

A PISTOL ON THE TABLE: MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND THE BASES OF U.S. POWER IN ITALY

Arriving at the Venice International Airport, one finds a small nondescript office labeled, in English, “Vicenza Community.” The office serves around ten thousand or so U.S. citizens living in the Vicenza area, a number equal to almost ten percent of the city’s population. These are the military personnel, family members, and civilians living and working on and around a constellation of military bases that have occupied Vicenza for almost three quarters of a century. Even before the recent construction of a controversial new base in the city, the Cold War-era installations included a major headquarters, an underground weapons storage facility capable of storing nuclear weapons, another underground base, depots, and a large gated housing development known as the “American Peace Village” (fig. 1).

Most visitors think of Italy as the land of Venetian canals, Roman ruins, and Florentine palaces. Few think of Italy as a land of U.S. bases. But since the early days of the Cold War, they’ve been in Aviano, Brindisi, Gaeta, Naples, Pisa/Livorno, Sardinia, Sicily, Verona, and Vicenza, as well as at the private “American Beach” on Tuscany’s Mediterranean coast and “Carney Park,” a military amusement-park-cum-sports-center secluded in the forested crater of an extinct volcano near Lake Averno. Most of these bases remain to this day.

During the Cold War, the United States maintained well over 100 military installations on thousands of acres of Italian territory (*Disarmiamoli*).¹ For most of the last seven decades, there have been more U.S. bases in Italy than in any other country in the world except Germany, Japan, South Korea, at times the United Kingdom, and the United States itself (Vine, *Base Nation*).

According to Pentagon figures, an average of 12,300 members of the U.S. military occupied bases in Italy during the Cold War. In 1958, there were as many as 18,000 (Kane). The bases were generally home to a similar number of family members accompanying military personnel, as well as hundreds more U.S. civilians working for the military. Assuming a conservative average of around 26,000 U.S. Americans connected to the U.S. military in Italy at any time and an average posting of around two years, it’s likely that well over one million U.S. citizens connected to the military spent a significant period of time in the country over the course of the Cold War. Counting shorter term postings, visits by naval vessels, retired military personnel, and tens of thousands of military personnel on vacation at the American Beach, the number is likely well over three million.

How does one begin to account for the influence over some 45 years of well over 100 military bases, occupied by millions of U.S. Americans, and one of the world's largest-ever arsenals of military weaponry, including thousands of tanks, bombs, guns, jet fighters, missiles, and nuclear weapons? It's extraordinarily difficult to trace the influence of such a large phenomenon, especially given Italy's regional diversity. Surprisingly, there is relatively little scholarship documenting the effects of U.S. bases and troops in Italy (particularly compared to research about bases in Japan, Germany, and South Korea). Tracing the impact of U.S. bases in Italy across the entirety of the Cold War would require a book-length treatment, at least. I focus here on the history of U.S. bases in Italy and some of their important sociocultural, economic, and political impacts.

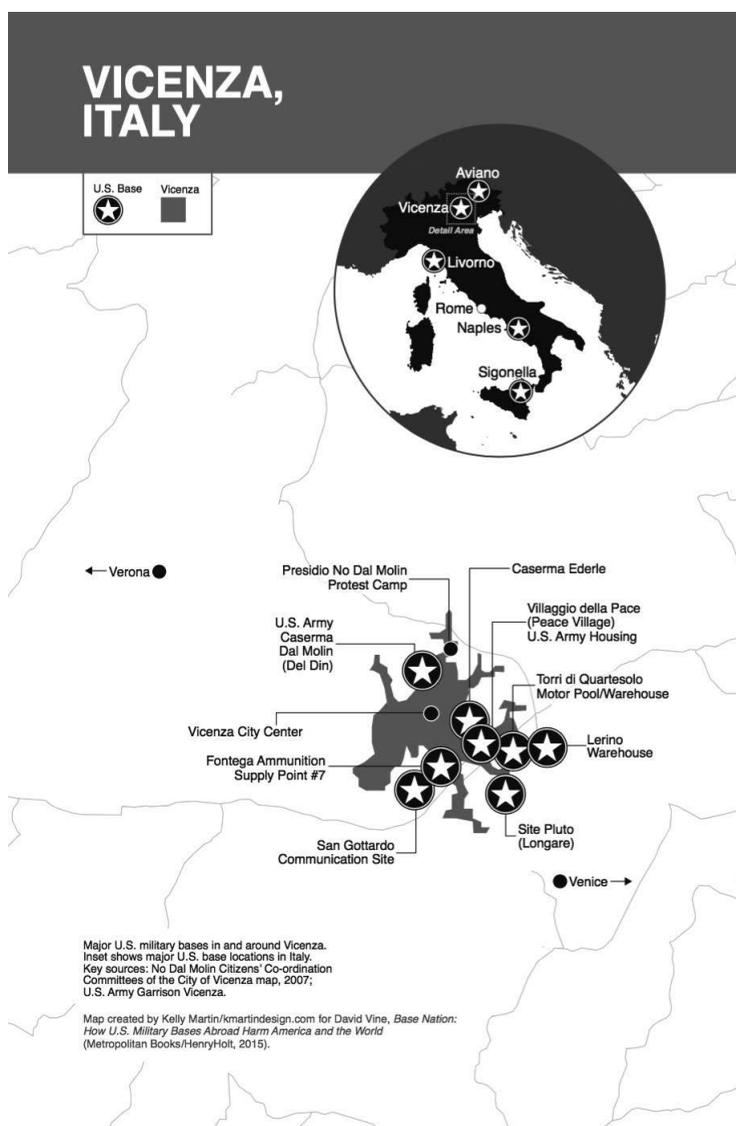
While the sections below discuss each of these realms in turn, the divisions are artificial. Each realm is clearly related to the others: bases' underground economies fed the popularity of blue jeans and other U.S. consumption items in Italy and vice versa. Although it will be impossible to trace all these sociocultural-political-economic connections, it is also important to note that U.S. bases have not exerted influence in Italy alone; the effects of U.S. bases are intimately related to other forms of U.S. influence from mass media to the actions of U.S. corporations, the CIA, and the U.S. Embassy.

This article draws on almost six months of ethnographic research conducted primarily in Vicenza, with short research trips to Naples, Aviano, and Pisa/Livorno, between 2009 and 2013. My work in Italy was part of a larger five-year project studying the impact of U.S. bases worldwide, which included research around more than 60 bases in twelve countries and territories (Vine, *Base Nation*). This article focuses on installations in Naples, Sicily, and Vicenza, while also drawing on evidence from bases in other countries given the consistency of cross-national patterns in the global network of U.S. bases.

Despite the relative inattention devoted to U.S. bases in Italy, I conclude that there may be no more significant a source of U.S. influence in the country in the post-World War II era than the U.S. military base. Although Hollywood, rock n' roll, blue jeans, and fast food may be more widely resonant symbols of the United States, the effects of U.S. bases have been felt in nearly every realm of Italian political, economic, and sociocultural life. Many of the bases resembled—and, to this day, still resemble—exaggerated versions of suburbia in the United States, with sprawling grounds, shopping centers, McDonald's, golf, and a car-based lifestyle subsidized by both U.S. and Italian taxpayers. These "Little Americas," as they are known worldwide, have, to varying degrees, shaped neighboring communities through greater exposure to a particular vision of "American" culture, the creation of underground "PX" (post exchange) economies, and the subtle shaping of local regulated economies to reflect U.S. consumption habits. Bases have generated a

range of relationships between Italians and U.S. Americans, from friendships and romantic partnerships to quiet tension and anti-base activism. Bases have also played a disturbing role in the resuscitation and violent rise of mafias in at least Sicily and Campania after World War II. More subtly, bases and troops—working in tandem with Hollywood movies, U.S. television programs, and rock n’ roll—have helped expand the dominance of the English language and feed the veneration of the American soldier and military service as the height of heterosexual masculinity and citizenship (Lutz).

When Fred Glenn² arrived in Vicenza as an army officer in 1955, he remembers finding sections of the city where bomb damage was still visible, a decade after the end of World War II. “Italy was dirt poor” at the time.



Glenn recalls how the Army employed hundreds of locals on base. “They were thrilled to have those positions,” which came with pay “light years ahead of” the local economy. From time to time, Glenn was the officer in charge of payroll for the main U.S. base in Vicenza, Caserma Ederle. The Italians would line up in front of a pay table, and he would pay them in cash. “We were required to have a pistol highly, highly visible,” he said. “In fact, on the pay table.” He thought the rule was “very outrageous” and put the gun on his lap. For Glenn, it was “an example of the rather cavalier way that [we] took them for granted. I don’t want to say walked over, but they were not handled” as they should have been (Vine, Interview with Glenn).

While U.S. and Italian officials portrayed bases as a gift of security throughout the Cold War (the degree to which U.S. installations actually protected Italy is debatable),³ bases functioned more like the pistol that Fred Glenn was ordered to put on the pay table: U.S. bases became not just a major source of U.S. influence in Italy, but also a powerful tool through which U.S. officials influenced Italian politics and politicians and maintained Italy in a subordinate position within a global system of U.S. political-economic dominance.

A Global Network of Bases

Ever since the United States gained its independence from Britain, bases abroad have played a key, if often overlooked, role in the country’s history and rise as a global empire (Gillem 3; Lutz 7-8). While many scholars date the creation of the first U.S. bases abroad to the seizure of Guantánamo Bay during the Spanish-American War in 1898, the country’s first extraterritorial bases were those built on Native American lands. More than 250 frontier forts helped enable the seizure of Indian territory and the westward expansion of the original 13 states into foreign territory across North America (Lutz 10). After defeating what remained of the Spanish Empire, the rising “American Empire” attempted to rival Europe’s greatest powers by building bases in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Cuba. When the United States intervened in Europe during World War I, the military closed its bases on the continent soon after the war and sent its troops home. After World War II, there was no such return.

In only five years of war, the United States developed history’s first truly global network of bases, vastly outstretching that of the British Empire. By war’s end, the United States had a collection of military bases unmatched by any prior people, nation, or empire in world history. U.S. bases were found in places from Trinidad and Brazil to Burma and India, Portugal, Iceland, Greenland, and on a string of small islands in the Pacific Ocean. By 1945, the United States occupied more than 30,000 installations at more than 2,000 base sites globally (Blaker 9, 23; *Monthly Review* editors). Hundreds of bases occupied the lands of the defeated Axis powers, Germany, Japan, Austria, and Italy.

many bases of such a size that they soon resembled fully fledged U.S. towns on other people's lands. By the Cold War's end, around 300,000 U.S. troops were permanently stationed in Europe alone (Nelson 10). Although the military vacated around 60 percent of its foreign bases following the Soviet Union's collapse (United States Department of Defense, "Strengthening" 5), today, the United States still possesses around 800 military bases in about 80 countries outside the 50 states and Washington, DC (Vine, *List*). The 44 base sites in Italy follow only the 120 in Germany, 121 in Japan, and 78 in South Korea (United States Department of Defense, *Base Structure Report*).

Bases in Italy

In Italy after World War II, unlike in Germany and Japan, U.S. troops briefly left the country. U.S. troops withdrew to Austria following Italy's signing of a peace treaty in 1947. After Italy joined NATO in 1949, its government allowed U.S. troops to return to occupy Italian bases in Naples, Verona, Chinotto, and elsewhere. (In Austria, by contrast, U.S. troops, along with Soviet and other foreign forces, withdrew completely from bases in 1955 as part of Austria's declaration of neutrality in the Cold War, which included a constitutional ban on foreign bases.)

The right-wing Christian Democratic party, which had overcome Italy's favored communist and socialist parties in 1948 elections with the help of U.S. State Department, Pentagon, and CIA support, repaid the favor by joining NATO and actively advocating for U.S. and NATO bases in Italy. The base presence in Italy grew beginning in 1951 as part of massive army reinforcements President Truman sent to Western Europe and Asia to contain "communist aggression" following the outbreak of the Korean War. Still suffering from the effects of the war and unable to defend itself as Cold War tensions deepened, Italy also gave the U.S. military rights to operate communication lines across the country and to occupy a large plot of coastal land between Pisa and Livorno, Camp Darby.

In 1954, the Christian Democrats established the foundation for the growing U.S. presence by signing the "Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement" following secret negotiations with U.S. officials. The agreement allows for the stationing of U.S. bases and forces in Italy under conditions that remain classified to this day. A former Italian Ministry of Defense official has suggested that the secrecy is a function of parts of the Agreement violating the Italian constitution (Cooley 195-99; Sandars 227-33; Duke 196-99).⁴

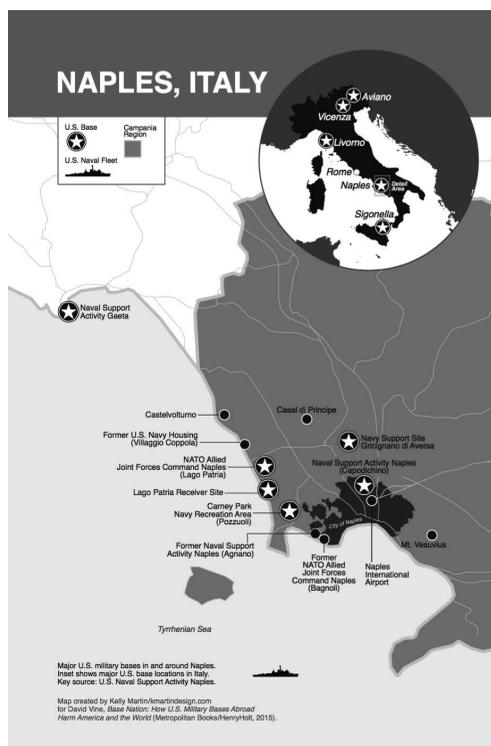
By the mid-1950s, there were 10,000 U.S. Army troops spread between Camp Darby, Caserma Ederle, and other installations in the northeast alone (GlobalSecurity.org). The troops became known as the Southern European Task Force, which was primarily a logistical force prepared to receive massive reinforcements to protect Italy in case of an

Eastern Bloc invasion through Yugoslavia. Elsewhere, major naval bases grew in places including Naples, Gaeta, Sicily, and Sardinia, given Italy's strategic positioning in the Mediterranean (GlobalSecurity.org). Beyond strategy, the U.S. base presence in the country owes something to the fact that troops have long enjoyed life in Italy for the same reasons tourists flock there.

Some claim that there are *no* U.S. bases in Italy. Since around the time Italy joined NATO, Italian and U.S. officials have agreed to call U.S. bases in the country, “NATO bases.” Locally, many refer to the bases this way. In some sense it is technically true that there are no U.S. bases in Italy, because the bases occupied by U.S. troops are officially NATO bases under the NATO status of forces agreement. However, U.S. facilities and personnel dominate almost every “NATO base.” As in other countries, word choice has long been a tactic to normalize the presence of U.S. bases and avoid the kind of anti-base opposition that foreign military installations often inspire.

“Little Americas” on Italian Soil

“It looks like an outlet mall!” my friend Sonia blurted out in surprise as we crested a hill on a quiet rural road in the Campania countryside outside Naples. This was our first sight of “Yankee City”—the massive, sprawling U.S. military base in Gricignano d’Aversa (fig. 2).



A Pistol on the Table

Sonia's initial reaction was spot on. A major part of the U.S. Navy "support site" is its "big box" shopping mall. Here, on an open plain, between fields of peaches, apricots, and grapes characteristic of Italy's south, the mall includes a Naval Exchange (the Navy's version of a "PX," which carries everything from clothes to electronics), a commissary supermarket, a movie theater, U.S. fast food restaurants, and rows upon rows of parking (Vine, *Base Nation* 115).

As Sonia and I somewhat nervously circled the base—which was ringed by a razor-wire-topped fence, security cameras, and motion detectors—we could see perfectly-ordered roads crisscrossing the base, large swaths of manicured and lavishly watered grass, shaded picnic areas and barbecues, children's playgrounds, skate parks, pools, and lines of neat apartment blocks. "Little Americas," like this one, have become both a symbol and an exaggerated version of U.S. life (Gillem). This includes a car-based lifestyle thanks to cars shipped free of charge for service members and gas heavily subsidized in Italy by taxpayers.

The effects that bases like the one in Gricignano have had on local communities and on the country are diverse. Italian and U.S. proponents of the base presence would point to the friendships, marriages, and other relationships built between locals and U.S. personnel and their families. Some would mention how, in 1963, troops based in Vicenza employed jets, helicopters, equipment, and supplies to help the rescue response after the Valjont dam overspilled, flooding towns with water and debris and killing 2,000 (Martinelli 55).

Others would mention the well-documented pattern of damage caused by U.S. bases in countries worldwide (e.g., Enloe; Gerson and Birchard; Lutz; Vine, *Base Nation*). Bases have been linked to the displacement of locals; crimes committed by military personnel, including murder, rape, and robbery; traffic and training accidents causing death, injury, and property damage; exploitative prostitution industries aimed at military personnel outside bases' gates; support for dictators and undemocratic regimes; and environmental damage (Gillem; Lutz; Vine, *Base Nation*; Yeo).

The existing literature provides at least some evidence of crimes, accidents, exploitative prostitution, and environmental damage connected to U.S. bases in Italy. Damage to local host environments around Italy, as in Sardinia (Masala; Monteleone 139; Romano), is clear. The only question is the degree to which local environments have been damaged. Worldwide, domestic and foreign bases, no matter the nation controlling the base, have caused widespread environmental harm because of leaks, accidents, and, in some cases, the deliberate burial or discharge of toxic materials (Weiner 4; Vine, *Base Nation* 135-148).

During much of the Cold War, before the introduction of widespread environmental legislation, the environmental damage caused by military bases was worse than today. In the United States and abroad, bases regularly dumped toxic substances into rivers and streams, including asbestos, leaded paint, and other hazardous materials. Bases habitually oiled down dirt roads to contain dust (Sorenson 67). Some dumped hazardous waste at sea, including materials associated with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (Sorenson 69-70; Bull). In the United States alone, the military estimated in 2000 that its bases contained 28,538 toxic waste sites and nearly twenty-seven million acres of contaminated property. The estimated cleanup costs were nearly \$50 billion (Durant 77-79). The military offered no count of toxic sites abroad, but there is reason to believe the environmental record has been considerably worse in Italy and elsewhere.

The impact of U.S. bases in Italy has been felt in many other realms. As in other parts of the world, bases became a source for cheap and increasingly desirable consumption items such as cigarettes and blue jeans: U.S. military personnel and their family members as well as Italians working on bases could buy goods tax free at the PX and then give or sell them to friends and acquaintances for their own use or resale (Gillem 92-93; Allum 99-100). The PX economy played some role in the growing popularity of U.S. pop culture, mass consumerism, and English after World War II. Giulia Simone (a pseudonym) grew up near the Caserma Ederle. She remembers people trying to visit the base to buy things cheaper than outside the gates. “You were lucky if you could get on the Caserma and buy things cheaper,” she told me (Vine, Interview with Simone).

While these and other relationships have existed as long as U.S. bases have been in Italy, the installations have also been a kind of gated community, sealed off from most Italian life, with relatively limited influence outside their gates. In Vicenza, for example, many of the people I met described there being little interaction between U.S. troops and the rest of the city for half a century after the soldiers’ arrival. “It’s not part of the city. It has no integration at all,” said Vicenza anthropologist and activist Guido Lanaro of the Caserma Ederle (Vine, Interview with Lanaro). The exceptions, according to Lanaro and others, have included Vicentini working on the base, the neighborhood immediately surrounding the Caserma, marriages between soldiers and local women, occasional friendships (especially involving personnel posted long-term in Vicenza), soldiers soliciting sex workers, and fights and disturbances at local bars.

Crimes and accidents, fights, and prostitution appear to have changed the reputation of U.S. forces beginning in the Vietnam War era in Vicenza (and beyond because of national media coverage):

Real problems with the local population of Vicenza started occurring...roughly in the 1960s, when the troops stationed in Caserma Ederle began getting involved in a series of negative events for the American

Army's reputation in the Italian peninsula. 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. (Martinelli 59)

In Germany, in the same years, growing GI violence, drug use, and crime similarly changed the reputation of the U.S. military (Nelson 104-108, 123). Martinelli adds, "It seemed as if the early glorious soldiers, that had come to rescue Italy during the war had vanished" (59). Across Italy, there was a growing "perception that US forces [we]re above the law" (Monteleone 139).

When she was growing up around Caserma Ederle in the 1980s, Giulia Simone remembers "it was normal to meet American soldiers in the streets and the shops. There were more of them [than] now," Giulia told me. "It was normal to wake up in the morning when they practiced training and singing and shouting" their marching cadences. "It was normal," she said, "but it was not accepted, not good, of course" (Vine, Interview with Simone).

"We were angry and—*infastiditi*—annoyed," Giulia explained. "But I think we didn't know what to do, to change this kind of situation, just to *supportare*," she continued, searching for the word in English, "to be patient. I think most of the people—because we thought they were so powerful, do you understand? And we were citizens...but we didn't have any big opportunity to challenge them. Maybe because we were just alone," she said, before hesitating. "We were not a movement. We were only one person. What can you do?" (Vine, Interview with Simone).

Giulia Simone was one of those to join the No Dal Molin movement, which began protesting the construction of a new U.S. base in Vicenza in 2006. Her words and the movement itself are a sign of the surfacing of tensions and resentments that have long simmered beneath the surface among locals, even in places, such as Vicenza, that U.S. and Italian officials have considered particularly supportive hosts (Vine, *Base Nation* 279-283).

Base Economics

U.S. officials have often assumed, in Italy and elsewhere, that the economic benefits of bases will ensure local support. Bases often look like a good deal for host countries and communities because they offer an economic infusion for local and regional businesses, governments, and citizens working on base. While I have not yet found a detailed study of the economic impact of U.S. bases in Italy or in any individual Italian base location, research in Germany, the United States, and elsewhere consistently shows that the benefits of bases are less significant than many expect. There are also a variety

of often-overlooked costs associated with bases that significantly decrease their net economic impact. For example, Italy provides base land free from rent or taxation. During the Cold War, Italy provided further financial support through direct “burden sharing” payments and, later, through in-kind contributions such as providing police security around bases, free utility connections, and the free use of its military’s buildings and training ranges. The value of these contributions easily ran into the hundreds of millions of dollars during the Cold War (United States Department of Defense “2004 Statistical”; Lostumbo et al. 131-132).

On a global level, some poor rural communities and other base locations have seen short-term economic booms touched off by U.S. base construction (e.g., Höhn 6, 31, 52). Along with Marshall Plan funds, the arrival of U.S. soldiers at Caserma Ederle in Vicenza in the 1950s surely played some role in the recovery of the city’s economy (Martinelli 50-51). In the long-term, however, bases rarely create sustainable, healthy local economies. Compared with other forms of economic activity, bases represent unproductive uses of land, employ relatively few people for the expanses occupied, and contribute little to local economic growth. Bases also tend to occupy valuable land that could be used in other ways. For example, the “American Beach” resort for U.S. military personnel occupied part of the Italian Riviera between Pisa and Livorno for decades before closing in recent years. The experience from Germany to Japan and California shows that once environmental damage is cleaned up, former bases can be transformed into schools, housing, office space, shopping, and museums, among other uses (Vine, *Base Nation* 287-290).

In Italy and elsewhere, the benefits of bases also tend to be enjoyed disproportionately by relatively few individuals and industries. Most on-base jobs available to locals are relatively low-skill, low-wage positions, such as janitorial and landscaping staff. The vast majority of higher-skill, higher-wage jobs go to U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians—not locals. Regardless of skill and pay grade, most of the people working on a base belonging to a foreign power are, unsurprisingly, foreigners (Cunningham and Klemmer 6).

Some local companies benefit from contracts for construction, the procurement of goods, and the daily operation, maintenance, and repair of bases. However, many of these contracts go to U.S.-based firms. Sometimes U.S. firms subcontract to local businesses, but in either case, the majority of contract dollars tend to go to large national and multinational corporations. Much smaller amounts of base money flow into local service industries like restaurants, bars, and taxis. Bases’ economic impacts have been further limited because they tend to resemble small, insulated U.S. towns that allow U.S. citizens to live on base without ever leaving. In Germany, for example, you can buy *lederhosen* at Ramstein Air Base’s shopping mall. Vicenza’s new Dal Molin base

(rebranded Del Din to distance itself from the anti-base protests) features an Italian-style café (adjacent to a Subway fast food restaurant and a U.S.-style mini mart).

Among locals who benefit from foreign bases' presence, some of the most advantaged are those involved in real estate. The Pentagon pays for the housing of U.S. military personnel, and it often pays well above market rates. Property owners, real estate developers, land speculators, real estate agents, and construction companies often enjoy large profits as a result.

In Vicenza, local landlords benefitted from the arrival of soldiers beginning in the 1950s. Often the same homes would be occupied by a near continuous series of soldiers, as one individual or family would replace another through regular deployment rotations (Martinelli 62-65; Lanaro, *Il popolo*). As Vicenza-based anthropologist Guido Lanaro explained to me, with the U.S. government paying soldiers' bills, it's "very convenient to rent to the Americans because you are one hundred percent sure that the rent will be paid" (Vine, Interview with Lanaro) Local renters can often find themselves priced out of their own communities (Lutz 32-33). Martinelli explains that unsurprisingly, "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...and mostly they could [periodically] increase the monthly rent tariffs" (Martinelli 62).

When Vicenza native Enzo Ciscato and U.S.-born Annetta Reams started looking for a home as newlyweds in the 1980s, Ciscato remembers, the preference for renting to soldiers' families was so great that they had trouble finding an apartment. Eventually, a friend introduced them to someone in the housing office of Vicenza's main base, Caserma Ederle. When the staffer learned that Reams was an American, he said, "Oh that's great!" He told Ciscato to "shut up" when visiting apartments. According to Ciscato, the base employee told them, "Act like a couple of Americans, because if they know you are Italian, they will not rent to you" (Vine, Interview with Ciscato).

"You can think how great that felt," Ciscato said. "As a person born in this town, to go to look for a house in this town, acting [like] an American soldier to be able to have a house" (Vine, Interview with Ciscato).

Around Naples, the military appears to have had a similar effect on the real estate market. In recent years, for example, the Navy—and U.S. taxpayers—were paying from \$2,000 to as much as \$8,000 per month for villas and other homes at two to three times local averages. Worse still, Italian investigators have shown that for years the Navy has been renting homes for its personnel that are owned by members of the Neapolitan mafia, the Camorra (*Il Mattino*; Ferraro; Jontz; Novak). Investigators discovered that out of some fifty villas seized from another Camorra clan, U.S. personnel were renting at least forty. Police suspected there were probably "hundreds more" (Totaro). One two-

story villa belonged to the mother of Camorra boss Antonio Iovine. Iovine has been identified as one of the thirty most dangerous criminals in Italy and put on a U.S. sanctions list to combat transnational criminal organizations (Cremonese; Totaro; Bompard; United States Treasury).

“Absurd isn’t it?” said Franco Roberti, the head of the Naples anti-mafia squad. “Italy contributes to NATO, and [U.S. forces belonging to NATO] are helping fill the coffers of the Camorra” (Totaro).

In Bed with the Mob

Paying rent to the Camorra in and around Naples is not an isolated incident. During a 2009 interview, a U.S. official in Naples (who has asked not to be named) told me the U.S. Navy has had a problem of getting “into bed” with the wrong people for decades. They’ve been doing it, he said, ever since the Allies arrived in Naples during World War II. Rather than work with ex-Fascist officials, the Navy found people who could get things done: the local mafia, the Camorra (Vine, Interview with U.S. official).

A pattern of military involvement with the mafia began with the Sicilian mafia, the Cosa Nostra, and the Allied invasion of Sicily. Though historians debate the extent to which the mafia aided the invasion, Italian-born, New York City-based mafiosi like Charles “Lucky” Luciano and Vito Genovese appear to have at least provided information about Sicily and local contacts to help with the 1943 landing and occupation (Behan 50-51; Newark 164; Lupo, *History* 187, vii; Lupo, “The Allies” 21-33). What’s clearer is that these connections deepened after the invasion. Allied leaders drew on the assistance of local mafiosi and in some cases appointed them as mayors to help ensure social order was maintained during the occupation. In these positions, bosses served as brokers between the Allies and locals, provided interpretation, and fulfilled other important jobs. Even one mafia expert who thinks the mafia’s role in the war has been somewhat overblown, says the Allied administration was “riddled with mafiosi” (Lupo, “The Allies” 29). Once they declared themselves “anti-fascist,” the allies had “trusted partners...able to police society,” as historian Tom Behan notes wryly, “very effectively” (Behan 53; Cockburn and Jeffrey, 127-129).

Collaboration and support for the mafia only deepened as U.S. leaders grew concerned about the power of the Italian communist and socialist parties. “Because of its anti-communist nature” the mafia was “one of the elements which the CIA use[d] to control Italy,” according to former high-ranking CIA official turned critic Victor Marchetti (Ganser 73).

After the Allies occupied Naples, connections with organized crime expanded further. When the head of the Allied Military Government and former lieutenant

governor of New York, Colonel Charles Poletti, arrived in Naples, he selected notorious New York gangster Vito Genovese as his interpreter and counselor (Genovese had earlier fled to Italy to escape a murder charge) (Lewis 125; di Fiore; Cockburn and St. Clair, 128). Through Genovese's influence, the military government appointed Camorra mayors in Campania towns (Lewis 69-70). They generally remain Camorra-dominated to this day (Saviano).

Genovese used his relationship with Poletti to smuggle oil, sugar, and other goods from the Naples docks in Allied military trucks. As in Sicily, where the mafia coordinated the illegal economy, the theft and illegal resale of millions of dollars of Allied troops' food supplies and merchandise soon became endemic (Lupo, "The Allies" 26). Up to 60 percent of unloaded goods may have disappeared in a devastated Naples, where hundreds of thousands were homeless and hungry (Lewis 109). An entire contraband system took root in the city, despite largely disappearing elsewhere in Italy after the war. GIs joined the ranks of customers buying contraband and frequenting brothels in Naples's famed and feared *Quartieri Spagnoli* neighborhood (originally built in the sixteenth century to house Spanish troops) (Lane 189, 192; Behan 46). While mafiosi ran the underground economy, British writer Norman Lewis, then an intelligence officer, wrote, "It is becoming generally known that it operates under the protection of certain high-placed Allied Military Government officials" (109-110).

With the opportunities provided by the Allied occupation, the Camorra was reborn in the post-war era. During fascist rule, Mussolini had brutally cracked down on and crippled the power of the Camorra, the Cosa Nostra in Sicily, and other mafias. Revived by its relationship with U.S. forces, the Camorra eventually overtook the economic power and influence of the Sicilian mafia. Over the course of the Cold War, *Il Sistema*—as locals tend to call the Camorra—gradually shifted from contraband and prostitution, small-scale extortion, and racketeering to become an "international business syndicate" specializing in construction, concrete, public contracts, garbage, and especially international drug trafficking (Behan 57-58). The Camorra became a global economic powerhouse, grossing an estimated €12 billion per year and employing 20,000 people (Truhn). By the end of the Cold War, the clans had also become the deadliest mafia in the country (Saviano).

One source of the Camorra's growing power was construction and other contracts with the U.S. Navy. In the 1960s, for example, the U.S. Navy wanted to build new housing for thousands of sailors and their families in the Naples area. The Navy hired the Coppola family, from the Camorra stronghold of Casal di Principe (Saviano 187-188). The Coppolas built the Villaggio Coppola—Coppola Village—along the coast north of Naples. It became known as "The City of Abuse" (Erhani). "They did not ask for authorization. They didn't need to," writes Roberto Saviano. "Around here

construction bids and permits make production costs skyrocket because there are so many bureaucratic palms to grease. So the Coppolas went straight to the cement plants” (Saviano 168; Erbani) The Camorra provided the building materials. With the help of cooperative politicians, the family built more than half of the Villaggio illegally on public land. The rest was built on private land acquired by one illegal means or another (Allum 162, xvi, 172; Erbani). The Villaggio helped the Coppolas become the “richest and most powerful” construction group in Campania (Spiga 21).

U.S. military personnel and their families lived in the Villaggio Coppola for just three decades. In the 1990s, the Navy ordered people to leave “because of the poor condition of the buildings and high crime” (Palumbo 3). When some of the Villaggio’s towers were torn down after barely 40 years of occupancy, Vincenzo Coppola did the demolition work (Spiga 21; Erbani). For the family, it was profit upon profit upon profit—thanks in no small part to Camorra connections.

When the military needed a developer for replacement housing in 1982, it again turned to the Coppolas’ Mirabella construction company, led by Cristoforo Coppola, a business partner with members of the Casalesi Camorra clan. After years of development that outlasted the Cold War itself, Congress finally approved a plan for the housing and support site in Gricignano d’Aversa and a new naval station at the Naples airport, which sits down a dingy, potholed road from what has been one of the largest open-air drug markets in Europe, dominated by the clans (Saviano 46-47, 63-67, 120).

U.S. bases in Sicily have also remained closely linked to the mafia since World War II. In the 1980s, at the now-closed Comiso base, firms controlled by the Cosa Nostra won most of the base construction contracts, many of the subcontracts went to Sicilian companies with mafia ties, and many of the temporary construction workers came from mafia-controlled firms in western Sicily. Locals quickly understood, as anthropologist Laura Simich explains, “that base construction was not effectively under the jurisdiction of Italian law” (79, 85, 91, 82).

In the 1990s, three major janitorial, grounds keeping, and maintenance contractors at Sicily’s Sigonella naval base were revealed to have mafia ties. According to court rulings, the controlling partner in the three companies, Carmelo La Mastra, was part of attempts to intimidate a competitor into withdrawing a contract bid. A U.S. court found that it was “probably in connection with that bid” that another firm’s owner was killed. La Mastra’s companies were placed under legal receivership, and he was indicted for his role in a “Mafia-type association” and bid rigging (*Impresa*).

Ties between the military and the Sicilian mafia may not have been simply the result of questionable oversight, but a deliberate decision. “It has even been suggested that the decision to install nuclear cruise missiles at Comiso was because the mafia could be relied

on to protect the site in return for the inevitable rake off it could extract on the hundreds of millions of dollars in construction contracts for roads, housing and so on,” the *New York Times*’s Flora Lewis wrote at the time. “Max Raab, the U.S. ambassador in 1983, when the site was being built, was said by aides to be philosophical about the situation, holding that the corruption was a problem for the Italian, not the U.S., government and that in any case the dollars would help stimulate the bedraggled Sicilian economy” (qtd. in Simich 91).

In Sicily and Naples alike, the repeated connections between the Navy and organized crime should be an expected, rather than a surprising, part of the U.S. military’s presence in the country. Around the world, the military has long sought base locations with a friendly and stable political-economic environment. Locating bases in poor and marginalized areas like Naples, ridden with organized crime, U.S. officials have assumed that the promise of jobs and money will help secure a long-term presence free of protest or dissent. This has largely been the case in Naples. There, over the course of more than sixty years, the Navy has faced relatively little protest, while embedding itself in the regional political economy—a political economy in which the Camorra is even more deeply embedded.

The “proliferation of U.S. and NATO bases” in Italy, explains military analyst Antonio Mazzeo, has helped “strengthen the political and economic power of criminal organizations” (Mazzeo). While the U.S. military presence is far from solely responsible for the resurrection and rise of the Camorra and Cosa Nostra, the bases have played a significant role. Over time, it appears that a succession of U.S. officials, like Ambassador Raab, have been “philosophical about the situation.” Which is to say, they seemingly have been unconcerned about the violent, deadly, and corrosive consequences of supporting the mafia.

Base Politics

The way the Navy has embedded itself in the political economy of Naples is something of a microcosm of how U.S. bases have embedded themselves in the broader Italian political economy since at least 1948. The U.S. government’s role in helping to shape that year’s pivotal national election became the foundation for the stable U.S. base presence in Italy throughout the Cold War and to this day. In the election, U.S. officials feared that Italy’s popular communist and socialist parties would come to power. The CIA, the State Department, the military, and other parts of the U.S. government used propaganda, smear campaigns, and threats to withdraw aid, among other tactics, to help the Christian Democrats secure victory. Shortly before the election, the military harbored warships off Italy’s coasts as a demonstration of their concerns about the left-wing parties (Cooley 208-209).

After its surprise victory, the Christian Democrats brought Italy into NATO, provided widespread base access, and maintained a client relationship with the U.S. government for decades. The party dominated Italian politics through the rest of the Cold War. U.S. officials had, in Italy's center-right-dominated governments, a partner agreeable to most requests about bases and other military matters and usually available to answer for anything that might go wrong, such as uncomfortable revelations about ties with organized crime.

The freedom, or “permissive environment” (Monteleone 2011, 136), with which the military has operated in Italy reflects the comfortable relationship the U.S. government has ensured since 1948. Most countries hosting U.S. bases have a status of forces agreement governing the rights and freedom of the U.S. military in the country. A U.S. military official in Italy (who asked not to be named) explained to me that the agreement with Germany is long and detailed. The foundational agreement with Italy remains the short, still classified 1954 Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement (BIA). Germans tend to be rather exacting when it comes to following rules, he added. The Italians “are more *interpretive* of guidance” (Vine, Interview with U.S. military official). By which he meant the U.S. military has had significant freedom of action from bases in Italy, without interference by Italian officials. This freedom has included the ability to launch military operations outside of the context of NATO. U.S. Ambassador Ronald Spogli described the dynamic in a 2008 State Department cable: “Italian military and political authorities have [historically] accepted... and granted their consent in a relatively informal manner” for U.S. officials’ interpretation of the BIA “that U.S. forces may be used for non-NATO operations” launched from Italian bases (Spogli).

An example from after the Cold War helps show how bases have been a powerful tool for the U.S. government to exert its political and economic power in Italy over left, right, and center governments alike. In 2006 and 2007, a large and diverse local and national movement arose to block the construction of a new base in Vicenza. State Department cables released by Wikileaks illustrate the pressure U.S. officials brought to bear to force center-left Prime Minister Romano Prodi to accept the base (Yeo 112). Five days before approving the base, Prodi tried to find a compromise to appease base opponents. Prodi offered Ambassador Spogli another site for a new base thirty miles from Aviano Air Base.

Spogli refused to consider the alternative. “We’ve been working on the project for two years and have spent \$25 million on planning,” the cable reports Spogli saying. “At this point we either have expansion at Dal Molin or not at all” (Spogli).

Spogli noted there would be “over a billion dollars invested” and that annual spending locally would rise by more than \$130 million (both may have been significant

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exaggerations).⁵ He suggested that if Prodi's government didn't agree, the United States would "take the project to Germany."

"This is not a threat," said the ambassador, "it's just a statement of fact" (Spogli).

A little more than one month after Prodi approved the base and just four days after a February 2007 protest drew tens of thousands to Vicenza, Prodi's coalition government fell over his support for the base and Italy's role in the U.S.-led Afghan war (Yeo 113).

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The Vicenza example illustrates how contrary to the portrayal of U.S. bases as a gift of security, they can be more like a Trojan horse: Once established, bases provide U.S. officials with a powerful tool to influence foreign governments' decisions about bases and a range of policy issues. The threat of withdrawing a base, alone, becomes a way to bend the will of host governments and populations given the perceived economic damage of base closure and the political damage host nation politicians can suffer as a result—even if the reality of economic harm is far different than the perception.

Italian politicians and elites, like those in other host countries, have gotten something out of these relationships too. "The U.S. basing presence may have diminished these host countries' overall national sovereignty," explains base expert Alexander Cooley, "but it also afforded their rulers significant private political benefits" (Cooley 250). The benefits have also tended to extend to Italian weapons manufacturers, which have enjoyed inclusion in lucrative arms manufacturing contracts, such as the F-35 strike fighter.

At other times, Italian politicians have resisted the pressure imposed by the base presence. The power of bases has never been total. In 1985, for example, the Italian government refused to allow U.S. officials to take into custody an accused terrorist captured at the Sigonella base. The base, writes Monteleone, "became a symbol of the Italian ability to resist American requests and to impose respect for Italian sovereignty over American bases on Italian soil" (132).

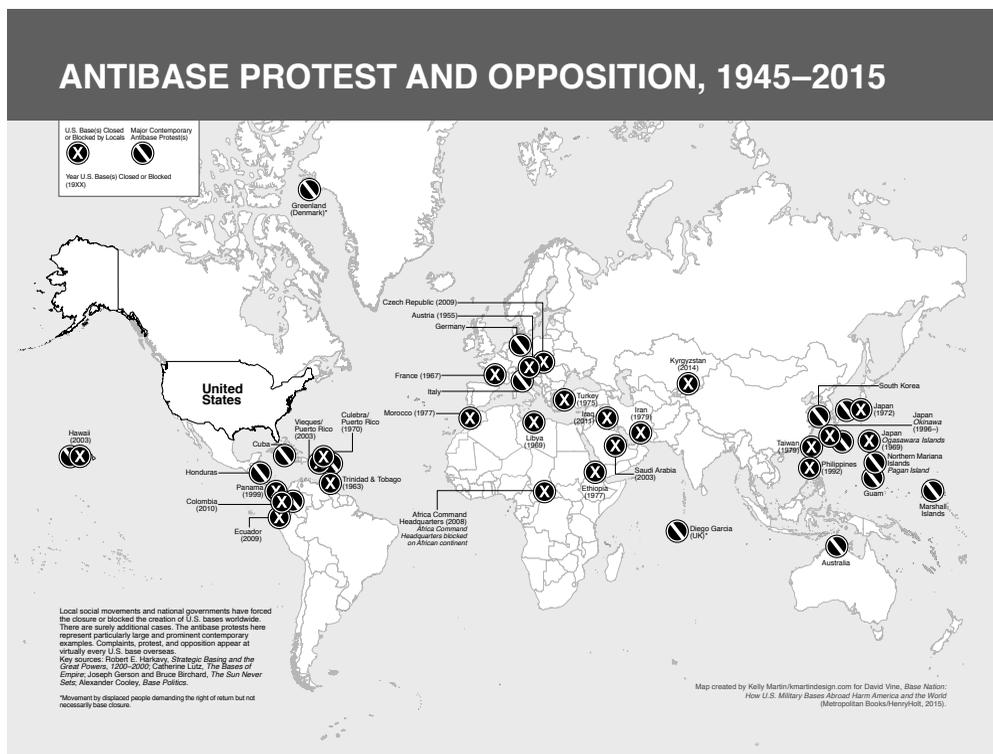
Still, since World War II, in Italy and around the world, overseas bases have been a major source of power through which the United States has asserted control over other countries and people. Alongside forms of U.S. economic and political power, bases have ensured U.S. influence, supported U.S. corporate interests, opened markets, helped maintain NATO and other alliances, and kept as many countries as possible within a U.S. sphere of influence (Vine, *Base Nation* 43). In addition to their military utility, bases have a symbolic power as implicit threats and demonstrations of dominance. This has

allowed U.S. officials to use bases as levers and tools to help secure support overseas for economic agreements and diplomatic negotiations. In sum, overseas bases have been a key tool for keeping as much of the world as possible within the rules of an economic and political system favorable to U.S. leaders.

In Italy (and beyond), U.S. officials have used bases as a kind of *pistol on the table* to help ensure Italian support for all manner of U.S. officials' economic and political goals. In a 2011 interview, a State Department official told me that he always likes walking into a negotiating room overseas “with an aircraft carrier off the coast” because of the power a carrier brings to the negotiating table. Having bases in Italy brought a similar power to the table during the Cold War—and bases continue to do so today.

The Future of U.S. Bases in Italy

Since the Cold War's end, bases in Italy have played increasingly prominent roles in a series of U.S.-led wars in the Greater Middle East (Vine, “Italian Job”). Unlike in Germany and almost all of Europe, the U.S. troop presence in Italy has remained effectively unchanged since 1991 (Monteleone 136-137). Italy has become an increasingly important pivot point for U.S. military intervention from Africa to the Balkans to the Middle East.



In recent years, Italy has also been the site of large anti-base movements in Vicenza and Niscemi, Sicily, in part inspired by the role Italian bases have played in the 2003 U.S.-led war in Iraq and other conflicts (Vine, “No Bases?”). Most observers were surprised by these protest movements. During the Cold War, U.S. forces operated in Italy with little of the heated protest and opposition to their presence seen in places such as De Gaulle’s France (which removed all U.S. bases in 1967); Greenham Common, England; Okinawa, Japan; and Vieques, Puerto Rico. The only exceptions were small, scattered protests in places including Naples and Pisa and a larger movement against the installation of cruise missiles at a base in Comiso, Sicily, in the 1980s (Simich). In 1998, many Italians were outraged when a U.S. marine pilot avoided Italian prosecution after he flew his jet too low and too fast and severed a gondola cable, killing twenty skiers.

Among the United States’ closest allies (Holmes 11), opposition has tended to grow over time as the contradictions of foreign bases become difficult to ignore: Even those living in democracies, writes base expert Amy Holmes, “are at the same time disenfranchised by the U.S. presence. They have virtually no say in what the United States does on their territory, U.S. officials are not elected, and only rarely are U.S. personnel tried in local courts for any crimes they may commit” (6). In other words, locals realize they are “being subjected to a foreign military presence that operate[s] outside the realm of democra[cy]” (Holmes 6).

Without the perceived threat of the Soviet Union or any other enemy to justify the U.S. presence, one wonders if the movements in Vicenza and Niscemi reflect a growing questioning of the U.S. base presence in Italy that may surface increasingly in the years to come.

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¹ Disarmiamoli’s list counts 109 bases after the end of the Cold War. What one counts as a “base” is complicated. Definitions and terminology vary. I use the term *base*, taken to mean any structure, facility, or place regularly used for military purposes of any kind. The Pentagon uses the term *base site*.

² The name is a pseudonym, as are others where indicated.

³ Like U.S. bases worldwide, bases in Italy may have escalated Cold War tensions, while “protecting” the West against a supposed threat—Soviet invasion from the east—that did not actually exist. This article avoids these debates to focus on the demonstrable influence U.S. bases had on the political-economic and sociocultural life of Italy during the Cold War.

⁴ A subsequent treaty was signed in 1995 that adds to but does not invalidate the BIA.

⁵ Congress appropriated around \$610 million. The discrepancy suggests that either Spogli exaggerated the base’s impact or that Congress appropriated additional secret funds.

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