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The Impact of the NATO/U.S.
Military Bases in the North East
of Italy

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ABSTRACT

L'IMPATTO DELLE BASI NATO/U.S.A NEL NORD EST

ITALIANO

La fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale nel 1945 sancì l'inizio di una nuova era in Europa, un'era di ricostruzione possibile solo grazie all'apporto degli Stati Uniti d'America, i vincitori incontestati del conflitto. Il Piano Marshall e la nascita della NATO rappresentarono i primi due passi per la risalita verso il ripristino e la salvaguardia degli interessi degli U.S.A. e degli stati europei che si trovavano al di fuori della sfera d'influenza sovietica. Infatti, la vicina Unione Sovietica cominciò a essere percepita come una notevole minaccia per il capitalismo americano. Per questo motivo gli U.S.A. decisero di incrementare la propria influenza geopolitica in un'area assolutamente strategica e cruciale come l'Europa Occidentale, prendendo in concessione le maggiori basi militari grazie ad accordi speciali della NATO. Questi patti tutt'ora prescrivono, in sincronia con le leggi nazionali, le principali regole da seguire da parte dei soldati che risiedono all'interno delle basi, che tante volte provengono da varie nazionalità. Con la stipula di diversi tipi di accordo che regolano lo status delle unità all'estero, si è riusciti a fare in modo che i soldati vengano inviati in Stati facenti parte della NATO. Data la vicinanza con la Jugoslavia socialista di Tito e la prossimità con "la cortina di ferro" che sostanzialmente divideva l'Europa dagli U.R.S.S., l'Italia divenne automaticamente una zona prioritaria, soprattutto nell'area del Nord Est. Sin dalla nascita della NATO, le strutture militari in Italia sono state poste sotto i riflettori per una serie illimitata di motivi.

Anche se l'America ha giocato un ruolo chiave nell'aiutare l'Italia a riprendersi da una situazione post bellica complessa a livello politico ed economico, l'arrivo di eserciti stranieri nelle basi italiane ha rappresentato un acceso motivo di discussione a livello locale e nazionale, sin dalle prime operazioni U.S.A. nella penisola, che per la stragrande maggioranza sono avvenute in nome della NATO. I temi più discussi riguardanti le basi militari in Italia spaziano dalle leggi speciali in vigore alla protezione diplomatica dei soldati che si trovano all'interno del campo militare fino alle decisioni di ampliare le strutture all'interno delle stazioni e al tema delle armi atomiche depositate in queste aree belliche. Allo stesso tempo, gli U.S.A. hanno rappresentato per l'Italia un

partner fondamentale per il mantenimento della sicurezza nazionale e internazionale, assieme a quella globale, in un mondo gerarchicamente sempre più difficile da inquadrare. A prescindere dai cambiamenti politici nei governi e nelle politiche estere di Italia e U.S.A., lo status delle basi militari NATO in Italia ha rappresentato un punto essenziale da segnare nelle proprie agende. Nessuno dei due paesi ha intenzione di compromettere la duratura alleanza che ha caratterizzato la loro storia.

Ad oggi, l'Italia è al secondo posto in Europa per numero di aree militari concesse alla NATO, dietro soltanto alla Germania. Il Nord Est italiano ospita Aviano e Caserma Ederle, due delle basi più importanti sul pianeta specialmente da quando sono diventate di proprietà della NATO dal 1950 in poi.

Quella di Aviano, situata nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, rappresenta una delle più moderne e sofisticate basi aeree al mondo al di fuori dei confini statunitensi. Solo recentemente, con il completamento di una serie di progetti di ristrutturazione, che vanno sotto il nome di Aviano 2000 e hanno interessato la maggior parte degli impianti all'interno dell'area, si è riusciti a migliorare la qualità delle infrastrutture e aumentare il prestigio della base. Aviano, assieme alla base militare di Ghedi, funge da deposito di armi nucleari, tecnicamente è proibito ma in questo caso è stato eccezionalmente autorizzato.

Nel vicino Veneto, nella rinomata città di Vicenza, la Caserma Ederle ospita un gran numero di soldati americani. Questa base è diventata il centro della prestigiosa South European Task Force nel 1965. Le missioni principali che sono partite da Vicenza annoverano spedizioni durante la Guerra Fredda, interventi nella Guerra del Golfo e nei Balcani negli anni '90 e molto più recentemente trasferite in Nord Africa e in Medio Oriente. Dopo numerose proteste, sit-in e petizioni da parte della popolazione locale, la base del Dal Molin, un ex-aeroporto civile di Vicenza di proprietà dell'Esercito Italiano, è stata convertita in stazione militare e ceduta agli Stati Uniti, nell'ambito di un programma di rafforzamento dell'esercito a stelle e strisce nell'area mediterranea, con un occhio di riguardo al Medio Oriente. L'inaugurazione ufficiale della base dovrebbe avvenire nel 2013. Abbiamo a che fare con due esempi di basi del Nord Est in mano di eserciti stranieri, geograficamente vicine, che apparentemente hanno molto in comune, ma che in realtà presentano numerosi aspetti discordanti.

In tutti e due i casi, il ruolo che giocano dagli abitanti si è progressivamente rivelato decisivo e ampiamente riconosciuto come un'assoluta priorità per poter convivere in

maniera armoniosa. Ciononostante non sempre è servito farsi sentire per risolvere le questioni inerenti a queste basi militari. Ad Aviano, la popolazione è rimasta prevalentemente neutrale davanti alle recenti mosse di ampliamento della stazione, soprattutto perché vi è sempre stata una tradizione di aviazione in città. Solo nel 1998, un caso di diritto internazionale creatosi in seguito al purtroppo noto incidente del Cermis, quando un aereo americano di Aviano causò la morte di 20 persone in una località sciistica, ha fatto aumentare i dubbi dell'effettiva utilità della presenza della base americana nel territorio.

D'altra parte Vicenza ha attraversato due fasi di diverso orientamento nei confronti della presenza americana in città. Dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, gli U.S.A. erano riconosciuti come i salvatori della patria dopo uno dei periodi più bui della storia vicentina e per questo motivo dovettero accettare per forza di cose la presenza degli americani all'interno della propria comunità. Solo negli ultimi anni, la nozione di libertà importata dagli U.S.A. si è trasformata, a detta di molti vicentini, in qualcosa di paragonabile ad un fenomeno di sottomissione e dominio. Da quando si è deciso di militarizzare ulteriormente la città di Vicenza, oltretutto protetta dall'UNESCO, la maggioranza della popolazione ha espresso il suo dissenso contro l'aumento della presenza dei soldati, armi e servizi di intelligence nel proprio territorio. La ragione di questa disapprovazione è in qualche modo collegata a una mentalità pacifista e alla mancanza di trasparenza da parte delle autorità italiane e americane nel fornire dettagli sul nuovo progetto del Dal Molin, che ha generato rabbia e confusione nelle teste dei cittadini. Oltre a queste tre basi principali, nel Nord Est sono presenti altri centri militari concessi agli U.S.A. e alla NATO. In molti casi sono stati scoperti depositi di armi e centri radar in aree che apparentemente erano state chiuse per inattività.

La tesi si concentra sulle origini della presenza militare U.S.A. e NATO, sugli accordi generali che la rendono possibile e sulle principali conseguenze dell'impatto delle basi NATO e della conseguente presenza americana in Italia. In più viene analizzato il rapporto tra i soldati che vivono e lavorano all'interno della base e i cittadini che vivono a ridosso di queste stazioni militari, attraverso il confronto dei diversi punti di vista sui temi che citati precedentemente, grazie all'apporto di varie fonti giornalistiche, documenti e interviste di alcuni politici coinvolti nella questione.

L'intento di questa tesi è quindi quello di esaminare e comparare le situazioni create nelle città di Aviano e Vicenza, per comprendere se effettivamente la presenza della NATO ha prodotto effetti positivi oppure può essere considerata come un'intrusione nella politica e nella società italiana. La domanda importante che ci si pone è se ha ancora senso ospitare queste basi militari in Italia, e in particolar modo nel Nord Est. La verità è che se anche trovassimo una risposta a questa domanda non risolveremmo nulla, visto che realisticamente non riusciremmo a trovare nessuna soluzione allo stato di cose attuale. Come vedremo nell'esempio specifico di Vicenza, l'azione di molti cittadini che si sono ribellati e hanno cercato in ogni maniera di esprimere la propria resistenza nei confronti dell'aumento di unità militari in città ha portato scarso, se non nessun effetto.

La maggior parte delle informazioni riguardanti il modo in cui funzionano le basi è considerata ancora top secret. Infatti una serie di trattati bilaterali siglati dall'Italia con gli U.S.A. sono stati resi pubblici solo decenni dopo l'effettiva ratifica. Allo stesso modo, la ragione politica di questa particolare cooperazione bellica rappresenta ancora un motivo di dibattito: per questo motivo tenterò di comprendere gli aspetti chiave per capire il rapporto tra l'Italia e l'America. Purtroppo sembrano non esserci soluzioni disponibili per cambiare le carte in tavola e poter intervenire nelle fasi antecedenti alla stipula di un accordo tra i due governi. Storicamente, nel dopoguerra l'Italia non è stata in grado di opporsi alle proposte americane. L'unica carta che rimane è quella della pressione dell'opinione pubblica nei confronti del governo italiano, in modo che si possano perlomeno comunicare ai propri cittadini informazioni più esplicite sul tema delle basi militari. Questo rappresenta un punto di partenza, dato che sono gli stessi cittadini italiani che pagano una percentuale delle spese di mantenimento per queste aree belliche. Questo è il prezzo che l'Italia continua a pagare, da quando è terminata la Seconda Guerra Mondiale.

ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF THE NATO/U.S. MILITARY BASES IN THE NORTH EAST OF ITALY

Following the end of World War II in 1945 a new era was about to begin in Europe, an era of reconstruction that would only be possible with the support of the United States of America, the incontestable winner of the conflict. The Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were the main resolutions adopted to restore and protect the interests of the U.S. and of the European states outside the recently developed Communist influence. As a matter of fact the neighboring Soviet Union was perceived as constituting the greatest threat to the rising American Capitalist world. The U.S. therefore had decided to increase its geopolitical influence in the strategic and crucial area of Western Europe by taking over some of the major military bases under the NATO agreements. These accords established, in relation to the national regulations, the main rules of conduct for the soldiers stationed in the camp, who happened to be of different nationalities. With the signing of a number of agreements regarding the status of forces agreements, military forces were allowed to be deployed and relocate in foreign countries within the NATO sphere. Due to its proximity to Tito's Socialist Yugoslavia and being situated on the doorstep of the "Iron Curtain" that divided Europe from the influence of the U.S.S.R., the Italian situation, and in particular the prominent Northeastern territories, drew particular attention. Ever since the birth of NATO, military facilities in Italy have remained under the spotlight for countless reasons.

Even though America has played a key role in assisting Italy in recovering from a complex situation of post-war political and economic crisis, the introduction of foreign-managed military bases in Italy has caused a great deal of debates and criticism at local and national level since the earliest U.S. operations, that for the most part have been running under the NATO flag. The most disputed issues concerning the Italian military bases have included the special jurisdiction and diplomatic protection for officers operating in the military bases, the decision to enlarge the size of the bases and the nuclear weapons situated in their basements. At the same time, the U.S.A. for Italy has represented a fundamental partner with regards to maintaining domestic and international safety, along with protection and a trustworthy landmark in the fast

changing global landscape. Regardless of the political changes in the Italian and American domestic and international policies in the last 60 years, the status of NATO military bases in Italy has remained a priority on the agenda of both countries. Neither country is willing to jeopardize the long lasting alliance that has characterized their relationship historically.

Italy is today the second state in Europe in terms of number of NATO military bases, where only Germany can count on more throughout its territory. The North East of Italy currently hosts two of the most important military stations on the planet, Aviano and Camp Ederle, especially since they were taken over by NATO during the 1950s.

The Aviano Air Base, located in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, is one of the most advanced aviation bases in the World outside the US. It came under the sphere of NATO as part of a bilateral agreement between Italy and the US. Just recently, the completion of a series of modernization projects that have affected the majority of the facilities inside the site, also known as Aviano 2000, which represents the biggest investment in history by NATO for a military base, have given the possibility to improve the quality of the infrastructures and increase the prestige of this location. Aviano, is also one of the two bases in Italy that functions as a deposit for nuclear weapons, which is technically prohibited but in this case has been authorized.

In the neighboring region of Veneto, in the important town of Vicenza, military forces were moved to Camp Ederle in great numbers. Camp Ederle became the headquarters of the South European Task Force in 1965. Some of the major missions that were assigned to the military personnel stationed in these bases were to protect the independence and sovereignty of European states during the Cold War, to intervene in the Balkans and in the Gulf War in the 1990s and most recently to oversee the revolutions in North Africa and in the Middle East. After several protests, sit-ins and petitions held by the local population, the Dal Molin base, the former civilian airfield in Vicenza now converted into a military site, which was used by the Italian Army, was ceded to the U.S.A., as part of a stars and stripes program to strengthen the presence of their Army, in order to be the main supervisors in the delicate and strategic Mediterranean area, primarily in the Middle East. The official inauguration of this highly controversial site is meant to occur in 2013. These are two examples of foreign governed defense settlements,

geographically very close to each other and apparently sharing similar vicissitudes, which in reality offer numerous contrasting aspects.

In both cases, the role being played by the inhabitants has been progressively significant and widely recognized as an absolute priority for both to cohabit harmoniously. Nevertheless those who have been determined to display their consensus or not for these sites, have not always been able to obtain their goals. In Aviano, the population has rather stood neutrally behind the recent expansion trends to their station, mostly because of the aviation tradition that has characterized the small city's past. Only in 1998, a noteworthy dispute of International law that was generated by the infamous Cermis tragedy, where an American jet stationed in Aviano caused the death of 20 people in a ski resort, pressured the locals to start questioning the effectiveness and moral principles of the purpose of the base.

On the contrary, Vicenza has undergone two different phases of orientation towards the American presence in their town. After World War II, the United States was seen as the main liberator from one of the town's darkest periods ever registered and therefore the population was relatively forced to accept this fact. Only in the past years, the imported American notion of freedom in Vicenza has shifted into something that is comparable to dominion and superiority. Since the decision to additionally militarize the city of Vicenza, which is protected by UNESCO, the majority of the population has expressed its opposition to the growth of U.S. soldiers, weapons and intelligence service in the bases. The reasons for the general disapproval in this case have been mainly related to a stronger pacifist mental attitude and to the lack on transparency of the details that have influenced the spread of news on the installations. Along with these three main stations, many more minor military stations, that play different strategic roles for the USA and NATO, are distributed in the North East of Italy. In many instances it has been discovered that supposedly closed down spots were actually hosting tactical U.S. property ammunition deposits.

This thesis will focus on the origins, legal foundations and main repercussions of the establishment of NATO bases and the consequent U.S. presence in Italy. It will also analyze the relationship between the individuals living in these military installations and the nearby Italian communities by confronting different point of views on the issues mentioned above through an examination of various newspapers, documents and

politicians' views together with other sources. The purpose of this dissertation is therefore to examine and compare the situations and evolution in the cities of Aviano and Vicenza. On top of this we will try to understand if the presence of NATO has had an overall beneficial effect or rather it should be considered a damaging intrusion in Italian politics and society. The main question is whether nowadays it still makes sense to host these military stations in Italy, and more specifically in the North East. The truth is that even if a conclusive answer is found to this question it is essentially futile, since it realistically would not bring about any sort of improvement to the current situation. As we will see in the specific example of Vicenza, the insurgence of local citizen, who have widely expressed their opposition to the supplementary military presence in town, had little, if any, positive effects.

Most of the information regarding the way these bases function is considered top secret. Several bilateral agreements between Italy and the United States have been unveiled to the public decades after their first ratification. However, the social and political reason of this particular military cooperation have remained a reason for discussion and research, and I will inquire on the key aspects in understanding the relationship between Italy and the United States. There seems to be no solution available to alter the way these pacts have taken place between the two governments. Historically, Italy has hardly been able to counter U.S. proposals. However what is possible to do is to start pressuring the Italian Government to deliver a clearer approach to the communication of details and information on this subject to citizens. This represents a starting point, on those people ending up paying for a notable percentage of maintenance expenses of these bases. This is the price that Italy has paid and will continue paying, in the aftermath of World War II.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Being born in the United States and having spent almost all my life in Venice, Italy, while traveling back and forth in the summer holidays to America, I have developed an unquestionable passion for these two similar yet very different cultures. In fact, it was an Italian explorer who discovered what would later become the United States of America, arguably the most powerful country in the World in the XX century, until the recent Financial Crisis. However, since this period, the balance has drastically changed in the geopolitical sphere, with the U.S. over taking several Mediterranean territories, which has, to a certain extent, contributed to the escalation of America's success worldwide. Since the beginning of World War I, the United States has been spreading its presence and influence by acquiring major military bases and taking advantage of several extraterritorial benefits, especially in Western Europe. In my dissertation, I will focus on two of the most advanced, modern and at the same time disputed examples of NATO sites on Earth, which are predominantly managed by the invisible hand of the United States. Ironically both of these places are located in the North East of Italy, situated only 150 km from each other. One in the small town of Aviano, in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia whilst the other is in the Veneto region, in the renowned and UNESCO-protected city of Vicenza.

Having been denied the possibility to access either one of these facilities, in particular their internal archives, mostly due to the post-9/11 antiterrorist restrictions, I will try to display the main features of these settlements, which remain unknown to many people. Moreover I will question the present and future utility of these military stations in Italy. Despite the difficulty of retrieving detached information regarding these military bases, yet with the support of various newspapers and magazines, especially thanks to the information given to me by the two main local newspapers¹ that have dealt with the individual stations, I will explain how these two analogous cases have experienced significantly different outcomes, especially in terms of business, legal issues and integration with the local community. The aim of this study is to compare these two

¹ *Il Messaggero Veneto* (Aviano Air Base) and *Il Giornale di Vicenza* (Caserma Ederle and Dal Molin).

operative realities, by exploring different sides that have marked the history of these sites.

In the first part of my thesis, the attention will be centered on the general presentation of these camps, to lay the foundations for further arguments that will cover more specific characteristics regarding these camps. In the third chapter I will analyze the treaties that regulate different details that enable NATO and the U.S. Army to be operative in Italy. Furthermore, the fourth chapter will cover several different aspects focused on the repercussions linked to integration with the local communities that have derived from the concession of these bases to foreign military forces, with a specific emphasis on the evolution of the presence of American soldiers in the Northeastern area of Italy. The fifth chapter will highlight different facts connected to the controversial multi-millionaire dollar restoration projects that took place in both the headquarters, as well as a brief outline of the economic and social impact on the whole territory surrounding the camps. The results show how dissimilar the effects have been for each of these cities, in particular in Vicenza, where the population's relationship with the American troops in the town has been problematic. In the final part of the dissertation there will be a review of a popular case of international law, the Cermis disaster of 1998, which involved the United States and Italy, and sparked rife international criticism.

2. THE BASES

2.1 Aviano Air Base

The city of Aviano, a provincial town of Pordenone, located in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, hosts one of the most influential American military bases overseas. It is one of the biggest and most up-to-date technological aviation bases outside the U.S. borders. As of 2012, there are 3,430 military units serving inside The Aviano Air Base, along with 194 U.S. Department of Defense civilians and 393 non-military employees who work inside the base.²

In July of 1910, the Aviano runway track was officially activated and soon after that, in 1911, it became the first aviation school in Italy.³ It was an immediate success and it attracted people not only locally but also from abroad. In 1919 the air base finally had a name: “Aeroporto Pagliano e Gori”, from the two aviators, Maurizio Pagliano and Luigi Gori, who during a mission in World War I, tragically died.⁴ They were posthumously declared national heroes and their names were labeled and scarred into the history of the air base.⁵ The Italian Air Force⁶ along with the German Luftwaffe, were the main operators of the air base during World War II. During these years, the airfield and the surroundings suffered plenty of bombings and were partially demolished.⁷ With the Germans and the Italians being defeated, the RAF⁸ took control of the Aviano Air Base in 1945 for a couple of years, until 1947 when the Italian Air Force regained control of the site.⁹ The year of 1954 represented a crucial moment for the Italian and American

² Base Structure Report 2012, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/ie/download/bsr/BSR2012Baseline.pdf>, consultation date 12 June 2012.

³ N. A. Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995-2005*, [n.s.], Aviano, 2005, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Aeronautica Militare, ITAF, has been officially active in Italy since 1923 although its ancestors, the Regia Aeronautica, started serving the Country around the end of the 1880s.

⁷ Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995-2005*, p. 2.

⁸ The British Royal Air Force.

⁹ Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995-2005*, p. 4.

partnership, as a result of the treaty that converted the Aviano Air Base into a NATO site.¹⁰ In 1955, USAFE¹¹ finally established itself at Aviano and began contributing to present and future NATO missions.¹² The first step was to improve the technical and structural conditions of the installation, which had suffered a great deal of damage during World War II.

During the Cold War the base of Aviano played a secondary role compared to other NATO military sites in Western Europe. In fact it was being used mostly as an army warehouse, without having a stable aviation unit. The curious nickname it was given during the Cold War, due to its idleness, was “Sleepy Hollow”.¹³ Germany, that was considered a high-risk target by the Soviet Union, was given finances to invest in the strengthening of its military sector. Nevertheless, with the end of the Soviet’s empire many changes were made in Europe by America, with conspicuous cuts of the troops in certain areas, up to the closure of several military bases that had played an essential role in the previous decades. The growing tensions in the Balkans and in the Middle East, made Aviano a key actor in conflicts like the Gulf War and in the U.S. intervention in Bosnia and in Kosovo, thanks to its strategic location.

In 1990, with the invasion of Iraq in Kuwait and, therefore, the beginning of the first Gulf War, the U.S. began its military operations in the Persian area by deploying the first troops in Saudia Arabia.¹⁴ America considered this specific location as vital and as a place to safeguard, especially for its alliance and special attention for the oil industry.¹⁵ In the opening of “Operation Desert Shield” and in the following “Operation Desert Storm”, Aviano played a crucial role in offering temporary accommodation to the troops and supplying with ammunitions and other military material, the main U.S.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ United States Air Force in Europe, was established in 1945 and its main task is to manage aviation operations mostly in Europe.

¹² Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995- 2005*,, p. 5.

¹³ Nation Master, Aviano, <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Aviano>, consultation date 13 June 2012.

¹⁴ N. A. Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995- 2005*, Aviano, 2005, p. 6.

¹⁵ Wikipedia, Saudi Arabia-United States relations, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia-United_States_relations, consultation date 13 June 2012.

Army squads involved in the Persian War.¹⁶ The role of the base, until the end of the conflict, in 1991, was strictly supportive but at the same time very significant and eventually acquired other primary tasks.

At the end of the Cold War, Spain decided to remove the majority of its American-administered bases due to protests against warfare and to the Nation's shift in geopolitical interests and foreign policy.¹⁷ Initially, the plan was to move these air force squads in some area in Southern Italy, but the U.S. and Italy had eventually agreed on choosing Aviano.¹⁸ This crucial moment, that at first seemed as an insignificant type of move, turned out to represent for the Aviano Air Base a way to become a decisive setting for the U.S. Army missions overseas. It slowly grew bigger than the U.S. command at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany, that was considered at the time as the number one NATO installation for aviation assignments overseas.¹⁹

What was considered to be a temporary soldier station became promptly a permanent one, with the beginning of the war in the Balkans, especially for the simple accessibility²⁰ from Aviano to the Yugoslavian territories. This change of events had major consequences in the functions of the Aviano base. The first one was the settlement in 1992 of the 401st Air Fighter Wing²¹ and a couple of F-16s Fighter Wings from the Torrejón Air Base.²² Soon after, also the 603d Air Control Squadron made its entrance in Aviano, directly from another U.S. installation in Germany, where it was

¹⁶ N. A. Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995-2005*, Aviano, 2005, p. 6.

¹⁷ Guerra & Pace, "L'ombra della basi", 2007, p. 57.

¹⁸ N. A. Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995-2005*, Aviano, 2005, p. 7.

¹⁹ Wikipedia, Ramstein Air Base, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramstein_Air_Base, consultation date 13 June 2012.

²⁰ According to the vice commander-in-chief of the 31st Fighter Wing during the Balkan War, Richard Brenner, the estimated flight time for a F-16 from Aviano to Sarajevo in Bosnia, was half an hour.

²¹ The squadron was based in Aviano for only 2 years, until 1994.

²² N. A. Waller, *Fifty Years of Friendship and Cooperation, A history of Aviano Air Base 1995-2005*, Aviano, 2005, p. 7.

integrated to the main 31st Fighter Wing.²³ Nowadays the Aviano camp hosts 60 F-16C/D aircrafts²⁴ which belong to the 31st Fighter Wing²⁵.²⁶

The 1990s had proven how NATO's and America's main tasks had suddenly shifted from Germany to Italy. This decade has represented for the Aviano Air Base a significant upturn of prestige, but at the same time it has been affected by a number of logistics problems inside the area.²⁷ The full capacity of the base was reached around the end of 1993, as a consequence of the U.S.'s recent decision to add extra aircrafts and troops.²⁸ There were way too many jets for the limited size of the airstrip and the housing situation became unbearable since some of the soldiers were forced to find accommodation outside of the camp. This provoked a constant traffic congestion in the streets of the city of Aviano and complaints from local Italian residents. In 1996, the Italian militia that had been stationed in the base, was transferred to a nearby military campsite²⁹, which will later be part of an upgrading program called Aviano 2000.³⁰

The Aviano Air Base became the leading headquarters for missions in 1993 and 1994 with the USAFE officers supervising a United Nation's no-fly zone operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and triggering assorted air and field attacks in the Balkan region.³¹ With the achievement of peace in 1995, Aviano supported another primary NATO mission in 1999 in the Balkans, this time in Serbia.³² The 31st Fighter Wing, that reached its staff and aircraft peak in that year, fired almost 10,000 raids against the Serbian Army, in order to stop President Slobodan Milosevic atrocities in Kosovo.³³ Nevertheless, with

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Military jet fighter aircrafts that have the ability to drop nuclear bombs.

²⁵ 31st FW, a U.S. Air Force subdivision commissioned to the USAFE. Has been present in Aviano since 1993.

²⁶ F. Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, Roma, Fuoco Edizioni, 2010, p. 17.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Caserma Salvatore Zappalà.

³⁰ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, p. 17.

³¹ *Ivi*, pag. 8.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ D. Bortolin and E. Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, Pordenone, Edizioni L'Omino Rosso, 2007, p. 69.

the end of the conflict in June of 1999, Aviano's contribution to the Balkans cause was massive and was mainly focused on peacekeeping operations until 2004, when the aircrafts made their final return to the air base in Italy.³⁴ The the governing of the situation in Kosovo was engaged by the European Union External Action Service.³⁵

After these successful assignments, the focus was shifted to the Middle East, where Aviano's 31st Fighter Wing took part to the Joint Task Force in Southwest Asia³⁶, mainly monitoring the skies in Kuwait.³⁷ In 2003, Aviano collaborated with SETAF, stationed in Vicenza at Caserma Ederle, by providing its airfields for additional spaces and assistance for the U.S. Army's duty in Iraq.³⁸ The most recent NATO task has taken place in Libya and in this case the Aviano Air Base has once again conducted, between 2011 and 2012, more than 2,000 Air activities.³⁹ In 2007 a USAFE division⁴⁰ was sent from Aviano to the U.S. base of Kunsan in South Korea, as part of a tutoring procedure in Asia.⁴¹ It is very unusual for a U.S. Army wing overseas to be sent outside of its area of competence, but at the same time it proves the flexibility of the American military supremacy in the World.

On top of all these missions, the priority since 9/11 for the Aviano Air Base, along with Caserma Ederle, has been to focus on dismantling potential terrorist movements, largely concentrated in the Middle East. The base in Aviano is one of the first U.S. managed military installations in Italy and, because of this, the components of the army have always been extremely mixed with the local population and its social structure. Only recently there have been moments of edginess between the two parties. In the

³⁴ Wikipedia, Kosovo Force, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_Force, consultation date 14 June 2012.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Part of the Southern Watch Operation that was lead in Iraq, from the First Gulf War until the war of 2003.

³⁷ Wikipedia, 31st Fighter Wing, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/31st_Fighter_Wing, consultation date 14 June 2012.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Wikipedia, 2011 military intervention in Libya, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_military_intervention_in_Libya, consultation date 14 June 2012.

⁴⁰ The 555th Fighter Squadron.

⁴¹ T. Barela, "Wing supports Operation Deny Flight", *Air Force Print News Today*, 25 September 2007.

mid-1990s an arguable project, called Aviano 2000 was approved. It was a NATO sponsored program aiming at converting the Zappalà campsite area into a series of infrastructures that would host the relocated U.S. Army units coming from Torrejón and take advantage of new spaces to expand the base. After a number of complaints against this project, the local population was able to persuade the Italian Government to invest part of the funds on a road network confining the area.⁴² Another reason of concern was the fact that with the creation of an even larger and, from this time on, self-governing camp, many Italian businesses in Aviano were slowly losing all of their clients, which were predominantly American.⁴³

Another important date related to Aviano is February 3 of 1998, when the tragedy of Cermis shocked many Italian citizens.⁴⁴ On that day an aircraft belonging to the Aviano base slashed the cable of a cableway, killing 20 people that were inside.⁴⁵ Immediately after this disastrous event there has been a controversy on what jurisdiction⁴⁶ should be chosen to put on trial the four marines that were on the plane.

The Aviano Air Base is known to contain several atomic reserves. This is a delicate theme because according to certain laws the presence of nuclear warheads is forbidden. In the beginning of the 1990s it hosted the AWACS⁴⁷, a very sophisticated electronic system based on a radar that was designed to launch aviation surveillance missions for tactical and communication reasons in the Adriatic Sea.⁴⁸ It has been tested afterwards and located on the powerful E-3 Boeing Sentry. AWACS is the most accurate system in the World for this specific task, since it can spot aircrafts up to a distance of 500 Km.⁴⁹

⁴² Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 76-77.

⁴³ *Ivi*, p. 81.

⁴⁴ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Either the Italian or the American.

⁴⁷ Airborne Warning and Control System.

⁴⁸ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, p. 17.

⁴⁹ NATO, The NATO E-3A Aircraft, <http://www.e3a.nato.int/eng/html/organizations/aircraft.htm>, consultation date 15 June 2012.

2.2 Caserma Ederle

The other main military base in the North East of the Italian Peninsula is Caserma Ederle⁵⁰. It is located in Vicenza, one of the most important cities in the region of Veneto, and distanced only 8 Km. from the beautiful Renaissance Palladian city center. A report from 2012 states that 2,804 soldiers are present in the base, along with 694 U.S. Department of Defense civilians and 1,135 non-military employers.⁵¹ While the percentage of the actual military components is higher in Aviano compared to Vicenza, this last statistic shows us how there are three times more U.S. DoD⁵² units and non-military civilians in Vicenza compared to the ones stationed in Aviano. Caserma Ederle is distributed on a 1,408,840 square foot⁵³ land, with 219 buildings, while Aviano is set on a 805,245 square foot⁵⁴ area and owns 112 structures.⁵⁵ These numbers do not yet include all those soldiers that will be deployed at the end of the works in the other military base of Vicenza, the Dal Molin base.

The base has different functions, starting from its main office of the U.S.'s Army Garrison under the denomination of United States Army Installation Management Command⁵⁶, which is an essential institution that supplies quality assistance to all army units.⁵⁷ Caserma Ederle is the home of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team⁵⁸ and of the United States Army Africa⁵⁹ also previously known as the Southern European

⁵⁰ Also known as Camp Ederle.

⁵¹ Base Structure Report 2012, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/ie/download/bsr/BSR2012Baseline.pdf>.

⁵² Department of Defense, Pentagon.

⁵³ 130,885 - 518 square meters (Base Structure Report 2012).

⁵⁴ 74,809 - 708 square meters (Base Structure Report 2012).

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ IMCOM, started running in 2006 and aims to incorporate every sort of benefit for people involved in the U.S. Army soldiers and their families.

⁵⁷ Wikipedia, Caserma Ederle, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caserma_Ederle, consultation date 16 June 2012.

⁵⁸ Also known as "sky soldiers", military units operative since 1915 that have also served in World War I. The brigade played a massive role during the Vietnam War and more recently it has been actively present in the Iraqi War of 2003 and in Afghanistan from 2005 until late 2010. It operates in Vicenza since its function restoration on June 12 of 2000.

⁵⁹ USARAF, part of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), was established in 2008 and replaced the former SETAF.

Task Force⁶⁰, as part of the U.S. Army in Europe, that operates mainly in missions in the Mediterranean area.⁶¹ Overall, the base is specialized on sending standard troops for wars on the battlefield, lead by airborne squads and bombardier squads with nuclear activation system knowledge.

Since the beginning of the 1940s, when it was built, up to the mid 1950s, Caserma Ederle was only used to give hospitality to a squad of Italian soldiers and later to an artillery brigade.⁶² The name of the settlement was given in memory of Carlo Ederle, a former soldier born in Verona who died at the age of 25 during World War I, who was awarded a medal of honor for his brave expeditions.⁶³ Finally on September 20 of 1955, as part of the plan established by NATO with the SETAF in Northern Italy, the Carabinieri⁶⁴ in the installation welcomed the first American troops, the 350th Infantry Regiment, who were previously serving in Austria.⁶⁵ This specific U.S. Army was also the one that had previously freed Vicenza from the Nazi occupation, and therefore the decision to host this squad was considered as a strategic maneuver to highlight the glorious gesture done by the Americans and to minimize any sort of tension that could arise from the very traditionalist population living in a town like Vicenza. The 5th Battalion 30th Field Artillery, another distinguished military unit, operated in Caserma Ederle from 1963 until the mid 1970s.⁶⁶ The main peculiarity of this battalion was its missile system that functioned with a very sophisticated launching apparatus for that period.

In 1965, SETAF's main office was eventually placed in Camp Ederle, after a series of foreign military budget and unit cuts made by U.S. President Eisenhower, registering

⁶⁰ SETAF, became active in October 25 of 1955 in Camp Darby (in the middle of Livorno and Pisa, Italy). Its headquarters was then moved to Verona and finally to Caserma Ederle in Vicenza.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ Wikipedia, Carlo Ederle, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Ederle, consultation date 16 June 2012.

⁶⁴ The Italian police.

⁶⁵ G. Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza (1945-1965), Storia di una convivenza fredda*, tesi di laurea, Università degli studi di Venezia - Ca' Foscari, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Corso di laurea in storia, a. a. 2006-07, rel. A. Castellato, p. 6.

⁶⁶ "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook* (25 October 2005), pp. 4-5.

the first major case, in 1970, of unemployment inside the Vicenza military site.⁶⁷ The soldiers were now 2,500 and the employment fell down 70%.⁶⁸ At the same time this gave the possibility to the Italian Army to gradually settle themselves inside the base and start a solid partnership with the Americans. The beginning of the 1970s represented for Caserma Ederle a turning point in NATO's operations, with a strengthening in relations with other U.S. combat teams in delicate areas such as Greece and Turkey.⁶⁹ In the following decade, towards the end of the Cold War, the 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment⁷⁰ settled in Vicenza.⁷¹ Their aim was to penetrate into the enemies airfields, in this case the Soviets, and they were known to be one of the most skilled aviation military teams in Europe.⁷² The 3/325 ABCT trained in harsh conditions, usually with snow, in the North East Swiss Alps, but also in Italy and Germany.⁷³

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ending of the U.S.S.R, the U.S. and NATO inevitably reshaped their geopolitical assignments and shifted to more localized tasks, such as peace operations programs. For example in 1991, the 3/325 ABCT was sent to Iraq, in the Gulf War, providing assistance to the persecuted Kurd population.⁷⁴ Furthermore, a significant humanitarian mission in Uganda was launched from Vicenza in 1994. As a matter of fact, a couple of thousands of U.S. troops were sent off to the East African States, to stop the emergency that had sparked from the internal conflict in Rwanda, causing many civilians to flee to Uganda and Zaire.⁷⁵ This assignment was subsequently taken over by the United Nations. In the following year, SETAF's division shifted from Camp Ederle to the direction of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the heart of the

⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁰ 3/325 Airborne Battalion Combat Team, 3/325 ABCT, better known as "Blue Falcons".

⁷¹ "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook*, pp. 4-5.

⁷² *Ibidem.*

⁷³ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁵ *Ibidem.*

warfare in the ex-Yugoslavian territory.⁷⁶ During the Balkan War, the base of Vicenza hosted one of the Combined Air and Space Operations Centers⁷⁷, a futuristic system that provided strategic information to the U.S. Army and a full scale picture of the situation in the sky and grounds for selected territories.⁷⁸ In this case it was aimed to Bosnia, ending up being very helpful for the development of NATO's strategies in that area. In 2001, the system was suspended from its activities in Vicenza.⁷⁹ With the peace agreement signed by the end of 1995, the U.S. squad made its successful return in Italy by 1996.⁸⁰ In the same twelve-month period, other two expeditions were accomplished, one in Liberia, which thanks to SETAF ended a seven-year civil war period, and the other one back in Rwanda and Uganda, where a severe refugee calamity was solved.⁸¹ In 1997, SETAF headed again to Africa, in the Republic of Congo, conducting a series of peacekeeping operations, while in 1999, following the Task Force Hawk⁸², SETAF took part of a Joint Task Operation⁸³ in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo.⁸⁴ The JTF was a system that was originated to be prepared in case of any sort of crisis that may occur in the selected area of interest of SETAF.

With the opening of the new century, the station of Vicenza had greatly upgraded its military potential by establishing, after a long period of inactivity, the glorious 173rd Airborne Brigade Team in its headquarters and by reintroducing the 503d Infantry Regiment, memorable for its triumphs during World War II, and was assigned to the main 173rd Airborne Crew.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ COAC, was revealed in 1996 and is subject to a close collaboration between NATO and the Pentagon.

⁷⁸ Wikipedia, Air and Space Operations Center, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_and_Space_Operations_Center, consultation date 19 June 2012.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook*, pp. 4-5.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² A successful massive division that was created in the summer of 1999 for NATO bombing operations in Yugoslavia.

⁸³ JTF, a term to describe the fusion and collaboration of multiple military components.

⁸⁴ "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook*, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

A couple of years later, in 2003, two big operations in Liberia and Iraq took off from Vicenza.⁸⁶ In the West African State of Liberia, SETAF was designated as the head team to coordinate a preemptive mission to a revolutionary movement⁸⁷ and an imminent famine catastrophe.⁸⁸ After 2 months, with more than 5,000 units that had gathered up from Caserma Ederle in a Joint Task Force, SETAF contributed to the suspension of hostilities in Liberia.⁸⁹ The signing of the treaty was the result of an arduous job done by the soldiers stationing in Vicenza. The other mission in Iraq⁹⁰ lasted 11 months and were overall harder but a huge success. The 173rd Airborne Brigade, together with the 31st Fighter Wing of the Aviano Air Base, garrisoned in the Northern area of the Middle Eastern Country. In the end they were able to: occupy one Iraqi city⁹¹, take control of strategic military sites as well as natural gas platforms, block the Iraqi troops and terrorist groups and finally deliver assistance to the Allied Insurgent Forces.⁹² On top of that, the division was able to introduce, in collaboration with certain local authorities, the first democratic political organizations, making an epoch-making impact in the Iraqi history.⁹³

In early 2005, Caserma Ederle witnessed another assignment, this time in Afghanistan.⁹⁴ SETAF's units, were transferred to the Bagram Airfield⁹⁵ in a specific campaign against terrorism, designed by the U.S. President George W. Bush, functioning as a protectorate engagement for the local population, located in a seriously unstable territory.⁹⁶ In 2011

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ After a first Civil War from 1989 until 1996, in 2003 a democratic guerrilla group had assaulted the capital Monrovia.

⁸⁸ "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook*, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ Operation Iraqi Freedom.

⁹¹ Karkuk, or Kirkuk, situated in the North of Iraq. The inhabitants of this town are mostly Kurds and the city is famous for its rich concentration of oil fields.

⁹² "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook*, pp. 4-5.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ The biggest U.S. military installation in Afghanistan.

⁹⁶ "SETAF: Through the years today", *SETAF Outlook*, pp. 4-5.

U.S. units were sent from Caserma Ederle to Libya, to play a supportive role to the injured local insurgents and plan future U.S. interventions and solutions for the Libyan society.⁹⁷ Camp Ederle is also the main establishment of the 223rd Area Support Group⁹⁸, a massive communication center for NATO and hub for the military management of the entire camp.⁹⁹ There are two ASG's for the U.S. Army in Europe, however, the one in Vicenza is the main coordinator for support and transportation activity in Italy.¹⁰⁰

The base in Vicenza has been recently involved in a controversial project of expansion, not within its own perimeter but in the Dal Molin Airport, another base which is located in the North of the city. This has been the main airport for Vicenza until 2008, when it was temporarily closed down. Ever since the disclose of the plan there have been multiple local groups that have been fiercely protesting against the execution of the conversion of the Dal Molin space into an American base.

⁹⁷ "Il comando AFRICOM passa di qui", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 20 March 2011.

⁹⁸ ASG. The leader of the 22nd ASG is nicknamed "the mayor of Caserma Ederle".

⁹⁹ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

2.3 Other Military Sites in the North East of Italy

There are many more military installations, such as logistic infrastructures and detachment support groups controlled by the U.S.A and NATO in the North East of Italy, that don't enjoy the same popularity in the media of Aviano and Vicenza. Most of these sites, located in the regions of Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Trentino-Alto Adige, are unknown to many people living in Italy. Some of these locations belong entirely to Italy, while some others have been conceded to NATO and the United States. The region with the highest density of U.S./NATO bases is the Veneto, with 19 sites in the cities of Venice, Verona, Vicenza, Padua and Treviso. In the area of Vicenza, besides the popular Camp Ederle and Dal Molin, there are two underground caves ammunition supply points in the Fontega base in Tormeno and in the Site Pluto in Longare.¹⁰¹ Both are structurally interconnected and believed to contain atomic weapons along with other special ammunition¹⁰². In Site Pluto the U.S. Army has been covertly depositing these weapons since 1954, creating a big mystery on the contents of these caves and criticism about the presence of dangerous substances such as plutonium.¹⁰³ Site Pluto contains a tunnel that is connected with the close antiaircraft defense military base of San Rocco di Longare.¹⁰⁴ This camp is managed on the outside by the Esercito Italiano¹⁰⁵ and in the inside by the American Army, which formed by 500 soldiers and represents a back-up team for Caserma Ederle.¹⁰⁶ In 1992, with an official ceremony, Site Pluto was declared inactive but still under the U.S.'s property.¹⁰⁷ There have been local reports that other unauthorized missions have been taking place in the following years, which have raised the general concern on the presence of radioactivity in the district.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, pp. 32-35.

¹⁰² Heavy artillery, surface to air missiles (SAM) and surface to surface missiles (SSM).

¹⁰³ Comitato No Dal Molin, Site Pluto, ieri, oggi, domani, <http://www.sitepluto.com/dalmolin/20070518sitepluto.pdf>, consultation date 15 July 2012.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁵ The Italian Army.

¹⁰⁶ Comitato No Dal Molin, *Site Pluto, ieri, oggi, domani*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

In the proximity of Treviso there are four military points. While in Oderzo and Codognè there are two ammunition storages and in the base of Ciano a powerful radar and hub for communications with NATO, in the air base of Istrana¹⁰⁹, where in 1999 several missions were launched towards Serbia, there is a branch of the U.S. Aviation Army.¹¹⁰ Verona is the home of the Command of the Allied Land Forces of Southern Europe¹¹¹ or LANDSOUTH and the Air Operations Center of USAF, that plan out various assignments to prevent wars.¹¹² Just recently in 2010, 22 Km. away from Verona, the West Star¹¹³ bunker, in the city of Affi, has been shut down due to recent NATO programs to cut military expenses.¹¹⁴ In the past, the West Star secret bunker of LANDSOUTH, has served as one of the most important transmission and broadcasting centers for the U.S.A. and NATO especially during the Cold War.¹¹⁵ The other sites in the province of Verona are in Lughezzano, in Erbezzo and in Sant'Anna d'Alfaedo.¹¹⁶ The first one includes a NATO radar that is administered by the U.S. Space Command, the second one is an important radio station house also known as Joint Combat Centre, supervised by the U.S. Defense, while the third one hosts a Wullenberg antenna, a different type of radar from the above mentioned, which is able to recognize any type of signal.¹¹⁷ Near Padua are situated other U.S. and NATO property radar sites, in Monte Venda and in Conselve.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁹ Headquarter of the 51st wing of ITAF.

¹¹⁰ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, pp. 32-35.

¹¹¹ Headquarters in Verona since 1951. The flag of the Allied Land Forces of Southern Europe has a golden winged lion, which reminds the lion of Saint Marks, the symbol of Venice.

¹¹² Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, pp. 32-35.

¹¹³ NATO code name for the base.

¹¹⁴ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, pp. 32-35.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

The main NATO establishment near Venice is in Lama di Concordia Sagittaria station, that is equipped with a RAT-31 DL/M¹¹⁹ radar.¹²⁰ The base of Lama has been a key location during the Cold War for sky-monitoring operations and is now recognized as one of the top three radar locations in the North East of Italy.¹²¹ The other American managed radar base in the Venetian territory, more specifically in Ceggia, has been closed down at the end of the 1990s, after a series of law suits that claimed that the site was producing radion, a radioactive substance.¹²²

The second region for number of American installations is Friuli Venezia-Giulia. Besides the Aviano Air Base and the Caserma Zappalà, the Caserma di Roveredo, near Pordenone, and the San Bernardo base, close to Udine, both work as a weapon and ammunition depot and as a supplier to the nearby Aviano Air Base for any sort of necessity.¹²³ The remaining ones are scattered around the area of Udine. The Rivolto Air Force Base, home of the popular aerobatic aviation team of the Italian Frece Tricolori, is often used as an alternative airport of the USAF. Near Pordenone there is a shooting range, il Poligono del Dandolo, situated on top of the hills of Maniago, which is used by the American Army for practice.¹²⁴ There are many another minor shooting ranges in the North East of Italy, and only recently there have been talks between the Italian and American Departments of Defense to allow the U.S.A. to take over some other areas to build new facilities, for the most part in the region of Friuli.

In the territory of Trentino Alto Adige, some other minor USAF radar and communication sites can be found, like in Monte Paganella, which is only a short distance from Trento, and in the base of Cima Gallina, near Bolzano. Both of these places have played a significant undercover role during the Cold War due to their proximity with the Iron Curtain.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ To be replaced by the end of 2012 with a even higher technology radar.

¹²⁰ Di Ernesto, *Portaerei Italia*, pp. 32-35.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

3. INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

3.1 The Agreements

The most delicate topic is to outline and figure out what actions are permitted and those which are considered to be forbidden to the American military divisions in these military sites in Italy. The bases in Aviano and Vicenza still fully belong to Italy, however, at the end of World War II, several bilateral agreements were reached for the concession of European military sites to the Americans and NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty¹²⁶, which represents the foundation of NATO, sets those rules that must be followed by its allied members. Especially with the recent plans of expanding both of these installations in the North East of Italy, it has come to the attention of the Italian population what truly lays behind the laws that regulate the presence of these foreign armed forces in their Country.

The first essential detail to keep in mind is the fact that neither NATO nor America pay some sort of rent to the Italian Government for the concession of these military bases. Italy's contribution for security sums up to 366 million dollars a year, where 3 million dollars are given straightaway to the U.S., while the remaining money is generated from a series of preferential treatments granted to America, that consist of fiscal downsizing, utility cuts, cheaper gas and phone calls for the soldiers, and mostly the complimentary lease of the settlements.¹²⁷ The 41% annual total cost of these military bases is financed by Italy.¹²⁸ Overall, only Germany and Japan pay more for their defense fee.¹²⁹ In other words this means that Italy does not charge any fee for the rent to the foreign military divisions stationed in their camps and, on top that, they hand over additional money to the United States of America, for unknown reasons. Furthermore, an agreement that was reached on February 2 of 1995, the Memorandum of understanding between America

¹²⁶ Was signed on April 4 of 1949 in Washington D.C. and is divided into 14 articles.

¹²⁷ United States of America Department of Defense, 2004 Statistical Compendium on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/allied_contrib2004/allied2004.pdf, consultation date 20 October 2012.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

and Italy¹³⁰, foresees that if a U.S. base in Italy for any reasons was closed down, the Italian Government has to compensate the Americans for all the improvements that were brought by the United States to the installation.¹³¹ We could define this as a sort of warranty, that ends up being advantageous only for the United States of America.

Many people have been debating if these military areas should be considered as a communal space, which reflects NATO's ideology, or a private quarter managed by the United States. Usually, a military area hosts American and NATO infrastructures and troops, and some times it also incorporates Italian ones. Some military bases in Italy combine different divisions, while others, like Camp Ederle in Vicenza, concede their space to permanent NATO forces, which in the majority of times corresponds to the U.S. Army. The reality is that there has never been a significant debate about the costs, the usefulness and the genuine missions related to the domestic interest for these bases in Italy. What we can register, though, is the existence of two opposite factions in Italy: those who are favorable to the fact that these sites are managed by foreign troops and the other who are totally against this idea. Therefore, the common trend of associating these allied military bases with the United States of America has restricted the dispute between pro-Americans and anti-Americans. Both the Italian and the American Governments have tried to keep this topic outside of the spotlight to avoid new protests that could possibly question the position of both countries in this field. That's why it's necessary to interpret the secrecy of these bilateral agreements, that work as a set of fundamental principles in installations like in Aviano and Vicenza. Since it's extremely complicated to come across reliable sources on this subject, we find ourselves navigating through a sea of confusion where the few information available keeps being decoded in different ways. For this reason several critics have been able in these years to express themselves without having a valid motivation to prove them wrong. The inevitable consequence has been the unintended creation of misconceptions about these bases, where some people have either considered them as extraterritorial, and therefore

¹³⁰ Also known as "Shell Agreement", that was endorsed by the generals of Defense of Italy, Francesco Cervoni and of the U.S.A., Charles Boyd.

¹³¹ Memorandum d'intesa tra il Ministero della Difesa della Repubblica italiana ed il Dipartimento della Difesa degli Stati Uniti d'America relativo alle installazioni/infrastrutture concesse in uso alle forze statunitensi in Italia, <http://byebyeunclesam.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/shell-agreement.pdf>, consultation date 4 August 2012.

not belonging to any jurisdiction, or have stated that certain bilateral agreements after a period of time become inactive. However, the most frequent trend, especially from the media and on books, is to associate these bases with both NATO and the United States. Like other agreements on other military sites in European territories, these military bases are technically supervised by the national police, so in this case by the Italian one. The agreements behind the cases of Aviano and Vicenza, along with the other bases in Italy, don't have an expiration date, which means that talking about rental bases to the U.S. or NATO is a mistake. However the regulations can be modified by the willing of one of the two Governments by updating certain aspects of the agreement or, in the worst case, the hosting country can decide to interrupt the concession of its installations to the foreign divisions, although this is uncommon.

The aftermath of World War II and the sudden start of the Cold War, brought Italy from a devastated national condition to a fresh and decisive political and military location in the middle of the two divergent blocs. The military bases present in the Italian territory became the symbol of defense for the North Atlantic allies, without having to invest on new expensive infrastructures. In the Western coalition, relationships between allies are developed in two paths, the multi-cooperative and the bilateral with America. This is the main reason why we can distinguish between an Italian military site conceded to the U.S.A. and one to NATO. When we speak of those ones associated to the Northern Atlantic Treaty sphere of influence we have to separate the ones that are common for all the allies, like headquarters, radar and telecommunication installations, and those that for necessity are handed over to NATO for a specific warfare task, like during the war in Kosovo.¹³² Italy's tendency in the past has always been incline to concede its military installations for these type of missions.

Another development that came to light in the beginning of the 1990s¹³³ is the presence of nuclear weapons in these military areas and if this is compatible or not with the treaties that regulate Italy's position towards this issue. Finally, the most argued matter is the legal status of these bases, whether in the event of a dispute they fall under the

¹³² N. Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, Servizio studi e servizio affari internazionali del Senato della Repubblica, XV legislatura, n.70, June 2007, p. 3.

¹³³ Although the nuclear bombs were stationed in these bases way before, since the 1970s, and therefore during the Cold War.

Italian, NATO or American jurisdiction. The truth is that the majority of the Italian population is unaware of the specific fact, but there are certain agreements made in the past by the Italian Government that for many years were considered top-secret. Italy is the only country in the European Union to have classified accords with the United States, since other Countries like Germany for example, have the possibility to track down these agreements by searching in a simple school textbook.¹³⁴ It is also true that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between a military base in Italy, that is fully managed by NATO or by the United States. The Italian Northeastern ones are essentially run by the American Army on the day-to-day basis and then for the primary missions they are supervised by NATO, although it is common to have different opinions on how the dynamics of these hierarchies operate. The mainstream idea is that the initial NATO commitments were the ones that provided a connection with Italy and its bases, but with the end of the Cold War the U.S. Army has progressively taken a radical increase of control in the management of these installations. Since the beginning of this North Atlantic alliance, we can't forget how the purpose of these reconverted soldier camps in Italy is supposed to be exclusively a matter of NATO, as stated on the actual treaty.¹³⁵ The most recent critics have been forwarded by some historians that affirm that because of a NATO Summit in Washington D.C. during the month of April in 1999, in the moment of climax of the War in Kosovo, a document¹³⁶ was approved, and has enabled the Secretary General of the Atlantic Treaty to encode future operations in regions that were not located inside their sector of responsibility, hence those tasks that were not covered by article 5¹³⁷ of the NATO Treaty.¹³⁸ The reality is that these global regulations are constantly being redefined, so it is getting problematic to clarify certain situations regarding these bases managed by a foreign party.

¹³⁴ P. F. Fedrizzi, *"Un processo italiano per i top gun del Cermis"*, *La Repubblica*, 27 May 1998, p. 26.

¹³⁵ The North Atlantic Treaty, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm, consultation date 6 August 2012.

¹³⁶ The Washington Declaration of 1999.

¹³⁷ Enables joint defense, should a member of the North Atlantic Treaty be subject to an armed assault.

¹³⁸ Nuovo concetto strategico dell'Alleanza Atlantica (NATO), http://www.studiperlapace.it/view_news_html?news_id=natoconcept99, consultation date 6 August 2012.

Within NATO, the only way to be eligible to send troops or take control over a military site from a member of the North Atlantic Treaty to another member State is to sign an agreement with the future hosting Country, that must be scrutinized by the North Atlantic Council¹³⁹.¹⁴⁰ Among the major NATO States that host foreign units¹⁴¹ in their territories, only France, back in 1966 with its President Charles De Gaulle, decided to cancel any further two-sided collaboration accords with NATO.¹⁴²

According to the North Atlantic conception, we have to distinguish between foreign military bases managed by NATO and those ones lead by the U.S.A., since they negotiate different types of deals.¹⁴³ However it is incredibly complex to do so, since certain information regarding these bases is confidential and mostly because these protocols are rarely advertised to the citizens. The truth is that these specific locations are hybrid, seeing that the actors and the operations that take place are mixed or also disjointed. This indefinite situation is common in other NATO bases outside of the Italian borders too.

Nowadays there are eight official armed forces sites in the Italian Peninsula under the U.S. authority and therefore subject to a written consensus between the U.S.A. and Italy. On the contrary the NATO and the U.S. partnership follows article 3 of the NATO Treaty, which functions as an ethic code to strengthen the independent and mutual support of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance in case of threats or attacks.¹⁴⁴ It is also frequent that a fully controlled Italian military installation¹⁴⁵, thus not related to NATO or the U.S., may offer its facilities to foreign troops.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ NAC, where in the making of an agreement, a Commission must be built to represent both States.

¹⁴⁰ The North Atlantic Treaty.

¹⁴¹ For the most part Americans.

¹⁴² NATO, 1966 Summary, <http://www.nato.int/docu/update/60-69/1966e.htm>, consultation date 6 August 2012.

¹⁴³ The North Atlantic Treaty.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁵ For example the Italian naval base of Taranto, Sicily. Although in 2012 there have been talks that a bilateral collaboration deal with NATO is being discussed.

¹⁴⁶ A. Desiderio, "Paghiamo con le basi la nostra sicurezza", *Limes*, IV (1999), pp. 27-41.

Given that the American military is the strongest in the World and is relatively isolated from Europe and the core of modern conflicts, the U.S., more than any other Country, takes advantage of the possibility to profit from the relocation in overseas bases to improve their involvement with NATO. This is why we can affirm that America is the main managing director behind the NATO. The formal agreement is the main source where we can find the index of commitments and rights that the foreign lodgers must conform to, with a strict connection to the national laws applied by the State hosting the base. It goes without saying that in the Italian jurisdiction, these agreements represent the reference point for both the U.S.A. and NATO.

If we analyze the sections of the NATO Treaty, there is no comprehensible position regarding the use of bases in a foreign country of the Alliance. The only useful information we can obtain is from two articles of the treaty. In article 3, as mentioned before, in the event of an armed assault, the treaty binds the members of the alliance to intervene on their own or assist each other.¹⁴⁷ But in article 9, where the NATO Council comes into play, a request for cooperation between two member States of the Alliance is required and runs apart from certain conditions enclosed in a bilateral treaty.¹⁴⁸ It is important to underline the fact that a partnership between two associated States does not imply that one of them must allow the permission to use a military base in its territory. The bilateral agreement is therefore the essential element to negotiate a deal with an army base.

In the case of Italy, the legal order provides for two different ways to arrange an international agreement. The first one is the conventional way, where a deal is sealed by being discussed in the Italian Parliament and eventually approved by the President of the Italian Republic through a specific law that is created at the moment and those conditions.¹⁴⁹ Then we have a simplified procedure¹⁵⁰ that allows the agreement to be instantly formalized right after being signed by the representatives of the government

¹⁴⁷ The North Atlantic Treaty.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Although not being utterly regulated by the Italian Constitution, this method is still a common practice in Italy.

committee.¹⁵¹ Article 80 of the Italian Constitution lists a group of deals, predominantly political¹⁵², that must be subject to the Parliament for a further endorsement while the simplified agreements disclose technical issues.¹⁵³ All the traditional arrangements are supposed to be published in the official journal of record of Italy¹⁵⁴, including the simplified ones.¹⁵⁵ The odd fact is that several arrangements that were made concerning the military bases in Italy have either been issued after a number of years or sometimes have never been published. On the contrary all the other deals involving members of NATO have always been released.¹⁵⁶ A crucial example of a simplified agreement is the one secured on October 20 of 1954¹⁵⁷, between the U.S. and Italy, the Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement¹⁵⁸. This deal has never been published or ratified by the Italian Parliament.¹⁵⁹ The B.I.A. is significant because it regulates the position of the American bases in Italy and mostly it specifies the maximum number of U.S. Army troops that are allowed to be deployed in the Italian sites.¹⁶⁰

The other equivalent agreement concerning the status quo of the foreign military units in Italian installations is the 1995 Shell Agreement¹⁶¹, which is a simplified agreement as well, that has remained undisclosed for three years.¹⁶² Only in 1998, after people invoked transparency of the Tragedy of Cermis that involved an American aircraft

¹⁵¹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p. 1.

¹⁵² But also deals that involve tax burdens, alterations and arbitration in the Italian territory.

¹⁵³ La Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana, <http://www.governo.it/governo/costituzione/principi.html>, consultation date 12 August 2012.

¹⁵⁴ *La Gazzetta Ufficiale* (See footnote 165).

¹⁵⁵ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p.1.

¹⁵⁶ According to laws 80 and 87, section 8, Italian Constitution.

¹⁵⁷ In 1954, other two important practical agreements were reached. One on the aviation status in Italy on June 30 and a naval one on October 20.

¹⁵⁸ B.I.A., also known as “Umbrella Agreement” or the Secret Agreement between the U.S.A. and Italy. It was signed by the Ambassador for the U.S. in Italy, Clara Booth Luce and Giuseppe Pella, the Italian Prime Minister at the time.

¹⁵⁹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p.4 - 5.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶¹ See p.19.

¹⁶² Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p.5.

stationed in Aviano, the details of the pact were revealed by the Italian Prime Minister of the time, Massimo D'Alema.¹⁶³

Both the Shell Agreement and the Umbrella Agreement, even if simplified deals, should have been published in the first place.¹⁶⁴ The controversial decision to keep certain details hidden from the citizens, that in a way violates to the Italian Constitution, living in a democratic system like in Italy, could be explained with the intention to preserve a Nation's security in foreign policy affairs. Still the Constitution should always work as a guarantee of commitment and genuine values, and as a benchmark that should never be questioned. That is why the citizens should, in any case, have the possibility to be informed about certain decisions made by their government. In the future, the chances are that the tendency in this field will not change and these bilateral agreements will still maintain certain details top-secret but at least the principles of the arrangement should be processed through the legislative mechanism and be published in *La Gazzetta Ufficiale*¹⁶⁵.

The most important kind of conventional deal concerning the foreign military units in Italy is the NATO Status of Forces Agreement¹⁶⁶, signed on June 19 of 1951 in London by all the North Atlantic Alliance members.¹⁶⁷ This specific SOFA deal defines all the rules regarding the conduct of military and civilian personnel, the residence permit and the application of regulations on fiscal and custom matters.¹⁶⁸ In the Italian case this protocol, that was approved by the Parliament and the Head of State, disciplines soldiers and civilian personnel operating in American or NATO bases in Italy.¹⁶⁹ Needless to say that this document is fundamental to comprehend how these specific army sites in Italy

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁴ According to law n° 839, 11 December 1984.

¹⁶⁵ It collects all the resolutions that have been ratified first by the Parliament and then by the President of Italy.

¹⁶⁶ Also known as SOFA, there are several types of these deals, depending on the partnership. The main objective is to clarify the rights of a Country's specific armed force division into another State, as part of a previous bilateral agreement.

¹⁶⁷ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p.5.

¹⁶⁸ NATO, *Agreement between the Parties of the North Atlantic Treaty regarding the Status of their Forces*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17265.htm, consultation date 13 August 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 5-6.

operate. If the foreign State, stationing in the hosted nation's facility, decided to change any sort of aspect regarding the conceded base, another agreement would have to be reached in order to make those adjustments possible. A further hint to understand the activities in the military sites in Italy is provided by the Convention on the Status of NATO, national representatives and the international staff¹⁷⁰, that mainly sets the regulations for the personnel during missions abroad.¹⁷¹

Other important documents are the NATO Protocol on the Status of International Military Headquarters, signed in 1952, and the Bilateral Agreement¹⁷² between the Italian Government and the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe that clarifies the position of international military sites in the Italian territory.¹⁷³ For the Aviano Air Base the situation is slightly different, since the activities inside this base are regulated by a Memorandum, divided into 13 articles, that was modified in 1993, following the new relocation of the American F-16's inside the base.¹⁷⁴ The Memorandum, which is considered valid only during peacetime, formally tells us that Aviano is under the Italian property.¹⁷⁵ The coexistence of the U.S. military sites in Italy was strengthened by the Memorandum of 1995, that in this case also disciplines the functions inside Caserma Ederle.¹⁷⁶ Any training operation, assigned to a specific unit, taking place in these bases has to be previously notified by the American leading officer to the Italian authorities or delegates, in order to be able to coordinate the chosen strategies.¹⁷⁷ The Italian commanding officer, present in these installations that have been conceded to the United States, has full power on the decision making process, also from a juridical

¹⁷⁰ Signed on September 20 of 1951 in Ottawa. The Agreement is divided into 27 articles.

¹⁷¹ NATO, Agreement on the Status of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, National Representatives and International Staff signed in Ottawa, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17248.htm, consultation date 13 August 2012.

¹⁷² Also known as SACEUR, was signed on July 26 of 1961 in Paris.

¹⁷³ NATO, Protocol on the Status of International Military Headquarters set up pursuant to the North Atlantic Treaty, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17300.htm, consultation date 14 August 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 23-25.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁶ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p.5.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

perspective.¹⁷⁸ When a plan has been approved by the Italian officials then it becomes the U.S. officer's responsibility to make sure that all operations are running smoothly. In the event that a requested action by the U.S. officer is not considered congruent with the Italian laws, a further consultation between other Italian authorities can be requested.¹⁷⁹ To have a clearer image of the compatibility of the laws in Italy and these international arrangements, an answer can be found in the Italian Constitution. In fact by analyzing article 11, we learn that some restrictions to the Italian authority are allowed to maintain justice and peace among States and for this reason an incentive is given to global organizations like NATO.¹⁸⁰ At the same time the Constitution forbids warfare against a nation.¹⁸¹ The Italian Court of Cassation¹⁸² has defined NATO¹⁸³ as a protective alliance that aims at generating and promoting peace in the World, through the usage of selfdefense.¹⁸⁴ Therefore this statement does not clash with the Italian Constitution's declaration of forbidding an unmotivated military attack towards another Nation and at the same time it authorizes an action of selfdefense if necessary. Speaking of the above mentioned restrictions to the Italian governmental power connected to the dynamics within the military infrastructures in Italy, selfdefense is considered as a prerogative by the U.N.¹⁸⁵ that in turn authorizes groups like NATO to promote justice and achieve peaceful scenarios.¹⁸⁶

Looking at the NATO Treaty we can state that the military bases in Italy that are run by the U.S.A., cannot be examined as an independent case because these sites are inevitably linked to NATO. Consequently the presence of NATO in Italy is not only guided by the treaty of NATO but additionally to article 11 of the Italian Constitution

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸⁰ La Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸² Which is comparable to the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

¹⁸³ In a declaratory judgement, n° 1920, of March 22 of 1984.

¹⁸⁴ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p.6.

¹⁸⁵ According to article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations that was signed in 1945.

¹⁸⁶ According to articles 2 and 3 of the NATO Treaty.

and as a result of the recent developments it must be considered inside the new geopolitical ideology established with the signing of the 1999 Washington Declaration.¹⁸⁷ This document has represented a big upgrade for NATO's sphere of influence in operations outside the alliance's virtual borders. The Washington Declaration, which is not legally binding, as an example of soft power, covers mainly assistance operations¹⁸⁸ such as peacekeeping, post conflict and peace building, peace support and various humanitarian tasks.¹⁸⁹ There is no real contradiction between NA5CRO and article 11 of the Italian Constitution, since these operations meet the regulation of the international law. We have only some interpretational uncertainty on when to apply these non-Article 5 operations, as in 1999 when the U.N. Security Council wasn't consulted before the decision to start the mission in Serbia.¹⁹⁰

Before any of these operations, any member of NATO can decide to not take part in the assigned task if they think it is complying with the international law.¹⁹¹ This plays a big role in the use of the military bases abroad. It is possible that in the future a nation belonging to NATO could decide not to allow external troops in its military sites. The main explanation is because the State might think that the operation has nothing to do with NATO's duties or the traditional international law and therefore is not obliged to concede its bases. The NA5CRO's outcome essentially depends on the agreement or not between the members of the alliance.¹⁹²

Since the mid-2000s, NATO's operations have mostly been directed towards solving emergencies, gradually becoming a leading protagonist in the geopolitical arena. We can affirm that the idea of alliance operating only within its Northern Atlantic frontiers is out-of-date. This shift had several effects on the status of the American military sites in Italy. It cannot be said that these U.S. bases function completely on their own and the reality is that they are still linked to NATO.

¹⁸⁷ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 6-8.

¹⁸⁸ Also known as Non-Article 5 crisis response operations, NA5CRO. This article 5 is referred to the one belonging to the NATO Treaty.

¹⁸⁹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 6-8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*.

3.2 What Really Goes on Inside These Bases

After having explored some of the international regulations behind the management of military sites in another Country, the idea many people could get is that these bases are used only in case of an assault. The truth is that these facilities in Italy, for example, are being used for other purposes. NATO has changed its idea of maintaining peace by launching preemptive operations against possible threats that could escalate into armed attacks. Since 9/11 most of missions have been focused on the growing phenomenon of terrorism. A more detailed description is needed to unravel the activities taking place in the military sites of Italy.

A selfdefense action can be initiated in case of an assault by another State or by non-State actors, such as a terrorist group.¹⁹³ According to the NATO Treaty¹⁹⁴, if any member of the alliance is under attack, Italy is compelled to make sure that its military bases are operative and should never obstruct the operations.¹⁹⁵ The unavoidable risk for Italy by conceding its military bases to other States or organizations, during specific operations in certain territories, is that this will probably increase the opponent's antagonism for the Nation backing the activities.

The category of peace-enforcing and peacekeeping operations is delicate and must be assessed by the NATO Council.¹⁹⁶ The primary inquiry done by the board is to confirm that a definite mission is considered as a licit NA5CRO.¹⁹⁷ Looking at the past, peacekeeping operations can be accepted simply with the hosting Nation's approval and with no particular need of having of a U.N. ratification.¹⁹⁸ On the contrary, a peace-enforcing operation normally requires a double authorization by the Councils of NATO

¹⁹³ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 6-8.

¹⁹⁴ Article 5, section 1. NATO members must provide assistance to one another, without interfering in the given tasks.

¹⁹⁵ The North Atlantic Treaty.

¹⁹⁶ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 6-8.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

and the United Nations.¹⁹⁹ In the beginning of the 1990s a peace-enforcing mission²⁰⁰ was adopted in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which allowed the Allies to preserve the no-fly zone in the Balkan region.²⁰¹

The NATO Treaty is a guideline on the employment of military bases in other territories and any operation apart from an Article 5 one and a NA5CRO shouldn't be permitted. The reality is far distant from this, as it became ardent during the Iraqi War. In 2003, Caserma Ederle in Vicenza launched several missions in Iraq despite Italy's decision not to participate into this war.²⁰² This is the inevitable consequence of conceding military sites to a foreign authority. In this case, for Italy, it was impossible to find a compromise even if the geopolitical strategy of the Nation had changed.

Another crucial deal that involves American bases overseas is the Berlin Plus Agreement²⁰³ that enables the European Union in case of necessity to benefit from NATO's possessions, especially from the military bases.²⁰⁴ The controversial issue drawn by the Berlin Plus Agreement, hence a NATO and E.U. partnership, is to figure out where the U.S.A. stands in the European Union context and if any mission launched by the E.U. from an American base would be considered legitimate or not.²⁰⁵

One of the most common mistakes is to define Aviano, Caserma Ederle or Dal Molin as foreign military bases while in reality they are Italian. Their international status doesn't imply a loss of hegemony and control over these sites. The base can be considered at the same level of a diplomatic office, where the foreign State enjoys certain privileges but it also subject to limitations and possible legal repercussions within, in this instance, Italy. The exterior of these military bases is supervised by the Italian police officers while the inside is handled primarily by foreign officers, although there must always be an Italian

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁰ U.N. Security Council resolution n° 816, 19 March 1993.

²⁰¹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 6-8.

²⁰² V. Volpi, "How Italy Became a Launching Pad for the US Military", *Counterpunch*, 4 October 2007.

²⁰³ Signed on December 16 of 2002. It consists in a series of pacts endorsed by NATO and the European Union on peace keeping operations.

²⁰⁴ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, p. 8.

²⁰⁵ The European Parliament, Berlin Plus Agreement, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/berlinplus_/berlinplus_en.pdf, consultation date 13 August 2012.

police officer in the location to display the national authority.²⁰⁶ In fact, the SACEUR Agreement affirms that the allied police must administer these military infrastructures with total respect towards the hosting Country's police.²⁰⁷ The actual concession of the property of the bases in the North East of Italy is granted to the foreign administration, but deep down it is still classified under the Italian property. In the event that the U.S. or NATO decided to construct a new building, they would first have to have their project accepted by a joint committee.²⁰⁸ In this case the final decision to modify the structure of the military site is up to the Italian Government but even with an authorization the possessions would still be Italian.²⁰⁹ The SACEUR Agreement also defines the activities that are permitted inside the bases, from the warehousing to the nautical responsibilities in the seas, although this is not the case of the ones in the North East of Italy.²¹⁰

According to a report of the Council of Europe²¹¹, the Aviano Air Base has been used for an irregular rendition operation²¹², and involved with the Abu Omar²¹³ case. This man, a suspected terrorist, was kidnapped by the C.I.A. in Italy, brought to Aviano and eventually sent to Egypt where he was supposedly tortured.²¹⁴ The extraordinary rendition missions are not allowed inside the bases; what's more, it is considered inhuman and illegal by the international law. These operations are strictly forbidden even if the country hosting the military sites authorizes it.²¹⁵

²⁰⁶ According to article 8, section 10 of the 1951 NATO SOFA Agreement.

²⁰⁷ NATO, Protocol on the Status of International Military Headquarters set up pursuant to the North Atlantic Treaty.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹¹ Issued in January of 2006 by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

²¹² Also known as extraordinary rendition, this is the illegal abduction of an individual, usually belonging to a terrorist group, to another State for further questioning.

²¹³ The Imam of a mosque in Milan, Italy.

²¹⁴ Wikipedia, Abu Omar case, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Omar_case, consultation date 20 July 2012.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

3.3 Weapons in Italian Bases

Aviano is reported to have nuclear warheads belonging to the U.S. and NATO in its basements, since the beginning of the Cold War.²¹⁶ With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many have been questioning the benefits of maintaining these weapons still active. The Non-Proliferation Treaty²¹⁷ challenges the presence of nuclear weapons in Italy and in most parts of the World. The NPT establishes the presence of five nuclear States, which are allowed to have atomic weapons in their territory as a deterrent: the United States, Russia, France, the U.K. and China.²¹⁸ These States have decided to create supplementary storages in other member territories of NATO and Italy is one of them.

The U.S. as a nuclear weapon State has the authorization to possess nuclear weapons but also the duty to not relocate these in any State that is considered non-nuclear.²¹⁹ Italy, as a non-nuclear State, cannot obtain any of these weapons or even produce them on their own.²²⁰ The solution that was found to solve the issue was the introduction of the two-man rule²²¹, where the U.S. still remains a nuclear State but in any moment they can decide to use it or transfer it in another State like Italy.²²² In this case it is legitimate only if Italy gives the official authorization, therefore the atomic presence in Italy is still fully regulated by the United States, making it compatible with the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

There are no official informations on the specific articles of the two-man rule but the general idea is that since the 1960s Italy has been part of this deal and that in the future if necessary it will be up to the Italian Government and the U.S. to produce an agreement, yet the opening decision will always come from America. It wouldn't be

²¹⁶ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 9-11.

²¹⁷ NPT, signed for the first time in 1968, it has later been expanded to many more States. The object of the document is to stop the creation of atomic weapons.

²¹⁸ United Nations, The Non-Proliferation Treaty of Nuclear Weapons, <http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2010/npttext.shtml,1995>, consultation date 22 July 2012.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²²¹ A safety procedure to maximize the deterrent presence.

²²² Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 9-11.

possible for the United States to unilaterally decide to handle atomic weapons in the Italian territory, that is located in a non-denuclearized area which means that it is eligible to hold nuclear warheads. The important element is that the atomic affair in Italy has to be entirely supervised and taken in charge by the American authorities.

The main intention of the NPT, with the nuclear States and the non-nuclear ones affiliated with the treaty, is to maintain stability and discourage any sort of attack against States that don't possess nuclear weapons in their region.²²³ This gives Italy a series of motivations to feel safe about the presence of atomic weapons in its territory.²²⁴ What really counts is not the partnership with a State that has nuclear power in their territory but the alliance with a nuclear State. That's why Italy's decisional power in this sector is extremely limited because it's a non-nuclear State. The International Atomic Energy Agency²²⁵ board, that is responsible in undertaking periodic inspections²²⁶, has never had any objections on the U.S. nuclear weapons situated throughout the Italian territory.

In 1996, the International Court of Justice delivered a judgement on the legitimacy of the use or threat concerning atomic weapons, that clearly states that the employment of these weapons is subject to the humanitarian international law.²²⁷ The Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions²²⁸ of 1949 technically forbid the use of a nuclear attack against another State, but the members of NATO before signing the Protocol had decided to allow the possibility to reformulate, if necessary, a mutual decision on the use of atomic weapons with a statutory reserve.²²⁹ This, in a way, nullifies the influence of the protocol on nuclear weapons manipulated by NATO. The opinion of the International Court of Justice and the Geneva Protocol have sparked several disputes on

²²³ *Ibidem.*

²²⁴ *Ibidem.*

²²⁵ IAEA, was founded in 1957 and its goal is to encourage the usage of nuclear energy as a an alternative energy and not for army reasons.

²²⁶ Based on article III of the Non Proliferation Treaty.

²²⁷ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 9-11.

²²⁸ Composed by four agreements that represent the basis for decisions regarding the humanitarian international law.

²²⁹ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 9-11.

the matter in question, because NATO has the power to bypass a set of regulations that are supposed to be the same for everyone.²³⁰ Italy is one of those States that has adhered to apply the protocol to conventional weapons and to not take a stand on the nuclear topic, that therefore has remained juridically unsettled.²³¹ With the International Court's statement, the statutory reserve adopted by NATO on the analysis on when these nuclear weapons should be used, has to be abolished. The only thing to do is to come up with a new coherent resolution, with no special shortcuts for anyone.

Another issue at stake is the employment of other types of weapons in Italy, a part from the nuclear ones. There are international agreements that either ban the possession of certain weapons or impose a complete disarmament. If both the State that is conceding its base and the foreign one located in the hosting Country are part of a same agreement that establishes limitations on a category of weapons, then there is no issue to be solved²³². But in case one of the two Countries involved in a military partnership, has agreed to a different deal, then an interpretation has to be made. The best example is the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban convention, signed in Ottawa in 1997, that outlaws the use of land mines.²³³ In this case Italy is part of this treaty while America is not. Italy took the obligation to eliminate any sort of land mine within four years since the official entry of this weapon category in the Italian region, even through a foreign Country like the United States.²³⁴ However, this gives a possibility to reinterpret article 4 of the Italian Constitution, by establishing a new bilateral deal between Italy and the U.S.A. that this way would allow the presence of these weapons in Italy, to avoid interference with the Ottawa Treaty.²³⁵

When it comes to arms limitation there are international documents that set explicit rules for the examination standards that have to be adopted, like the challenge

²³⁰ *Ibidem*.

²³¹ *Ibidem*.

²³² In the Chemical Weapons Convention, CWC, signed in 1993, both Italy and the U.S.A. took part to the same deal. In this case any type of chemical weapons is forbidden.

²³³ United Nations, Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention, [http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/8DF9CC31A4CA8B32C12571C7002E3F3E/\\$file/APLC+English.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/8DF9CC31A4CA8B32C12571C7002E3F3E/$file/APLC+English.pdf), consultation date 25 July 2012.

²³⁴ According to article 4 of the Italian Constitution.

²³⁵ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 9-11.

inspections²³⁶. In any moment a Country that is suspected of breaking the laws designated by the CWC can be reported by another State to the Organization for the prohibition of chemical weapons²³⁷, that will conduct further investigations.²³⁸ If either the Aviano Air Base, Caserma Ederle or Dal Molin were to be inspected, then there would have to be a distinct deal between Italy and the United States or NATO that would allow this procedure. Every inspection has to follow the rules of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Whatever policy the Italian Government plans to adopt, especially for the nuclear issue, the attention has to be focused on the safety of the population living near these military bases, and not only, in order to avoid disasters like Chernobyl and Fukushima.

²³⁶ That are based on the Chemical Weapons Convention.

²³⁷ OPCW, is formed by the same components of the CWC.

²³⁸ Ronzitti, *Dossier: le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, pp. 9-11.

4. LOCAL HISTORY AND IMPACT ON THE TERRITORY

4.1 Aviano

The city of Aviano and the nearby area of Pordenone were quite a calm location for a busy military base, especially when it started welcoming the first American troops after the end of World War II. This works out perfectly for the soldiers and the staff considering that many times these installations are specifically designed to be built in areas either in the middle of nowhere or in a not extremely populated location.

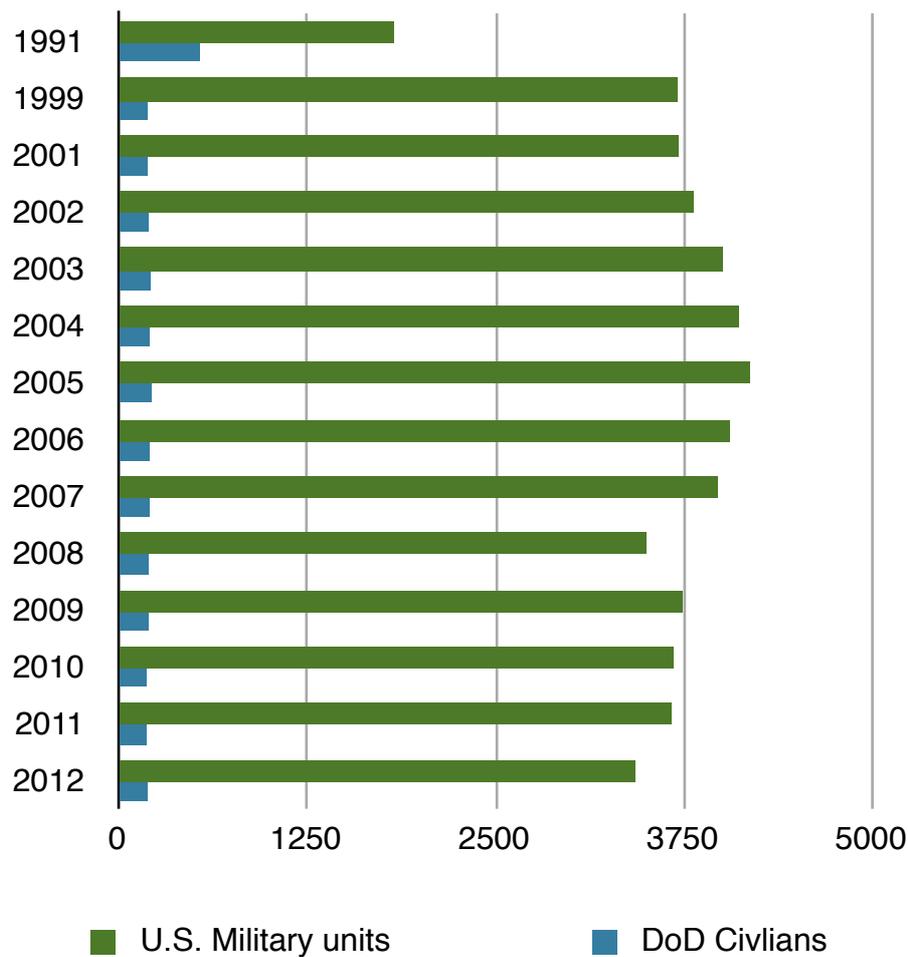
During the Cold War the real particularity and utility of this base was the extreme closeness to what Winston Churchill had defined the Iron Curtain, or border line with the Communist Block. The decision of taking over the large base of Aviano was calculated as a strategic move because of its imperceptible position that was considered as a perfect action plan for stealthy attack, to the Soviets satellite territories. The truth is that unless you had the correct address it would be highly difficult to find the base or spot it from a distance. Only recently there have been private shuttle buses that run from the Marco Polo Airport of Venice²³⁹, the most important one in the North East of Italy, directly to the Aviano Air Base.²⁴⁰

Through the years, the Aviano Air Base has always tried to keep a discrete attitude towards the surrounding area and is considered by locals as a low-profile site, for example compared bases in Vicenza. The presence of American troops has been reshaped during the years. As it was mentioned earlier, the Aviano Air Base, along with Caserma Ederle and Dal Molin from Vicenza, has gained more strategic importance in the military game after the end of the Soviet Union. The base itself has always been located in one of the most important positions for the U.S. and NATO interests. With the end of the Cold War, the danger in the 1990s target moved quickly to another zone, the Middle East and to the Balkans. After solving the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the red-hot bull's-eye returned, and is still in progress, predominantly to the Middle Eastern area. In the last two decades the North East of Italy has represented a fundamental starting point for the missions in the geopolitical World. Since then, there have been several many structural changes in the arrangement of soldiers serving in Aviano:

²³⁹ It operates daily flights to New York, Miami and Philadelphia (SAVE Venice Airport).

²⁴⁰ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

Figure 1: population inside the Aviano Air Base and Caserma Zappalà, Aviano (Italy)



Source: Base Structure Report

The diagram indicates that in the 1990s, the soldiers stationing in the base have increased by 103,3%, going from 1824 in 1991 to 3709 by the end of 1999. It is also interesting to notice the cut of Department of Defense civilians²⁴¹ by almost 180%. The base of Aviano has after this first initial reshaping gone through a stable trend of units in the 2000s. In February of 2012, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, announced that the Obama administration and the Pentagon intend to withdrawal 11,000 American soldiers from military sites in Italy and Germany by the end of 2017.²⁴² In the next five years the American armed forces in Europe, that are currently 81,000, are going to be

²⁴¹ Base Structure reports from 1992 until 1998 are not available.

²⁴² "Gli USA ritirano 11,000 soldati da Italia e Germania", *Blitz Quotidiano*, 17 February 2010.

trimmed to 30,000.²⁴³ At the same time the number of U.S. troops throughout the World is going to experience a downsizing from 565,000 to 490,000.²⁴⁴ According to the plan, the base of Aviano is expected to send back to the United States about 850 soldiers.²⁴⁵ Just one month before, in January 2012²⁴⁶, Philip Gordon²⁴⁷, Assistant of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, had denied rumors that the Aviano Air Base, along with the U.S. base in Naples, would be soon shut down, because of the planned cuts to the military spending.²⁴⁸ Gordon, in reality aimed at reinforcing the Transatlantic alliance and the strategic importance of these sites.²⁴⁹ It seems as if the war in Libya, that was taking place in that period, was the main reason why the U.S. did not want to give up these sites, which are located so close to the Middle East. Furthermore Gordon's statement set the stage to the above mentioned U.S. army downsize overseas.

Before these recent and widespread developments, back in the initial years of conversion of the base into a U.S. and NATO ownership, Aviano's popularity was low and mostly remained out of the spotlight, to minimize the use or construction of new infrastructures. There had never been an intricate street system around the location, flashy light system, bilingual street signs or anything that could be considered as ostentatious, such as the American style of doing things.²⁵⁰ It was rather preferred to maintain things conformed to the tranquil district of Pordenone. However the dimensions of the installation and the remodeling of the Zappalà area have been hugely modified with Aviano 2000, and inevitably the appearance of the military bases in town is not as secretive as it used to be in the past. For anybody seeking for a stereotypical hype American locality going to Aviano and in the surroundings, this might turn out to

²⁴³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁶ G. Maggi, "Governo USA: "Basi italiane: Aviano e Napoli restano", *La Stampa*, 9 January 2012.

²⁴⁷ Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs.

²⁴⁸ Maggi, "Governo USA: "Basi italiane: Aviano e Napoli restano", *La Stampa*.

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁰ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

be a major disappointment. Nevertheless the activities that take part inside the base are far from calm.

The traditional way to arrive to the Aviano Base is to catch a train and stop at the Pordenone main train station, where nearby you can spot a sign that says “NATO personnel only” and that gives directions on how to be formally welcomed and escorted to the site, although it is more common that a meeting is arranged before travelling from the United States to Italy.²⁵¹ This is valid for most part for soldiers or personnel that will be stationing inside Aviano. Before 9/11 it was possible to enter the base as a visitor through a connection inside the base, but after the New York attacks took place it has become increasingly more problematic to get a pass to enter the facility unless having a sponsor that would cover the daily access.²⁵² Since the road system surrounding Aviano and the close villages are small compared to other towns of the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, it is likely to get stuck into a mixed traffic jam of tractors and cars. The easiest way to distinguish an American vehicle from an Italian one is through the “AFI”²⁵³ driving license plates.²⁵⁴ The local Italian population doesn’t mind anymore for the increase of bottleneck situations that occur on the street and can be considered fairly integrated with the American community, which has to be considered as a crucial achievement for an Italian district. One of the primary complications for an American serving in Italy, along with the language, is the driving style divergence. If you’re lucky enough or passionate about cars you might run into one of typical yellow American school buses or the 1984 Tucker Sedans or other iconic stars and stripes cars. The natives of Aviano and in the surroundings, especially those who have seen the American relocation in the base, are not too informed about the exact circumstances that linked to the history of the base, like the first exact Italian handover of the military base to the Americans or the current operations taking place inside the site. The air base is a secondary topic of discussion among the residents, unless there are major missions

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁵² Based on my personal experience.

²⁵³ Armed Forces Insurance. It includes military and civilian automobiles.

²⁵⁴ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

reported from the media that are departing from Aviano. For the most part it continues to be a training zone in case of necessity.

The Aviano Air Base is comparable to a little city with almost 10,000 people living inside the military site, which include American and Italian troops, various types of squadrons, Department of Defense officials and families of the units.²⁵⁵ Colonel Brian Pukall²⁵⁶, the commander of the 31st Mission Support Group, is comparable to the Mayor of any town you would find in Italy. His job is to manage the life inside the base and the municipality he serves for is the Mission Support Group. Unlike Italy, where mayors are elected every 5 years, in this case the American version one of the Aviano military base is chosen every couple of years.²⁵⁷ In a way, the curious fact is that the city of Aviano, where 9.270²⁵⁸ people live, finds itself with two mayors, an official Italian one that works for the city council outside of the base and another stars and stripes one that governs inside the military site, which is almost the same size of the actual city of Aviano.²⁵⁹

Since the Aviano 2000 plan was initiated, the base has been progressively set independent with the introduction of chain stores, fast-food restaurants and other facilities²⁶⁰ that most of the times can't be found in Europe.²⁶¹ In other words, it's like living in the United States and this gives the people working inside the base a sense of being back home and this facilitates the transition in a new reality. Aviano 2000 has brought the United States to rely almost entirely on U.S. domestic sources for the installation, not contributing as much as it used to, to the integration with the local people that live in the vicinity of the base. However some U.S. families residing in Aviano decide to raise their children in Italian schools so that they can get the best of

²⁵⁵ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

²⁵⁶ Aviano Air Base, Colonel Brian D. Pukall, <http://www.aviano.af.mil/library/biographies/bio.asp?bioid=14354>, consultation date 20 August 2012.

²⁵⁷ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

²⁵⁸ City Council of Aviano, Dati Statistici e Geografici, <http://www.comune.aviano.pn.it/Demografia.9891.0.html>, consultation date 21 August 2012.

²⁵⁹ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

²⁶⁰ Such as gyms, baseball fields, pools, an Alpine Golf Course, hospitals, cinemas, club and chapels.

²⁶¹ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

both worlds, to take the most of the Italian culture, language and the free educational system.²⁶²

The territory around the Pordenone region is rather particular, since it's shaped in a rare ramification system that is typical only in certain parts of the valley²⁶³ that covers the Center and Eastern side of Northern Italy. This distinct landscape, filled with small communities, is completed with the massive presence of the Alps, that suddenly obstructs any type of view beyond that point. The decision by the American strategists to settle in a base with these features in the surrounding areas is not coincidental. Instead of relocating the troops and all the other affiliates to the air base in the inconvenient little towns outside of the military site, Aviano hosts all of the units inside its perimeter. We can speak of a legitimate city inside of a military base, equipped with the most technological establishments compared to any city of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia territory. There is also a directive within the Aviano Air Base that has established the maximum limit of American inhabitants in each Italian municipality in order to avoid an uncontrolled immigration phenomenon that could jeopardize the general local Italian communities.²⁶⁴ Another topic of discussion is the real estate situation in the whole town of Aviano, that is around 25% owned or run by Americans, creating a case of social coercion: between the Italian and American properties there are 65 food-related businesses and 13 hotels in a town inhabited by 9.250 people.²⁶⁵ This is unusual for a city of these proportions, considering that the other municipalities adjacent to Aviano, that averages nearly the same number of inhabitants, can count on the half of the enterprises that Aviano has. The curious fact is that the majority of the businesses in this military town are named after popular American sport celebrities and movie actors or just decorated with legendary licences plates proving once again how this city is somewhat harmoniously integrated to the native community and culture.²⁶⁶ Most of the times this is just an image detail, since the products served and the employers inside

²⁶² *Ibidem*.

²⁶³ Pianura Padana.

²⁶⁴ E. Furlanis, "Aviano, Oh-Ahio!", *Limes*, IV (1999), pp. 107-124.

²⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

these places are still Italian, except for some minor exceptions.²⁶⁷ The rest of the businesses in Aviano, mainly the bars, reflect the typical local style that you would easily find in the Friuli region or in the North East Italy. These American styled restaurants, that somewhat recall the idea of the breweries in the Southern part of the U.S., are still the most popular among the Italians living in the district, showing how the integration of these two cultures in Aviano is very advanced. Some shops run by Italians also incorporate large signs in English on the window display, almost as if their customers were more Americans than local.²⁶⁸ With or without signs in English the businesses outside this area were really healthy, until the Aviano 2000 project had begun. The curious fact is that paychecks inside the military camp are given on a weekly base, unlike for Italy, so it makes it easier for the soldiers to spend them.²⁶⁹

The housing situation has always been a delicate topic for the local Aviano population, being disputed among the small group of anti-Americans and all the other ones that are favorable to the base. The problem is that the value of real estate has become exorbitant and obtaining a permit from the municipality to build a new property is problematic.²⁷⁰ The few bids that have been made available by the Aviano city council have been largely won by American construction sites, that have a considerable interest in acquiring real estate in the region.²⁷¹ It is hard for the Italian businesses to compete with the American ones, especially when money is involved. Several projects²⁷² regarding the construction of 500 more affordable houses in the towns near Aviano have been completed since the end of the 1990s.²⁷³ The base itself has a limited capacity to host a certain number of units, while other unlucky units have to settle for a location outside the military site.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem.*

²⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

²⁷² *Ibidem.*

²⁷³ *Ibidem.*

Except for the financial aspect, the official American reports released by the base indicate a rather limited interrelation with the Italian community.²⁷⁴ It looks like the U.S. military divisions present in the base operate in their own independent path from the Italian troops and population living in the area. Regardless to the apparent bureaucratic lack of interest it is worth to outline that the connection between the American authorities and the local population of Aviano is strong compared to other military bases in Italy, like Camp Ederle and Dal Molin in Vicenza. If you ask an elderly local, walking in the streets or just resting on a public bench, what they think about the Americans that have lived in Aviano, they will most likely tell you that they are just different from Italians and that their way of showing interest to a different culture would be the same in another country hosting their military base.²⁷⁵ On top of that they will also tell you that the new generations are less friendly compared to the first troops that settled in the base.²⁷⁶

We have to consider the fact that the language barrier is a psychological barrier that is hard to overcome and can lead to being introverted. Also, for many young soldiers this represents their first visit outside of the U.S. borders, which can sporadically lead to a complicated approach to the integration with the natives. This is the reason why the base contains every type of commodity that you would find in the United States, to make sure that the newly arrived units feel comfortable, almost as if they were in their hometown. There are also some Americans that after serving in the Aviano Base decide to keep living in Italy, mostly for either business reasons or love affairs.

The city council of Aviano, in collaboration with the other municipalities in the area, tried in many ways to get closer to the Americans inside the base, by organizing sport and musical events that would incorporate U.S. thematics, but the results have been limited and in most cases the presence of Americans attending these meeting has been inadequate.²⁷⁷ There are no actual cultural associations that make arrangements for events that bring together the two communities, but the reality is that the military

²⁷⁴ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

²⁷⁵ Based on my personal interviews, Aviano, 17 July 2012.

²⁷⁶ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

²⁷⁷ From an interview with Enri Lisetto, journalist from *Il Messaggero Veneto*, in Pordenone, 4 July 2012.

divisions inside the air base largely arrange their own exclusive ones²⁷⁸, with a few exceptions like the popular Italian American Friendship Festival that takes place in September.²⁷⁹ The festival is typically held in the town of Maniago which is located approximately at 16 Km. from Aviano.²⁸⁰ The first edition was inaugurated in 2001, following the World Trade Center attacks, and since then it has been taking place every year in the main square of Piazza Italia.²⁸¹ The festival includes a series of gastronomical, sporting, musical and other memorial proceedings, mostly related to 9/11, between the units working inside the base, the local Italian populations and the Fire Department of Pordenone.²⁸²

Rather than the cultural aspects, the Americans choose to give prominence to the religious side. In fact, there are several places of worship inside and outside the base that preach in English, where the units from Aviano along with any other international guest can go to confess.²⁸³ Usually each religious site is either run by former soldiers or by religious missionaries, and they include hundreds of members and to participate in these rituals, the soldiers or the DoD civilians must pay a monthly fee.²⁸⁴ There is no actual reason behind the decision of creating these places of worship in the exterior of the military site, anyhow these places function under complete discretion. Apart from the internal Aviano Air Base Chapel, the most popular ones located outside of the base and in nearby towns, are the Aviano Baptist Church, the Calvary Baptist Church and the Aviano Center²⁸⁵, that officially collaborates with the Military Chaplains Association of the United States.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁸ Most of the occurrences are nowadays published on the event section of the “Aviano Air Base” Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/avianoairbase?fref=ts>.

²⁷⁹ J. Weaver, “Italian, American Friendship Festival set for Sept. 10 in Maniago”, *Aviano Air Base*, 25 August 2011.

²⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁸² *Ibidem*.

²⁸³ Aviano Center, <http://www.avianocenter.com/page17.php>, consultation date 5 September 2012.

²⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁵ Established in Aviano in 1991.

²⁸⁶ Aviano Center.

The beginning of the 1990s have represented the spark to a series of plans that aimed at enlarging the size of the airfield, which meant making use of additional lands in the area. With the doubled number of units present in the base in 1993, the chosen project that would create a sense of local tension towards the American policy, was Aviano 2000, especially because the surrounding territories, in the first place, did not receive money or real incentives.²⁸⁷ Along with NATO and the U.S.A., the plan was funded by Italy as well. The remodeling, that the base underwent with Aviano 2000, has been massive and it has had a huge impact on the countryside terrains, in an area right next to the municipal road that connects Aviano to Pordenone. This appears contradictory compared to the preliminary idea of the U.S.'s strategy of keeping a military base in a hidden spot. The area expansion had profound repercussions mostly for the municipalities in the Pordenone area, where the public services like the telephone network, the garbage collection and the road systems have been enormously affected.²⁸⁸ For example the National Cancer Institute²⁸⁹ of Aviano, was not able to connect to the public drainage system because it was wholly engaged by the new super-base. After receiving no clarifications on the subject from the base authorities, a large group of the city councils teamed up, along with labor unions specialized on military affairs in Italy, to deny the local agreements that would enable the progress of the project and on top of that organized a demonstration to occupy several building sites.²⁹⁰ The protest shook the Italian Government²⁹¹ to directly intervene at the origin of the problem by providing the municipalities a sum close to 12 million euro²⁹², that would improve the entire public system in the area.²⁹³ This was a big achievement for the local institutions, although the

²⁸⁷ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, pp. 19-46.

²⁸⁸ T. Tissino, *Aviano USA*, *FVG Peacelink*, <http://www.fvg.peacelink.it/aviano2000/aviano-usa.html>.

²⁸⁹ One of the most important laboratories for research on cancer in Italy, which was founded in 1981 and began its activities in the mid-1980s in Aviano.

²⁹⁰ T. Tissino, *Aviano USA*, *FVG Peacelink*.

²⁹¹ Through the Minister of Defense Beniamino Andreatta (Aviano, Ohio).

²⁹² 24 billion Italian lira at the time (Aviano, Ohio).

²⁹³ T. Tissino, *Aviano USA*, *FVG Peacelink*.

sum was in all probability not enough to cover the expenses of a reformed public network. This episode created some frictions between the U.S. and Italy.

Because of Aviano 2000, also the quantity of local trash rose in an exponential way, especially compared to the average of the municipalities in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, which means that local citizens in Aviano were obliged to pay more taxes on the garbage collection, mostly because of the intense activities inside the base.²⁹⁴

The other issue that keeps provoking tension is the incessant noise that is produced by the planes departing and landing from the airstrip. For many locals living in the vicinity of the base, the blazing sound of the military aircrafts flying in the airs of Aviano has become something so ordinary.²⁹⁵ Dozens of flights are operated every day and when there is a serious mission in progress there numbers abruptly increase.²⁹⁶ Many elder local people have been trying to assert themselves, without any remarkable results. Iolanda Vicenzini, an 82-year-old lady from Pordenone once tried to call the police wondering if there was any solution possible stop flights leaving after 9 PM, because she could not get back to sleep anymore, but the answer she got was negative.²⁹⁷ The police is not able in this case to modify the regulations concerning the air traffic of an air base with these characteristics.²⁹⁸ The old lady's plea was considered touching by the media and many fellow citizens have displayed their solidarity.²⁹⁹ Not only the noise pollution but also the air pollution generated by these jets is considered a major problem by many local and Italian citizens, who are becoming progressively worried for the environment. Many people living in the military surroundings, to bypass the problem, opt for a simple pair of ear plugs.³⁰⁰

Besides from these minor episodes of edginess, the local's opinion on the American presence in Friuli is overall positive. By interviewing people in Pordenone and in the

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁷ "Jet USA rumorosi, anziana protesta", *Il Messaggero Veneto*, 30 May 2011.

²⁹⁸ *Ibidem.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibidem.*

city of Aviano, the majority thinks that the base represents a reason to be proudful.³⁰¹ When the Americans started moving inside the air base, the reaction was extremely enthusiastic. The best indicator came since the beginning of the 1960s, when from certain regional radio stations a regular broadcast in English from the United States was being transmitted in the North East of Italy.³⁰² This new reality was deeply appreciated by the Italian population, that this way started having a further direct perception of the American supremacy in the World and could practice their English language skills.³⁰³ This specific radio station³⁰⁴ was initially intended to broadcasted in both the bases of Aviano and Vicenza, and not really for a public use. So anyone outside of the base that was technologically capable of intercepting the channel or just had one of the most modern radio devices, in all likelihood produced in the U.S., was considered lucky. Since the first arrivals of Americans in Aviano, the influence on the way Italians lifestyle has been massive. Learning a new language was considered by the locals as an innovative incorporation to an exceptionally traditional territory, but what really affected the population was the unmistakable American style. The whole stars and stripes fashion, becoming trendy with the first Hollywood movies, was now detected as a more intimate factor in the local's day-to-day life.³⁰⁵ The hairdos, the music, Levi's jeans, aviator jackets and sunglasses and the combat boots are just a few of those items that became in vogue and that inspired several young generations, starting from Friuli-Venezia Giulia to then expand in other regions, mostly in Northern Italy. The U.S. and NATO's impact in this territory has been impressive, especially if we think of the impoverished conditions Italy was going through when America took over Aviano. The living conditions have improved drastically since the Americans have set foot in Italy and this has given the opportunity to the ones who have gone through a difficult period of reconstruction to realize how vital the American presence has been, regardless from some arguable decisions in the recent years that have been made.

³⁰¹ Based on personal interviews in Pordenone and Aviano, 17-18 July 2012.

³⁰² Furlanis, "Aviano, Oh-Ahio!", *Limes*, pp. 107-124.

³⁰³ *Ibidem*.

³⁰⁴ *Radio Vicenza*

³⁰⁵ Furlanis, "Aviano, Oh-Ahio!", *Limes*, pp. 107-124.

The general idea of people living in Aviano or in the area of Pordenone is of an American community that has integrated itself quite well into a different reality like Italy.³⁰⁶ Every region in Italy that hosts an American or NATO military base has a whole different story in terms of local population and mentality towards sharing their territory with another culture and peculiar situation. Despite the project of Aviano 2000, the decision to keep supporting missions against terrorism and wars in the Middle East, the Cermis tragedy and some other minor negative affairs, the base in Aviano remains one of the few authentic examples in Italy of integration between locals and military guests. Sure, there have been protests, but most of the residents still consider the base to be a part of their indelible past that has given them a great deal of influence and support to become who they are. Unlike other communities in Italy dealing with a similar situation, people in Aviano have decided to underline their special relationship with the different generation of Americans that have lived in their land. Even if the expansion of the base has certainly brought even more secrecy to NATO and U.S. operations, the locals rather than finding intolerable the presence of foreign military basements in their territory, prefer to be disinterested and embrace a neutral standpoint. This how we will see further on, is divergent compared to the situation between locals in Vicenza and Caserma Ederle.

³⁰⁶ Based on personal interviews with locals in the city of Aviano and in Pordenone, 17-18 July 2012.

4.2 Vicenza

The population of Vicenza has gone through a bittersweet relationship with the American troops living in the Caserma Ederle. We have to go back to 1943 when still during World War II the allied troops, run by the Americans, were attacking several Italian towns³⁰⁷, and Vicenza was one of these. The town had gone through a series of devastating air strikes that killed hundreds of people, wounded other thousand and provoked destruction to the majority of the urban area, including schools, hospitals churches and theaters.³⁰⁸ This was certainly not the best first impression for the Americans who were ready to dive into a new reality, and interact with a different type of community compared to the one of Aviano. In fact many people still associated with the Fascist party and anti-allied forces, as soon as the Americans started moving into the military site in the mid-1950s in Vicenza, began to cover the whole city with graffiti that included deriding messages towards the United States of America's theory of liberation.³⁰⁹ However this was only a minority of the inhabitants, while most of the people that lived in Vicenza considered the arrival of the Americans, in many ways, as a great occurrence for their entire territory, almost like a miracle. There are some Italian movies that prove the joyful feeling of locals greeting the American troops. The films gives us an idea of a euphoric crowd that discerns the foreign soldiers as the saviors of Italy.³¹⁰

Those living in Italy before 1945, who were against Mussolini and Hitler had little possibilities of changing their destiny and living a better life. This is the main reason why the U.S.'s and NATO's successful efforts in terminating the war, were seen as a promising reality for a steady recovery of Italy and in this case Vicenza. This feeling of appreciation for the North Atlantic Treaty and the United States continued for at least a couple of decades, until the mid-1970s, primarily from members of the Italian Christian

³⁰⁷ Still governed by Mussolini's Fascist regime.

³⁰⁸ G. Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza (1945-1965), Storia di una convivenza fredda*, tesi di laurea, Università degli studi di Venezia - Ca' Foscari, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Corso di laurea in storia, a. a. 2006-07, rel. A. Castellato, p. 5.

³⁰⁹ *Ivi*, p. 6.

³¹⁰ Combat film RW265, *Gli alleati a Vicenza 111 ADC 4254* and *Gli alleati a Vicenza 111 ADC 4158*, Luce Archive, 28 April 1945.

Democratic Party and part of those³¹¹ who were committed during World War II to defeat any sort of Fascist or Nazi movement in Italy.³¹²

Before choosing Vicenza as the designated military site after the end of World War II, there were several other options, located in the region of Veneto, that the Italian and American Government were discussing about, like Treviso and Bassano del Grappa.³¹³ Eventually Vicenza was picked³¹⁴ by Paolo Taviani, the Italian Minister of Defense³¹⁵ for various strategic reasons.³¹⁶ First of all, Vicenza was historically considered at the time as a highly conservative city and this certainly helped the Governments to reach a compromise. Many believed that the town's relation with the Christian Democratic Party, lead by the politician Alcide De Gasperi³¹⁷, would have contributed to an easier integration of the American soldiers in the area. In the first post-World War II phase the local population, which was seen as the main possible obstacle concerning the arrival of U.S. troops in Caserma Ederle, reacted pleasantly to the presence of their new fellow inhabitants. Furthermore, the social integration in the military field of America and NATO into a devastated part of Italy suggested rapid and beneficial repercussions from the political and financial points of view. The end of the war represented a milestone for the majority of the people living Vicenza, that could now count on the best ally in the business and could finally start safely planning their future, which was something impossible during the Fascist regime. Along with the first funds flowing in Italy through the Marshall Plan, since the beginning of 1950, other capitals were destined to aid the conditions of Vicenza thanks to the establishment of Camp Ederle.³¹⁸ The military assistance in Italy substantially helped improving the low salaries in 1950 and 1951, and

³¹¹ I Partigiani.

³¹² Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 6-7.

³¹³ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁴ L. Nuti, *US Forces in Italy, 1955-1963*, in Wolfgang Krieger, "US Forces in Europe: The Early Years", Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1994, pp. 251-272.

³¹⁵ In charge from 1953 until 1958.

³¹⁶ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 9.

³¹⁷ Covered many positions like: Italian Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the European Coal and Steel Community.

³¹⁸ R. Raftopoulos, *Italian Economic Reconstruction and the Marshall Plan*, Justus-Liebig Universitat Giessen, p. 17.

Vicenza's military base was conceived as the primary source to economically recover back to a normal state of welfare.³¹⁹

In September of 1955, around 50 U.S. Army units belonging to SETAF officially stepped inside Caserma Ederle to ensure that the Umbrella Agreement was operative.³²⁰ On September 29, the other large portion of soldiers that was expected to arrive from Austria in a second stage, finally made its way through to Vicenza. This day was considered³²¹ as a decisive day for the community, where the Italian people gathered by the military site manifested their curiosity and affection for the newcomers, while many of those who were not present at the welcoming of the troops were still wondering and hesitant if this whole plan was going to be rewarding for the population or not. The public display of care from the American side came from SETAF's Colonel Willard W. Hawke³²² who expressed his pleasure for being responsible of his division in Vicenza and was extremely pleased to be able to deal with the local hospitality and was committed to establish as soon as possible a connection between the military units and the Italian residents.³²³ Similar observations were coming from the mayor of Vicenza³²⁴ in those days, who assured the population and members of SETAF that Caserma Ederle would become a symbol of friendship and cooperation that would connect the U.S.A. and Italy.³²⁵ The mayor gave some advises on how to quickly adapt to the Italian lifestyle and encouraged the troops to shop only in stores that visibly displayed prices on items.³²⁶ Many Italian businesses in the area surrounding Camp Ederle were trying to take advantage of the Americans by defrauding them many items.

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

³²⁰ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 10.

³²¹ "L'autocolonna col primo scaglione del SETAF è giunta ieri alla caserma in viale della pace", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 30 September 1955.

³²² Started stationing in Vicenza since 1955, and managed an army of 2,500 American troops. His mandate is related to the remarkable growth of the American community in Vicenza, (http://www.italyinstyle.it/PrenNew/mod_descprodotto.asp?prod_id=333).

³²³ A. Di Lorenzo, *The American Heart of Vicenza*, Vicenza, Ergon, 2004.

³²⁴ Giuseppe Zampieri (1948-1976).

³²⁵ "La batteria di lanciarazzi Honest John sarà installata su un'altura di Campedello", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 12 October 1955.

³²⁶ *Ibidem*.

The reason why the American troops were coming along in different stages was mostly because the expert consultants of the base did not consider the recently established Caserma Ederle ready to host a massive amount of units all at once, but the idea was to gradually incorporate them in a longer-range time span. The base, in the beginning of the 1950s had just undergone massive changes and was partially redesigned to fit to the American and NATO standards.³²⁷ Caserma Ederle was still believed to be located in the outskirts of Vicenza, but this conception has gradually changed. This gave time to organize and plan out the logistic conditions concerning the installation. Many U.S. soldier's families were initially discouraged to move as well to Italy, predominantly because the local population in Vicenza was urgently looking for new housing and therefore there was a common sense decision to make sure that the first arrivals of the U.S. troopers in the region would not interfere with the convalescent situation that was affecting many towns in the North East of Italy. The decision of allowing foreign soldiers to station in Italy, hence in Vicenza and Aviano, was part of the post-World War II North Atlantic Treaty, and this minimized any sort of serious critics. An obstacle to the NATO's plan and their subsequent arrangements in Italy was represented by the PCI³²⁸, which was against the idea of a joint-State organization, because it was rumored that it would have profited on the wrecked social and urban circumstances that had affected Italy.³²⁹ In this specific case, Vicenza was an unpopular town for this political party, especially compared to other cities in the Italian peninsula, and as a result the preoccupations for possible protests were minimal. The Italian adhesion to NATO was the only possible solution after many years of tension.

The establishment of SETAF's military division in Vicenza did not alter the local's public opinion. For those who were skeptical about this innovation, the American presence did not represent at issue, and to tell the truth a great deal of them began getting familiar with their new neighbors. The inaugural ceremony, that was held on October 25 of 1955, actively involved the residents of Vicenza, and consisted in a public greeting to the district and a series of events that were set in different areas

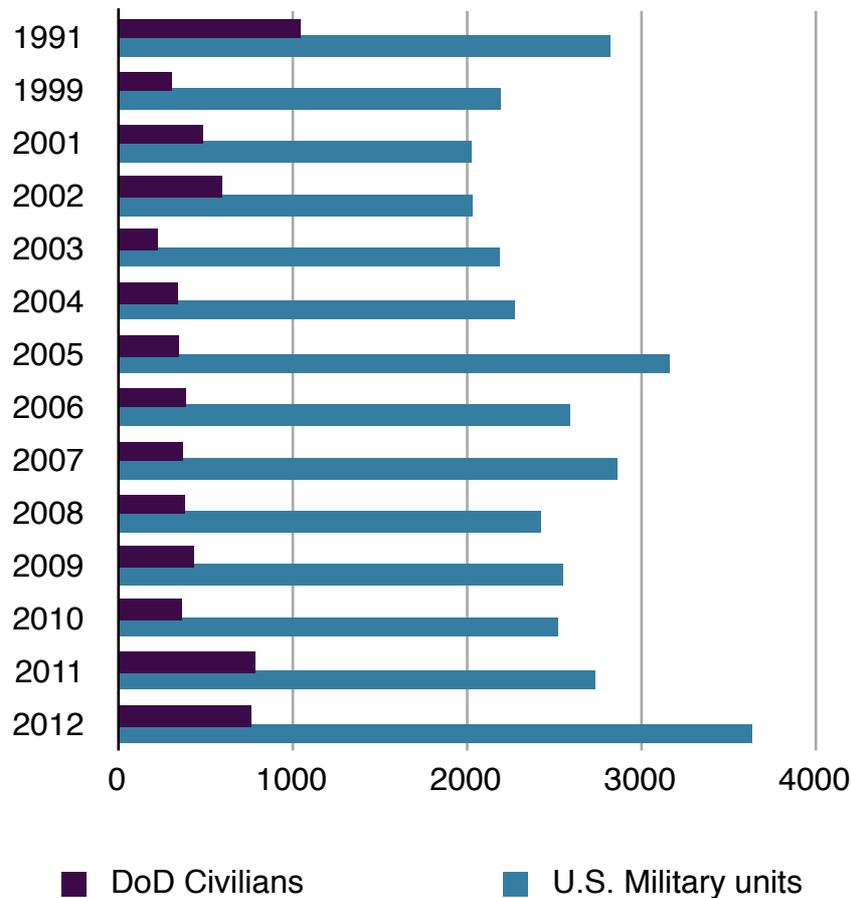
³²⁷ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 12.

³²⁸ Italian Communist Party.

³²⁹ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 12.

around town.³³⁰ The general spirit was festive and proved a preliminary positive but yet premature impact of the Americans in Vicenza.³³¹ Since the first arrivals of these troops from overseas, many events have occurred bringing a change to the relationship between the U.S. Army and the local population. Tension these days is extremely strong, mostly because of the remodeling of an additional military base in Vicenza that will additionally inflate the number of soldiers in town. This graphic helps us understand to a greater extent the amount of troopers in town:

Figure 2: population inside Caserma Ederle and Dal Molin Airfield, Vicenza (Italy)



Source: Base Structure Report

The charts indicates a massive number of DoD units working in Vicenza in the beginning of the 1990s, that was downsized in the following years. In 2005 we can

³³⁰ "Con una solenne cerimonia alla "Ederle" ufficialmente costituito il SETAF", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 26 October 1955.

³³¹ *Ibidem*.

notice a peak of soldiers stationing in Caserma Ederle and in the provisional Dal Molin airfield. With the close completion of the renewal project of the Dal Molin base, 2012 has registered the highest peak of soldiers in Vicenza, with a 32,9% increase compared to 2011.

Italian and U.S. authorities in connection to the base, launched several initiatives, mostly concerning issues derived from communication to field trips with the local inhabitants, to soothe the integration of the American Army in a new tough reality.³³² An information office that deals with public affairs is situated in the base, whose task has always been to arrange various sort of events.³³³ In the first years of SETAF serving in Caserma Ederle, the office mostly aimed at educating its fighters to the Italian cultural factor, also by organizing expeditions in various areas in the North of Italy.³³⁴ Getting to know the cities, the natural resources and the history that confined the military base were considered as a priority by the U.S. officials. These days the public office is more concentrated on other issues, like managing news updates coming from the national and international media and justifying any position that the divisions undertake inside and outside of the base, although they cultural activities connected to the Italian community are still relevant but less frequent. Back in the day, for example, the commanders of the division decided to involve their troops in visits with the nearby orphanages to encourage creating a first degree of friendship between the Americans and the Italians.³³⁵ The soldiers were either starting basic conversations or donating items. These sort of occurrences were already standard back in the United States and this refined the process of acculturation and fellowship.³³⁶

Another important initiative was an unofficial practical guide, that included as well an Italian phrasal book, was handed out to the units in order for them to get familiar with the typical expressions that could be heard walking around the city.³³⁷ The language

³³² Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 13.

³³³ *Ibidem*.

³³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³³⁷ *Ivi*, p.14.

barrier was considered as one of the biggest impediments for the soldiers arriving in Italy. The level of English language spoken in Vicenza, and in Italy, was poor compared to nowadays, which certainly did not help the U.S. troops. The guide that was distributed to all the units, mostly in the North East of Italy military installations, and for some strange reason it did not even refer to Vicenza at any point in the text.³³⁸ After a few years of familiarization with the county's territory, SETAF started arranging annual festivities that included the participation of the locals and largely the main authorities of Vicenza which year after year conferred an increasing amount of prestige to these events.³³⁹

Since the beginning of the 1960s the initiatives of collaboration between SETAF and the Italian administration increased, mostly with basic concessions of U.S. troops and aircrafts to give assistance to some difficult situations that would develop in the villages near Vicenza. One of the most significant episodes of cooperation occurred in October of 1963, when part of the Vajont dam³⁴⁰ overspilled creating a huge mixed wave of water and debris that killed almost 2,000 people and destroyed many small towns, in particular the towns of Longarone, Casso and Erto creating a red alert situation in the whole area.³⁴¹ This infamous episode for Italy represented, on the bright side, for the American military divisions in the North East of Italy a decisive possibility to demonstrate their devotion to their hosting country. In fact most of the units from Aviano and from Vicenza were involved in a series of rescue missions to aid the Italian Army, the firefighters and other volunteer groups. In particular SETAF launched several missions involving jets and rescue helicopters, taking advantage of the impressive technological repertoire that was available at Caserma Ederle.³⁴² The U.S. mission included the deployment of soldiers, food and other emergency devices. SETAF's Army effort was massive and was recognized with the grant of an honorary citizenship by the

³³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³³⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁰ Which is located at only 15 Km. from the Aviano Air Base and 161 Km. from the city center of Vicenza.

³⁴¹ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 15.

³⁴² *Ibidem*.

communities that were implicated in the tragedy.³⁴³ The American intervention was crucial and gave the proper motivations to leave behind the catastrophe and focus on a promising future.³⁴⁴

On the other side also the local population showed its respect to the American cause, when U.S. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was killed in 1963. In this case the city council of Vicenza printed and displayed posters all around the city along with other demonstrations³⁴⁵, to pay tribute to the loss of the beloved President in Italy and mostly in the U.S. and in the American community in Vicenza. The death of JFK, like a bolt from the blue, marked a change in policy of the SETAF division in Vicenza, in connection with the Italian community. The terrible episode had strong repercussions on the U.S. Army that made the Caserma Ederle act mistrustful towards any relation outside of the base.³⁴⁶ The activities inside the military site became progressively more autonomous from the Italian ones, especially concerning businesses. Caserma Ederle could now count on facilities like schools, hospitals, shops that reduced episodes of integration between the American and Italian community. The aftermath episode of JFK's death, in a way, has many similarities to what happened in the wake of 9/11, especially for the U.S.'s isolationist tendency to handle relations from the allies and the hosting countries in its overseas bases. The U.S. divisions in the base went through a phase of "americanization" inside the base and self-sufficiency, way earlier compared to the one that matured in Aviano.³⁴⁷ The mid-1960s represented the first moments of growing tensions with the locals.³⁴⁸ Nevertheless it was unthinkable that such a powerful country like the United States could entirely rely on an impoverished and newly established Republic of Italy, mostly because they already were auto-sufficient. That is also why not many Italians were focusing too much on the relationships that

³⁴³ *Ibidem.*

³⁴⁴ "Vajont, cittadinanza onoraria alla SETAF Army", *Il Corriere delle Alpi*, 8 October 2011.

³⁴⁵ "Varie manifestazione nella ricorrenza del decimo anniversario della SETAF", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 22 October 1965.

³⁴⁶ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 16.

³⁴⁷ "Relazioni umane: un punto di incontro tra Vicenza e USA", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 23 October 1965.

³⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*

could develop with the Americans, but yet it is a key factor that can definitely affect the functioning of a foreign military base in a hosting country.

The newcomers arriving in Vicenza were supplied with a little introductory guide in English, written by the base's information office, that would explain how Caserma Ederle was structured and all the other essential facts.³⁴⁹ Over the years the base has undergone several logistic and governance changes, so this guide has always been updated depending on the modifications. Nowadays it is much easier for an American soldier to retrieve all the useful information he might need prior to his departure to Italy, by simply just visiting the official website of the military site³⁵⁰. Back in the day the guide was not as detailed as it is currently but yet it provided all the indispensable points that a newcomer should be aware of.

The main facts underlined in the guide are related to the several facilities like clubs, bars, movie theaters, baseball fields and restaurants that were located inside Caserma Ederle, along with the events that were organized by SETAF within the installation.³⁵¹ One of the most popular places in Camp Ederle has always been the megastore that sold every sort of good, ranging from snacks to clothing, that an American would want and could not find in an Italian boutique.³⁵² In some occasions it was possible for Italians to access the base and buy rare products for their domestic market, although recently this practice has been unattainable, due to the current restrictions³⁵³ on welcoming guests.³⁵⁴ Probably the most significant aspect to be notified about, was the legal status of a foreign soldier stationing in another country. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, in Italy, like in all the other NATO Allied member States, a trooper is subject to the domestic regulations³⁵⁵. The agreement technically allows the possibility to defend oneself from a legal action in front of an American judge, although the priority is that in

³⁴⁹ *Vicenza's Military Post*, 1961.

³⁵⁰ <http://www.usag.vicenza.army.mil/sites/local/newcomers.asp>.

³⁵¹ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 17.

³⁵² *Ivi*, pp. 19-20.

³⁵³ Also in the Aviano Air Base.

³⁵⁴ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 19-20.

³⁵⁵ As established by the NATO SOFA Agreement of 1951.

the event of a felony the offender must stand a trial in an Italian court. The reality is that the past and the present have taught us in several occasions that the juridical system in Italy has showed its distinguished weaknesses and has had several problems managing or solving situations involving American troops, as confirmed with the case that took into account the U.S. pilots incriminated in the Cermis episode. The guide also warned the soldiers to handle carefully any sort of transaction associated with Italian dealers, particularly regarding settlements that imply contraction of debts or paying for something in installments, mostly because this practice was not as common in America as it was Italy, beginning from post World War II years, and maybe because the general idea was that the U.S.A. considered some Italian entrepreneurs as swindlers.³⁵⁶ Many troops before moving inside the base were previously stationed in the other minor or NATO or U.S. affiliated military sites in the North East of Italy, so the guide this way represented a helpful tool in terms of orientation and integration inside a new reality. The whole plan of converging the predominance of the financial circuit in the core of Caserma Ederle, in a way, had automatically jeopardized potential deals and partnerships involving the local businesses. By promoting its national products, SETAF's indirect message to the units was to stimulate the purchase of the base's goods. Only a small share of Italian products were dealt with the local companies in the vicinity of the site, mostly either food or dressmaking related.³⁵⁷ This was perceived in the town of Vicenza as an obvious negative sign and worsened the already shaky relationship between the base and the locals. Compared to Aviano, where at least the divisions were more keen on dealing with the businesses surrounding the base until the creation of Aviano 2000, Caserma Ederle has almost entirely focused from the start on a different policy that has privileged other economic factors rather the social ones and this will be one of the elements.

The real problems with the local population of Vicenza started occurring a few years following the concession of the military site to SETAF, roughly in the 1960s, when the troops stationed in Caserma Ederle began getting involved in a series of negative events

³⁵⁶ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 17.

³⁵⁷ *Ivi*, p. 20.

for the American Army's reputation in the Italian peninsula.³⁵⁸ The most popular cases were associated to alcohol abuse, car accidents, involvement with prostitution scandals and different type of brawls, that were being reported on Italian newspapers on a regional and national scale.³⁵⁹ It seemed as if the early glorious soldiers, that had come to rescue Italy during the war, had vanished and were replaced by a reckless generation of newcomers from the U.S. who had lost the perception and the essence of the whole mission in Europe. It's hard to say if the whole fault should be blamed on the recruitment of armed forces personnel from low-class areas suburbs of the United States and therefore with a closed mentality compared to the ones living on the coasts of America, or the inhabitants of Vicenza were not as patient compared to the communities residing in Aviano. The reality is that there was not a big difference from the units stationing in Caserma Ederle, Aviano, Italy or in the rest of the NATO allied States. What plays a big role in these situations are different factors, in the main related to the hosting city's tradition, either cultural, political or religious. Of course we should not forget to highlight the sometimes immature conduct of some young American troops, trying to kill the time from a training session to another.

The issues related to excessive drinking were considered by the locals as the most frequent among the troopers outside of the base. Several people from Vicenza began to complain, usually through the local and regional newspapers, like *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, reporting and condemning episodes of vandalism that sometimes affected monuments and political centers³⁶⁰ and disorders throughout the city.³⁶¹ In particular an unknown letter for "Mister Joe"³⁶² of 1957, written in Italian, reveals the point of view of a local citizen who denounces the disrespectful behavior of some Americans through his city, often getting into fights with Italian either for political reason or simply just for

³⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 23.

³⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁰ Affiliated with Socialist or leftist parties.

³⁶¹ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 23-25.

³⁶² By Joe, the author of the letter, seems to be addressing his message to a non specified soldier wandering around town, almost as if he was the ideal representation of the stereotypical American stationed in Camp Ederle.

the sake of it.³⁶³ He blames most of the actions of the units on the heavy drinking, something that apparently from his words was very common among the soldiers.³⁶⁴ What is denounced is the disrespect for the Italian tradition and the low devotion to a country that is hosting them and giving the young soldiers a possibility to live an incredible experience overseas. Also, some other older people that had experienced living in those years have confirmed around Camp Ederle, have confirmed these delinquent episodes.³⁶⁵ In the nights outside Caserma Ederle, the soldiers were used to going with prostitutes, and many times at the end of the sexual intercourse the Americans would get into fights or discussions, mainly because they didn't want to pay for the service.³⁶⁶ Sometimes these episodes would also end up in court.³⁶⁷

Car accidents involving American military units, were another issue at stake during those years. The notorious Vicenza military post guide had previously warned the newcomers that driving in Europe and especially in Italy could have represented for some of them a new tough experience, concerning narrower local streets, no massive highways like in the US and high density of bikers and pedestrians.³⁶⁸ If these incidents are still common nowadays due to the high number of soldiers in the base and of drivers in the streets, back in the day they were even more frequent. Even in this case the excessive consume of alcohol was a major factor in these negative episodes.³⁶⁹ Other causes were related to the lack of technology in the vehicles and on the street system, the different style of driving compared to the United States. In 1955 SETAF's Sergeant Kenneth Nobbs was involved in a car accident that killed an Italian farmer.³⁷⁰ What was later discovered was that the Sergeant was driving under the influence, and was arrested inside Caserma Ederle. Nobbs was judged by an Italian criminal court and has was

³⁶³ "Letterina a Mister Joe", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 February 1957.

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁵ Based on personal interviews, Vicenza 23 July 2012.

³⁶⁶ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 29-31.

³⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 26-29.

³⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁰ "Pittsburgh GI held in fatal accident", *Huntingdon Daily News*, 10 November 1955, p. 5.

charged with manslaughter.³⁷¹ It was typical in the first years of the U.S. Army service in Vicenza that if soldiers were engaged in car accidents were used to hit-and-run in order to avoid juridical consequences. In case of an accident, the American troops were subject to different types of sanctions depending on a series of factors.³⁷² For example if the soldier was driving with a standard American drivers license, then the authorities would proceed with the same path that would be adopted with an Italian driver. The real issues would arise if in a crash the driver with a U.S. military passport driving a vehicle, property of the army, in this case the request to trial them had to be forwarded to SETAF's commanders that would then apply the regulations made between the U.S. and Italy.³⁷³ To stop this deadly phenomenon, SETAF decided to set up driving instructive classes mainly focusing on the Italian road structure and hired a panel to make researches and investigate on the way Americans were driving in the roads in the area of Vicenza and Veneto.³⁷⁴ The program was mostly directed to the U.S. citizens, but also in part to the Italian ones to sort of create a mutual understanding of rules to be respected on the streets. Also the local police officers³⁷⁵ printed and distributed a handbook giving tips for the soldiers of Caserma Ederle, on how to prevent other cases of car accidents.³⁷⁶ The police also dedicated some days to a responsible and healthy style of driving, willing to persuade drivers to be safer while at driving.³⁷⁷ The process of integrating the newcomers on the road took a long period of time to be considered operational, but it was certainly one of those issues that the population cared about. A part from the social factor, which was not the best, at least the financial impact in the first years of the arrival of SETAF in Vicenza was positive. The fact of choosing a city full of history like Vicenza among other possible destinations, was certainly related to valuable logistic matters, to a better transportation and road system, but at the core the

³⁷¹ "Il sergente americano Kenneth E. Nobbs colpevole di omicidio colposo pluriaggravato", // *Giornale di Vicenza*, 18 March 1956.

³⁷² Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 26-29.

³⁷³ *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁵ Polizia Municipale.

³⁷⁶ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 26-29.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

choice was strictly connected to economic reasons mostly for the proximity of the town to newborn local industries and businesses. Before Caserma Ederle became virtually auto-sufficient, the U.S. Department of Defense strategists saw Vicenza as the ideal place to place one of their army division as a solution to improve profits.³⁷⁸

The fear of Communism, the creation of NATO and the introduction of the Marshall Plan all became a synonym for the spread and likeliness in other States of favoring the American economy, the most powerful in the world. The image overseas of the United States after World War II and with the beginning of the Cold War was perceived as the wealthiest and most productive. The Italian Government's investment in a city like Vicenza, with the prestigious partnership of NATO and the U.S.A., was considered the most advantageous scenario especially looking at the potential creation of opportunities on every scale, especially with new jobs available. The people from Vicenza were not only welcoming the same ones who had saved Italy from Fascism and Nazism at the end of the war but also were welcoming a great economy. Housing was the most affected sector in the surroundings of Caserma Ederle by the American impact.³⁷⁹ Although in most cases the soldiers would only be renting these houses, not for financial problems but mostly for timing reasons since their deployment was based on short-term stays. Buying a property was not considered a convenient option and what is interesting to notice is that this matter had also affected the people of Vicenza. The war had impoverished the majority of the Italian families, leaving these to settle for rent as well. With the increasing number of units coming from the States after 1955, it seemed as if the Americans were exercising their own real estate monopoly. Houses were given away on a temporary basis, creating a continuous phenomenon of reoccupation of the same houses involving the future newcomers.³⁸⁰ The Italian landlords preferred to sublease their property to Americans rather than to locals, because this way they were able to receive a stable income from the soldiers depending on the term that had to be served and mostly they could increase the monthly rent tariffs.³⁸¹ This last case was

³⁷⁸ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 42.

³⁷⁹ *Ivi*, p. 32.

³⁸⁰ *Ivi*, p. 33.

³⁸¹ *Ivi*, p. 34.

frequent especially when new soldiers would in town to replace the previous ones and were not aware of the current price for housing. In the first years of SETAF in Vicenza there were many landlords that tried to take advantage of the Americans moving into town, known to be very wealthy in those years, by charging them a substantially higher rent compared to the local average ones.³⁸² For this reason, an agency inside Caserma Ederle was established to monitor fraudulent activities to protect the incomers.

The establishment of Villaggio della Pace certainly isolated many of those Americans stationing in Vicenza from the local population, but it also sparked a match for the raise of average rents in town and in all the other communities nearby.³⁸³ The U.S. Government sponsored³⁸⁴ the construction of a series of houses just outside Vicenza, in an area distant 1,6 Km. from Camp Ederle, reserved to American soldiers, Department of Defense units and their families stationing in the base. The project was launched to find a solution to the poor conditions of Italian houses available after the war and to the quick overcapacity of the Caserma. This aggregation of houses was established after the arrival of SETAF and is set on an area of 326,710 square meters, with a perimeter of 2.627 Km. Works began in 1958 and lasted approximately 2 years, when finally it started to host the tenants on July 4 of 1960. A solution to the numerous and pending request for housing were being satisfied only in the beginning of the 1960s. Nowadays the village features 273 lodgings and is considered a restricted area and exclusively conceded to the Americans.³⁸⁵ The idea behind the Villaggio della Pace was to resemble the concept of a typical U.S. residential area, usually located in the outskirts of bigger towns. Another point that was considered crucial was the fact that this village was not meant to be isolated from the center and the locals, but in the end it inevitably turned out to be. This complex of houses is furnished with all sorts of facilities such as schools,

³⁸² *Ibidem*.

³⁸³ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, pp. 35-37.

³⁸⁴ U.S. State Department, Technical arrangement between the Ministry of Defense of the Italian Republic and the Department of Defense of the United States of America regarding the infrastructure in use by the U.S. Forces in Vicenza, Italy, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/109191.pdf>, p. 23, consultation date 1 August 2012.

³⁸⁵ R. Powers, "U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Vicenza (Caserma Ederle), Italy, *US Military @ About.com*.

pools, hospitals and basketball and other playgrounds.³⁸⁶ Around the city there are as well now 360 places situated in the surrounding territory, which are controlled by the Government.³⁸⁷

The opening of Caserma Ederle was the biggest boost for the local economy not to mention the national one. The real estate sector was, as mentioned earlier, one of the most affected by the strong American dollars, but also in the little municipalities near Vicenza. The prototype of accommodation that Americans usually aimed for was above standards compared to those that locals would choose, mostly for their favorable financial situation. Furthermore, in those years many homes were being built following the American standards and the luxurious style, fulfilling the U.S. requests. Who was lucky enough would be able to live in the base or in Villaggio della Pace but some others would have to relocate in these more distant cities. SETAF's idea was not to concentrate all of the soldiers in one area, but slowly, with the growing number of newcomer from the U.S., to locate them in these towns that were considered close to Vicenza. In those days the street system was not the most improved, which meant that commuting would take longer or would be considered less pleasant compared to the modern ones.³⁸⁸ By spreading the families in other parts of town gave the possibility to not shock the housing market which was starting to go frenzy since the U.S. arrival.

The urban planning of Vicenza was hugely influenced by the U.S. presence, especially the some road system interconnected with the base. Some streets surrounding the base were renewed and fully financed by the Americans, since they had been ruined by the circulation and traffic of tanks and other heavy military vehicles.³⁸⁹ The arrival in 1955 of the first SETAF troops was certainly an improvement for the local activities.³⁹⁰ The investments were mainly directed to Italian construction companies as an incentive for these businesses to increase their profits and help develop the city. The houses available

³⁸⁶ A. Statera, "Vicenza, la base della discordia. Niente aeroporto ai parà USA", *La Repubblica*, 26 October 2006.

³⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁸ Lanaro, *Gli americani a Vicenza*, p. 35.

³⁸⁹ *Ivi*, p. 32 - 33

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

in Vicenza in 1951 went from 17.520 to almost 20,000, in 1954.³⁹¹ Along with these numbers the general demand for other accommodation was of other 2,000 places. With the arrival of SETAF's units 1956 The number of houses went up to 21.701 while the request had gone down to 1,000, meaning that the American requests for housing outside of the base were slowly being fulfilled.³⁹² However, the integration in town of foreign troops has represented as well a decisive factor in the downfall of the city's economy and relationship with the local population.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem.*

³⁹² *Ibidem.*

5. SUPERSIZING IT: DAL MOLIN & AVIANO 2000

5.1 Dal Molin - Before Reaching a Deal

The expansion of the U.S. military presence in Vicenza has been one of the most discussed topics in Italy and in America. What makes this case more interesting are the different phases that the project has undergone, from the rumors to the agreement and finally up to the recent developments connected to the completion of the project. There have been many critics and several insurgent groups were created to contrast the progress of works, mostly due to the lack of clarity concerning the intentions of the Americans taking over another military site in town, besides from the existing Caserma Ederle. The expansion of the airfield, the creation of new houses and a massive storage area, the potential environmental pollution, the traffic outside of the base and the demolition of existing the rugby field are just a few of the topics that have been under the spotlight since the introduction of the plan.

The Dal Molin affair is nowadays well known, but in the beginning of the agreement the situation was quite different, mostly because of the undercover negotiations that took place between Italy and America. This new U.S. military site in Vicenza, which in this case is not related to NATO, is the result of a growing process of militarization. The new American base will be one of the most powerful military sites on Earth, thanks to its weaponry, a significant number of tanks and the highest level of intelligence systems.³⁹³ All of this will develop in an area that is distant only 1,3 Km. from all the distinguished Palladian masterpieces, that also happen to be protected by UNESCO.³⁹⁴ The new Dal Molin project will host SETAF military infrastructures and buildings for a total of 350,000 square meters inside a 700,000 square meters territory.³⁹⁵

In this case the media has played a big role in the spread of information regarding the status of the Dal Molin airfield. In the first articles that were released, back in 2003, when the first talks between the U.S. and Italy started, the coverage was predominantly

³⁹³ McMilitary, Information sheet by the No Dal Molin group, <http://mcmilitary.org/media/200708071019.pdf>, consultation date 20 August 2012.

³⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁵ P. Dato, "Wikileaks svela il pasticciaccio Dal Molin", *Lettera 43 Quotidiano Online Indipendente*, 20 February 2011.

regional with the most relevant *Il Giornale di Vicenza*³⁹⁶. Another free newspaper, *Il Vicenza*, was able to contrast the main newspaper in town and investigate deeply on the information related to the Dal Molin case. Only recently, in the January 2011, the editorial group that published *Il Vicenza* went out of business.³⁹⁷ Only in 2006, when the Dal Molin arrangement was settled and the Pentagon revealed all the details concerning the base, the case gained visibility on a national and international level. Several mistakes and incorrect details were published in the national Italian newspapers, some caused by bad sources and some due to a report manipulation. By analyzing certain information published in the newspapers in Italy, we will see how certain points were not discussed and examined as much as they should have, mostly because they were considered hot topics and therefore probably difficult to offer to the locals of Vicenza. In certain occasions, like in those involving military agreements between Italy and the United States, some issues connected to Dal Molin were not even mentioned by newspapers and were only discovered afterwards mainly through independent reporters. Before the recent completion of the project, to better comprehend the background we are dealing with, the Dal Molin site was a military airport divided into two sections: the East section of the airfield was reserved for civilian uses and was managed by a local Italian air transportation company while the West part belonged to a division of the Italian Air Force and was used from the mid-1950s until 2001, involved with NATO operations.³⁹⁸ The Italian Air Force was dismantled from Dal Molin at the end of October of 2003.³⁹⁹ The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina represented an essential mission for the history of the Dal Molin Airfield, since it directed and coordinated several influential air missions that took place in the Balkans.⁴⁰⁰ Still in 2003 the general idea transpiring from the leaders of the site had virtually decided that the airfield would be

³⁹⁶ Founded in 1915.

³⁹⁷ "Fallito il gruppo editoriale E-Polis: chiusi sette giornali provinciali in Veneto e Friuli", *Il Gazzettino*, 14 January 2011.

³⁹⁸ E. Pepe, "Dal Molin, c'è la concessione: al Comune l'area a est per i prossimi 50 anni", *Vicenza Più*, 29 December 2011.

³⁹⁹ "Il ministero azzera il Dal Molin", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 29 October 2003.

⁴⁰⁰ T. Ripley, *Conflict in the Balkans 1991 - 2000*, Oxford: Osprey Aviation, 2001, p. 51.

closing down, between 2006 and 2007. All of this up until the Americans made an official offer to take over the site.

The first negotiations between the U.S. and Italy regarding the conversion of the outdated Dal Molin airfield into another American military base, took place in 2003.⁴⁰¹ SETAF's division in Caserma Ederle started lacking of housing availability for its newcomers and had to deal with the increasing number of troops ready to serve in the war in Iraq. The idea was to unify in Vicenza the other units belonging to the 173rd Airborne Brigade, that were at the time stationed in Germany. Approximately 2,000 soldiers were meant to be deployed in the newly remodeled base. The first preoccupations came from the people living near the Dal Molin airfield, who after discovering the gossip, started getting concerned about the integration and a complicated compatibility between a military and a civilian sector within a base. At the same time the owners of Dal Molin, such as the Vicenza city council, the provincial Council of Veneto and the Chamber of Commerce, pictured the potential U.S. offer as an advantageous opportunity on every scale, for the city, the growth of working opportunities for local businesses and for the modernization of the airport itself. On top of that the possibility of leasing the site to the American Army and function under Italian regulations was considered the best option.⁴⁰²

In late 2003 talks and meetings began between Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the Mayor of Vicenza Enrico Hüllweck⁴⁰³, who confided on Berlusconi's friendship with U.S.'s President George W. Bush to enter as soon as possible into negotiations and formalize a deal containing favorable conditions for the city as well as for the Mayor's image.⁴⁰⁴ Only the following year, in mid-2004, *Il Giornale di Vicenza* reveals that the deal between the Italy and the U.S.A. has been reached, confirming the arrival of the 2,000 soldiers that were expected to arrive in the first place but in different phases and not all at once.⁴⁰⁵ For the first time other details are described involving the conversion

⁴⁰¹ P. Erle, "La Setaf vuole il Dal Molin", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 June 2003.

⁴⁰² *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰³ Has been the Mayor of Vicenza from 1998 until 2008.

⁴⁰⁴ "Caro Berlusconi, facci volare", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 4 November 2003.

⁴⁰⁵ "Il Dal Molin diventa americano", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 23 April 2004.

of the Dal Molin site, from the spaces that would be conceded to the U.S. Army⁴⁰⁶ up to the redistribution of the troops starting from Camp Ederle. As of 2004 the coverage of these negotiations is not yet documented on national or international newspapers, but only on a regional scale. In October of the same year the amount related to the Dal Molin affaire was disclosed, with 10 million dollars ready to be deposited in the city council along with another sum around 400 million dollars that would be generated in the following years with the stimulus of activities in the surrounding of the site.⁴⁰⁷

In the era of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in 2005 the first opponents to the Dal Molin expansion project started gathering up and having people sign petitions to stop the progress of the project.⁴⁰⁸ This is the first time that *Il Giornale di Vicenza* published the opinion of those against the Dal Molin situation. The letters arriving at the newspaper editorial staff, accused the city council of earning money as a priority and being the main responsible of the possible death of an artistic city like Vicenza and for transforming it into a military town.⁴⁰⁹ Right after this, further confirmations on the reached agreement for the base came from Mel Sembler, the American Ambassador to Italy.⁴¹⁰ Sembler remarked his happiness for the imminent official agreement for the new U.S. presence in Dal Molin by affirming that: “This is going to be a very good thing for Vicenza”.⁴¹¹ For one of the first times we are able to own different newspapers such as the national Italian newspapers and magazines along with international ones such as *Stars & Stripes*⁴¹², that covers issues based on a global scale, compared to the regional *Il Giornale di Vicenza* and newly established *Il Vicenza*. From now on, there will be a general increased visibility for this case and possibility to diversify the sources and points of view to analyze the developments with the project.

⁴⁰⁶ In this case just the former NATO infrastructures were meant to be taken over and not the airfield and the space that was reserved to the Italian Air Force.

⁴⁰⁷ A. Mardon, “Bush ipoteca il Dal Molin”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 20 October 2004.

⁴⁰⁸ M. Smiderle, “Gli antiamericani berici alzano la voce”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 March 2005.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹⁰ R. Rizzo, “U.S., Italians reach agreement for Army to use portion of air base near Vicenza”, *Stars & Stripes*, 12 April 2005.

⁴¹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹² An American newspaper founded in 1861 that covers events involving the U.S. Army, mostly overseas. The paper is approved by the Congress and Department of Defense.

Finally in 2006 the Dal Molin topic became a widespread matter of interest in the domestic news, also appearing in other newspapers and media outside of the Italian peninsula. Several political parties opposed to Berlusconi's political party, Forza Italia, battling for the elections⁴¹³, started promoting useful information on the Dal Molin subject not so visible to the population. According to some facts based on certain documents divulged by these unions, Italy would be expected to pay 37% of the expenses from the resettlement of the U.S. troopers in the renovated military site.⁴¹⁴ The whole point was to show the people in Vicenza the possible implications deriving from the approval of the plan, in this case the Italian citizens would end up indirectly paying for a foreign military base in their town.

After speculations on a possible withdrawal of the Americans from the state of affairs, on May 26 of 2006, the project is officially presented to the Vicenza city Council and the townspeople, this time with attachments of virtual graphics of Ederle 2.⁴¹⁵ From now on this will represent the moment where the two main newspapers covering the whole Dal Molin storyboard will end up in clash while publishing certain articles. We can state that *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, which started writing about the affair since the very beginning, started undertaking a defensive position towards the preservation of the plan and minimized the coverage of protestants and unhappy citizens. *Il Vicenza* instead, a newspaper with a much smaller editorial staff and fewer financial possibilities compared to *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, tried to offer a different perspective on the reality of Dal Molin by making reportages on site that could underline the flaws of the updates coming from the rival paper and clarifying certain points. Since its free distribution and before its recent closure, *Il Vicenza* has functioned as the popular newspaper, and has aimed at standing close to those people in Vicenza that started to question the legitimacy and advantages of the new Dal Molin design. The environmental concerns that would derive from a new military base and the questionable fact of boosting the quantity of soldiers, in a town that already counts one of the largest amounts of U.S.

⁴¹³ Romano Prodi was elected Prime Minister of Italy in May 2006 and remained in charge until May 2008.

⁴¹⁴ C. Carli, "Con le basi americane Vicenza paga la guerra", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 22 February 2006.

⁴¹⁵ G. M. Mancassola, "Aeroporto agli USA: spunta un niet", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 20 May 2006.

units in Italy, are just a few of the most relevant themes that the newspaper has given space to. *Il Vicenza*, on presentation day, had described the whole situation by saying: “the Dal Molin is getting ready to go off to war”.⁴¹⁶ Both papers had described the common reaction of the people and of a number of politicians, present at the introduction of the project, as unenthusiastic. The main disappointment was connected to the messiness of certain details and the absence of certified documents or agreements reached between U.S.A. and Italy. The possibility of creating a purely informative referendum on what people think, has been featured and supported in many articles by *Il Vicenza*, while *Il Giornale di Vicenza* has slowly considered this option as a waste of time and money. The official welcoming summit for the Dal Molin project, between the representatives of SETAF and the Vicenza city Council administration took place on May 31 of 2006.⁴¹⁷ The anomalous detail in this case is how the Mayor Hüllweck had invited only journalists of *Il Giornale di Vicenza* and another local TV station⁴¹⁸, probably considered as the only reliable sources of information that would back up the city’s decision to remodel the base and therefore increase the military presence in the city.⁴¹⁹ It’s interesting to add how both the Mayor and *Il Giornale di Vicenza* have denied this mutual favorable treatment.⁴²⁰ This way, the other newspapers covering the progress of the project, like *Il Vicenza* but also other national scale ones, were not given the possibility to access the conference room inside of the building hosting the press release.⁴²¹ The consequences were major, since we experienced a legitimate case of a somewhat censorship or limitation in a freedom of information. The perception is that the Mayor of Vicenza and all the people involved in the affair, clearly did not want to publicly expose certain irresolute themes related to the plan such as the environmental pollution, the exact costs of the whole operation or the possible problems related to an

⁴¹⁶ “Il Dal Molin si prepara alla guerra”, *Il Vicenza*, 23 May 2006.

⁴¹⁷ G. M. Mancassola, “La nuova caserma al via nel 2007”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 31 May 2006.

⁴¹⁸ *tvA Vicenza*.

⁴¹⁹ Mancassola, “La nuova caserma al via nel 2007”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

⁴²⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴²¹ E. Dante, *La stampa e il “caso Dal Molin”*, tesina per il corso di Teorie e tecniche del linguaggio giornalistico, Università degli studi di Padova, Corso di laurea in Scienze della Comunicazione, a. a. 2006-07, rel. R. Fiengo p. 26.

excessive militarization of the city and the fact that the citizens would end up paying for almost 40%⁴²² of the remodeling of the Dal Molin site. The questionable move in this case aimed at securing the friendly media that would in any event be a devoted ally in such a confusing and doubtful situation.

In the beginning of June 2006, we start witnessing the first statements coming from the Italian Government and in this instance by Francesco Rutelli, the Minister of Cultural Activities and Welfare, who expresses his ideas on the whole base situation and in this case it is suggestive to notice how the main newspapers of Vicenza analyze his words.⁴²³ *Il Giornale di Vicenza* reported that Rutelli had affirmed how an agreement between Italy and the United States had already been reached and it was just a matter of time before it would have gained national visibility.⁴²⁴ On the other hand, *Il Vicenza* underlined that the Minister's inclination was to open to a popular referendum in order to truly understand where the idea of the locals stood in this project.⁴²⁵ The clash between the two newspapers is clearly visible, especially since Rutelli's interview took place the same day and not on separate occasions. Furthermore, just a few days after this, to make things even more complicated than they were at that point, *Il Vicenza* publishes some brand new statistics linked to the Dal Molin issue. Among the several numbers displayed in the article, the most significant is related to the total costs for the plan that now, according to the newspaper, will reach 800 million dollars⁴²⁶, almost three times more compared to the first estimates.⁴²⁷

Only in July of the same year, we register the first pacific demonstration organized by the "No Dal Molin" members, the recent established group of citizens opposed to the plan. At this event, *Il Vicenza* had announced that 1,000 people were present at the rally to send out their reluctance to the base development program while *Il Giornale di*

⁴²² See p. 19.

⁴²³ G. M. Mancassola, "Rutelli conferma fra Italia e USA c'è già un accordo", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 1 June 2006.

⁴²⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁵ "Da Rutelli niente assist agli USA", *Il Vicenza*, 1 June 2006.

⁴²⁶ The final quotation for the Dal Molin project is of 535 million dollars.

⁴²⁷ "Sotto il Dal Molin un affare da mille milioni di dollari", *Il Vicenza*, 5 June 2006.

Vicenza had cut the number down to a half, demonstrating again the evident dispute between the two newspapers.⁴²⁸

As a result of the protests and the Italian's Prime Minister in charge at the time⁴²⁹ intention to reexamine the position of foreign military presence in the country, the Dal Molin project experienced a period of prolonged stalemate.⁴³⁰ Even Giancarlo Galan, President of the Region of Veneto, had expressed his intention and commitment to await for a final resolution from the Government in Rome on the Dal Molin deal in order to reveal the Region's requirements related to the Americans offer.⁴³¹ The local's insurgency movements had played a major role in the definition of the Dal Molin game and became the new influential actors which represented a threat to the city authorities agreements. Minister Prodi's aim was to reconsider certain details connected to the airfield expansion and offer a different point of view to the many unsatisfied citizens affected by this situation. With a new government in Italy lead by a different political party, there had been plenty of rumors concerning a possible sudden dissolution of the whole American-Italian deal of Dal Molin. In opposition to the rebel group, we have to register the establishment of another one that this time was favorable to the project.⁴³² The so-called "Si Dal Molin" committee was created by a portion of the population of Vicenza, that after hearing about the potential breakdown of the creation of Ederle 2 got together to make their voice heard.⁴³³ This council claims that the expansion of the Dal Molin airfield would represent a continuation to the bilateral cooperation between Italy and the United States.⁴³⁴ The pro-Dal Molin group focused its attention on themes like a profitable partnership with the Americans, the maintenance of the U.S. Army and NATO tradition in town and all the other future repercussions that would derive from the

⁴²⁸ Dante, *La stampa e il "caso Dal Molin"*, pp. 29-30.

⁴²⁹ Romano Prodi.

⁴³⁰ G. M. Mancassola, "Base USA, Hullweck attacca", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 6 July 2006.

⁴³¹ F. Ballardini, "Parla Galan", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 1 August 2006, p. 18.

⁴³² K. Harris and S. Jontz, "Italy is rethinking expansion of US brigade at Vicenza", *Stars & Stripes*, 28 July 2006.

⁴³³ L. De Marzi, "Dal Molin: pro e contro", *La Voce dei Berici*, 8 February 2007.

⁴³⁴ *Ibidem*.

alliance with the States, rather than on topics such as the excessive militarization and the environmental pollution.

The following months are characterized still by a number of unanswered questions. One of these was referred to the anomalous fact that SETAF, according to the media, had not yet officially asked for the permission to use the civilian airport but only for the military sector. It seems as if the Pentagon had been privately discussing terms in the first place with the Italian authorities for a full employment of the airfield by the U.S. Army division, because it's hard to believe that the Dal Molin was going to be used just for offices and accommodation for troops and families. Another dilemma was represented by the transition and possible change of plans connected to existing agreement for the expansion of the airfield, from Berlusconi's political party that had at first begun negotiating with the U.S., to the center-leftist coalition at the Government. In late September, one of the most relevant Italian magazines, *L'Espresso*, took part to the growing group of media covering for the Dal Molin case and leaked some interesting information on the agreement.⁴³⁵ The weekly magazine dedicated its cover page and exclusive articles on what these journalists were able to find out through some intricate investigations. Most of the data available in this reportage has been considered scandalous considering the lack of clarity and reliable news that was published in the previously. In this case, *L'Espresso* pictures the U.S. authorities that had been discussing a deal with Vicenza, as firmly convinced about their plan of increasing the military presence in a key territory like Italy and underlines the will to transform the city into the main point of departure for missions in the Middle East.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, the Americans had requested the whole space of the Dal Molin site and had planned to furnish the new Ederle 2 with a devastating set of weaponry that would include more aircrafts and tanks, compared to the proposed deals that had appeared on the local newspapers, along with the most reliable intelligence services.⁴³⁷ All of this information was contained and described in detail in a booklet made by the Pentagon and given to

⁴³⁵ R. Di Caro, "A Vicenza comanda Bush", *L'Espresso*, n. 38 (21 September 2006).

⁴³⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴³⁷ *Ibidem*.

the Vicenza city Council.⁴³⁸ The idea was to make out of Dal Molin and Caserma Ederle the strongest U.S. military bases in Europe and therefore make Vicenza one of the most important military towns outside of the North American borders. In substance, by analyzing the articles in the magazine, it seemed as if America and Italy had been discussing this massive deal for years and the yet city of Vicenza had done little or nothing to inform its citizens and ask for their opinion. We know for a fact that Mayor Hüllweck's effort to inform the population on the features of the agreement were inadequate and definitely came too late. The general opinion of the people from Vicenza, close or affiliated to the "No Dal Molin" committee, has been dissenting towards the administration of their town, the Government in Rome and the Americans. As soon as most of the information, released from the edition of *L'Espresso*, was later mentioned in several Italian tabloids, both SETAF and the city Council and the Pentagon had rejected the rumors that were disclosed in the volume of *L'Espresso*.⁴³⁹ The Dal Molin project attracted even more visibility when on October 26, the official reunion between the parties was televised, finally giving an opportunity to the population of Vicenza to witness talks that would change the future of their town.⁴⁴⁰ The live conference was anticipated that day by an article of *La Repubblica* which anticipates that the deal with the Americans had been found way back in 2004 thanks to Berlusconi and Hüllweck who met the Dick Cheney⁴⁴¹ in Vicenza, while the local citizens were totally unaware of this fact.⁴⁴² The article also confirms that the 173rd Airborne Brigade stationing in Germany would be transferred to Dal Molin soon after the completion of works.⁴⁴³ Not even the release of an Italian Chamber of Commerce booklet⁴⁴⁴ that aimed at demonstrating the progress and done by the Americans in all

⁴³⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴³⁹ G. M. Mancassola, "Scende in campo il Pentagono per smentire L'Espresso", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 23 September 2006, p.1.

⁴⁴⁰ Broadcasted on tv by *tvA Vicenza* and *Anno Zero* and via radio by *Radio Vicenza*.

⁴⁴¹ Vice President of the U.S.A. from 2001 until 2009.

⁴⁴² A. Statera, "Vicenza, la base della discordia. Niente aeroporto ai parà USA", *La Repubblica*, 26 October 2006.

⁴⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁴ Di Lorenzo, *The American Heart of Vicenza*, Vicenza.

these years and visible the U.S. spirit in the city of Vicenza, was enough to change the opinion of the population on the reconversion of the base. A poll that was published prior to the meeting of the televised meeting, had shown how more than 60% of people⁴⁴⁵ were against the base expansion and an 84% of them wanted the possibility to express their idea with the referendum.⁴⁴⁶ However, during the city Council live conference, the project will be approved⁴⁴⁷ leaving the last decision to the Government, creating an inseparable fracture between the city and the people.

The first recognized demonstration by the “No Dal Molin” group took place on December 2 of 2006 and had created a certain alarm in the city for possible public disorders. Around 30,000 people gathered up and marched throughout the city of Vicenza starting from the operative base of Caserma Ederle up to Dal Molin.⁴⁴⁸ The message that was delivered from the protest was against further militarization and actually aimed at convincing the Prodi government to rethink the position of Italy in the geo-political world and remove the foreign soldier presence from also the bases located in peninsula.⁴⁴⁹

The year of 2007 was decisive for the destiny of the Dal Molin project. It all started when the U.S. Ambassador to Italy⁴⁵⁰ on January 9 paid a visit to the one of the most important banks of Vicenza, where he met the Mayor and other important local entrepreneurs.⁴⁵¹ The following day he went to Rome to meet Prime Minister Prodi, giving them an ultimatum for a finalization of the deal, especially because Germany had made an offer to unify its military bases the 173rd Airborne Brigade, stationed in Camp Ederle.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁵ Out of 1500 interviewed.

⁴⁴⁶ Poll issued by *Demos & Pi*, a notorious Italian social-political research center, <http://www.altravicenza.it/dossier/dalmolin/doc/20061011demos.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁷ 21 voted “Yes”, 17 voted “No” and 2 absentees.

⁴⁴⁸ S. Westbrook, “No Dal Molin, No War”, *Peace & Justice*, 2 December 2006.

⁴⁴⁹ Coordinamento Nazionale per la Jugoslavia, <http://www.cnj.it/iniziative/nodalmolin/vicenza2006.htm>.

⁴⁵⁰ Ronald Spogli, was in charge from 2005 to 2009.

⁴⁵¹ A. Desiderio, “La Fatal Vicenza”, *Limes*, IV (2007), p. 316.

⁴⁵² *Ibidem*.

The turning point occurred on January 16, when Prime Minister Prodi during an official visit in Bucharest, had surprisingly announced that the Italian Government's intentions were to support the U.S. offer for the Dal Molin deal.⁴⁵³ The decision had swept away all of the pressures and rumors that had imagined Italy declining the American proposal because of the new political administration in charge of the country and Germany making a bid to host the SETAF division. Prodi had also added that the possibility of creating a referendum for the population of Vicenza and express their opinion was not up to the Government but rather a matter that had to be dealt by the local administration.⁴⁵⁴ The Minister had specified in the interview, that the delay had been caused by unsolved issues related to the territory and the urban area and not for political problems, like some had imagined.⁴⁵⁵ The rival and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi had accused Prodi, right before his announcement in Romania, for disrespect towards the North Atlantic alliance and the friendship with the United States of America.⁴⁵⁶ In the end the decision made by Prodi was overall expected, especially looking back at the history of cooperation between the U.S. and Italy. What prevailed in the final resolution for the benefit of the Italian cause were aspects like the increase of activities around the Dal Molin area, the creation of new jobs and the established partnership with the Americans in Camp Ederle and in the North East of Italy. What appeared to be puzzling was the fact that Prodi had declared prior to his trip to Bucharest, that he would have waited until his return to Italy to reveal his position on the Dal Molin situation. In reality the Prime Minister's decision, which did not involve any signing of documents but just an oral agreement, was secretly taken days before.⁴⁵⁷ With the recent escalation to popularity of *Wikileaks* and its publications, we are able to add significant pieces to recreate the puzzle that clarify Prodi's different levels that brought him to take this decision.

⁴⁵³ "Vicenza l'annuncio di Prodi: "Il governo non si opporà", *La Repubblica*, 16 January 2007.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁶ A. Mognon, L'ex premier Berlusconi: "Il no ci rende inaffidabili", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 17 January 2007, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ A. Mognon, "Il retroscena: la scelta spiegata agli alleati al telefono l'altro ieri", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 17 January 2007, p. 2.

In late 2011 *Wikileaks* publishes a cablegram⁴⁵⁸ dated January 17 of 2007, titled “Fried presses Prodi on Afghanistan, Dal Molin Base”.⁴⁵⁹ In this report, U.S. Ambassador to Italy Ronald Spogli and Daniel Fried, a U.S. diplomat specialized in transatlantic relations, pressure Prodi, during a summit between Italy and America, to come up with a final resolution on the Dal Molin case. Prodi suggests that: “what he could offer was a location 30 miles from Aviano, where there would be no overcrowding issue, no local opposition” instead of the Dal Molin airfield.⁴⁶⁰ Spogli later reminds the Prime Minister that an agreement with the authorities in Vicenza and from the Region of Veneto had already been reached.⁴⁶¹ The cablegram also adds that:

“the Ambassador said we have been in Vicenza for 50 years. We went to the previous government, said we wanted something close to Camp Ederle, and this is what they offered. In addition to the assurances of the last national government, approvals had been obtained from both the regional government and municipality. We've been working on the project for two years and have spent \$25 million on planning. Going somewhere else, like Aviano, loses the benefit of collocation of forces. Since we're so far down the road, at this point we either have expansion at Dal Molin or not at all. We'll take the project to Germany, because the Army wants the two 173rd Airborne groups together.” (Fried Presses Prodi on Afghanistan, Dal Molin base)

What Romano Prodi underlines in the cablegram is that the biggest obstacle is represented by a part of the local population which is against the expansion of the base and that his will is to cooperate until the end with America. Another issue is the fact that the newly established government is not considered by Prodi as adequate yet to make a decision on this delicate matter. The possibility of deploying the soldiers to a base in Germany instead of Vicenza is rejected in the article by Prodi. Ambassador Spogli finally adds that:

“This is not a threat, the Ambassador said, it's just a statement of fact. If we do not move forward, Congress could pull the money back in a matter of days. There would be

⁴⁵⁸ Classified as “secret”.

⁴⁵⁹ Wikileaks, Fried Presses Prodi on Afghanistan, Dal Molin Base Decision, <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=07ROME96>, cable time 17 January 2007, publishing date 1 September 2011, consultation date 26 October 2012.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

over a billion dollars invested, much of it to local contractors, with annual spending on the local economy likely rising from \$170 million to over \$300 million annually. The head of the local industrialists group had told the Ambassador he was planning to send a message of support to the PM.” (Fried Presses Prodi on Afghanistan, Dal Molin base)

The end of the cablegram announces that Prodi will do “one last effort and provide the Ambassador with his answer within a few days”.⁴⁶² We know how things went afterwards.

The second official demonstration organized by the “No Dal Molin” group was held on February 17. This time the people reunited to march through the city until Dal Molin, there are almost the double or triple of compared to the first demonstration with 70,000 to 80,000 people according to the Prefecture of Vicenza and 200,000 according to the organizers of the protest.⁴⁶³ This rally was described as the most remarkable in the history of the city, with an attendance of people higher than when the Pope John Paul II visited Vicenza in 1991.⁴⁶⁴ The newspaper *Il Vicenza*, had dedicated 11 pages of its issue, to underline the composed atmosphere and the legitimate march of the locals, defining these people as “the population of peace” who started using the rainbow flag with a white print of “pace” on it as their motto.⁴⁶⁵

On June 9 a third protest was organized by the “Dal Molin” faction mixed with the “No War” committee, this time in Rome with almost 150,000 people, on the day that President of the United States George W. Bush arrived in Italy to hold a press conference with Romano Prodi.⁴⁶⁶ This demonstration was not as peaceful like the other ones, in fact 6 people were arrested, 10 people wounded and a bank window destroyed.⁴⁶⁷ The Bush-Prodi interview touched many different themes like the war in Afghanistan, other specific situations in the Middle East and global warming, while the Dal Molin topic was not even mentioned during the discussion and actually only at the

⁴⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶³ G. Cesarotto, “Vicenza, la pace alza la sua bandiera bianca e contagia la città più americana”, *Il Vicenza*, 18 February 2007, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶⁶ M. Smiderle, “Scontri dopo la manifestazione anti-Bush”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 10 June 2007, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

end of the conference.⁴⁶⁸ Prodi revealed that there was no need to further discuss with the President about the details of the project because it had already been arranged.

The first Italian Government official Dal Molin document specifying the details of the program were released after Bush's visit in Italy. Paolo Costa, former Minister of Public Works was nominated in Rome as the external administrator, to follow closely the developments of the new military installation.⁴⁶⁹ The agreement anticipates massive works of redeveloping in the area⁴⁷⁰ of the airfield and aims at inaugurating the base by 2011.⁴⁷¹ A joint union between two major Italian companies in the business⁴⁷², were awarded with a contract to take charge of the clearing up operations from possible explosives from the past wars and redevelop the area into what would soon become the new American base in Vicenza along with Caserma Edele.⁴⁷³ The U.S. Army had chosen this enterprise group among many others in Europe without a public competition, basing their decision on an arguable purely monetary factor and on the fact that they had worked in the past for the Italian Government and for the Americans in various redeveloping tasks connected to other military bases in Italy⁴⁷⁴. Also in this case, Paolo Costa and the commissioned companies did not reveal any sort of details on the plans linked to the Dal Molin, reinforcing even more the distrust of the entire situation.

Looking at the plan itself, several structural changes were made to the initial proposed one, mainly with a redistribution of the buildings to limit the visible effect and place the entrance in the Southern part of the site.⁴⁷⁵ The Dal Molin had been transformed from a

⁴⁶⁸ M. Smiderle, "Prodi: Decisione presa. E Bush ringrazia l'Italia", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 10 June 2007, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁹ "Dal Molin si' definitivo del Governo", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 15 June 2007, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁰ To be completed by the beginning of January 2008.

⁴⁷¹ G.M. Mancassola, "Dal Molin: fase operativa. C'e' la firma del Governo", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 15 June 2007, p. 10.

⁴⁷² S.T.R.A.G.O. Is based in Pozzuoli and A.B.C. Appalti Bonifiche Costruzioni is based in Florence.

⁴⁷³ G. Guidi, "Bonifica, già affidato l'appalto: la procedura evasa un anno fa", *Il Vicenza*, 25 September 2007, p. 22.

⁴⁷⁴ For example in Maniago (Pordenone).

⁴⁷⁵ G. M. Mancassola, "Cosi' e' cambiato il progetto: l'ingresso e' ora a sud", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 15 June 2007, p. 10.

limited space destined to soldier activities into a full-on military campus, progressively being shaped to Caserma Ederle and with its same functions.

In September of 2007, the first “No Dal Molin” festival was celebrated with almost 30,000 people who attended at the event in front of the base.⁴⁷⁶ Around 200 of these were able to get inside site and had planted 150 trees as a symbol of freedom in an area that would soon become a complex of buildings for the U.S. Army.⁴⁷⁷

Just when things seemed to be all set up, in November 2007, the project was modified once again by a meeting between SETAF, the Mayor of Vicenza and Paolo Costa and it was unanimously decided to build all the new infrastructures on the West side of the Dal Molin airfield, mostly to cut the expenses for the population and reduce the environmental pollution while the civilian side of the airport would remain active even if the size of the strip would be shortened.⁴⁷⁸ According to the article the beginning of works was planned to start in June 2008.⁴⁷⁹ For the umpteenth time, another rally staged by the opponents of the Dal Molin project in the end of December, with a presence of 30,000 people, although the organizer counted almost 80,000 units.⁴⁸⁰ During the demonstration a bomb exploded in a phone booth, creating panic among the locals.⁴⁸¹

In the beginning of 2008, the technicians of the commissioned building firms, began clearing up operations in order to dismantle possible explosive devices present underground, linked to the World War II era. *Il Vicenza* had forecasted that these activities would take almost 9 months and therefore there would be a good deal of time before the licensed works would begin.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁶ G. M. Mancassola, “Al Dal Molin 150 alberelli contro la base”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 16 September 2007, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷⁸ G. M. Mancassola, “Ederle 2, si’ definitivo si va a ovest”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 20 November 2007, p. 15.

⁴⁷⁹ G. M. Mancassola, “L’aeroporto sopravvive. Ma la pista si accorcia”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 20 November 2007, p.15.

⁴⁸⁰ G. M. Mancassola, “Oltre 30mila in Marcia al corteo del No”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 16 December 2007, p. 10.

⁴⁸¹ D. Neri, “Bomba a carta ai CC e scritte sul teatro”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 16 December 2007, p.11.

⁴⁸² D. Comunello, “Dal Molin è ripartita la bonifica” *Il Vicenza*, 15 January 2008, p. 20.

An additional fact that inflated the anger in all the people against the plan, was the announcement made by the Italian Government that in March 2008, the civilian section of the Dal Molin airport would close down for good, after almost 80 years of activity.⁴⁸³ After the withdrawal of the Italian soldiers, the airfield in Vicenza was increasingly losing all of its authentic elements, just for money. The initial design to remodel the civilian airstrip was therefore abandoned, sparking the critics of the Aviation Clubs present in Dal Molin who had accused the Mayor, Paolo Costa and all of the administrators of Vicenza of being the main people to blame for this decision.

While the official statements, the rumors and the protests now kept occupying every newspaper, *Il Vicenza*, unlike the rival *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, had started investigating to a greater extent and had stated that the works inside the Dal Molin airfield had already began, even though there was no trace of official document giving the authorization to do so, and the citizens for the most part were unaware of this.⁴⁸⁴ The main local committees had demanded for a clearer and more reliable source of information for the population, along with a higher responsibility by the city council of Vicenza to take care of the evolution of the base and make sure operations were rightful. Months later, in the summer of 2008, with still no sign of the completion of the program, Silvio Berlusconi who in the mean time was reelected Prime Minister of Italy⁴⁸⁵, had confirmed his intentions to maintain the promises made regarding the international agreements with the United States, that had also been confirmed by the Prodi government.⁴⁸⁶ While the newly appointed Mayor of Vicenza, the center-leftist Achille Variati⁴⁸⁷, who had accused both Berlusconi and Prodi of disregarding the actual situation of the Dal Molin in town, had indicated to once and for all launch the infamous referendum in order to involve the citizens in the decision making process.⁴⁸⁸ Variati's

⁴⁸³ G. Zaniolo, Vicenza, "Addio all'aeroporto pista chiusa", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 27 January 2008, p. 12.

⁴⁸⁴ F. Fogu, "I cantieri della Ederle: si informi la città", *Il Vicenza*, 10 April 2008, p. 21.

⁴⁸⁵ May 8 of 2008.

⁴⁸⁶ M. Scorzato, "Berlusconi: la Ederle 2 si farà", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 July 2008, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁷ Had already been Mayor of Vicenza from 1990 until 1995, and before being reelected in 2008 he was the leader of the Democratic Party of the Region of Veneto.

⁴⁸⁸ M. Scorzato, "Variati: parlano tutti, ora tocca ai vicentini", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 July 2008, p. 11.

announcement and promise were made in an interview that goes back to February of 2008, when the candidate was battling to become the Mayor of Vicenza.⁴⁸⁹ The new Mayor's actions have to be classified as a set back compared to Hüllweck, who had always declared to be favorable to the Dal Molin project and tried all he could to pay little attention to the requests of the population. In May, Mayor Variati had met the commissioner of the project, Paolo Costa, to reinforce his position close to the annoyed citizens and to order a stoppage to the Dal Molin clearing up operations up until the population would be informed on the dynamics of the project and express its opinion.⁴⁹⁰ Paolo Costa, at the meeting, had only expressed his discontent for a new delay for the beginning of the working campaign in the site. He added that he would have referred to the Government in Rome what the official intentions of the city of Vicenza were concerning the Dal Molin situation.⁴⁹¹ Just a few months later Costa had declared, after more than four years of arrangements, that the idea of organizing a referendum was pointless since the Ederle 2 project would begin shortly and it would only damage the relationship with the Americans along with the credibility of Italy for any sort of future deal.⁴⁹²

Between June and July of 2008, two controversial circumstances added even more disorder to the Dal Molin case. On June 20, the Regional Administrative Court of Law⁴⁹³ of Venice had determined that the preliminary works in the Dal Molin area would have to be suspended, after Commissioner Costa had given the authorization to start the operations.⁴⁹⁴ Codacons⁴⁹⁵, the Italian association for protection of consumer rights, had appealed to the Court because the Committee for the Ederle 2 project had not

⁴⁸⁹ M. Sopelsa, "Se divento sindaco subito un referendum al Dal Molin per ascoltare tutti i cittadini", *Il Vicenza*, 25 February 2008, p. 22.

⁴⁹⁰ F. Fogu, "Base USA, Variati incontra Costa: stop ai lavori fino all'autunno", *Il Vicenza*, 5 May 2008.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹² M. Smiderle, "Dal Molin, le chiavi alle ditte. Il cantiere può aprire subito" *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 August 2008, p. 13.

⁴⁹³ In Italian, "Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale" or TAR.

⁴⁹⁴ F. Tosatto, "Dal Molin, il TAR blocca le ruspe. Il sindaco: a ottobre un referendum", *La Repubblica*, 21 June 2008, p. 17.

⁴⁹⁵ In Italian, "Coordinamento delle associazioni per la difesa dell'ambiente e dei diritti degli utenti e dei consumatori".

exchanged views with the population, which was planned by the Italian-American memorandum.⁴⁹⁶ Therefore the Court had promptly ruled that the procedures were unconstitutional and the redeveloping activities had to be stopped. Furthermore the Court's decision was supplemented by the fact that the environmental dossier released by the Region of Veneto was considered inaccurate as well as Prodi's questionable verbal agreement with the U.S. for the opening of operations, in such a delicate matter.⁴⁹⁷ On top of this, the TAR of Venice had determined that a referendum had to be taken in October, as recommended by Mayor Achille Variati.⁴⁹⁸ Just when things seemed to be solved, approximately one month later, on July 29, the TAR's decision was abruptly reversed by the Italian Council of State⁴⁹⁹ based in Rome.⁵⁰⁰ In this case the Government along with the Region of Veneto had appealed to the State Council against Codacons, the "No Dal Molin" committee and the city council of Vicenza for the decision pronounced by the TAR of Venice regarding the suspension of works in the Dal Molin area. The Council of State had ruled that all the acts related to the project were licit and consequently the East side of the airfield could be eventually handed to the Americans and to the construction companies.⁵⁰¹ The explanations disclosed in this sentence by the Council were multiple.⁵⁰² First of all the Dal Molin project follows the 1954 BIA Agreement⁵⁰³ signed by Italy and the United States of America, adopted within the North Atlantic Alliance framework, where the U.S. is expected to bear the expenses for any program, giving them a great deal of immunity from Italian laws. Additionally the agreement between the two countries means that an administrative judge is competent to formulate a definitive verdict. Finally, in the secretive

⁴⁹⁶ Tosatto, "Dal Molin, il TAR blocca le ruspe. Il sindaco: a ottobre un referendum", *La Repubblica*, p. 17.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹⁹ A governmental juridical body that manages cases related to public regulation of activities in Italy.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰¹ G. M. Mancassola, "Bocciato il TAR sì alla Ederle 2. L'aeroporto va agli americani", *Giornale di Vicenza*, 30 July 2008, p. 15.

⁵⁰² *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰³ See p. 25.

documentation related to the Dal Molin project there is no trace of obligation to consult the population and there appear to be no environmental-related issues connected to the Ederle 2 project. There is also a series of formal permits that had been granted by Romano Prodi, George W. Bush and Dal Molin Commissioner Paolo Costa, which further validated the carrying on of operations. The decisions coming from the Regional Court were overturned and gave the possibility to SETAF and the Americans to have full access to the base and start working on the East section of the base. The operations would resume from the redevelopment of the area to then proceed to the demolition of the former Italian buildings. Achille Variati, had reacted to this sentence by expressing his disappointment but at the same time confiding in the possibility of changing things another time.⁵⁰⁴ The Mayor had stated that he would respect the Council of State sentence and that the order did not jeopardize the actions done since the new Vicenza administration had been in charge.⁵⁰⁵ Variati confirmed once again that the popular referendum would take place regardless in October.⁵⁰⁶

The referendum was taken on October 5 of 2008, organized by the city Council of Vicenza and the results were suggestive since 95% out of 24,094 of the people had voted “No” and therefore against the Dal Molin project, 3% had voted “Yes” while the rest of ballots had remained blank.⁵⁰⁷ Only 29% of the population of Vicenza had decided to vote therefore it gives the idea that those who were favorable to the project had simply decided to not attend this debatable procedure.⁵⁰⁸ The quorum, or legal number to overturn a ruling, set by the judges of the the Regional Administrative Court of Law of Venice was of 35,000 voters, but still this wouldn’t have made a difference. In fact just four days before the poll took place, the Council of State had ruled that the referendum was not going to considered valid and just ended up remaining a statistical

⁵⁰⁴ M. Scorzato, “Non è cambiato nulla. La consultazione si farà”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 30 July 2008, p. 17.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁷ G. M. Mancassola, “Votano in più di 24mila. Tanti ma non è quorum”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 6 October 2008, p. 14.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

tool.⁵⁰⁹ The Council in Rome had actually cancelled the date of the referendum, hence every effort Achille Variati had done during his electoral campaign and his days in office in Vicenza had vanished. The Mayor had sent 87,000 electoral ballots to the citizens, spending around 120,000 euro.⁵¹⁰ The main motivation given by the Council of State was that there were not sufficient reasons to arrange this “survey” mostly because the Dal Molin project was considered ready to go.⁵¹¹ Variati had decided to adhere to his initial plan and arrange the referendum regardless from any decision. After the results the Mayor had expressed his joy for demonstrating to the Country that was able to teach a lesson of democracy. This whole situation shows how no matter all the popular propaganda that can be made to interrupt something this vast, what counts is what one person decides and in this case it’s the Italian Prime Minister. When leftist politician Romano Prodi was elected, those who were against the Dal Molin project had imagined and hoped for a radical change of views and for a detaching approach from America’s proposals. The reality is that it is unlikely that any present and future Italian leader would refuse to cooperate with the United States. The last controversial episode of diplomatic dissent between the U.S.A. and Italy was the Sigonella Crisis⁵¹², which goes back to 1985 when Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi had refused U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s requests to extradite four suspected Palestinian terrorists, one of which was Abu Abbas, leader of the Palestine Liberation Front, who had hijacked an Italian ship⁵¹³. The airplane that had captured the terrorists had been diverted to NATO military base of Sigonella in Italy, where subsequently Abu Abbas was sentenced, denying the possibility of being convicted by the Americans.

⁵⁰⁹ G. M. Mancassola, “Il Consiglio di Stato blocca il referendum: è irrealizzabile”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 2 October 2008, p. 16.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹² Wikipedia, Bettino Craxi, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bettino_Craxi, consultation date 15 November 2012.

⁵¹³ The name of the ship was Achille Lauro, which also gave the name to this diplomatic incident.

5.2 Dal Molin - Beginning of Works and Recent Developments

The year of 2009 has represented the final turning point to this endless Dal Molin story. On January 20, almost 200 people made their way inside the base and stationed in the civilian side of the airfield for almost four days.⁵¹⁴ The owners of the site, ENAC⁵¹⁵, had surprisingly decided to leave the base-opponents deliver their message in a peaceful way, avoiding tensions to rise and any other possible incidents. Just three weeks later, a similar blitz was organized but this time the police was authorized to respond and the outcome was different.⁵¹⁶ The rebels had blocked a couple of trucks that were involved in the redeveloping works at the site, sparking the reaction of the Vicenza police headquarters that ended up arresting 14 people.⁵¹⁷ The permanent “No Dal Molin” presidium, camping outside of the base, had justified their actions to *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, as a way to delay the operations taking place inside the airfield.⁵¹⁸ The insurgents had also asked for help from their Mayor, in order to reestablish a sense of democracy in the Dal Molin affair.

Ten days later this last hectic demonstration, on February 21, the Italian Ministry of Defense⁵¹⁹, through Commissioner Paolo Costa, had announced that the final project had been officially approved, setting the beginning of activities inside the Dal Molin domain.⁵²⁰ The definitive project foresees the building of a complex of 25 buildings for military use that would be situated on the West side of the Dal Molin site and in an area of 75,000 square meters.⁵²¹ These new American owned buildings were meant to coexist with other structures belonging to the former base. As expected, Mayor Variati

⁵¹⁴ D. Neri, “Duecento No Dal Molin con un blitz occupano l’ala civile dell’aeroporto”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 21 January 2009, p. 10.

⁵¹⁵ Ente Nazionale per l’Aviazione Civile.

⁵¹⁶ D. Neri, “Una giornata di proteste, denunciato tutto il corteo”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 11 February 2009, p. 18.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹⁹ Through the Direzione Generale dei Lavori e del Demanio (GENIODIFE).

⁵²⁰ G. M. Mancassola, “Ederle 2, via libera finale. Base pronta in tre anni” *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 21 February 2009, p. 11.

⁵²¹ *Ibidem*.

hadn't given up, defining the Dal Molin project as a "historic mistake" had promised to "use his authority to prolong the construction, or even stop it outright" and said that he "believed a majority of the city's people oppose the U.S. using the Italian military facility".⁵²² Not even the environmental assessment, that had been conducted by the members of the Dal Molin committee and presented by Paolo Costa, had convinced Achille Variati, who had that it defined the examination inadequate to change people's opinion on the plan. The final date announced at the Dal Molin ratification-day for the beginning of works was set for April of 2009.⁵²³

After the opening of the construction site in the airfield and a massive "No Dal Molin" demonstration on July 4, notorious for being Independence Day in the United States of America, other problems started rising.⁵²⁴ This time it was mostly the people living in the surrounding of the site, not always necessarily sympathetic to the committee against the expansion of the base, who started complaining about the dust generated by the scrapping of the former buildings along with the noisy labor, caused by truck transit and by the sound of drilling, mostly starting from 6:30 in the morning.⁵²⁵ Once again, Achille Variati, stood close to those who had been most affected by this whole situation and appealed to the Regional Agency for Protection and Prevention of Veneto⁵²⁶, along with the commissioner of the project Costa, demanding for scrupulous inspections of the decibel level coming from the construction site.⁵²⁷

After just a few months since the beginning of operations in the new Ederle 2 project and the deployment of thousands of U.S. troops from Caserma Ederle in Afghanistan, *Stars & Stripes*, the finest U.S. Army newspaper, had reported that around 465 million dollars had been spent by America for the achievement of the various projects in

⁵²² K. Harris, "Dal Molin projects gets final approval, Vicenza mayor expresses concerns", *Stars & Stripes*, 21 February 2009.

⁵²³ *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁴ "Clashes at protest vs US base expansion in Italy", *The Guardian*, 4 July 2009.

⁵²⁵ G. M. Mancassola, "E' allerta per i rumori e polveri. Lavori controllati dall'ARPAV", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 26 August 2009.

⁵²⁶ Also known as ARPAV.

⁵²⁷ G. M. Mancassola, "Ederle 2 lavori rumorosi", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 5 August 2009.

Caserma Ederle, Dal Molin and in Villaggio della Pace.⁵²⁸ The construction site's total value inside the base was estimated at 375 million dollars.⁵²⁹ The U.S. magazine had highlighted the rapidity of working operations inside the site, where eventually the remaining division of the 173rd Combat Brigade would be relocated from Germany into Vicenza, and on top of this had estimated the official opening ceremony for the fall of 2012.⁵³⁰ On a slightly different note, the newspaper *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, which had always been a bit critical towards leftist Mayor Variati, had underlined the fact that the city council of Vicenza had only invested 1,4 million euro in 2009 for town planning fees, less than a half compared to what was spent in 2008, wanting to show how little trust the local administration had towards such a big project and soon to be reality in their town.⁵³¹

After several disagreements, the Italian Government and the city council of Vicenza found a deal to come up with recurring updates that would include documents describing the operations and timing for labor activities inside the base, for an improved transparency, along with additional public works connected with the new Dal Molin infrastructures, financed by Italy.⁵³² To enter more into detail, Costa and Variati's agreement foresaw the drawing of the definitive project for the citizens, the removal from that State ownership of the Eastern section of the airfield and the funding of a beltway and an electric-based bus system in the surroundings of the Dal Molin area.⁵³³ The Mayor of Vicenza had inevitably given up to the Italian subjugation to America's power in these type of international dealings but nevertheless has shown his spirit of fighting for something bigger than his and the whole city.

⁵²⁸ K. Harris, "Construction booming at Vicenza", *Stars & Stripes*, 29 November 2009.

⁵²⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵³⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵³¹ G. M. Mancassola, "Lavori da 465 milioni di dollari", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 30 November 2009.

⁵³² "Accordo Variati-Costa sul Dal Molin", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 19 January 2010.

⁵³³ *Ibidem*.

In one of the first editions of *The Outlook*⁵³⁴, the weekly magazine published by the American military community of Northern Italy, the Major General of SETAF⁵³⁵ and Colonel of U.S. Army Garrison⁵³⁶ both in Caserma Ederle had stated that “by the end of 2012, Dal Molin will be the most modern and environmentally-green installation in use by any U.S. military command” and that “the Vicenza Military Community will soon encompass the second largest U.S. Army community in all of Europe”.⁵³⁷ Both the Commanders had also confirmed the rumors regarding the details of the projects taking place inside the Ederle 2 construction site, to improve lifestyle for the Americans stationed in Vicenza which included “a new Ederle indoor swimming pool, the Ederle gym expansion, a world-class expanded health and dental center and state-of-the-art elementary and middle schools at Villaggio (della Pace, Edit)” along with a “build to-lease housing in multiple Vicenza communities”.⁵³⁸

Part of the “No Dal Molin” committee stationed outside the Dal Molin base had reported, to the city council in early 2010, that some the wells in the proximity of the airfield contained brown water and therefore had suspected that the causes were related to the construction site works coming from the military base.⁵³⁹ Another issue emphasized, this time by the Department of Archeological activities of the Veneto Region⁵⁴⁰, was the discovery of prehistoric ruins from the Roman era in a section of the construction site near the airfield.⁵⁴¹ This had inevitably sparked the reaction of all the rebels against the Dal Molin, who tried to use this as an additional excuse to stop the project. However, the real issue at stake was represented by the aquifer in some areas of

⁵³⁴ Free newspaper that covers different topics and that is distributed in Caserma Ederle and in Camp Darby located in Livorno, Italy.

⁵³⁵ William B. Garrett.

⁵³⁶ Erik Daiga.

⁵³⁷ W. Garrett and E. Daiga, “We have great expectations for the Vicenza Military community”, *The Outlook*, 14 January 2010, Vol. 43, Issue 2, p. 2.

⁵³⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵³⁹ M. Scorzato, “Ora dai pozzi esce anche acqua e fango”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 31 January 2010.

⁵⁴⁰ “Soprintendenza per I beni archeologici del Veneto” in Italian, which is a branch of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities.

⁵⁴¹ R. Luciani, “Sorpresa: dall’area spuntano anche resti dell’eta’ della pietra”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 16 January 2010.

the base.⁵⁴² The problem was documented by a number of “No Dal Molin” volunteers on January 31, who had illegally entered inside the facility, taking advantage of the fact that the works had been temporarily suspended since December 2009, and had taken pictures around the construction site, which had proven that certain areas were completely flooded and in some cases had frozen because of the rigid temperature.⁵⁴³ The photographs were later handed to Mayor Variati, who had initially condemned the fact that the people had accessed the base without permission but afterwards had expressed his concern for the situation that had developed all of a sudden.⁵⁴⁴ The activists had supposed that the cause of the inconveniences was related to the thousands of poles that had been installed in the ground as a foundation for certain buildings and had therefore created a dam effect without giving the possibility to the aquifer to drain off in the Bacchiglione river⁵⁴⁵. It was later reported that 37 people belonging to the “No Dal Molin” group had been reported to the police for cutting the fence and abusively entering inside the installation.⁵⁴⁶ Achille Variati had decided afterwards to send a letter to Commissioner Paolo Costa to have some clarifications on the possible causes of the aquifer.⁵⁴⁷ The Mayor was mostly worried of the conditions of the water since it could have possibly flowed into the public aqueducts.⁵⁴⁸ In the end of March of 2010, ARPAV, in collaboration with the city Council of Vicenza, had partially confirmed what the activists had theorized, where the main fault was given to the 3,800 poles in the ground which had created a barrier for the water to down flow in the river.⁵⁴⁹ Another alarming fact that was highlighted from the tests of the water in the Dal Molin construction site was the high presence of trichloroethylene, a toxic substance that had

⁵⁴² G. M. Mancassola, “Variati e le foto del blitz Dal Molin, Non li approvo ma la falda preoccupa”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 2 February 2010.

⁵⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁵ Runs between the cities of Padova and Vicenza.

⁵⁴⁶ G. Todescan, “Blitz del No Dal Molin, 37 denunciati”, *Il Corriere del Veneto*, 1 February 2010.

⁵⁴⁷ G. M. Mancassola, “Variati: la falda e’ a rischio”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 17 February 2010.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁹ G. M. Mancassola, “Ostacolato il deflusso verso il Bacchiglione”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 28 March 2010.

not been yet found in the chemical test prior to June 2009.⁵⁵⁰ During the development of these issues, the local company that manages the water supply in Vicenza⁵⁵¹ projected that the U.S. Army would have to pay the Dal Molin administration an annual water bill of approximately 400,000 euro, were around 500 to 700 cubic meters of water would be consumed per day by the Ederle 2 site, based on a population of 2,000 people.⁵⁵²

Meanwhile the actual remodeling works in the base at the Dal Molin Airfield were regularly taking place, in summer of 2010, other problems related to future housing started to be emerge. The planned date for the reunification of the 173rd Brigade from Germany⁵⁵³ had been postponed to a date to be defined⁵⁵⁴ because of the limited capacity in the imminent accommodations being built in the Dal Molin and assigned to the American troops. Out of 2,000 soldiers coming from Germany, only 1,200 would be relocated in the facilities inside Ederle 2, which were designed largely for single people.⁵⁵⁵ Most of the U.S. families would still be placed in residences around little towns of Vicenza. This logistic problem had become critical in 2007 especially after a project aiming at recreating a new Villaggio della Pace this time in Quinto Vicentino⁵⁵⁶ was declined by the local urban administration.⁵⁵⁷ With a 2 year span left before the opening ceremony of the base, U.S. officials had started worrying about the functionality of Ederle 2. This happened mostly due to the high expenses for such a plan, since the Americans did not want to buy the houses, but would have rather rented them out, option that was turned down by the locals. The Italian construction companies

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵¹ Acque Vicentine. The company was founded in 1906, under the name of Aziende Municipalizzate Industriali di Vicenza, and started providing different services such as gas, water, electricity and public transportation. In 2008 it started specializing in water supply for Vicenza and the other nearby districts.

⁵⁵² G. M. Mancassola, "Dal Molin bollette da 400 mila euro", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 30 April 2010.

⁵⁵³ From the bases of Schweinfurt and Bamberg.

⁵⁵⁴ Late 2012, according to *Stars & Stripes*.

⁵⁵⁵ K. Harris, "Housing concerns may delay move from Germany to Italy", *Stars & Stripes*, 12 June 2010.

⁵⁵⁶ Which is distant 7,4 Km. from Vicenza.

⁵⁵⁷ Harris, "Housing concerns may delay move from Germany to Italy", *Stars & Stripes*.

weren't completely against the project, but had an obvious preference in having the Americans invest on a long-term contract for housing investments.

A part from the "No Dal Molin" committee, even the notorious labor unions CISL⁵⁵⁸ and UIL⁵⁵⁹ that up until that moment had not lined up against the foreign military bases in Italy, decided to align themselves to the activists after the Dal Molin base had not published a competition to hire Italian citizens for the site.⁵⁶⁰ Instead, the redundant workers from the foreign bases in the south of Italy⁵⁶¹ were given priority for employment in the upcoming opening of Ederle 2, compared to those in Vicenza who had relied on the promises made by the Americans for new job openings with the redevelopment of the site. The Italian trade unions had believed that there was a limit to tolerance and it had unequivocally been crossed with this event.⁵⁶² Another factor that was considered discouraging was the fact that the Americans were looking for personnel with experience in the sector and therefore the probabilities of hiring someone who had worked in another military site had more possibilities to be recruited in Dal Molin. CISL and UIL had previously calculated that with the launch of the new site in Vicenza, around 300 people would be qualified to be hired, instead the idea being delivered was divergent and frustrating, especially because several new job opportunities were guaranteed in the first years of the presentation of the project.⁵⁶³

In an interview published in the fall of 2010, by *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, of Paolo Costa, who had just been reconfirmed for his fourth year as the Commissioner of the Dal Molin project, many of his statements had appeared debatable.⁵⁶⁴ First of all, Costa had affirmed that since the creation of the plan, many things had changed and that people from Vicenza and surroundings had changed their mind in a more positive and consolidated way on the perspective of having another foreign military base in their

⁵⁵⁸ Confederazione Italiano Sindacato Lavoratori, founded in 1948.

⁵⁵⁹ Unione Italiana del Lavoro, founded in 1950.

⁵⁶⁰ G. M. Mancassola, "Posti di lavoro alla Ederle? Bye Bye", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 7 September 2010.

⁵⁶¹ Such as Sigonella and Naples.

⁵⁶² Mancassola, "Posti di lavoro alla Ederle? Bye Bye", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

⁵⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶⁴ "La Ederle 2 è ultimata, ora tangenziale e parco", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 25 October 2010.

city.⁵⁶⁵ He had also given most of the credit to the municipality administration of Vicenza, for working along with the Italian intentions in an international standpoint and therefore the city had helped the State maintain a global credibility for coming agreements.⁵⁶⁶ As for the recent local employment issue, Paolo Costa had replied that the chances of being unable to hire people from the regional territory were true and had added that he would have done all he could to make sure that the relationship with the people from Vicenza would not be jeopardized.⁵⁶⁷ He had also manifested limited hopes to the national financing of the beltway and the park⁵⁶⁸ that were supposedly designed to arise next to the Dal Molin area.⁵⁶⁹ When he was asked about the possible employment of employees from other American bases in Italy he said that he had to still get in touch with these military sites.⁵⁷⁰ Finally Costa had remarked that the buildings inside Dal Molin were to be considered fundamentally complete and he had confirmed the date⁵⁷¹ that he and all the staff involved in the project, had already predicted for the finalization of works.⁵⁷²

To prove that the situation between the administration involved with the project and the population of Vicenza was still somewhat tense, unlike Paolo Costa had affirmed in the interview, another demonstration was organized by the “No Dal Molin” committee, on January 16 of 2011, this time as a torch-light procession with more than 1,000 people⁵⁷³ who gathered up throughout the city.⁵⁷⁴ This specific date is significant because in 2008, Prime Minister Prodi had announced, in a general state of uncertainty, that the Italian Government was willing to fulfill the promise made with the Americans, confirming

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶⁸ Parco della Pace.

⁵⁶⁹ “La Ederle 2 è ultimata, ora tangenziale e parco”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁷¹ End of 2012.

⁵⁷² “La Ederle 2 è ultimata, ora tangenziale e parco”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*.

⁵⁷³ A. Mignano, “Piu’ di mille alla fiaccolata del No Dal Molin”, *Vicenza Piu’*, 16 January 2011.

⁵⁷⁴ G. Guidi, “Il popolo dei “No Base” torna in piazza. Domenica fiaccolata in centro storico”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 11 January 2011.

that the works base in Vicenza would be accomplished. In this case as well, a protest demonstration had taken place. In the 2011 one, the activists had given up on the possibility to stop the works in the base and had decided to fight even harder for other issues like the environmental one which primarily concerned the flooding in the Dal Molin area.

In this crucial period for the completion of the project, new *Wikileaks* cablegrams involving the Dal Molin affair were disclosed, generating even more mystery on the case. In July of 2008, in preparation of a meeting of former Deputy Assistant of the Secretary of Defense for African Affairs⁵⁷⁵ with the Italian Government, U.S. Ambassador Spogli had prepared a rundown on a number of topics that would be useful.⁵⁷⁶ The main topic of the discussion will be the negotiation with Silvio Berlusconi, who in the mean time had been reelected⁵⁷⁷ Italian Prime Minister, and with Gianni Letta⁵⁷⁸, for a creation of a department of the United States Africa Command⁵⁷⁹ in Vicenza. In this case Letta had appeared to be favorable to the idea of hosting an AFRICOM Department in Italy, rather than in other places, such as Spain, that were proposed as an alternative.⁵⁸⁰ However from the cablegram we can decrypt that Spogli appears a bit aware of the risks from the idea of having to discuss terms about AFRICOM:

In addition to securing political support, the Embassy expects there will be complicated legal issues arising out of the 1954 Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement (BIA) that governs the U.S. military presence in Italy. The BIA (Bilateral Infrastructures Agreement, Edit) only authorizes U.S. use of facilities "within the spirit and framework of NATO collaboration" unless otherwise agreed to by the GOI (Government Of Italy, Edit). Using U.S. Forces based in Italy for non-NATO missions is sensitive. In the past, Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in Vicenza has, however, been able to deploy troops on humanitarian and peacekeeping missions to Africa after obtaining

⁵⁷⁵ Theresa Whelan.

⁵⁷⁶ Wikileaks, Scenesetter for Visit of DASD Whelan: AFRICOM, <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=08ROME893>, cable date 22 July 2008, publishing date 1 September 2011, consultation date 23 October 2012.

⁵⁷⁷ Second prime minister mandate, from May 2008 until November of 2011.

⁵⁷⁸ Under Secretary to the Council of Ministers from 2008 until 2011.

⁵⁷⁹ AFRICOM (See p. 10).

⁵⁸⁰ Wikileaks, Scenesetter for Visit of DASD Whelan: AFRICOM.

concurrence from the MOD (Ministry Of Defense, Edit) on a case-by-case basis. CNE Naples has exercised command-and-control functions for U.S. Navy humanitarian and capacity-building operations in Africa (Africa Partnership Station). To move from a case-by-case basis to permanent ongoing operations will put us in uncharted legal territory. There could also be potential difficulties with regard to obtaining Italian visas for African trainees, since they would not be eligible to enter Italy under the NATO SOFA. Should we decide to base the AFRICOM Command HQ here, a full bilateral agreement on its presence and operations may be required. (Scenesetter for visit of DASD Whelan: AFRICOM, 3.)

The perception is that Ronald Spogli had already in his mind a solution to secure an AFRICOM deal, bypassing the potential conflicting bilateral regulations in Italy. He also points out that the priority was to make sure to separate the two topics, the infamous Dal Molin one and the potential AFRICOM one, to avoid additional disorders with the population of Vicenza. Just a few days later, from another cablegram of July 29 of 2008, Spogli had underlined that the summit with the Italian Government had been encouraging, however he had added that “the devil will be in the details”, which is referred to the fact that the project involving AFRICOM and Vicenza were somehow shaping up into an illegal agreement.⁵⁸¹ The Ambassador had described the Italian’s reaction to the proposed plan this way:

The GOI has made very clear their desire to host the off-continent AFRICOM HQ (headquarters, Edit). Italy seeks to increase its influence in Africa given its geographic proximity, and sees a synergy between U.S. goals in AFRICOM and the GOI's strategic goals in Africa. Letta told DASD (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Edit) Whelan and the Ambassador that he hoped the U.S. would seriously consider Italy given its geographic proximity to Africa, the history of strong U.S./Italy bilateral relations, and most importantly the excellent U.S./Italian mil/mil relations especially with respect to basing. Letta emphasized the GOI's history of providing operational flexibility for U.S. forces and the GOI's intent to continue to do so. Furthermore, as the proposed home to two of the service component commands, he argued Italy would be a natural location for the HQ. (Italy: proposed way forward on AFRICOM, 5.)

Spogli had eventually added that it was urgent, for any of the U.S. people in charge of the negotiation, to pressure Italy on a final decision, considering the Country’s slow-

⁵⁸¹ Wikileaks, Italy: Proposed Way Forward on AFRICOM, <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=08ROME945>, cable date 29 July 2008, publishing date 1 September 2011, consultation date 23 October 2012.

moving tendency to handle international agreements, such as the Dal Molin case.⁵⁸² The Ambassador at the end of the document seems to have faith in the fact that Berlusconi could be the key-factor to a prompt unlocking and positive resolution of the affairs.⁵⁸³ In a cablegram of November 2008, Ronald Spogli kept praising the fact that Prime Minister Berlusconi was the principal person to rely on for these agreements, despite his unfashionable ways of describing U.S. President Obama⁵⁸⁴ and his openings to Iran and Russia, not compatible with the American policy.⁵⁸⁵ Finally Spogli had advised Assistant Secretary of Defense Theresa Whelan that:

Your visit will provide an opportunity to highlight our cooperation on Africa through Italy's hosting of portions of AFRICOM. GOI officials were initially hesitant to sign off, due to concerns over how and under what circumstances U.S. forces in Italy might deploy to potential conflict zones in Africa. The GoI eventually agreed to the establishment of AFRICOM's Army and Navy subcomponent commands in existing facilities in Italy on October 1, but asked us to delay announcing the move (ref b). The South East Europe Task Force (SETAF) in Vicenza has assumed the Army component functions and a component of NAVEUR in Naples is now fulfilling the naval functions. Italian concerns focused on SETAF and hinged on two issues -- one legal and the other local and political. The classified 1954 Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement (BIA) limits U.S. basing in Italy exclusively to troops deployed for NATO purposes. After long negotiations, the GOI accepted our broad interpretation of the BIA and the NATO SOFA as applicable to the AFRICOM subcomponents due to their role in supporting NATO Operations in Africa and their availability for other NATO missions as required. But the GOI asked for us to delay public announcement of the shift due to local controversy over the expansion of the base in Vicenza to the Dal Molin airfield. (Scenesetter from your december 3 visit to Rome, 10.)

In December 2008, Caserma Ederle's historic Division of SETAF⁵⁸⁶ was converted into a section of the headquarters of the United States Army Africa⁵⁸⁷, part of the

⁵⁸² *Ibidem.*

⁵⁸³ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁸⁴ Berlusconi had defined Obama as "suntanned".

⁵⁸⁵ Wikileaks, Scenesetter for Your December 3 Visit to Rome, <https://www.cabledrum.net/cables/08ROME1406>, cable date 19 November 2008, publishing date 8 September 2011, consultation date 24 October 2012.

⁵⁸⁶ Now also known as SETAF/USARAF.

⁵⁸⁷ Operations are directed by the U.S., the U.K. and France. AFRICOM's main headquarters is in Stuttgart (Germany) and is involved with 53 African States.

AFRICOM.⁵⁸⁸ Spogli had affirmed in his last days in office that nowadays Italy represents the “home to the most comprehensive set of military capabilities - from the 173rd Airborne to cutting edge Global Hawks - that we have anywhere outside the United States”⁵⁸⁹ and that “with the establishment of AFRICOM, Italy has become an even more significant partner in our power projection calculations”.⁵⁹⁰ Meanwhile Vicenza was proceeding towards an unstoppable militarization of the city and was slowly destined to become the most populated town in Italy by American soldiers. The most recent official numbers of U.S. presence in Dal Molin, which were registered in September of 2011, sums up to 1,619 units, with 1,547 soldiers, 68 members of the Department of Defense and other 4 civilians.⁵⁹¹

The works in the Dal Molin area continued and had finally seemed to be shaping in the right way for American and Italian administrators. In January of 2012 David Buckingham, United States Army Garrison Commander of Vicenza, had denied⁵⁹² the voices of possible cuts in the soon-to-be inaugurated Dal Molin base, since Barack Obama had began working a process of downsizing of personnel and funds in the U.S. overseas military bases. Yet, Buckingham had declared that the Pentagon’s intention was to cut 15% of the U.S. military personnel in Europe. The colonel had declared that the new base would open 275 working positions, 200 reserved for Italians⁵⁹³. Looking back at the preliminary settlements of the Dal Molin project, around 350 jobs were predicted of being generated with the new site, while now the possibilities of being employed in the new base were slowly diminishing, especially because other military camps in Italy were on the way of being altered by the U.S. cut policy, letting down expectations that had been created. Furthermore Buckingham had predicted that by the

⁵⁸⁸ “Il comando AFRICOM passa di qui”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 20 March 2011.

⁵⁸⁹ Wikileaks, Final Thoughts on the US-Italy Relationship: What We Can Ask for a Strong Ally, http://racconta.espresso.repubblica.it/espresso-wikileaks-database-italia/dettaglio_eng.php?id=3, cable date 5 February 2009, publishing date 8 September 2011, consultation date 25 October 2012.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹¹ Base Structure Report 2012 (See p. 10).

⁵⁹² M. Scorzato, “Obama taglia la Ederle, il Dal Molin resiste”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 14 January 2012.

⁵⁹³ 65 of these were destined to those being affected by the downsizing in Caserma Ederle.

end of works in Dal Molin, Vicenza would be hosting around 5,000 soldiers between the new base and Caserma Ederle.⁵⁹⁴ Sure, it is a difficult assignment to predict an exact estimate of potential jobs that could be created with a military base abroad and most of all it is almost impossible to predict a financial crisis with the entity of the one that began in 2008, but still it is comprehensive to end up having a majority of the population of Vicenza irritated by the own Government and America. The ones who have ended up making the most of the situation in Vicenza are clearly the United States of America and once again it was proven that the powerless population was not able to modify state of affairs.

In April of 2012, David Thorne⁵⁹⁵, the successor of Ronald Spogli as U.S. Ambassador to Italy, had paid tribute to the Italian hospitality and had underlined all the decades of partnership between America and the city of Vicenza.⁵⁹⁶ Moreover Thorne had disclosed some numbers related to the latest status of the Dal Molin, which he had defined as the biggest American military base outside the U.S. borders: 311 million dollars invested for the creation of the base, a yearly generation of more than 500 million dollars in incomes⁵⁹⁷, more than 2,000 U.S. soldiers a complex of 34 buildings⁵⁹⁸, 900 staffers⁵⁹⁹ working in the construction site, a general raise in real estate activity in Vicenza and in the entire region and finally the opening ceremony of the site around the end of 2012.⁶⁰⁰ In August of 2012, the press officer at Caserma Ederle had expected the date of inauguration of the Dal Molin to be delayed to March 2013.⁶⁰¹ Luca Zaia⁶⁰², the President of the Region of Veneto, who was also present at the meeting with

⁵⁹⁴ A. Mazzeo, "Le nuove guerre dei militari USA di Vicenza", *Cado in Piedi*, 24 March 2012.

⁵⁹⁵ In charge since August 2009.

⁵⁹⁶ "Base USA, inaugurazione a fine dicembre. Sono in arrivo oltre 200 soldati americani", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 3 April 2012.

⁵⁹⁷ Along with the U.S. military base of Camp Darby, Livorno.

⁵⁹⁸ Which include several green areas.

⁵⁹⁹ Workers and architects.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰¹ A. Zorzan, "Ederle 2, soldati con le valigie pronte. A marzo prossimo il trasloco al Dal Molin", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 8 August 2012.

⁶⁰² In charge since 2010.

Ambassador Thorne and Mayor Variati, had specified that the new base would generate almost 300 million euro.⁶⁰³

The most recent issue related to the base has been represented by the unanticipated announcement made by the Italian Commander of Caserma Ederle⁶⁰⁴ on the name change of the Dal Molin base into Del Din.⁶⁰⁵ Formerly the base was named after Tommaso Dal Molin, a pilot born in the province of Vicenza who heroically died in a plane crash 1930. The decision was taken back in November of 2011, by former Italian Minister of Defense, Ignazio La Russa. The new title of the base is connected to Renato Del Din, a partisan who died at the end of World War II, who was not born or has any relation to Vicenza. Perhaps the choice of naming a base after someone else from Dal Molin was a design to erase all the negative associations that had characterized the evolution of the project in the past years or maybe a nationalist like La Russa wanted to use someone who had taken part to the Resistance in Italy, like Del Din, as a symbol of a patriotism for the new base, for a work that seems to represent a patrimony for domestic defense. If we look at the way the plan has developed throughout the years, it is easy to think that the United States have had full control on the whole Dal Molin situation from the start and it seems as if they could care less about the name that is assigned to the base. Mayor Variati, unaware of the changes, had also sent a letter in April of 2012 to the Italian Minister of Defense⁶⁰⁶, criticizing the fact that neither him or the citizens of Vicenza had been not consulted.⁶⁰⁷ One month later, the Minister's spokesman had replied by saying that the property of the Dal Molin site, that formerly belonged to the Italian Air Force, had been taken over by the Italian Army and therefore was entitled to modify certain aspects of the installation.⁶⁰⁸ The decision of changing

⁶⁰³ "Vicenza, Dal Molin pronta per l'inizio del 2013", *Lettera 43 Quotidiano Online Indipendente*, 3 April 2012.

⁶⁰⁴ Edoardo Maggian.

⁶⁰⁵ G. Todescan, "La nuova caserma USA intitolata a un partigiano. L'anni si ribella", *Il Corriere del Veneto*, 18 April 2012.

⁶⁰⁶ Giampaolo Di Paola, in office since November of 2011.

⁶⁰⁷ "La base USA è Del Din e non più Dal Molin a insaputa di Variati: mi appello al ministro", *Vicenza Più*, 19 April 2012.

⁶⁰⁸ M. Scorzato, "Caserma USA, Dal Molin - Del Din, il cambio nome non è definitivo", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 27 May 2012.

the name of the base was defined by the representative as an unofficial move that had to be legalized before being considered validated.⁶⁰⁹ The spokesman had finally concluded that the chances of keeping the name of the Base in honor of Dal Molin were poor and city council of Vicenza had no authority in the decision-making of this case.⁶¹⁰

The Dal Molin, Del Din or Ederle 2, however you want to call it, is meant to become one of the most crucial American military settlements in Europe. The proximity of the base to the Middle Eastern area is definitely one of the major reasons that has pressured the U.S. to heavily invest in the Italian peninsula. The people belonging to the “No Dal Molin” committee and those living in the surroundings of what is meant to become one of the most crucial bases in the Continent, have been remarkable for their constant efforts made in these years. In a democracy, the nation should always have the right to express disapproval, in this case for a project that had never taken into account the residents of Vicenza for any sort of decision. On the other side we have experienced how powerless, most of times, the actions of these people have turned out to be. The fear of ending up militarizing the ancient Palladian town is slowly becoming reality, especially because after the completion of the Dal Molin, a new defense project connected with the U.S.A. is set to be unveiled. As a matter of fact the Pentagon is ready to invest 26,2 million dollars for the modernization of Site Pluto⁶¹¹, located at only 10 Km. from Vicenza, after several years of inactivity.⁶¹²

If we consider the 500 million dollars in military investments made by the United States in the city of Vicenza in the last 10 years, it is easy to recognize the consideration and the strategic importance that the Americans have for this particular town.⁶¹³ It is essential to keep in mind that also that the U.S. does not pay for all of the expenses related to these military sites overseas, in fact the Italian Government finances the

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁶¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁶¹¹ See p. 12.

⁶¹² N. Negrin, “La base americana Pluto sarà ricostruita con 21 milioni”, *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 25 August 2012.

⁶¹³ D. Pelanda, “Dal Molin Vicenza preoccupata per la militarizzazione USA”, *Articolo Tre*, 30 August 2012.

existence of these bases.⁶¹⁴ This is also one of the main reasons why the citizens have been so fierce about their protests against these camps. In this affair, the leading figures profiting are unquestionably the working companies, starting from those involved in the construction sector up to those which are in charge of the wiring that runs inside the base. These firms are the ones that receive the majority of the prosperous investments both from the United States and Italy. While the ones who are mostly affected are the unfortunate citizens that end up paying for the functioning of these installations.

The environmental repercussions on Vicenza that will be caused by the redeveloping of the Dal Molin area have been a critical and noticeably a popular topic among the activists. The energy, like gas⁶¹⁵, water⁶¹⁶ and electricity⁶¹⁷, that will be used by the base is going to be of massive proportions, not to mention the fact that the city already can count another high-power consuming base such as Caserma Ederle. We have to picture this situation inside a framework where the United States had not taken part to the gas emission Protocol of Kyoto, which enabled them to pollute with no proper restrictions since the military site considering its status of extraterritoriality. Furthermore the latest decision in the 2011 climate summit in Durban⁶¹⁸ to have America, China and India cut their carbon emissions is unlikely going to be effective for the protection of global warming and the environment. Sadly, on top of this, Vicenza has been reported by Legambiente⁶¹⁹ in 2012 as one of the top 10 cities with the most contaminated air in

⁶¹⁴ See p. 19.

⁶¹⁵ Dal Molin will consume the amount of gas that more than 5,000 inhabitants benefit from (McMilitary - Information sheet by the No Dal Molin group <http://mcmilitary.org/media/200708071019.pdf>).

⁶¹⁶ Dal Molin will consume the amount of water that more than 30,000 inhabitants benefit from (*Ibidem.*).

⁶¹⁷ Dal Molin will consume the amount of electricity that more than 26,000 inhabitants benefit from (*Ibidem.*).

⁶¹⁸ Which replaces the Protocol of Kyoto agreements.

⁶¹⁹ One of the major Italian environmental associations.

Italy, with sky-rocket particle pollution levels in the PM10 and PM2.5⁶²⁰ measurements.⁶²¹

What has really played a key-role in the Dal Molin affair has been the press, that at the start has been impressively controlled by those who were in charge of the project, clearly worried of the population's opinion. The main goal, before it inevitably became a primary issue, was to make sure that such a controversial plan would not become a matter of national and international interest. The reality is that the power expressed by the media is still so firm and this is clearly a sign of poor interpretation of a democratic society. Once again, the United States have displayed their influence in these type of affairs. Looking back at its glorious history, the aesthetic and internal appearance of Vicenza have been reshaped in such a way that will permanently scar the town's future.

⁶²⁰ The PM10 are the contaminated fragments of 10 micrometers in terms of thickness while the PM2.5 are the ones measured by 2.5 micrometers.

⁶²¹ Legambiente, Dossier Mal'aria di Legambiente 2012, http://www.legambiente.it/sites/default/files/docs/opuscolo_malaria2012.pdf, consultation date 20 December 2012.

5.3 Aviano 2000

Before the beginning of the 1990s, the military base of Aviano was merely used for minor tasks, such as a temporary airport for jets and for further NATO and American division deployments in nearby regions and was considered an obsolete camp. In those days there used to be less than two-thirds of the soldiers that are nowadays stationed inside the base. Currently we count almost 8,000 U.S. units in the station, which include soldiers, civilians and relatives of the troops, along with more than 1,500 Italian troopers and base staff members⁶²². Prior to the expansion of the installation, whenever a military or property renovation mission took place inside the base, locals would consider it almost as an extremely rare event. The perception was that the hangars in Aviano were almost too big for the number of activities that occurred inside the site. Rather than peacekeeping operations, which as a matter of fact began only after the beginning of Aviano 2000, the attention most of times was drawn by the sometimes arguable behavior, due to excessive drinking, of some soldiers in bars outside of the base. Now everything has changed. Since the enlargement of the military potential in the whole area, the air base has developed into one of the most modern and powerful NATO and U.S. headquarters overseas. Moreover, with the possibility of now counting on two major airfield sections, the role of the United States Air Force in Aviano, the prime branch based in the camp, has suddenly become prestigious.

Aviano has experienced a similar path to Vicenza in terms of modernization and expansion of its structure, but on the other side it has been surrounded by fewer negative connotations compared to the Dal Molin odyssey. Aviano 2000, which is the name that was assigned to the restoration plan of the area, has been promoted by NATO and therefore the United States, facilitating the acceptance of the initiative, compared to Ederle 2 where the United States was the only tangible actor in the negotiations for the concession of the base. It's important to keep in mind that the Aviano Air Base is still property of the Italian Government, which has decided to concede its belongings to NATO, that at the same time acknowledges the presence of the United States within the settlement. The project consisted in an expansion and improvement of all the active and

⁶²² O. Kreisher, "Thunder road on the Southern Flank", *The Airforce Magazine*, September 2002.

inoperative buildings and technologies, previously present in the air base of Aviano, for the divisions present in the camp such as USAF⁶²³ and the U.S. NAVY⁶²⁴.

In 1992, when the two F-16 Fighter Wing Squadrons were relocated from the Spanish base of Torrejón to the quiet site of Aviano, after a number of alternative military camps in the South of Italy were abandoned as a possible new settlement for the American Units, the first elements of a possible renewal of the decaying base in Friuli Venezia Giulia started to assemble. At the time the choice of Aviano was not considered as a crucial move by either the American or the Italian Government, especially because the base had no former permanent divisions inhabiting the base. The discreet lifestyle surrounding the area and the imminent departure of the Italian Army from the installation in 1995, had represented the major factors for the introduction of an additional U.S. presence in the North East of Italy. A few years later with the war in Yugoslavia there were no more doubts that Aviano had been the right choice in all respects. Ever since there have been a series of structural changes inside the base that are classified as the Aviano 2000 program and that are due to be ready in 2013.⁶²⁵ The proposals have been managed by the 31st Civil Engineer Squadron, that has been able in these years, especially thanks to its leader Steve Rose⁶²⁶, to develop a number of innovative projects, that all combined are increasing the strength and will end upgrading the status of the military base of Aviano worldwide.

The investments made for Aviano 2000⁶²⁷ sum up to more than 530 million dollars, out of which 352 million dollars have been sponsored by NATO and 174 million dollars⁶²⁸ from the U.S. Government.⁶²⁹ The Italian Government has also helped financing 12 projects with 10 million dollars along with a 210 acre concession, which consisted in

⁶²³ 31st Fighter Wing and 16th Air Force.

⁶²⁴ Atlantic Division for Naval Facilities Engineering (LANTDIV), Engineering Field Activity Mediterranean (EFAMED) and Resident Officer in Charge of Constructions (ROICC).

⁶²⁵ K. Harris, "End to Aviano construction almost in sight", *Stars & Stripes*, 6 August 2007.

⁶²⁶ Chief of the Project Management Office of Aviano.

⁶²⁷ From 1995 until 2005.

⁶²⁸ R. Tomaiuolo and G. LaGassey, "Benefits of a project office", *United States Air Force*, 25 June 2003.

⁶²⁹ L. Arana-Barradas, "Aviano undergoes Renaissance", *United States Air Force*, 24 September 2007.

the former Zappalà base, for terrain to be used for the assignments.⁶³⁰ This represents the second highest financing of all time for a military structure in the World and the number one modernization process implemented by NATO for a military base.⁶³¹ United States Air Force Colonel Gary LaGassey⁶³² was appointed as the managing director of the Aviano 2000 project. The fact of having different actors sponsoring the creation of such a costly affair, has to be examined with a specific perspective. The risks of undertaking Aviano 2000 have been multiple: the different expectations, the requisite to coordinate operations between different leaders, the realization of having different laws into play and communication problems due to different languages. We have to also picture this project as an interconnection between all the plans, that for example involve electric power, gas and water. This could have only created a knock-on effect in the event that any of the projects would experience a delay. Eventually the projects undertaken were throughout exceptionally successful, in part for the undisturbed local population atmosphere that never really attempted to halt the operations and also to the excellent partnership between the United States and Italy. These factors cannot be applied to the analogous idea in Vicenza behind the Dal Molin affair.

A total of 264 projects were foreseen and conducted by a cooperation between American and Italian construction companies, even if out of these only 99 were classified as major, with 33 were that have been managed by the Italian Air Force and the other 66 led by the United States Navy.⁶³³ Other 26 of these blueprints were fully funded by the U.S. Air Force.⁶³⁴ The U.S. Congress and NATO fundings were mainly divided in two directions, with about 460 million dollars destined to the F-16 division, while the remaining money was used to finance the rest of the expenses related to the 4 square kilometers town inside the base that had been shaping up.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁶³¹ *Ibidem.*

⁶³² Began serving in Aviano in 1995 as the USAFE Commander of relations between Italy and the United States of America.

⁶³³ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 73.

⁶³⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁶³⁵ *Ibidem.*

The main particularity of this base is that it is structured all around the city of Aviano and it is divided into 6 individual quarters, unlike many other military sites in the world. This resulted in a complicating factor for the architects. The first quarter, the former Aviano Air Base, which initially had been notorious for having heavy traffic jam, has been reviewed.⁶³⁶ With the Aviano 2000 project, the area of what was once called Zappalà has been transformed in the main hub of the Aviano base, especially for its location outside the city center and therefore to prevent car congestions on the streets. This quarter has also become the center of many other projects, such as new dormitories for soldiers, logistic center, schools and all sorts of American style stores.⁶³⁷

The Aviano 2000 construction works began in 1995, in the sector of the former Salvatore Zappalà barracks⁶³⁸, in a delicate moment for the military base.⁶³⁹ There had been several rumors that asserted that there would have been a permanent closure of the site, until the U.S. and Italy reached an agreement.⁶⁴⁰ Unlike in the Dal Molin base, the planned works inside the Aviano area took place regularly, and were divided into three main projects that were executed progressively one at the time, due to the initial limited space of the base.⁶⁴¹ These ideas started to become reality only in 1997, with the establishment of a complex of buildings that was intended to function as a mall with a Commissary and Base Exchange assignment, a major building for logistic and management matters which was called Base Exchange, and finally a well-organized internal road system.⁶⁴² The other “minor” projects include a 6 building accommodation⁶⁴³ complex to host the soldiers along with shared leisure facilities for

⁶³⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 74.

⁶³⁸ Where the Italian Army had stationed since the beginning of the 1950s and that with the arrival of the 31st Fighter Wing was destined to be converted into space for U.S. and NATO causes.

⁶³⁹ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 76

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 74.

⁶⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴³ With 276 rooms.

the soldiers, a brand new 31 meter earthquake proof watchtower⁶⁴⁴, different types of school, a movie theater, a post office, a playground area for the children.⁶⁴⁵ One of the main sectors of the base that has been modernized is the first hangar, where a modern Corrosion Control Facility was created, enabling the specialists of the division to personally paint the F-16's.⁶⁴⁶ In 2012, the first aircraft was air-brushed in the new Aviano base.⁶⁴⁷ The first hangar now also hosts a flight simulator, located in a basement on the opposite side of the airfield. This specific large storage building is commonly used for different types of ceremonies that include commemorations and the performance of the national anthem.⁶⁴⁸

The Aviano 2000 project has also made possible the creation of a shooting range, a new large storage area for the deposit of military equipment, and a specific structure that will facilitate the way pilots access the aircrafts and perform frequent flight tests at any time, especially during critical weather. With the departure of the Italian divisions inside the base in 1995, four basements⁶⁴⁹ became available and were converted into supplementary state for the 31st Fighter Wing division.⁶⁵⁰ Other Aviano 2000 projects, that were based in the remaining three hangars include the civilian terminal of the base, an area to refuel the F-16s and a brand new light system installed on the airstrip.⁶⁵¹ On the social side, a substantial amount of funds were invested to make sure that the site would recreate a true to life feeling and atmosphere for families living far way from home, even in a critical place like a military camp. The base in Aviano, thanks to the expansion enterprise, can now count on a library, an assistance center for the newly arrived troopers, a housing office that functions as a real estate agency to solve any sort

⁶⁴⁴ That costed 1,7 million euro (Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 88).

⁶⁴⁵ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 74.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 75

⁶⁴⁷ J. Weaver, "Aviano unveils first locally painted F-16", *United States Air Force*, 24 October 2012.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴⁹ A couple of them used to host Italian tanks.

⁶⁵⁰ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 75.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

of allocation problem involving the families living inside the base.⁶⁵² The military divisions administrators inside the base have also the possibility to modify and incorporate new projects. The General of the 31st Fighter Wing at the time⁶⁵³, Charles F. Wald, had affirmed that the way the project had smoothly developed was a clear sign that the American and NATO presence in the city of Aviano was meant to be long-term and not just a temporary solution.⁶⁵⁴

To deal with the possible protests of the population from the Aviano 2000, in 1997⁶⁵⁵ the Mayors of the local municipalities surrounding the site had collectively requested the Italian Government to financially contribute to alleviate the sustainability and environmental impact of a project with these proportions in the territory.⁶⁵⁶ Eventually a year later, in 1998, Italy had authorized the funding of a first draft that consisted in a 12 million euro⁶⁵⁷ contribution that would be destined to the districts as a stimulus to invest on public works.⁶⁵⁸ The main projects consisted in improvements to the streets, the sewerage system and waterworks, the developing of new suburban areas and the refinement of the real estate network.⁶⁵⁹ One of the priorities that was triggered with the initiation of Aviano 2000 and set by most local administrations, was to favor the American influence in the territory, from the private stars and stripes companies up to the soldiers, and stimulate investments with Italian businesses.⁶⁶⁰ This is a curious fact considering that the population alongside to Aviano has never shown clear signs of opposition to the U.S. position in the area but has rather done a great deal of things to incentivize their presence, an example of civility that cannot be applied to the case in Vicenza.

⁶⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵³ Wald served in Aviano from May of 1995 until July of 1997.

⁶⁵⁴ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 74.

⁶⁵⁵ The negotiations had begun in 1995.

⁶⁵⁶ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 76.

⁶⁵⁷ That would be divided into six deferred payments.

⁶⁵⁸ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 76.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 77.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

The primary problem in the first place that derived from the relocation from Spain to Italy of the Fighter Wings was represented by the housing situation of all the American families in the Aviano Air Base. The U.S. had initially plotted to create a residential district reserved for its soldiers and relatives, such as Il Villaggio della Pace in Vicenza, but the idea had been quickly turned down by the local administrations that had given the option to build houses in shared areas.⁶⁶¹ The agreement that was reached between the U.S. Air Force and the Mayors of the communities foresaw the fabrication of a series of homes with an Italian building design but also with American plant engineering.⁶⁶² Even the Italian construction firms have been positively affected by Aviano 2000 and the American and NATO capitals. The Italian President of Building Constructors⁶⁶³ for the city of Pordenone, Valerio Pontarolo, has confirmed this effective trend in the category, saying that the expansion of the base has given the possibility to many people to work thanks to the many building sites inside the base.⁶⁶⁴ Furthermore Pontarolo has added that the introduction of the American's way of projecting and dealing with these type of projects is impressive and different from what normally occurs in Italy.⁶⁶⁵ For example, the United States approach to Aviano 2000 has consisted in paying a design engineer, who becomes in charge of the whole comprehensive project that is later subject to bids by the various building contractors. In this case, offering the most money does not necessarily mean that they would automatically become winners of the contract but there is also a voting system prior to the final decision that analyzes the conduct of the firms while making an offer. This method of selection is quite different compared to the Italian one, which instead begins from the definition of a financial plan that has to be obtained by the designer, and that is usually modified by the construction firms. Even the American payment process while dealing with engineer projects is another aspect praised by Pontarolo.⁶⁶⁶ Unlike the

⁶⁶¹ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁶² *Ivi*, p. 78.

⁶⁶³ Also known as Associazione Nazionale Costruttori Edili, ANCE.

⁶⁶⁴ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 78.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*

Italian mentality which in most cases chooses to carry out background checks on the appointed firms for an assignment, the Americans prefer to trust the companies since the beginning, because if anything went wrong there are certain conditions in the deal that enable to terminate the contract.⁶⁶⁷ The Americans involved in the Aviano 2000 project have been impeccable in fulfilling the terms that were established, making sure that all the deadlines regarding the completion of works of the project were met.⁶⁶⁸ Nothing compared to the situation that has been developing for all these years in Vicenza.

Nowadays these expansion projects in the base have been finished, not just in the city of Aviano, but also in towns in the province of Pordenone, and have not yet registered any sort of major problems between the Italians and the Americans living in the same districts. This proves again the cooperative spirit between the same actors, in a town like Aviano very close to Vicenza where there is still a debate that involves everyone and where there has historically been a struggle to reach consensual deals for similar causes. Nonetheless we have to register a number of episodes that have aimed at destabilizing activities inside the base. In September of 1993, three individuals belonging to the Italian terrorist organization of the Red Brigades⁶⁶⁹, had placed an explosive and shot multiple times at the dormitories, where the Americans were sleeping.⁶⁷⁰ There have been several attacks carried out by a local terrorist group.⁶⁷¹ The most relevant episodes occurred in 1996, when a U.S. military vehicle was set on fire a day before the arrival in Aviano of former U.S. President Bill Clinton and in 1999 another stars and stripes car is hit by a bomb.⁶⁷² These incidents, along with some other minor terrorist attacks, that the NTA had later justified as a strategy of menace lead by political opposition against the United States, ended up playing a big role on the future way of acting of the foreign soldiers outside of the base. The administrators of the Aviano site had began encouraging their troops to keep a low-key and observant attitude

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ivi*, p. 79.

⁶⁶⁹ Also known as Brigade Rosse or BR.

⁶⁷⁰ "Bombe ad Aviano: proclama delle BR in aula", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 7 June 1994, p. 14.

⁶⁷¹ Nuclei Territoriali Antimperialisti, also known as NTA, that is somewhat similar to the BRs.

⁶⁷² "Incendiate due auto di soldati USA", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 March 2003, p. 12.

outside of the air base. The first actual measure that was adopted, was the removal of acronyms from the plaques of the automobiles, that would have a connection with the military base of Aviano and the United States.⁶⁷³

The favorable impact of Aviano 2000 is now vanishing since the most part of the projects have been completed. As a matter of fact, the growth plan that took place in Aviano has marked a line between a positive and a negative chain of events, especially for the local economy. Since 1955, when the first U.S. troops were being stationed in the peripheral base in Friuli Venezia-Giulia, until the mid-1990s, there has been an increasing beneficial effect thanks to the stars and stripes presence in the territory. Local sectors like real estate, increasing job opportunities and rising demand for accommodation and food provisions were among the few that profited from the foreign military addition to the district population. The beginning of the 1990s, the years prior to Aviano 2000, were described⁶⁷⁴ as a stabilized partnership between NATO, which for the most part meant America, and the local communities that either worked inside the base as civilians or gained from the increased business spreading outside the camp.⁶⁷⁵ Also social integration escalated, with many American families sending their kids to Italian kindergartens and elementary schools.⁶⁷⁶ Nevertheless, an ambitious remodeling assignment, like the one that took place in Aviano, corresponded, for instance, to a natural predilection for leading national and international companies rather than the local ones to be commissioned for the construction works. Furthermore, the simultaneous decrease in value of the U.S. dollar compared to the euro, that came along with the beginning of the expansion operations inside the base, and the growing fear and fight against terrorism launched by the United States after 9/11, have damaged the positive commercial trend that was originated with the relocation of the 31st Fighter Wing division in Aviano.⁶⁷⁷ However most of the complaints coming from the local businesses were addressed to the fact that the prices of general retail shops and

⁶⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷⁴ By Mayor of Aviano, Giovanni Zanin, who served in the city council from 1980 until 1995.

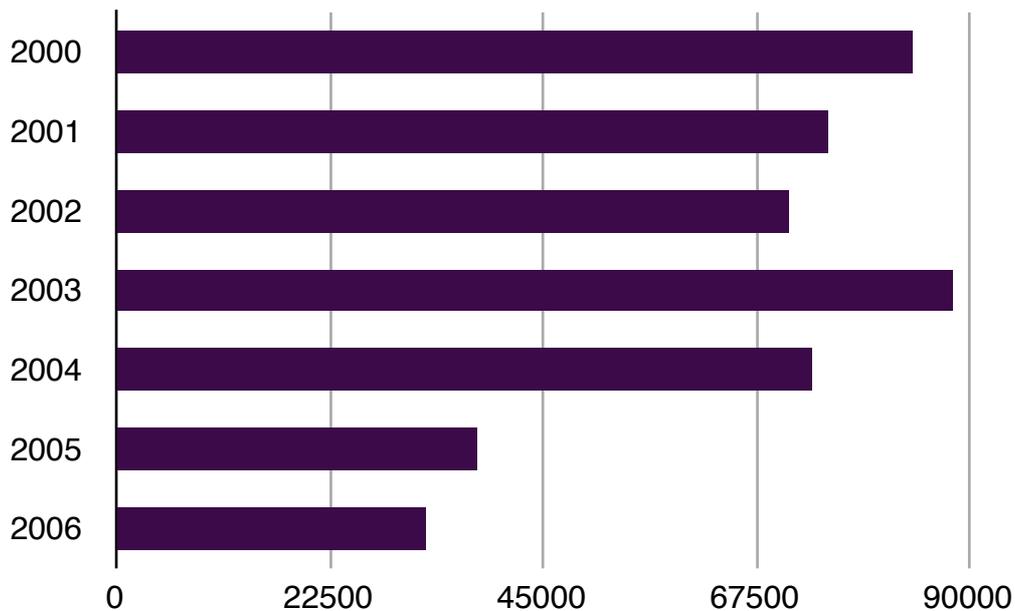
⁶⁷⁵ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 81.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 82.

restaurants inside the military site after Aviano 2000 were competitive and slightly lower compared to the ones outside.⁶⁷⁸ This is a chart released that has been released by the Department of Commerce and Tourism of Friuli Venezia-Giulia:

Figure 3. Tourism in Friuli: U.S. presence in the municipalities of Pordenone



Source: Region of Friuli Venezia-Giulia

We can notice the progressive decline of Americans in the appointed territory in terms of tourists. The data is based on reservations on hotels and who are not necessarily related to the military site. The answer to these decreasing circumstances is associated to the effects that have developed since the expansion of the air base. In 2006 the number of U.S. citizens visiting the area has dropped down by more than 50%.

All of these factors combined, merging in the Aviano 2000 project, have brought the U.S. Army to gradually lean towards an auto-sufficient status, knocking down many local hopes of establishing a fortified commercial partnership with America. The genuine mistake by the Italian side was to hand over spaces and multiple investment possibilities, that have somehow posed a threat to future local entrepreneurs, discouraging them from financing projects that could largely subsist on tourism. The

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

administrators of Aviano and the surrounding communities, even if located in minor and supposedly insignificant towns, should emphasize on the “made in Italy” label, which is unique, widely recognized in the World and therefore in several cases a synonym of commercial success.

The Mayor of Aviano during the project⁶⁷⁹, Gianluigi Rellini, has been the most reliable witness to the slow decline of most of the businesses located around and in the proximity of the base. Many of these restaurants, lodging and other various stores have not been profitable as much as the years before the camp’s expansion. Mayor Rellini has affirmed that the Aviano 2000 project has had two types of repercussions on the community.⁶⁸⁰ In the first place, when the works officially had initiated, nearly all the local occupations were subject to the enthusiastic impact of the U.S. aura in the territory and in the Friuli area, especially thanks to the occurrence of a number of subcontracts.⁶⁸¹ After a period of potential success, many businesses began registering losses, especially hotels, which originally had embodied the prime category capable of attracting foreign capital.⁶⁸² According to Rellini, a great deal of them had to shut down, largely because they were unable to compete with the newly established housing inside the base.⁶⁸³ Therefore soldiers that had arrived recently in Italy would rather establish themselves inside the cheaper quarters inside the base instead of temporary lodge in a county hotel before finding an opportune accommodation, which was something popular before the development of the military site. Moreover, a massive build to lease housing project launched by the U.S. Government in the end of the 1990s, that foresaw the creation of 700 fully furnished family apartments situated in 16 separate districts close to Aviano, specifically for American soldiers, has impoverished the local real estate orbit.⁶⁸⁴ However after an initial successful trend, in 2011 only 530 of these projects were built and due to the Financial Crisis, many of these modern houses were

⁶⁷⁹ Has served for two mandates.

⁶⁸⁰ Bortolin and Lisetto, *Aviano USA*, p. 82.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸⁴ L. Arana-Barradas, “Aviano undergoes Renaissance”, *United States Air Force*, 24 September 2007.

considered too expensive and in the most cases ended up being empty.⁶⁸⁵ Some Italian construction firms that had entered an agreement for these houses with the Pentagon, have been now trying to sell, most of the times with negative results, these properties.⁶⁸⁶ The fact that these accommodations are being put up for sale doesn't necessarily mean that the U.S. presence in the area is being reduced, instead usually there is a basic strategic relocation in the territory for future construction s along with a reduction of the capacity of these homes.

The strengthening of the base in Aviano has been tremendous and was justified as an improved way to air-combat different complex situations and shall be considered as a support settlement in defense of the Southern area of the European sphere, with a priority in maintaining stability in the Mediterranean region. Following a research on the economic impact of the stars and stripes bases overseas, made by USAF and then presented to the U.S. Congress, we can observe some interesting statistics on the money and jobs that have been generated by the business interconnected to Aviano 2000.⁶⁸⁷ The study⁶⁸⁸ shows that 427 million dollars have been pumped in Aviano's and surrounding economy. The majority of these capitals, 199 million dollars, correspond to the spendings of the military staff outside of the air base.⁶⁸⁹ Furthermore 104,9 million dollars were produced by the purchase of general equipment and tools, 47,3 million from the investment in construction and assembly proceedings and 16 million for functioning expenses.⁶⁹⁰ On the occupational side, with almost 60 million dollars in salary retributions, 1,743 new positions were created thanks to the military base.⁶⁹¹ The main concern related to the credibility of this official data is the fact that there is no mentioning of the negative impact of the base with the local territory. More in specific we are talking about environmental and acoustic pollution, impoverishment of the

⁶⁸⁵ D. Schettini, "In vendita gli alloggi di Aviano 2000", *Il Messaggero Veneto*, 21 July 2011.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸⁷ USAFE Economic Impact Analysis 2009, <http://www.usafe.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-101109-001.pdf>, consultation date 23 November 2012.

⁶⁸⁸ As of September of 2009.

⁶⁸⁹ USAFE Economic Impact Analysis 2009.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

natural resources since the base is located in a tall Pordenone valley, heavy vehicle traffic, the buildup of residues and high risk of radioactive materials due to the presence of atomic weapons. Additional elements that increase the feeling of doubtfulness of this research are the unregistered contracts reached by the American Department of Defense and other local administrative delegations. Also the fact that there have been recent military cuts to the budget for military bases outside the U.S. borders and that is arranged by the Pentagon, which means that the number of accommodations inside the base will drop along with the average monthly lease. There have been certainly beneficial factors with the outcome of the improved base, but the real risk stands behind the aspect of depending almost exclusively on an economy based on military revenues and therefore on the American presence in the territory. The main reflection of this idea is the massive increase of rents for houses in the district that surrounds the air base, which in a slacking economy means, for example, an increase of complications for a young couple to move into a place. The instantaneous generation of profits has provoked an inflation of the real estate sector in the community.

One of the most controversial topics related to Aviano is represented by the presence of atomic weapons inside the base, which is forbidden by the law. Regardless from this veto, Italy is to be considered to all intents and purposes as a nuclear State. A secret agreement called “Stone Ax” was signed years later the end of World War II, between the 1950’s and the 1960’s, and was renovated in 2001 after 9/11.⁶⁹² With the growing terrorism menace in the World, the details of the pact finally came to light. William Arkin, an American nuclear weapon expert, was the first person to reveal the existence of this bilateral agreement.⁶⁹³ It is estimated that Italy hosts 90 atomic warheads⁶⁹⁴, out of which 50 are situated in the Aviano Air Base.⁶⁹⁵ The decades of secretiveness of the accord show how the United States had clearly in mind a way to store atomic weapons in the proximity of the Soviet Union in the first place and after its dissolution at the

⁶⁹² “Nucleare rivelazione dagli USA: in Italia 90 bombe atomiche”, *La Repubblica*, 15 September 2007.

⁶⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹⁴ The other 40 are positioned in the military base of Ghedi, in the North of Italy.

⁶⁹⁵ H. Kristensen, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe, A review of Post-Cold War Policy Force Levels and War Planning”, *Natural Resources Defense Council*, February 2005.

beginning of the 1990s and with the escalation of other types of operations, such as in the Balkans and in the Middle East, it became handy to continue relying on Italy, mainly on Aviano's tactical setting. There is a massive sense of mystery in Italy that surrounds such a delicate issue.

What was considered in 1951 as an innocuous concession of a small-scale base by the Italian Government to the United States, has developed nowadays into a major deal. Perhaps the secrecy of the deal for almost fifty years was an intuition by those who had signed the agreement, that this was not just an ordinary deal. The more than 9,000 residents of Aviano have been used for generations to the fact of sharing their town with the Yankees. As we have seen, the partnership and friendship between the two cultures, prior to the recent multitude of projects that have taken place inside the base, were noteworthy. However, since the beginning of Aviano 2000, more than integration between Italy and the U.S. in this area, it seems more accurate to say that the Americans have overall lived their own life, within the walls of the air base and have done very little to amalgamate with the natives, especially because the soldier's duty in the same station would not last more than five years. Yet, the situation in Aviano, which is undeniably covered with a sense of mutual respect by the two parties, represents a clearer case of integration compared to Vicenza's one. Nobody of the local population, at the time, would have thought that the relocation of the F-16's from Torrejón to Friuli-Venezia Giulia could bring NATO to undertake the largest investment in its history and deeply affect the fate of the city. From a peripheral military settlement, the Aviano expansion project has transformed the base into something that looks little by little as a firm. If we consider this conception, the air base is one of the most important companies in the Western side of the region of Friuli, second only to Zanussi⁶⁹⁶ which specializes on domestic appliances.⁶⁹⁷ The unfair aspect of Aviano 2000 is that of all the funds supplied by NATO and the United States, none have been destined to the hosting city or to the nearby municipalities.⁶⁹⁸ In fact the Italian Government has had to pay out of its own pocket all the necessary capitals to hush up any possible critics and support the

⁶⁹⁶ One of the leading businesses in Italy and Europe for home and kitchen devices.

⁶⁹⁷ A. Laggia, "Inchiesta: con la NATO in casa", *Famiglia Cristiana*, 18 February 1998.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

inevitable consequences of such a project. This is a major drag for a town that has to live with 4,000 foreign troops and civilians, which theoretically correspond to almost the 50% of the recent population of Aviano⁶⁹⁹. We can just think of the growth of garbage triggered by the modernization of the base, which means that the citizens have to pay more taxes to tackle the raise of these specific social expenses. It appears that the local administrators and Mayors of these districts have been pleased by the circumstances, mostly because the partner and the lobbying movement interconnected with the Aviano Air Base that they have been dealing with are way to powerful to suggest a tenacious and self-determining decision. Even the few signs of protests, that hardly end up being published in the newspapers, have been able to deface the state of activities.

⁶⁹⁹ Although they are not included.

6. THE CERMIS DISASTER

6.1 A Transatlantic International Law Case

On February 3 of 1998, at 15:13 a sky gondola in the valley of the Cermis mountain, in the distinguished ski vacation spot of Val di Fiemme⁷⁰⁰, collapsed after a hundred meter drop to the ground and ended up killing twenty people from several different nationalities⁷⁰¹, who like many other tourists on that occasion had been taking advantage of the day for some skiing activity.⁷⁰² The unfortunate incident was caused by a military American jet⁷⁰³ that had departed from the Aviano Air Base, which in that period underwent remodeling plans with the Aviano 2000 project, shearing the wire that connected the cable car from the bottom to the top of the rift. Compared to the safety regulations set for these type of planes, the aircraft had been flying in the valley at a dangerously low altitude. This episode, also known as the Cavalese⁷⁰⁴ disaster, has represented a negative turning point in the way the Italian citizens evaluate the existence of American military bases in their country and raised concern on the actual dangers that are linked to these camps. A large part of the media in the World has given visibility to this inquiry, especially those States that were affected by the loss of their citizens in this tragedy, along with all of those Nations that are part of NATO, since the base of Aviano nowadays represents one of its main defense headquarters.

The Cermis disaster is an extremely problematic case to examine since it involves sections of international law and for this reason it has sparked all sorts of critics. The main topics of discussion have been the lack of collaboration with United States, the dubious discharge of the undisciplined American pilot of the jet and the disappearance of the evidence. Furthermore the lawyers representing the relatives of the Italian victims in the incident have experienced multiple difficulties to obtain a compensation and in their attempt, to verify the culpability of the pilots and the assistants on board. Problems

⁷⁰⁰ Located in the Dolomites, part of the Eastern Alps in the Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige.

⁷⁰¹ Italians, Germans, Polish, Austrians, Belgian and Dutch.

⁷⁰² B. Marzio, "La cabina è caduta come un giocattolo", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 31 August 1994, p. 5.

⁷⁰³ An EA-6B Prowler Aircraft, specialized in radar and defense tasks. The jet is generally 18 meters long and the wings come up to 16 meters.

⁷⁰⁴ The town in Trentino-Alto Adige where the Cermis mountain is located.

such as having to cooperate with the U.S. attorneys, keeping alive the case in the media and being able to comprehend the Italian Government's moves on the subject to avoid political exploitations are just a few of the inspirational talking points that can be gathered from this tragedy. The Cermis disaster has been a compelling two-year long legal battle, along with the considerable repercussions generated in the following years by this case, that eventually has seen the parents's victims partially triumph and the guilty pilots admitting their responsibility for the catastrophe, an unlikely scenario compared to the usual juridical cases in Italy.

The story of the captain of the jet, Richard Ashby, who had just turned 31 years old at the time, is gripping, as that tragic flight was supposed to be one of his last ones before returning to the United States.⁷⁰⁵ Many of the pilots in America destined to be stationed abroad had heard that the Aviano Air Base was one of the prime locations to be assigned especially for the stunning and unique mountain scenarios that made training with their aircrafts even more stimulating, being used to the enormous and deserted valleys back at home. Flying at a lower than permitted altitude was considered as a hallmark among U.S. airmen, mainly because this gave the possibility to prove to their superiors that they deserved a better position, often leading them to promotions and therefore pilot more powerful airplanes.⁷⁰⁶ The other members of the Prowler that caused the incident were Ashby's co-pilot Joseph Schweitzer and other two commissioned officers⁷⁰⁷, William Raney and Chandler Seagraves.⁷⁰⁸ During the flight, Richard Ashby performed a different maneuver compared to the premeditated itinerary, entering Val di Fiemme, where as a coincidence the unlucky aerial cable car was located.⁷⁰⁹ After this hazardous decision and due to the fact that the jet was moving at a speed of more than 400 miles per hour⁷¹⁰, Ashby was unable to identify clearly the view from his standpoint and had

⁷⁰⁵ A. Comola and A. Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, Milano, Sperling & Kufer Editori, 2002, p. 18.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰⁷ Also known as Electronic Counter Measures Officers.

⁷⁰⁸ Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 21-22.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹⁰ Around 1,000 Km. per hour.

no more time to make an emergency change of direction.⁷¹¹ This led the aircraft to slash the wire of the cable car and trigger the tragedy. The damaged prowl was able to make its way back to the Aviano base. After the incident, pilot Ashby sent an e-mail to his mother, expressing all of his worries for what just happened and what could possibly be in store for him.⁷¹² In this rare message he reveals how he did not see the cable that connected the gondola and how he feared of becoming a scapegoat for the entire affair.⁷¹³

If we could go back to the days that followed the tragedy, the first issue that would have emerged, was to determine whether it was the Italian's or the American's right to trial the pilots for the death of the 20 unfortunate people. Another problem that should be verified, was the legal responsibilities connected to the pilots's conduct during the flight, but this was a minor issue compared to the above mentioned one. In this case, no trial can be motioned until the end of investigations. After that, since this case is classified as an international law dispute, the lawyers of the Italian victims, for example, would have to wait for the national Government's decision to take action on the Cermis case. It was foreseeable that if the pilots were to be trialled in the United States, the most probable penalty they would face would have been a disciplinary action, since historically the Americans had no intention to ruin their image and reputation outside of their borders and especially in a military-related event.

The indispensable element to consider in the event of military related incidents between at least two States is the SOFA Agreement⁷¹⁴, which legally regulates all those litigations that may involve NATO members. In the case of a negative fact occurring in the territory of the Country hosting the base, this 1951 pact foresees that the priority for taking charge of criminal liabilities must be handled by the court of law affiliated to those troops stationed abroad and thus involved in the accident abroad, while on the contrary, the public liabilities, such as pecuniary damages, should be taken care by the

⁷¹¹ J. Tagliabue, "Jet in Italy flew too low, a top U.S. Official admits", *The New York Times*, 7 February 1998.

⁷¹² Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 25.

⁷¹³ G. Vistica and E. Thomas, "The view from the cockpit", *Newsweek*, vol. 131, no. 18, 4 May 1998.

⁷¹⁴ See page 23, footnote 54.

Nation hosting the camp. The State that has the precedence to trial the guilty party, can in any moment decide to decline this possibility and hand to the other State involved in the case to take full responsibility for the prosecution. A couple of weeks after the disaster, the Italian Government had expressed its will to persuade America to reject the option of proceeding against the pilots and have Italy deal with the affair.⁷¹⁵ This request will be turned down by the United States.⁷¹⁶ The Cermis tragedy was provoked by a U.S. property aircraft stationed in Aviano, a NATO controlled air base, which in that particular period had been predisposed to intervene in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and later in Kosovo. That infamous day of February, the flight was not authorized by NATO and was later discovered that this was just an ordinary training air trip.⁷¹⁷ Looking at the regulations of the SOFA agreement and at the usual procedure in these circumstances, there were no doubts that the United States would have agreed for a domestic trial of their pilots, mostly because the episode at first gave the impression of being triggered by the reckless navigation of the airman rather than by a human casual misfortune. On top of this, if an Italian court would have had the possibility to proceed against the pilots involved in the Cermis disaster, the punishment would have been in all probability more intransigent compared to the American's one. Nevertheless, article 7 of the SOFA Agreement asserts that the hosting country has the priority to establish and remark any potential violations from the incident, usually if it does not appear on the foreign country's legislation.⁷¹⁸ It's doubtless that the U.S. had no intention to be unable to deprive of the possibility of appealing for the jurisdiction and abandon their soldiers in such a critical moment for their foreign policy.

The investigations by the Italian police took place in the Aviano Air base immediately after the accident, where the Prowler EA-6B was considered to be the main source of evidence to incriminate the members of the aircraft.⁷¹⁹ The particularity of this jet is that

⁷¹⁵ D. Martirano, "In Italia il processo su Cermis", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 20 February 1998.

⁷¹⁶ "U.S. Won't let Italy try airmen in gondola accident", *Cnn World*, 14 March 1998.

⁷¹⁷ "Tragedia del Cermis rapporto Forze armate USA: è stata tutta colpa nostra", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 13 July 2011.

⁷¹⁸ NATO SOFA Agreement, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17265.htm, consultation date 3 January 2013.

⁷¹⁹ Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 53.

it does not have a regular black box, like most aircrafts. which in case of crashes is considered to be the foremost proof material.⁷²⁰ At the same time the Prowler is equipped with a recorder that traces all the movements registered by radars.⁷²¹ However this device is renowned to quickly⁷²² lose track of this activity, so by the time the aircraft had returned to Aviano it had already lost the potential useful material for the investigators.⁷²³ The crew onboard that day had taken a photo camera and a video recorder with them, a procedure which was not allowed, to show their relatives back in the United States how their training missions were executed, as a little memory of their stay abroad.⁷²⁴ Ironically the tape of the recorder was destroyed by Ashby and Schweitzer after the emergency landing, nullifying the possibility to have another valuable source of proof.⁷²⁵

On March 4 of 1999, during the first official trial, Richard Ashby, was ruled innocent by the Court-martial, formed by a Marine commissioner officers board, which automatically meant that copilot Schweitzer was considered acquitted. Ashby this way went from facing a possible 200 year punishment⁷²⁶ in prison to guiltlessness.⁷²⁷ The decision was considered controversial not only in Italy but also in all those countries involved with the losses of the victims in the cable car.⁷²⁸ The first element that Ashby's lawyers had advanced to prove their client's innocence was that the Mount Cermis ski gondola system was not indicated on the maps that were given to the crew and were found afterwards in the cabin of the Prowler that day, so therefore it was impossible for

⁷²⁰ J. Tagliabue and M. Wald, "Death in the Alps: a special report; How Wayward U.S. Pilots killed 20 in the ski lift", *The New York Times*, 18 February 1998.

⁷²¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷²² Usually the data remains preserved for 1 hour (*Ibidem*).

⁷²³ Tagliabue and Wald, "Death in the Alps: a special report; How Wayward U.S. Pilots killed 20 in the ski lift".

⁷²⁴ Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 22.

⁷²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 57.

⁷²⁶ Based on a 10 year punishment per person killed. (Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 139).

⁷²⁷ S. Vogel, "Marine pilot acquitted in Alps deaths", *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1999.

⁷²⁸ Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 135.

the pilot or for the assistants to avoid the incident.⁷²⁹ The U.S. Army system foresees the use of maps made only in America, and not by other countries which would be in all likelihood more detailed.⁷³⁰ The point is that the defense attorneys of the troopers had shown to the court that the map that was found in the aircraft, which was the same that was distributed to all of the American bases in Italy, did not include that aerial tramway in Cermis.⁷³¹ If only a map curated by Italy would have been handed out to the U.S. soldiers, we might not even be here talking about this catastrophe and this international relations incident. The pilot's attorneys were also able to demonstrate that the jet was authorized to fly at an altitude of 500 feet⁷³² from the ground⁷³³, while in actual fact it was intended to stay at a distance of 2,000 feet⁷³⁴ above the earth.⁷³⁵ In fact this height was settled in a new regulation that was adopted in April of 1997 by the region of Trentino-Alto Adige.⁷³⁶ Richard Ashby was poorly informed about the existence of this directive and eventually stated that he thought that the minimum altitude for flying in that sector was 1,000 feet⁷³⁷.⁷³⁸ Additionally, it was established that the in-flight radar⁷³⁹ that determines distance from legitimate and secure altitudes was not functioning correctly and therefore was unable to indicate the precise parameters to the crew. Perhaps the audacious maneuvers executed by Ashby triggered the malfunctioning of the apparatus. Antonio Granero, the public Prosecutor's office in Trento, who was in charge of the investigations, had proven that the altimeter was

⁷²⁹ M. Wald, "U.S. Maps become legal issue in alpine cable accident", *The New York Times*, 13 March 1999.

⁷³⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷³¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷³² 152,4 meters.

⁷³³ "Assolto il pilota della strage del Cermis", *La Repubblica*, 4 March 1999.

⁷³⁴ 609,6 meters.

⁷³⁵ "Il Giallo Cermis", *La Repubblica*, 14 March 1999.

⁷³⁶ Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 64.

⁷³⁷ 304,8 meters.

⁷³⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷³⁹ Also known as altimeter.

perfectly working.⁷⁴⁰ Granero had called for all the crew to be committed for trial, for manslaughter, negligent homicide and harm to transport's security.⁷⁴¹ However all these elements were not enough to incriminate the U.S. Airmen. So, if it was not Richard Ashby and the other components of the unit's fault, then who's was it? The Court of Camp Lejeune had acknowledged that the tragedy was caused by the fearless handling of the Prowler, yet they were punished with disciplinary and administrative actions.⁷⁴² Technically, Schweitzer could have been judged with a heavy sentence, since his role of copilot designated him as the one in charge of communication with watchtowers and decisions related to air navigation.⁷⁴³ He should have been the one to advise Ashby to maintain the route that was initially established and he should have warned the pilot of the high speed, the low altitude and the imminent cable car in the valley. Instead nobody still up-to-date has been appointed as the attested responsible for this tragedy and they only ones who have paid have been those 20 innocent people that lost their life on that devastating day. Maybe it's just the town of Cavalese's natural association with a variety of tragic events. In 1976 another aerial tramway had suddenly dropped down to the valley killing 42 people⁷⁴⁴, in 1985 two dams had collapsed provoking 269 deaths⁷⁴⁵ and in 2013 a snowmobile had fallen into a precipice taking away the lives of 6 russian tourists⁷⁴⁶.

In May of 1999, the Court-martial had stated that pilot Richard Ashby was guilty of handing to his copilot Joseph Schweitzer, the imaginable incriminated tape to burn it into a bonfire and replace it with an empty one.⁷⁴⁷ Ashby was convicted to 6 months of

⁷⁴⁰ Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 60.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴² *Ivi*, p. 61.

⁷⁴³ *Ivi*, p. 60.

⁷⁴⁴ Wikipedia Italia, Disastro della funivia di Cavalese, [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disastro_della_funivia_di_Cavalese_\(1976\)](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disastro_della_funivia_di_Cavalese_(1976)), consultation date 3 January 2013.

⁷⁴⁵ Wikipedia Italia, Disastro della Val di Stava, http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disastro_della_Val_di_Stava, consultation date 3 January 2013.

⁷⁴⁶ A. Sciacca, "Cermis motoslitta finisce in un crepaccio; Morti sei turisti russi, altri due sono gravissimi", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 4 January 2013.

⁷⁴⁷ R. Serrano, "Pilot in ski gondola accident convicted in tape destruction", *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May 1999.

jail for obstruction of justice and plotting for his activity, a light sentence compared to the potential to the one⁷⁴⁸ he had been linked with, before the beginning of the inquiry in March of that same year.⁷⁴⁹ Both of the pilots were discharged from their Marine position.⁷⁵⁰ Schweitzer, in a 2011 personal interview with the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, had admitted that the video they had been recording during the flight had started off as a game but then all of a sudden things had dramatically changed.⁷⁵¹ Furthermore he admitted his act of incinerating the tape because he did not want to end up on the popular *CNN News*, since in the video he was repeatedly smiling during the recording.⁷⁵² This proves the state of problems that investigators had to go through in order to find a way to virtually rebuild the flight route and acquire further precious details.

Looking at the facts related to the topic of compensations for the families hit by the loss of those who died in the Cermis affair, we can notice some discrepancies. In February of 1999, Italy had supplied 65,000 dollars to each family, which was later refunded to the Italian Government by America.⁷⁵³ After an initial approval⁷⁵⁴, the U.S. Congress had eventually refused to pass a proposal that foresaw an aid of 40 million dollars for the relatives involved in the disaster.⁷⁵⁵ Finally, in 2000, a sum of 40 million dollars was recognized as the ultimate compensation for the relatives, with 2 million dollars per family.⁷⁵⁶ For the distribution of payments of the total amount of money, article 8 of the SOFA Agreement was applied:⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁴⁸ See page 115.

⁷⁴⁹ "Pilot who sliced gondola cable gets prison term for obstruction", *The New York Times*, 11 May 1999.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵¹ P. Mastrolilli, "La tragedia del Cermis? Colpa dei comandanti", *La Stampa*, 1 August 2011, p. 22.

⁷⁵² G. Di Feo, "Cermis il pilota confessa", *L'Espresso*, 20 January 2012.

⁷⁵³ "America's obligation in Italy", *The New York Times*, 10 March 1999.

⁷⁵⁴ "Dagli USA 70 miliardi per le vittime del Cermis", *La Repubblica*, 24 March 1999.

⁷⁵⁵ A. Farkas and D. Martirano, "No ai risarcimenti per il Cermis", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 15 May 1999, p. 16.

⁷⁵⁶ "Cermis, sì delle famiglie al risarcimento", *La Repubblica*, 26 April 2000, p. 25.

⁷⁵⁷ NATO SOFA Agreement.

e. The cost incurred in satisfying claims pursuant to the preceding sub-paragraphs and para. 2 of this Article shall be distributed between the Contracting Parties, as follows:

1. Where one sending State alone is responsible, the amount awarded or adjudged shall be distributed in the proportion of 25 per cent. chargeable to the receiving State and 75 per cent. chargeable to the sending State. (SOFA Agreement)

In this case, the United States ended up providing the 75% of the 40 million dollars, while the rest was financed by the Italian Government.⁷⁵⁸ The reaction from the families side was overall filled with disappointed.⁷⁵⁹ The Mayor of Cavalese had recognized that the reparations were legitimate but he had highlighted that the fact that pilots had remained unpunished was surely concerning.⁷⁶⁰

What appears odd is the rapidity by which the owning company⁷⁶¹ of the aerial tramway were able in a few months after the tragedy to obtain a compensation of 20 million dollars from the U.S. Congress in order to rebuild the damaged components, while the relatives of the victims had yet to receive updates on any sort of compensation that they would be eligible for.⁷⁶² The curious fact is that the entity of the damages resulted in a sum of maximum 1 million dollars.⁷⁶³ Sure, we can understand the extra amount for moral recompense but frankly 19 millions sounds way too high. Even in this case it seems as if the United States were touched more by the economic harm rather than the emotional side of all those families scarred by this event.

The incredible part of the story is that only in 2011, after 13 years of silence, a document dated March 10 of 1998⁷⁶⁴ and signed by Peter Pace, the commanding Officer of the Southern European Marines Squad at the time, was unveiled to the public.⁷⁶⁵ This report shows Pace's determination to undertake every step necessary to condemn the

⁷⁵⁸ E. Caretto, "Cermis risarcite le famiglie", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 April 2000, p. 16.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶¹ Società Funivie Alpe Cermis.

⁷⁶² Comola and Mioni, *Cermis il prezzo di una tragedia*, p. 84.

⁷⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶⁴ More or less a month later from the accident.

⁷⁶⁵ M. Molinari and P. Mastrolilli, "E' colpa nostra, dobbiamo pagare", *La Stampa*, 13 July 2011.

crew of the Prowler for their irresponsible conduct, such as the speed of the aircraft and the negligence to respect the altitude limits imposed by the Trentino-Alto Adige region.⁷⁶⁶ Furthermore, the record discloses other useful information linked to the guiltiness of the pilots. In other words, the U.S. Marine Officer displays his objectiveness in the affair and declares his commitment to guarantee that the United States pay all of their dues that would eventually emerge from the trial.⁷⁶⁷ This document could have potentially represented a very useful tool during the lawsuit to clarify certain arguments, especially since it was revised by a very influential character in that military environment. Clearly someone more powerful than Pace did not want to this chronicle to be exposed. On top of this, Richard Ashby has just recently admitted that the discharge of the Marines was already arranged before the actual verdict by a secret accord between the defense and prosecution parties.⁷⁶⁸

The acquittal of Ashby and the Prowler crew sounds like the end of an unfair process that has once again given the possibility to the United States to appear clean to the rest of the World, at least with the facts. The motivations given by the lawyers of the Marines appear persuasive but lack of considerable association with the actual evidence discovered in the jet that was seized in Aviano. It seems as if that the thesis submitted by the defense attorneys had limited structural sense, almost as if the priority was to object every source of proof formed in Italy. Despite the coverage of the case by several major international newspapers, the Cermis disaster was not considered as a crucial trial in the U.S. and has rather gained more visibility in Italy for its unjust outcome. It was unthinkable that America would pronounce guilty one of its soldiers for a case like this one, mostly in terms of future military scenarios, where all the soldiers being stationed abroad would end up living with the fear of committing a mistake like Ashby's and ending up in his same situation of legal agony. The outcome of the trial has inevitably changed the way many Italians envision the U.S. presence in their country. The visible reality is that Italy, from America's perspective, represents nothing more than an outpost, almost like a former colony, and a fundamental virtual base to keep the

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁶⁸ A. Visconti, "Cermis patto segreto dietro il processo", *La Repubblica*, 2 February 2008.

situation under control in high-risk areas like the Middle East. Still, if we question the existence and meaning of NATO bases nowadays, we have to think of the North Atlantic and America's framework as a commitment that goes back to the end of World War II, which has unquestionably guaranteed a level of protection for the Italian population, but at the same time has increased the risks related to incidents connected to the military sphere. Having the presence of such a powerful country like the United States in Italy means having higher possibilities employment and potential investments simultaneously means that we will be unable to be part of the decision making, like the Cavalese tragedy, because America is always going to have the last word. It's hard to accept but this is the reality. On top of that the behavior of the Italian Government in the Cermis disaster, along with many other cases, has been quite unresponsive and distant. The truth is that the Italian skies are becoming the gyms for the U.S.'s training flights.

7. CONCLUSION

The end of World War II and the intervention of the United States of America in Europe, determined the beginning of the end for Italy's position in significant international affairs. Not that many more options were available after 1945, but Italy has dug its own grave in terms of its future foreign policy. The geopolitical layout has drastically changed since the beginning of the 1990s and is still currently evolving. Even the partnerships between States have advanced and in some cases have been modified. Since 9/11 the U.S., that still represents the most powerful militaristic and financial power in the World, although incessantly challenged by China, has been facing a global war on terrorism. America has consequently conducted wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq by heavily depending on its conceded military stations in the northeast of Italy. The recent joint-operations in the Arab Spring, indicate that the future target is always behind the corner.

As we have seen in the study case confrontation of similar phenomenons in Aviano and Vicenza, the paradox is that we end up having two different outcomes. This demonstrates the unpredictability of foreign managed installations in these Italian towns, coming from neighboring regions and distanced only 154 Km. from each other, that yet offer interesting and contrasting features. In both cases, the implementation of the recent restyling projects to the camps can be labeled as the most critical phase of tension, in divergent ways, between the community and the army divisions. We must underline how these programs, Aviano 2000 and Dal Molin project, are extremely analogous, since they have involved the modernization of additional military and civilian areas that had fallen into disuse, which were implemented to the central base, extending the influence of NATO and the U.S. concessions in the district.

On one side, the city of Aviano has experienced since the start an overall positive impact from hosting overseas units in its air base, mostly for its distinguished tradition for flights and piloting, along with the population's enduring admiration for the American people. The negative factors have been related to the Cermis disaster, which has inevitably scarred the reputation of the settlement and of the soldiers, and the slow vanishing of local businesses near the military quarters due to the growing autonomy of services by the Aviano Air Base. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have unquestionably

raised the concern in every U.S. Army possession and concession overseas. This explains the isolationist trend of gradually leaning towards a more auto-sufficient attitude that has transformed the military bases in Italy and negatively affected all those commercial activities that used to greatly profit from the American transactions.

On the other side, Vicenza has never really had a well-balanced relationship with the military contingents. The reasons are multiple, however America's decision to acquire the Dal Molin airfield has been the trigger for the local inhabitant's protests and rallies. Without a doubt the importance of Vicenza, a town that hosts some of the finest historic buildings and cultural spots in Italy, which moreover counts on a population which is fifteen times more compared to Aviano's⁷⁶⁹, certainly gains a more influential meaning. As a consequence, when a controversial episode occurs in Vicenza, this makes a significant impact on a domestic level. Being a moderately big and important city also means that there is a higher chance of having disparate outlooks on the issue, that an opposition group is created, which is exactly what happened with the creation of the "No Dal Molin" committee. At the same time, the clash of opinions within the population has coexisted with a proper dispute between the main local newspapers that have reported and investigated on the affair, through a favorable or antagonistic view of these military bases. In substance, these popular sources of news for the citizens had just created even more confusion on the situation due to the discrepancy of informations. Even UNESCO, that has included Vicenza under its World Heritage Program since 1994⁷⁷⁰, has expressed its concern for the growing warfare presence in the territory, especially because of the proximity of both Caserma Ederle and Dal Molin to the city center.⁷⁷¹ Given these arguments, the people from Vicenza have had a valid point in their road to obtain a change, mostly scared of having their city shift from a renowned artistic image to a dominant militaristic one. Sadly, the people's efforts and requests have been ineffective. More than on a local and regional scale, the issue stands at the roots of Italy and at its unreliable Government, unable, as we have discovered, to

⁷⁶⁹ Aviano has 9,025 inhabitants (Istat) while Vicenza has 116,006 (Comune di Vicenza).

⁷⁷⁰ UNESCO, City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/712/>, consultation date 10 January 2013.

⁷⁷¹ "La base USA ci preoccupa, E l'UNESCO scrive all'Italia", *Il Giornale di Vicenza*, 23 March 2010.

take a stand on this particular case and on the general matter concerning the concession of military bases to the U.S. and NATO.

It appears clear that the genuine interest of the United States and reason behind these conflicts is justified by the energy resources available in the Middle Eastern area. By looking at a geological map we can easily spotlight that the major oilfields are located in these lands, mostly those Countries that were attacked by America and its allies. The reasons why the U.S. has these many bases spread in Europe are constantly changing. However, if we want to visualize the way the United States evaluates its military stations abroad, these quotes from the Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure, handed in 2005 to the President and Congress, help us comprehend many details:⁷⁷²

The U.S. overseas basing structure must serve both in the near term and for decades to come. The global network of U.S. bases becomes the skeleton upon which the flesh and muscle of operational capability will be molded. The bases themselves and the agreements that govern them become both a reflection of and contributor to our alliance relationships around the world. (III)⁷⁷³

The strategy further assumes continued influence and leadership in NATO despite troop reductions in Europe. To the extent that significant U.S. forces remain in Europe, leadership could remain. (F2)⁷⁷⁴ (Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facilities Structure of the United States)

This wipes out any possible doubts related to the American way of visualizing these bases. Additionally these words prove that the stars and stripes military presence in Europe is necessary to deploy soldiers in every territory of interest and mostly it protects the U.S. directorship over Europe.

America will always consider the Italians as one of their most precious allies available, regardless from the President that ends up living in the White House. However, we would be daydreaming if we actually thought that the United States had in mind for the future a specific strategy connected to the economy, the environmental issues or the

⁷⁷² Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/obc.pdf>, consultation date 15 January 2013.

⁷⁷³ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

political system exclusively for Italy. It is more accurate to say that the relations between the U.S.A. and Italy must be set in a wider pattern that includes all those States that typically are known to belong to the Western society. Sure, Italy could be navigating in much worse waters but the reality shows us that the Country has been relegated to a secondary position for decades. Since the end of the Cold War there have been way more unconstrained possibilities to take action and express certain thoughts. However, it is unlikely, if not impossible, that Italian politicians would decide all of a sudden to have the country stand on its own feet and abandon such a strong partner like the United States. Even if Italy would display some sort of hesitation towards potential American's proposals, the U.S. would not end up spoon-feeding a dissatisfied Italian Government and population. Only if Italy decided to create a specific problem, then the United States would then be forced to come up with a resolution. An extremely dangerous option that frankly should be avoided in all ways, for the sake of the Italian society. For instance, the no-global movements, largely present in Vicenza and representing the biggest opposers to the militarization of the city and the territory, do not represent an alternative choice to the current unconvincing political parties in Italy, especially in a moment where the State is experiencing, among many other European ones, probably the biggest economic crisis of all time. Italy's biggest misfortune is probably connected to the fact that its peninsula is located in such a strategic geopolitical position. Looking back at the past, the Italian military bases have played a fundamental role in many operations. The Middle Eastern crisis, which does not appear to be anywhere close to a conclusion, means that these settlements in Italy, rather than being disregarded have to be reinforced and this exactly what has happened. Considering that Italy is part of the North Atlantic Organization, it must comply with the agreements that were stipulated in the first place. Perhaps one day when the emergency in the Middle East will be solved, then another NATO ally might end up being in the same situation that Italy has been living in the last years. In many ways, the general relations between Italy and other States are interconnected to the United States, because signing agreements with certain Nations that are not highly regarded by the U.S. is potentially dangerous for the transatlantic partnership. Nonetheless, the impression is that some other States in Europe, certainly living nowadays in a better overall condition compared to Italy, have been able to care less about certain friendships

and rather concentrate on other affairs, such as strengthening the European Union. It is inevitably impossible to please everybody, in fact the consequences related to making a certain decision will surely leave someone dissatisfied. The Italian Government after the Cold War, especially when Berlusconi was in charge of the Prime Minister position, the decisive era for the status of foreign managed military bases in Italy, has focused on relatively unproductive issues, like focusing on the friendship aspect with other World leaders rather than suggest a plan that would gradually shape up a legitimate identity for the whole country. A superpower like America has always traditionally looked for partners capable to make unfashionable commitments. In the past, Italy has remotely attempted to do this with a direct result of political disorder, uncertainty and hesitancy. For the most part Italy is not considered worldwide as a prime Country for its sense of decision making ability. Perhaps it is unfair that still today the United Nations permanent Security Council members⁷⁷⁵ have not changed, yet it is improbable that any one of these would ever decide to renounce to its incontestable power. The truth is that elements such as the economy and the population do not represent the only elements necessary to be respected in the international setting. The transatlantic connection should be pictured as an additional form of association in the international context and not as the essential one. The U.S. as well cannot dedicate itself completely to the relation with Europe, since it relies on a multitude of other interconnections.

The concession of its military bases and soldiers to the United States, may also be seen as the Italian Government's way to gradually escalate to a higher position in terms of reputation. The first logical step for Italy would be to think differently from the mentality that links every action to the United States. This does not mean that Italy should abruptly end the relationship with America, but instead should focus on domestic aspects, which is in some way happening these days. The problem in this case is the lack of a serious and long lasting strategy that would incorporate national interests for Italy, such as a healthy economy along with a precise social and political framework, and a more audacious foreign policy, something complex to generate considering the civic disorder and monetary crisis.

⁷⁷⁵ See p. 33.

Italy appears to most States as weak on an international level because the Country's system is weak and because of its economic and political status. It is complicated to take any sort of action when your internal structure is not able to come up with decisions and administer them. Since the aftermath of the conclusion of Fascism, the Italian executive power has been understandably poor. Thinking that just by having a governmental change in Italy would magically solve every problem in foreign policy is one of the biggest mistakes. By focusing on a development of a new image for Italy worldwide is another convincing aim, like the U.S. did with the shift from George W. Bush to Obama, which would display to many World leaders, and the U.S.A., the effort of willing to change. Italy should aspire to be a Country with a solid project, capable of producing and working towards specific strategies, because only with the acknowledgement of hard-working and perseverance, this can become a reality.

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