemnation of the massacre carried out by Hamas and her solidarity with the Israeli victims and the hostages, but she accompanied that language with an increasingly explicit denunciation of the price paid by the population of Gaza. For the Italian government, 7 October was no longer sufficient to provide absolute cover for the choices of the Netanyahu government[11].

During the same period, the issue of arms also came to the fore. The government maintained that it had authorized no new licences for exports

9 On the G7 meeting in Fiuggi-Anagni and the debate over the ICC arrest warrants, see *Dal G7*... 2024; *Dichiarazione dei Ministri*... 2024.

10 On Italian healthcare assistance to Gaza in 2025, see *Nuovi fondi a sostegno di UNICEF*... 2025.

11 On the second anniversary of the attacks of 7 October and the official statements by Mattarella and Meloni, see *2° Anniversario dell'attacco*... 2025.

to Israel after 7 October 2023, but the question of earlier licences and shipments connected to previously approved contracts remained unresolved. In 2025, the precautionary revocation of a pre-existing licence showed that this distinction was no longer sufficient to neutralize the criticism raised by the opposition parties[12].

The Left-Wing Opposition and Futuro Nazionale

The evolution of the Meloni government's position on Gaza also had consequences for the Italian political system, as the Israeli-Palestinian question increasingly became part of the confrontation between the governing majority and the opposition parties. The Democratic Party, the Five Star Movement, and the Greens and Left Alliance attempted to use the crisis as common ground, presenting a shared position against the Meloni government[13].

This unity, however, remained fragile. The Five Star Movement adopted harsher language, based on accusations of Italian complicity and on the defence of street mobilizations. The Democratic Party instead attempted to maintain a more moderate profile, presenting the recognition of Palestine as a means of strengthening the Palestinian National Authority rather than legitimizing Hamas. The Greens and Left Alliance occupied the most openly accusatory position, linking Gaza to the denunciation of Israeli responsibility and, more broadly, of Western policy in the Middle East[14].

The parliamentary vote of 2 October 2025 on the resolutions concerning Gaza and the conditional recognition of Palestine clearly revealed the limits of this unity. The joint motion presented by the Democratic Party, the Five Star Movement, and the Greens and Left Alliance was rejected, while a formula tied to the release of the hostages and to the political and military exclusion of Hamas was approved. Clear divisions also emerged within the Democratic Party: several members of its reformist wing voted for the alternative resolution presented by Italia Viva, the party founded by former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, exposing fractures within the opposition bloc. Palestine thus became a symbolic and ideological bond for the opposition, but the divisions

[12] On arms exports, pre-existing licences, and the first revocation of a licence, see *Governo Meloni revoca*... 2025; *Nuovo record*... 2026.

[13] On the joint motion presented by the Democratic Party, the Five Star Movement, and the Greens and Left Alliance concerning Gaza and the recognition of the State of Palestine, see *Mozione unitaria Pd-M5S*... 2025.

[14] On the different positions within the opposition bloc, see *Mozione Pd-M5S-Avs*... 2025.

that emerged in Parliament showed that this did not translate into a common alternative to the government's foreign-policy position[15].

Meanwhile, the domestic consequences of the Gaza debate were not limited to the left-wing opposition, since on the right the rise of MEP and General Roberto Vannacci led to his break with the Lega and the founding of Futuro Nazionale in February 2026. The new party did not emerge from the Gaza crisis, but its rise took place within a broader political climate in which pro-Palestinian mobilizations had become one of the most visible forms of opposition to the government, while Vannacci sought to occupy the political space opened to the right of the governing majority.

Vannacci presented himself as the political answer to this broader discontent, positioning himself to the right of the governing majority and accusing Meloni and Salvini of having weakened their original positions through the compromises required by government. Immigration became one of the main grounds for this criticism, since despite the governing right's emphasis on security, arrivals remained at around 66,000 per year between 2024 and 2025. This allowed Futuro Nazionale to present itself as a more radical alternative on borders, national identity, and remigration, while accusing the governing coalition of having failed to translate its political language into equally restrictive policies[16].

The party's rapid growth reflected the frustration felt by part of the Italian electorate over these issues. Futuro Nazionale reached almost 100,000 paying members and initially polled between 4.6 and 5%, while raising more than €300,000 during its first months of activity. The latest YouTrend poll for Sky TG24, released on 18 June 2026, placed the party at 5.9%, allowing it to overtake the League, which stood at 5.8%. The figures were still limited, but they revealed a clear political space to the right of the governing majority which became increasingly relevant as Italy moved closer to the 2027 general election[17].

The political effects of this polarization were therefore visible on both sides of the domestic debate. Progressive street movements increasingly linked Palestine to their opposition to the Meloni government, while Futuro Nazionale

[15] On the parliamentary vote of October 2025, the rejection of the Democratic Party–Five Star Movement–Greens and Left Alliance motion, and the votes of several reformist Democratic Party members for the Italia Viva resolution, see *Gaza, approvate*... 2025; *Si della Camera*... 2025.

[16] On Vannacci's break with the League, the launch of Futuro Nazionale, and his attempt to outflank Meloni's coalition from the right, see Balmer, Amante 2026; *Cruscotto statistico*... 2025.

[17] On Futuro Nazionale's membership, polling, and financing, see Balmer 2026; Balmer, Amante 2026; Gonzato 2026; *Sondaggio YouTrend*... 2026.

presented itself through a language centred on the homeland, borders, and security. Gaza thus became part of a broader political confrontation that extended beyond foreign policy itself and increasingly influenced the domestic context in which the government's international choices were debated.

Italy's Domestic Front: Street Protests, Flags, and Ideological Short Circuit

The domestic dimension emerged most clearly in the streets, where the Palestinian flag expressed not only solidarity with Gaza, but also became part of a broader political opposition to the government and to the Western position on the conflict[18].

The Palestinian tragedy remained real, but in Italy Gaza increasingly became part of a wider political confrontation. The Palestinian question was gradually connected not only to opposition to the Meloni government, but also to other issues already present in the Italian political debate.

The "No Meloni Day" of 14 November 2024 made this overlap visible. The protests began as a mobilization against the government's policies and the Security Bill, but soon also adopted pro-Palestinian language. In Turin, several demonstrators entered the Mole Antonelliana, removed the flags on display, including the Italian flag, and raised a Palestinian flag[19].

Defence Minister Guido Crosetto reacted by accusing the most radical groups of using the Palestinian flag as a justification for urban violence. For the government, the issue was therefore no longer limited to solidarity with Gaza, because the protests had also become a question of public order and direct opposition to the executive[20].

A similar overlap emerged between the Palestinian cause and LGBTQ+ demands. At Roma Pride, Palestinian flags appeared alongside claims concerning civil rights, bringing together causes that belonged to very different political and historical contexts. This created a clear tension, since solidarity with Palestinian civilians coexisted with support for a national movement that also included political and religious forces whose positions on LGBTQ+ rights were in direct contrast with those defended in the demonstrations. The problem was therefore not solidarity with the Palestinian population, but the tendency to

[18] On the overlap between student protest, anti-government mobilization, and pro-Palestinian slogans, see *No Meloni Day, studenti in piazza*... 2024.

[19] On the Mole Antonelliana episode, see *Italia, studenti in piazza*... 2024.

[20] On Crosetto's reaction, see *Scontri al 'No Meloni Day'*... 2024.

merge different struggles into the same political framework even when their historical and political foundations did not coincide[21].

The same mechanism reappeared in October 2025 with the general strike for Gaza and the Global Sumud Flotilla. The protest connected solidarity with the Palestinian population to criticism of the government, rearmament, and Western policy in the Middle East, while the Guarantee Commission declared the strike unlawful because the required notice period had not been respected. Palestine therefore became increasingly connected to the domestic confrontation with the Meloni government, moving beyond the limits of a foreign-policy debate[22].

By 2026, Palestine had also acquired a clear electoral importance for the opposition, with Elly Schlein stating that, in the event of victory, recognition of the State of Palestine would be among the first measures adopted by a progressive government (*Schlein: Se vinceremo elezioni*... 2026)[23]. This showed why the domestic dimension could not be separated from foreign policy: a political issue strengthened by street mobilization had entered the electoral programme of the opposition and, in the event of a change of government, could translate directly into a different Italian position on the Israeli-Palestinian question.

Conclusion

Italian policy on Gaza was not a simple oscillation between Israel and Palestine. After 7 October, the Meloni government began from a position of clear solidarity with Tel Aviv but was forced to adjust that line in the face of the humanitarian crisis. Israel remained a central ally, and Hamas continued to be excluded from any form of political legitimacy, but Gaza compelled Rome to adopt more cautious and multilateral language.

The real problem, however, emerged in the streets. Part of the opposition transformed Palestine not only into a total political symbol, but also into part of its electoral agenda ahead of the 2027 general election. Solidarity with a population under attack became intertwined with an identity defined against the government, the West, law-enforcement agencies, and national symbols. In that context, the Palestinian flag did not always serve to understand the actual

21 On Palestinian flags at Roma Pride, see *Al via il Roma Pride*... 2025.

22 On the general strike for Gaza and the Global Sumud Flotilla, see Amante, Armellini 2025; *Sciopero generale*... 2025.

23 Remarks by Elly Schlein at the AVS festival in Rome, 8 September 2026.

situation in Gaza but became a means through which like-minded people could recognize one another.

These street movements did not broaden public awareness as their participants intended. They often remained confined within their own political space and hardened the attitudes of those who observed them from the outside, increasing their intolerance and impatience. The more dissent appeared as a rejection of the national order, the more it gave an advantage to identitarian and conservative right-wing forces, including the political area gathered around MEP Roberto Vannacci and Futuro Nazionale[24].

Foreign policy thus became part of Italy's domestic political conflict. The government's actual position was rarely debated in the streets, where part of the country increasingly spoke only to its own political camp and left little room for genuine discussion.

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