

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
Washington 25, D. C.

March 23, 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: NSC 5411 - U. S. Policy Toward Italy



1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff submit herewith their comments and recommendations concerning the draft statement of policy in NSC 5411, entitled "U. S. Policy Toward Italy".

2. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the proposed statement of policy with respect to Italy does not place in proper perspective the strategic importance of the Italian peninsula and Sicily under the NATO strategic concept nor the critical impact upon the security of the United States and of the Free World in general which would attend the loss of Italy to Communist control. Further, under the contingency of the achievement of control of the Italian Government by Communists, the draft statement of policy prescribes courses of action in terms which do not adequately reflect the seriousness of such a situation in its potential effect upon over-all United States objectives.

3. "The Position of the United States with Respect to the Communist Threat to Italy", NSC 67/3, approved by the President on January 11, 1951, stated in part as follows:

"3. In the event either that an armed communist insurrection receives assistance from outside Italy, or that a portion of Italy falls under communist domination by armed insurrection or other illegal means, the United States should:

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"e. In consonance with over-all strategic concepts, recognizing that the integrity and security of Italy are inseparable from the security of the North Atlantic area and the Eastern Mediterranean, and in consonance with the international commitments of the United States, make such use of U. S. military power as may at the time be

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appropriate to prevent Italy from falling under Communist domination.

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"5. In the event that the communists gain participation in the Italian Government by legal means and threaten to achieve control of the Italian Government, or in the event that that Government ceases to evidence a determination to oppose communist internal or external threats, the United States should initiate measures including special political operations designed to prevent communist domination and to revive Italian determination to oppose communism. Further, the United States should take military measures in collaboration with other North Atlantic Treaty nations to counter communist actions which would threaten the strategic position of the United States in the Mediterranean."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are in general agreement with these statements of policy.

4. By virtue of its pivotal geographic position, Italy's military importance to NATO transcends the actual contribution in armed forces and war materials which Italy itself is capable of making. Italy occupies a central position in the NATO front line of defense extending from the Baltic to the eastern boundary of Turkey. The loss of Italy would effectively breach that line. Italy's NATO forces are relied upon to provide protection for the southern flank of Allied Forces Central Europe and for the western flank of the forces expected to defend the Yugoslavia-Greece-Turkey front. As a base area for naval and air forces, Italy holds a commanding position over the western and central Mediterranean, and flanks the Balkan countries. Hostile forces operating from Italy and Sicily could seriously disrupt, if not actually sever, the lines of communication through the Mediterranean linking western Europe with the Suez base area and the Middle East.

5. With Italy under Communist domination, Yugoslavia would be subjected to greatly increased pressure to effect an accommodation with the Soviet Bloc.

6. The psychological impact which the fall of Italy to Communism would have on the Free World would be incalculable in terms of the effect upon the will of the anti-Soviet countries, notably France, and of the so-called neutrals to resist Communism.

7. Subjugation of Italy and conversion of its military potential to the use of the Soviet Bloc would gravely threaten the security of the entire NATO area, including the Mediterranean Sea, and might well necessitate abandonment of the current NATO strategic concept for the defense of Europe. Therefore, the United States, preferably in concert with its principal Allies, should be prepared to take the strongest possible action to prevent such an eventuality, such action possibly extending to the use of military power.

8. In the broader sense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that, from the military point of view, the organized endeavor of the Free World to stem the growing power of the Soviet Bloc and ultimately to reduce the Communist threat has reached that point where no further strategically or psychologically important acquisitions of territory, natural resources, industrial capacity, or military manpower by the Soviets should be passively accepted, even under circumstances in which action to deny such accretions might involve increased risk of general war.

9. The Joint Chiefs of Staff submit in the Appendix hereto suggested changes to NSC 5411 which would bring the draft statement of United States policy toward Italy into consonance with the foregoing views. Subject to the incorporation of the substance of these suggested changes, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that you concur in the adoption of NSC 5411 by the National Security Council.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

/s/ ARTHUR RADFORD

Arthur Radford,
Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff.



APPENDIX

SUGGESTED REVISIONS TO NSC 5411

1. Change paragraph 1 to read substantially as follows:

"1. The 'cold war' loss of Italy to Communist control would result in profound political, psychological, and military damage to the free world. Such a loss would:

"a.

"b. Strike a damaging blow to the national will of anti-Soviet and so-called neutral countries to resist Communism, and to the hopes of the peoples of Satellite countries for ultimate liberation from the Soviet yoke.

"c. Reduce appreciably the total available NATO defense forces, and deprive the NATO of industrial capacity capable of assisting in meeting the needs of the armed forces of other NATO countries.

"d. Deprive the Allied Powers of strategically important air and naval bases from which to support NATO ground forces in southern Europe, to support the over-all air offensive, and to defend sea and air lines of communication in the Mediterranean area.

"e. Require drastic revision, if not abandonment, of the present NATO strategic concept for the defense of Europe, because of the pivotal geographic location of Italy in the NATO defense perimeter and the commanding position of the Italian peninsula and Sicily with respect to the Mediterranean.

"f. Seriously impair Yugoslavia's over-all capability of contributing to Western defense, and greatly increase the pressure on that country to effect an accommodation with the Soviet Bloc.

"g. Add substantial manpower, military equipment, technical skills, and industrial capacity to the Soviet Bloc.

"h. Make possible Communist control of Italian Somaliland."

2. Delete the first two sentences of paragraph 12 and substitute the following:

"12. While Italian forces cannot be expected to make any substantial contribution to the defense of Europe outside Italy itself, they are expected to develop the capability, when supported by naval and air forces of the other Western Powers, of protecting the southern flank of Allied Forces Central Europe and, in conjunction with the Yugoslavian forces, of defending the western flank of Allied Land Forces Southeastern Europe. Additionally, the Italian peninsula and Sicily constitute an area of great strategic importance as a base area for the air and naval forces of other NATO nations. Furthermore, the heavy industry and the oil refining facilities of Italy have been rehabilitated to the point that they can now not only meet the needs of the Italian armed forces but, through the cross-servicing system, help to fulfill the materiel requirements of the armed forces of other NATO countries."

3. Modify paragraph 30 as follows:

a. Delete the third line as now written and substitute the following in lieu thereof:

"Government by constitutional processes and threaten to achieve"

b. Delete subparagraph d.

4. Insert a new paragraph 31 substantially as follows, and renumber the subsequent paragraph accordingly:

"31. In the event that the condition described in (1) of paragraph 30 progressed to the actual achievement of control of the Italian Government by the Communists, the United States and its remaining NATO partners would be faced with the possibility of the imminent alignment of Italy with the Soviet Bloc, followed by the incorporation of the Italian military potential into the Soviet Bloc military structure. Recognizing that the ultimate development of this situation would gravely threaten the security of the entire NATO area, the United States and its principal NATO Allies should take appropriate concerted action, possibly extending to the use of military power, to assist elements seeking to overthrow the Communist regime in Italy."

5. Revise the staff study accompanying NSC 5411 as appropriate in order to bring the evaluation of the strategic importance of Italy into consonance with the changes suggested above.