

Giorgio Napolitano in Washington. The Italian Point of View

Maria Rita Latto (May 27, 2010)



Giorgio Napolitano's visit to the White House on May 25, 2010 strengthened the friendship and mutual sympathy between Barack Obama and our President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano. However the Italian press found just a little space for some analysis and comments by eminent experts of international politics who expressed their opinions about the status of the relationship between United States and Italy during the Obama administration.

Giorgio Napolitano's "business trip" to the White House on May 25, 2010, served as a reminder of the strong relations and mutual sympathy between Barack Obama and our President of the Republic. But the encounter was not covered sufficiently by our home country's media, perhaps because it took place during a period of great economic crisis, while in our country other touching topics are present these days.

However, among the many pages of articles about Tremonti's yearly financial law or the law against wiretappings, a little space was found for some interesting evaluations by eminent analysts of

international politics who expressed their opinions about the status of the relationship between United States and Italy during the Obama administration. Interviewed by the [Corriere della Sera](#) [2], Richard Perle, ex-assistant Secretary of Defense and advisor to George Bush, defined Napolitano's visit as "crucial" for his country. In fact, during the days previous to the visit, the Quirinal had underlined many times how this trip to Washington of the Head of State had begun as an invitation from Obama.

A trip organized very rapidly by the American administration, an unusual procedure, considering that the diplomatic custom and the intense agendas of commitments require such events to be set up largely in advance. In the press release, the White House underlined "Italy's strong contribution" to the world's peace operations pointing out that President Obama would be "quite happy to carry on consultations with President Napolitano after their meeting that took place last July in Rome". Richard Perle explained to the *Corriere della Sera* what reasons there might be for such a rush. The ex-advisor, first of all, reminded the readers that Obama, soon after beginning his term at the White House, had communicated with Napolitano even before Berlusconi. "Perhaps he deliberately meant to keep his distances from the Italian Prime Minister.

I don't know if this is true - said Perle - but I think that probably Napolitano, the first Italian Communist leader to visit America during the 1980s is respected by Obama". Perle, making it clear that collaboration between the US and Italy exists regardless of their respective leaders, believes that the friendship between Berlusconi and Bush will probably not transfer itself to the Prime Minister's relationship with Obama. "Napolitano - says Perle - has lots of experience within party politics and the stability of your country is crucial for us". Furthermore, in November there will be mid-term elections in America and Napolitano's visit could be read as functional to that. "Americans - underlines Perle - say that the three Is are crucial during elections: Israel, Italy and Ireland, meaning Jewish, Italian and Irish voters. It sure doesn't hurt Obama, who has his problems with Israel, to be seen with Napolitano - concludes Perle - especially around the June 2 national Italian holiday. The Democrats are in trouble and need support".

Another influential commentator of international politics, Sergio Romano, was contacted by many newspapers to evaluate President Napolitano's Washington visit. On the [Corriere della Sera](#) [3] Romano spoke about the relationship between Italy and the United States from after World War II up to the present. According to Sergio Romano, the Italian foreign policy has always based itself upon a couple of constants: European unity and friendship with the United States".

After Berlusconi's ascent, the Euro-Atlantic pair was set aside to privilege relations with the States. Such a choice, according to Romano, produced "modest results" within the Italian foreign policy, while Obama's victory and Napolitano's trip mark the return of the old pairing and Berlusconi will have to adapt himself to this new turning point in relations with the United States.

In an interview in [Il Messaggero](#) [4], ex-ambassador Richard Gardner, the first US diplomat to open to the Communists, sees this visit as "meaningful" and defines Napolitano and Barack as "two intelligent and wise leaders, but also pragmatic".

"Obama wants to understand how serious the European crisis is and wants an answer from someone who, like him, believes in the European experiment. This is a great and important political success for Italy. I love your country, but I must admit that Italy's importance has faded during the past few years. Few here in Washington remember the great contribution that your country provides to peace missions, and its role in the foundation of a United Europe. Obama's motion towards Napolitano will remind everyone".

Of course there are those, like Ida Dominijanni on [Il Manifesto](#) [5], who saw the meeting as a humiliation to the "sultan", Berlusconi, as he was defined by his ex-wife Veronica Lario. Dominijanni starts way back, from the G8 that marked the beginning of the friendship between Napolitano and Obama, arriving to the present date, with "the new understanding against the law on wiretappings. And also - continues the journalist -, it wasn't Napolitano to push for this meeting in Washington: Obama asked him, usually sparing in receiving European personalities. There's enough here to hurt the Knight's narcissism. And, you can bet on it, to feed his latest conspiracy syndrome, American this



time”.

On [Il Riformista](#) [6], Luigi Spinola sees Giorgio Napolitano's trip as a way to “reassure Barack Obama over the political and economical keep of the old continent”. Spinola names Richard Gardner as the one who explained to Americans that “the first (post) Communist at the Quirinal 'is a true statesman, a true democrat, and a sincere friend of the United States'”. Two years later – adds *Il Riformista* – also Henry Kissinger, during a meeting organized at Villa Madama by Aspenia, gets close to self-criticism for the mistrust of the past”. Since that meeting in July the messages, also indirect, between Washington and Rome multiplied, culminating in the public praise pronounced by Napolitano over the health care reform, very much appreciated by Obama, and the common wavelengths over “green economy”, social issues and the situation in the Middle-East. However, according to Spinola, Europe's economic crisis and the risk of an epidemic push President Obama, “up until now not very interested in us, to take our weakness seriously. Political weakness just as much as economic. Evident in the swings of European decision makers, who, according to Giorgio Napolitano, caused 'heavy prestige losses'”.

President Napolitano's visit to the United States also included a meeting with Nancy Pelosi which took place amid a climate of great cordiality. The Speaker of the House defined Giorgio Napolitano as “a great leader, a man of culture and defendant of democracy”, who's value is not only recognized among Italians “but also in the rest of the world”. Nancy Pelosi also said that when it was announced that the Italian President would be speaking, there were so many requests to participate on behalf of members of the House and Senate that a larger hall had to be chosen”. And finally, to crown the success of the visit in American soil of President Napolitano, she admitted: “All of us think Giorgio has the best job in the world as President of Italy”.

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