

ITALIAN LECTURE

DIPLOMACY AND WAR IN
LATER FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

By MICHAEL MALLETT

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'It is obvious that ever since the Roman Empire . . . Italy had never enjoyed such prosperity, or known so favourable a situation as that in which it found itself so securely at rest in the year of our Christian salvation, 1490, and the years immediately before and after.'¹ The famous words of Francesco Guicciardini at the beginning of the *Storia d'Italia* have been in the minds of all historians who have involved themselves in the debate about the state of Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century. Guicciardini's golden age of peace and stability has been echoed by those who have wished to stress the constructive balance of power, free of outside interference, achieved by the Italian League of 1455, by the growth of permanent diplomacy, and by the activities of far-sighted politicians.² It has been denounced by those others who have attached more importance to the tensions and fears of the period, to declining military effectiveness, to intrigue, deception, and growing social unrest.³ But on both sides there has been a

The following abbreviations will be used in the footnotes: ASF—Florence, Archivio di Stato; ASMa—Mantua, Archivio di Stato; ASMi—Milan, Archivio di Stato; ASMo—Modena, Archivio di Stato; ASV—Venice, Archivio di Stato.

¹ Francesco Guicciardini, *La storia d'Italia*, ed. C. Panigada (Bari, 1929), i. 2; English translation by Sydney Alexander, *The History of Italy* (London, 1969), pp. 3-4.

² For differing approaches to this view of the period, see particularly G. Soranzo, *La lega italiana* (1454-5) (Milan, 1924); E. W. Nelson, 'The Origins of Modern Balance of Power Politics', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, i (1943); R. Cessi, 'La lega italiana e la sua funzione storica nella seconda metà del secolo XV', *Atti del R. Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, cii (1942-3); Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, 1955), pp. 91-100; V. Ilardi, 'The Italian League, Francesco Sforza and Charles VII (1454-61)', *Studies in the Renaissance*, vi (1959).

³ Among critics of the 'optimistic' approach, see particularly E. Pontieri, *L'equilibrio e la crisi politica italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XV* (Naples,

tendency to emphasize Italian military unpreparedness in 1494, either as a result of intense disunity or of peaceful coexistence. The wars of the period have tended to be described as brush-fire wars, temporary aberrations and breaks in the normal pattern of diplomatic relations, or as the result of the ambitions of over-powerful *condottieri*. Both interpretations, therefore, place emphasis on a certain separation between war and the normal course of politics.

It is the aim of this lecture to question some of these interpretations, particularly in the light of the unfolding publication of the letters of Lorenzo the Magnificent which has provided the opportunity for sustained and detailed research into the Italian politics of the period.¹ This work, in which I have had the good fortune to become involved, is confirming some of the older ideas and hypotheses; it gives substance to Garrett Mattingly's vision of the importance of systematic diplomacy, and to some extent supports the views of the powerful influence of the leading military captains. But above all it is setting before our eyes the intimate connections between this diplomatic scene and the ever present threat of war and preoccupation with war.

A balance of power has been defined as a way of conducting international relations to avoid major wars by constantly adjusting alliance systems in accordance with changing military and economic strength. It involves a shift from a preoccupation with the purely local and immediate to a concern for areas not necessarily contiguous to the frontiers of the main powers involved. All this is to some extent true of Italy between 1454 and 1494, but it is particularly important in the Italian context not to see balance of power as a sort of panacea for all political ills, a universal acceptance of the need for peace and harmony, a kind of political enlightenment. It was rather a stalemate produced by economic exhaustion and a realization that the days of easy conquest had passed, even though the hegemonic aspirations remained. It was a situation which called for incessant alertness, a need to be constantly informed about the military strengths and

1946); B. Barbadoro, 'Il problema dell'equilibrio e la crisi della libertà d'Italia', *Questioni di storia medioevale*, ed. E. Rota (Milan, n.d.), pp. 455-73; F. Catalano, 'Il problema dell'equilibrio politico e la crisi della libertà italiana', *Nuove questioni di storia medioevale* (Milan, 1964), pp. 357-94; G. Pillinini, *Il sistema degli stati italiani (1454-94)* (Venice, 1970).

¹ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, eds. R. Fubini and N. Rubinstein, i-iv (Florence, 1977-81). The volumes so far published cover the period 1460-80; vols. v and vi will be devoted to 1480-4.

intentions of rival powers, a determination to be prepared both to seize opportunities for minor gains and to counter such opportunistic moves by others. It was also a situation which was both fostered by, and itself encouraged, the growth of permanence in regimes, bureaucracies, diplomatic activity, and military establishments.

There is, of course, a danger in seeing the period too much as a whole. It is possible to suggest that the first ten years after the peace of Lodi saw a more positive balance achieved in which some Italian leaders, notably Francesco Sforza, Cosimo de' Medici, and Pius II, worked for peace, and that thereafter, despite the amount of information available to regimes through their diplomatic networks, despite the continual state of military preparedness, the tensions mounted. The shifting alliances of the post-1466 period on the whole failed to take account of changing military and economic strengths. The regimes themselves become more insecure internally and more inclined to thoughtless bellicosity in the search for quick advantage. But behind such interpretations of gradual breakdown there tends to lie the dangerous assumption of historians that the main interest of the period lies in understanding the events of 1494. The roar of Charles VIII's guns has filled the ears of those who have studied the preceding years and conditioned their historical perspectives. One of the great advantages of the work on the Lorenzo letters is that it has concentrated the mind of the researchers involved on specific moments in the period and isolated them to some extent from the Guicciardinian 'crisis of Italy'. Such an approach suggests that while there were undoubtedly shifts in emphasis, and climactic moments, like Otranto, which profoundly affected the political scene, the underlying tensions between the Italian states remained surprisingly constant between 1454 and 1494. Milan, usually linked to France, was always suspect to Naples, fearful of Angevin, and later French, claims to its throne. Venice's fears of the Turks and of Milanese reprisal for the Lombard lands lost before 1454 were constant factors. The rising economic and naval power of Naples frightened all the other Italian states, while the hegemonic aspirations of King Ferrante in Genoa and southern Tuscany, as he sought to turn the western Mediterranean into an Aragonese lake, affected Florence and Milan in particular. The Papacy, inevitably mutable in its policies, yet had a consistent fear of Naples on its southern frontiers and of a possible Medici *signoria* on those to the north. Florence, beset by financial problems and open to interference and infiltration from all sides, conducted an economic

rivalry with Venice and an increasingly apparent territorial and jurisdictional rivalry with the Papacy. In the midst of it all was the Romagna, the one significant political vacuum left after 1454 in which all the powers sought advantage and spheres of influence. Nor can the pressure on the system from outside Italy be said to have varied in any consistent manner. The dangers of French intervention and interference, and of Turkish incursion, were ever present.

It would be wrong to overturn traditional thinking to the extent of suggesting that these tensions, which created a sort of cold-war situation in Italy, generated a positive arms race. The maintenance and improvement of artillery trains was certainly a part of the military planning of most of the Italian states, and there was a growing awareness of the formidable potential of the new weapons. The Milanese artillery train in 1472 consisted of 16 large cannon which required 227 carts and 522 pairs of oxen to transport them and all the miscellaneous accessories for their use.¹ By 1471 Bartolomeo da Cremona was training 20 gunners at a time in the Venetian arsenal,² and in 1498 the Senate declared that 'the wars of the present time are influenced more by the force of bombards and artillery than by men at arms'.³ But it was more the maintenance of permanent establishments of traditional forces which preoccupied governments. The Italian League of 1455, and all subsequent alliances of the period, sanctioned, encouraged, and yet sought to limit, such standing armies. The terms of the League set the size of the armies at 6,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry for Milan, Venice, and Naples, and 2,000 cavalry and 1,000 infantry for Florence and the Papacy.⁴ But undoubtedly all the states, with the exception of Florence, exceeded these levels of permanent troops in the years which followed. Galeazzo Maria Sforza in the early 1470s had detailed plans drawn up for the speedy mobilization of an army of nearly 43,000 men and the permanent effectives at his disposal numbered over 20,000.⁵ Venice could count on a standing cavalry force of about 8,000 men during the 1460s and 1470s, supplemented by 2,000 professional infantry and an increasingly effective and trained select

¹ M. E. Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters; Warfare in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1974), p. 161.

² ASV, Senatus Terra, reg. 6, 49^v (7 Oct. 1471).

³ ASV, Senatus Terra, reg. 13, 64^v (27 Dec. 1498).

⁴ Soranzo, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3.

⁵ E. C. Visconti, 'Ordine dell'esercito ducale sforzesco, 1472-4', *Archivio storico lombardo*, iii (1876).

militia.¹ Paul II, throughout his pontificate, deployed an army of 8,000 to 10,000 men for a series of minor campaigns designed to strengthen his control over the papal state.² The Aragonese kings of Naples were more interested in building up naval than military strength, but by the 1470s the military ambitions of Alfonso, Duke of Calabria, ensured that a large standing force was available, and the influential *Memoriale* of one of his principal lieutenants, Diomede Carafa, indicated the degree of permanence and professionalism expected of this army.³ The maintenance of these forces consumed, in peace-time, about half the annual income of the Italian states. Florence, for reasons which I have explored elsewhere, was reluctant to undertake such expenditure and normally maintained its standing forces at or below a minimum level to conform with its alliance obligations.⁴

With this build up of permanent forces there was inevitably a decline in the mercenary nature of the leadership. Captains were encouraged to take out long-term contracts and to settle permanently within the frontiers of the state which they served. Most of the Italian states resorted increasingly to relying on their own subjects to provide military leadership; this was particularly true of Naples, Milan, and the Papacy, less so of Venice; Florence remained once again exceptional in this respect. At the same time the increasing dependence of military forces on the state led to the states themselves adopting that traditional feature of *condottiere* warfare—the tendency to conduct wars of manoeuvre and attrition, with the avoidance of battle and heavy loss one of the key features. As the main responsibility for maintaining expensive and precious troops passed from captain to state, so the anxiety not to take unnecessary risks was also transferred. This reinforced the whole framework of fifteenth-century war policy which was oriented towards wars of attrition which damaged the rival state's

¹ M. E. Mallett, 'Preparations for War in Florence and Venice in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century', *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations*, I (Florence, 1979), 150.

² Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters*, p. 117; G. Zorzi, 'Un vicentino alla corte di Paolo II; Chierighino Chiericati e il suo trattatello della milizia', *Nuovo archivio veneto*, NS xxx (1915); A. Da Mosto, 'Ordinamenti militari delle soldatesche dello stato Romano del 1430 al 1470', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, v (1902), 31–3.

³ I. Schiappoli, *Napoli aragonese: traffici e attività marinara* (Naples, 1972), pp. 25–32; P. Pieri, 'Il "Governo et exercitio de la militia" di Orso degli Orsini e i "Memoriali" di Diomede Carafa', *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, xix (1933).

⁴ Mallett, 'Preparations for war', *passim*.

economy and aimed at minor territorial gains—rather than at the annihilation of the enemy. Thus the whole tendency in the late fifteenth century for the tempo of Italian warfare to slow down and to rely heavily on tactics of manoeuvre was more the result of the policy of governments than of the preferences of the captains. However, the War of Ferrara, which will be the focus of the later part of this paper and which is sometimes described, quite erroneously, as ‘the last medieval war in Italy’, was to prove somewhat exceptional in this respect.¹

The fact that most of the Italian states in the second half of the fifteenth century had large permanent armies in a greater or lesser state of constant preparedness undoubtedly affected the conduct of relations between those states. But it would be wrong to overestimate the extent to which those permanent forces were normally ready for war or themselves fostered a willingness to go to war. While it was certainly true that contingents of heavy cavalry could be alerted at very short notice, and dispatched to counter or support aggressive political moves, full-scale mobilization was a very different matter. Milan was able to move relatively large bodies of cavalry to the Bolognese within days in response to tensions in the Romagna, as in June 1470 when 1,500 cavalry were sent,² and in May 1480 when Roberto da Sanseverino went with 3,000 cavalry to counter a papal threat to Pesaro.³ But the mobilization of the permanent forces meant moving them over to wartime rates of pay and in some cases filling out the ranks with new recruits. It meant the paying of large advances or *prestanze* before the troops could be moved out of quarters. It meant the rounding up of additional horses and oxen for the baggage trains and the levying of the militia and pioneers to accompany the army. All this took time, and above all ready cash—a commodity of which fifteenth-century states were always short. A state like Venice, which had access to the assets in the vaults of its banks in emergency, was thus able to mobilize much more quickly and effectively than the other Italian states. This was clear in April 1480 when 400,000 ducats was needed, and quickly available, to get the army and a huge river fleet ready for the war of Ferrara. This advantage, as much as

¹ F. Secco d’Aragona, ‘Un giornale della guerra di Ferrara (1482–4), *Archivio storico lombardo*, 8th ser. vii (1957), 344. For the best account of the War of Ferrara, see E. Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara del 1482* (Padua, 1893).

² Lorenzo de’ Medici, op. cit. i. 158.

³ ASMi, Archivio sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Firenze 299 (18 May and 2 June 1480); Dukes of Milan to Filippo Sacramoro in Florence.

any other factor, accounts for the general fear of Venetian imperialism in this period.¹

If the presence of permanent forces contributed significantly to the conditions of *equilibrio* in which the Italian states found themselves in the second half of the fifteenth century, it was diplomacy which provided the mechanism of the system. Diplomacy to avoid war, diplomacy to prepare for war, diplomacy to end war; the two were crucially linked. Garrett Mattingley in his seminal book on *Renaissance Diplomacy* rightly countered the claims of the diplomatic theorists themselves that their main object was to preserve peace, but he underestimated the intimate connections between diplomacy and war in fifteenth-century Italy. He introduced, in fact, an unnatural separation between the two by ascribing the growth of permanent diplomacy in Italy to the unreliability of the mercenary system, and by suggesting that 'diplomacy was for rulers, war for hired men'.² This second suggestion is the result of a peculiarly Florentine view of Renaissance development, a view which, particularly in the field of international relations, leads to severe distortions. While it is on the whole true that the Florentine political élite had little direct experience of war and regarded diplomacy as a laudable, and indeed necessary, occupation for the good citizen, the same generalization is less applicable to the other Italian élites. In Venice the very experienced military *provveditori* and the ambassadors came from the same small social group, and were often the same men.³ Many Milanese and Neapolitan diplomatic envoys had military experience, and not a few of them were 'hired men' in the sense of not being native-born subjects of the states which they served. Among the leading Milanese diplomats of the period were Prospero Camogli, Nicodemo Tranchedini, Sacramoro and Filippo Sacramori, Antonio Bracelli, and Sforza Bettini, all of whom were not Milanese by origin and some of whom served other states during their careers.⁴ Giovanbattista

¹ D. Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, in *Archivio storico italiano*, vii (1843), 253. For a discussion of the fear of Venetian imperialism in this period, see N. Rubinstein, 'Italian Reactions to Terraferma Expansion in the Fifteenth Century', in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. J. R. Hale (London, 1973).

² Mattingley, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-2.

³ M. E. Mallett, 'Venice and its *Condottieri*, 1404-54', in *Renaissance Venice*, pp. 135-7.

⁴ For short biographies of some of these men, see L. Cerioni, *La diplomazia sforzesca nella seconda metà del Quattrocento e i suoi cifrari segreti* (Rome, 1970), i; on Prospero Camogli, see P. M. Kendall and V. Ilardi, *Dispatches with Related Documents of Milanese Ambassadors in France and Burgundy, 1450-83*, ii (Ohio, 1971), xvi-xxi.

Bentivoglio in the service of Naples, Zaccaria Saggio da Pisa, the Mantuan envoy in Milan in the late 1470s and early 1480s, Antonio da Montecatini, Ercole d'Este's man in Florence for a number of years, are other examples of this phenomenon.¹

That the military context within which these diplomats operated was no longer one of errant, and potentially faithless, mercenary captains is a point which has already been made. This is not to deny that a small group of prestigious captains did maintain a degree of independence and mobility in their allegiances and this enabled them to influence, but not I suggest control, the relations between the Italian states. The political roles of men like Federico da Montefeltro and Roberto da Sanseverino were of great significance in the years round the War of Ferrara and these can be well studied through the diplomatic correspondence of the period. One of the main functions of the resident ambassadors was the negotiation of the *condotte* of such men who provided the high command of the permanent armies. This was one of the points at which military organization and diplomacy were inextricably intermeshed. Similarly the negotiation of the alliances and leagues which dominated the period required detailed consideration both of those high-level contracts and of the general level of the maintenance of permanent forces.

But it was in their role as information gatherers that the diplomatic agents of the period had their closest contacts with the military world. Ambassadorial dispatches were filled with information on troop movements and dispositions, on the state of preparedness of companies, on the activities of paymasters and commissaries as indicators of impending mobilization. A dramatic improvement in the quality and flow of information was one of the principal characteristics of Italian statecraft in the second half of the fifteenth century. The resident ambassadors, more informal spies and informers, and the development of patron-client relationships in which one of the main obligations on the client was to keep his patron informed, all contributed to this. The information provided was not, of course, just military information. Reports on revenue, proposed taxes, and on the popular reactions to taxes were always welcome, although interestingly enough ambassadors rarely reported on economic conditions of a more general nature. The other main area of interest to ambassadors was the

¹ For Giovanbattista Bentivoglio, see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, viii. 633-4. Zaccaria Saggio was the Mantuan representative in Milan throughout the 1470s and the early 1480s. Antonio da Montecatini arrived in Florence in October 1478 and remained well into the 1480s.

unity of the regime to which they were accredited. The role of ambassadors in noting, seeking out, and even fostering factions within the Italian states is a fascinating area of research. The envoys of the other powers in Florence clearly encouraged the existence of pro-Milanese, pro-Aragonese, and pro-Venetian factions within the Florentine political class. This was not just a way of gaining additional inside information, but a form of calculated subversion and interference which could affect policy decisions and if necessary be directed towards undermining the political will of the Republic. Ambassadors seem to have been a good deal less scrupulous in these matters than Mattingly suggested and the question clearly has important implications for both external and internal affairs. However, it is too big a topic to open up in this paper and I want to move on from this rather general discussion to consider some detailed examples which illustrate the points I have been making, chosen from the period of the War of Ferrara.

The signing of the peace which ended the Pazzi War on 13 March 1480, and of the league between Naples, Florence, and Milan on the same day, initiated a period of two years uneasy tension which can be described as the preliminary to the War of Ferrara which broke out on 2 May 1482.¹ The alliance systems which confronted each other in the opening stages of that war were forged two years earlier in March and April 1480. The League of Naples was the recreation of an *entente* of the late 1460s and the league between Sixtus IV and Venice, signed on 16 April, was a natural counterbalance to it. The papal-Venetian league grew out of the dissatisfaction of both parties with the peace of 13 March and the desire of Girolamo Riario to find support for his Romagna ambitions. It was negotiated by Cardinal Foscari with Riario and the Pope, with active encouragement from Federico da Montefeltro who was angry at the preference being given to other *condottieri* in the Neapolitan League.²

In fact the Neapolitan League itself was in a good deal of difficulty in the summer of 1480. The idea, which was floated in early May, that the League should be reformulated in the light of the emergence of the rival papal league, took three months to materialize. The main reason for this delay was the difficulty which the three allies had in agreeing on a military command structure. This stemmed partly from the rivalries among the *condottieri* concerned, Ercole d'Este and Roberto da Sanseverino

¹ Lorenzo de' Medici, *op. cit.* iv, particularly, 367-402.

² E. Piva, 'Origine e conclusione della pace e alleanza fra i Veneziani e Sisto IV', *Nuovo archivio veneto*, ns ii (1901).

supported by Milan and the Duke of Calabria supported by Naples. But more importantly the difficulty arose because of the deep-rooted suspicion in Milan and Florence of Neapolitan hegemonic intentions, because of the temporary internal crisis in Milan caused by the erratic behaviour of the Duchess Bona and the ambitions of Ludovico Sforza, and because of Florence's apparently adamant refusal to make the financial contributions expected of it towards the cost of the *condottieri*. The first of these issues was exacerbated by the fact that the Duke of Calabria and his troops were still occupying the Senese and appeared to be bringing to fruition the long-term Neapolitan ambition to establish a foothold in southern Tuscany. As Pierfilippo Pandolfini remarked in a letter of 9 July to Lorenzo de' Medici, it was necessary 'to have the King as kinsman and companion, and even as father, but not as Signore', and the Milanese appeared to concur with this view.¹ But at the same time it was the Florentine ambassador in Milan, Pierfilippo Pandolfini, who was most outspoken in his comments on the critical internal situation in Milan itself, and his male chauvinist remarks about the instability of female rulers were scarcely calculated to promote collaboration between the two states.² However, it was the Florentine obstinacy over money which was the most recalcitrant of the problems. This was only in part a reflection of genuine financial difficulties following the heavy costs of the Pazzi War. Feeling was growing in Florence that it was being milked by its allies and that it was time to make a stand and demonstrate that the Florentine treasury was not bottomless.³ Lorenzo was particularly sensitive to public unrest over taxes, and was anxious to use the *condotta* issue to put pressure on King Ferrante to give back the Florentine towns in southern Tuscany which had been occupied by the Neapolitans and Sienese during the Pazzi War.⁴ These were to be persistent themes in Florentine diplomacy in the next two years and they illustrate well the interrelationship between military organization, finance and broader political considerations, both external and internal, which preoccupied the diplomats of the period.

¹ ASF, Signoria, Otto e Dieci; legazioni e commissarie, missive e responsive, 10, 263-4^v (9 July 1480): '... se fe havere il Re per parente et compagno, et per padre, ma non per Signore!'

² Ibid. 169^v-171 (2 Apr. 1480) and 177-79^v (8 Apr. 1480); Pierfilippo Pandolfini in Milan to Lorenzo.

³ L. Landucci, *Diario fiorentino del 1450 al 1516*, a cura di I. del Badia (Florence, 1883), p. 35.

⁴ ASMi, Archivio Sforzesco. Potenze estere, Firenze 299 (25 June 1480): Filippico Sacramoro from Florence to Dukes of Milan.

The Neapolitan League was finally renewed on 25 July 1480 and the *condotta* of Ercole d'Este as lieutenant-general of the League, which was a part of the agreement, included secret clauses specifically guaranteeing Ferrara against Venetian aggression.¹ Throughout the negotiations the threat of war in the Romagna to frustrate the ambitions of Girolamo Riario had been another constant theme which helped, in fact, to bring the League to fruition.²

But war in a different form was about to erupt in Italy. On 27 July, two days after the signing of the League, a Turkish fleet of 150 sail appeared off the coast of Puglia. Within days Otranto had fallen and for over a year events in Italy were to be crucially conditioned by the threatening presence of the Turk on Italian soil.³ The Duke of Calabria and the bulk of his troops were withdrawn from Tuscany to face the new threat, and Florence saw the possibility of taking advantage of the withdrawal, and of Ferrante's new difficulties, to reclaim the lost towns. The 'insperato accidente' of Otranto, as Machiavelli described it, seemed to give diplomatic advantage not only to Florence.⁴ Sixtus IV seized the opportunity to strengthen his prestige through vociferous championing of a crusade and to humiliate Ferrante by forcing him to beg for crusading funds.⁵ Ludovico Sforza was able to resolve the internal crisis in Milan by taking control from the Duchess Bona without fear of Neapolitan interference. While in Venice the Senate pondered what advantage could be drawn from the embarrassment and preoccupation of Naples.

There was, of course, a widespread belief that Venice had

¹ F. Fossati, *Per l'alleanza del 25 luglio, 1480* (Mortara-Vigevano, 1901). For the *condotta* of Ercole d'Este, see ASF, Riformagioni, atti pubblici, cxxxviii (25 July 1480).

² E. Piva, 'L'opposizione diplomatica di Venezia alle mire di Sisto IV su Pesaro e ai tentativi di una crociata contro i Turchi, 1480-81', *Nuovo archivio veneto*, ns v, vi (1903); F. Fossati, 'Nuovi documenti sull'opera di Ludovico il Moro in difesa di Costanzo Sforza, *Atti e memorie della Dep. di storia patria per le Marche*, ns i-ii (1904-5); F. Fossati, *A proposito di una usurpazione di Sisto IV nel 1480: documenti milanesi* (Vigevano, 1901).

³ C. Foucard, 'Fonti di storia napoletana dell'Archivio di Stato di Modena: Otranto nel 1480 e nel 1481', *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, vi (1881), 82-3; P. Egidi, 'La politica del regno di Napoli negli ultimi mesi dell'anno 1480', *ibid.* (1910), 699-705.

⁴ N. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, a cura di F. Gaeta (Milan-Feltrinelli, 1962), p. 546.

⁵ Foucard, *op. cit.*, pp. 609-28; E. Carusi, 'Osservazioni sulla guerra per il ricupero di Otranto e tre lettere inedite di Re Ferrante a Sisto IV', *Archivio della società romana di storia patria*, xxxii (1909).

actually engineered the Turkish assault, and a general fear that the Venetians would use the situation to their positive advantage by initiating some aggressive move in northern Italy.¹ However, their apparent reluctance to take advantage of the situation is perhaps an indication of their passive involvement in the whole affair. It is tempting to suggest that growing tension over Ferrara and the eventual outbreak of the war was somehow linked to the Turkish invasion, but the chronology of the events does not really bear out such a hypothesis. The build up of that tension was a slow and erratic process and there is little evidence of Venice seizing with both hands the opportunity offered by the distraction of Naples.

The position of Ferrara as a Venetian satellite had been a cause of tension between the two cities for centuries. The famous *capitoli* which gave Venetians extensive commercial concessions in Ferrara, free access to the Po, and the right to maintain a Visdomino in the city who presided over the Venetian community, went back to the twelfth century.² In 1405 Venice had established control over the salt pans at Comacchio and forced Ferrara to buy from the Venetian monopoly, but this in turn created constant irritations over Ferrarese salt smuggling. During the Lombardy wars the Polesine had been ceded by Venice to Ferrara in return for military support and this served to create a strident faction of Venetian landowners in the area which took every opportunity to press for aggressive action against Ferrara. The marriage of Ercole d'Este to Eleanora d'Aragona, the daughter of King Ferrante, in 1472 further aroused Venetian suspicions, and it was soon clear that Ercole intended to use his new relationship with Naples and his position in the Neapolitan League of July 1480 to strengthen his position *vis-à-vis* Venice. During the negotiations over the League in the summer of 1480 Lorenzo de' Medici had expressed his concern that Ercole d'Este was likely to draw the League into a war with Venice.³

All this suggests that Venetian aggressiveness was not the only explanation of the war of Ferrara, and that such aggressiveness was at least in part the result of pressure from a private interest

¹ Piva, 'L'opposizione diplomatica', i. 75-89; F. Fossati, 'Alcuni dubbi sul contegno di Venezia durante la ricuperazione d'Otranto', *Nuovo archivio veneto*, ns xii (1906); A. Bombaci, 'Venezia e l'impresa turca di Otranto', *Rivista storica italiana*, lxvi (1954).

² ASV, Miscellanea atti diversi, 6A, *Rei Ferrariensis liber*; Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara*, i. 9-12.

³ ASMò, Carteggio degli ambasciatori, Firenze 2 (15 July 1480): Antonio da Montecatini to Niccolò Sadoletto in Naples.

group within Venice.¹ These indications are borne out by the events of 1481 and early 1482. The first significant flickers of alarm came in January 1481 when the Venetians, after protesting about the building of houses on the Polesine frontier which were being used by salt smugglers, sent in troops to burn them down. The tremors caused by this episode ran through the diplomatic correspondence of all the Italian courts.² But it was like one stone dropping into a pool; the ripples had largely dispersed when in May Vettor Contarini, a fanatical anti-Ferrarese noble, arrived in Ferrara as Visdomino, and was within weeks engaged in a row with the ecclesiastical authorities which led to his excommunication.³ Protests from Venice and harassment of Venetians in Ferrara followed. By late August Venetian protests were changing to positive counteraction and once again the diplomats of Italy were beginning to register reactions to the increasingly threatening situation. However, throughout this period there was no evidence of a Venetian military alert.

Then on 16 September Girolamo Riario arrived in Venice. He came ostensibly to cement the papal-Venetian alliance, to negotiate a *condotta* for himself, and to receive the rank of honorary noble of the city. But his ambitions in the Romagna were well known and there were even indications that he aspired to the throne of Naples itself.⁴ Venetian help was crucial to these aspirations and Venetian help could perhaps be bought by a papal offer of Ferrara. It is not known how complete the agreement was between Riario and Venice at this stage, but clearly papal favour was an essential preliminary and a decisive encouragement to any move against Ferrara. Equally clearly, however, Riario was not much liked in Venice. He earned for himself a reputation for meanness by refusing to tip the oarsmen of the *Bucentaur* and the servants in the palace that were placed at his disposal, and seemed to attach little importance to the privileges conferred upon him.⁵

By this time Otranto had finally been recaptured and in a sense Venice's opportunity had passed without the Republic having made any real effort to grasp it. But by late September decisive

¹ Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara*, i. 16 and 55.

² ASMo, Carteggio degli ambasciatori, Firenze 2 (3 Jan. 1481): Antonio da Montecatini to Ercole d'Este.

³ Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara*, i. 19.

⁴ ASV, Dieci, misti, 20, 32 (9 Nov. 1480); Sigismondo de' Conti, *Istorie dei suoi tempi* (Rome, 1883), i. 114-15.

⁵ Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara*, i. 50-3.

moves were being made. Venice began to construct three great bastions within the Ferrarese frontiers and the tide of protest now flowed the other way.¹ For two months the League debated an appropriate response; dispatches and instructions shuttled backwards and forwards between Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples. By December Milan and Naples began to mobilize and ambassadors of the League were sent to Ferrara to offer support to Ercole d'Este and consider putting diplomatic pressure on Venice. By January Venice seemed to be set on a course for war; troops were being called out all over Lombardy, and moved from the eastern frontier to billets in the Padovano.² In late January Alberto Cortese, the Ferrarese ambassador in Venice, took fright at the rising tide of feeling against him and fled from the city.³

It was at this stage, however, that both inevitable delays in military mobilization and the intricacies of diplomatic manoeuvre intervened. None of the members of the League were anxious for war; Naples was bankrupt and not very concerned about the defence of Ferrara; Florence declared categorically in February that it could spare no men or money for Ferrara until the question of the Sienese towns was resolved;⁴ Milan was preoccupied with the growing rift between Ludovico Sforza and Roberto da Sanseverino and with the rebellion of the Rossi family; all felt it essential that agreement should be reached with Federico da Montefeltro about a *condotta* with the League before there could be any question of war with Venice. But Federico refused to negotiate actively until March when his current *condotta* with Naples and the Pope was approaching its expiry date.⁵ There was a widespread belief that Venice was merely trying to force Ercole d'Este out of the League and would stop short of war. This may

¹ ASV, Senatus Secreta, 30, 33 (24 Sept. 1481). On 4 Jan. 1482 1,500 Venetian infantry were ordered to garrison the new bastions (ASV, Senatus Secreta, 30, 46).

² ASF, Otto, responsive, 2, 161 (report of Bongianno Gianfigliuzzi from Ferrara of 7 Jan. 1482); *ibid.* 200 (report of Pierfilippo Pandolfini from Naples on 26 Jan. 1482).

³ Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara*, i. 67.

⁴ ASF, Signoria, missive, *minutari*, 12, 138^r-138^v (instructions of Otto to Gianfigliuzzi in Ferrara of 11 Feb. 1482); ASMa, Archivio Gonzaga, 1627 (Zaccaria da Pisa in Milan to Federico Gonzaga, 16 Feb. 1482).

⁵ ASF, Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato (henceforth MAP), XLV. 198 (Giangaleazzo Sforza to Lorenzo de' Medici, 5 Dec. 1481). Federico finally agreed to open negotiations with the League on 7 Mar. 1482 which was three months before the expiry of his *condotta* with Naples and the Papacy (ASF, Otto, responsive, 2, 224; Pierfilippo Pandolfini from Naples to Otto, 4 Feb. 1482).

have been true initially but Venice was increasingly encouraged by the hope of gaining the services of Roberto da Sanseverino if he defected from Milan, and by the assurances of Riario that he would bring the Pope on to its side. In late March ambassadors of the League were in Urbino waiting impatiently while Federico consulted with his astrologers about a suitable date for signing his new *condotta*,¹ and Sanseverino was on his way to Venice to conclude terms with the Republic. On 3 April this contract was signed and Venice had a significant accretion of strength to its already powerful and by now largely mobilized standing army.² Venice now began to prepare a large river fleet for use on the Po and some money and infantry began at last to arrive in Ferrara from its allies.³ On 15 April Federico da Montefeltro finally signed with the League as captain-general having persuaded the allies to accept an elaborate military plan for concerted attacks on Rome and across the Adda.⁴ On 30 April Sixtus IV finally offered Ferrara to Venice.⁵ Two days later Roberto da Sanseverino crossed the Tartaro on a five-mile causeway prepared by Veronese pioneers and threw his army into the heart of the still largely defenceless Ferrarese state.⁶

This complex and rather abbreviated story brings out clearly some of the interconnections between diplomacy and war which I have been seeking to stress. Ambassadors were active at every point; in Ferrara they were seeking to advise and encourage Ercole d'Este in his dilemma of whether to give in or resist; in Milan they were trying to help Ludovico Sforza resolve his internal problems and get his army ready; in Florence their role was to find a solution to the problem of the Siennese towns without driving Siena into the arms of the Venetians. Meanwhile in Rome the ambassadors of the League and of Venice were alternately

¹ ASF, MAP, LI. 103 (Luigi Guicciardini and Pierfilippo Pandolfini from Urbino to Lorenzo de' Medici, 31 Mar. 1482).

² R. Predelli, *I libri commemoriali della Repubblica di Venezia, Regesti* (Monumenti storici pubblicati della R. Dep. veneta di storia patria, 1st ser. *documenti*, vols. 3, 7, 8, 10, 11. Venice, 1879-1901) v. 268-9.

³ The Bishop of Parma, the Milanese envoy in Ferrara, reported in early April both on the Venetian preparations and that 'in quella terra non si parla altro che di guerra benchè i vecchi et più savi non la volessino' (ASF, MAP, LI. 106; Bernardo Rucellai from Milan to Lorenzo, 4 Apr. 1482).

⁴ ASF, MAP, LI. 122 (Luigi Guicciardini to Lorenzo de' Medici, 15 Apr. 1482).

⁵ E. Piva, 'La cessione di Ferrara fatta da Sisto IV alla repubblica di Venezia (1482)', *Nuovo archivio vèneto*, NS xiv (1907), 415.

⁶ Piva, *La guerra di Ferrara*, i. 76-7.

cajoling and threatening Sixtus IV; in Naples the Milanese and Florentines had to convince Ferrante of the necessity for war; and in Urbino they had to cope with the vagaries and ambitions of that great prima donna, Federico da Montefeltro. Alongside all this activity the stage was at least partly taken up by the commanding figures of Federico and Roberto da Sanseverino without whose participation the war was unlikely to start, and by the 50,000 men who were gradually preparing themselves in their billets.¹

The war itself revealed a combination of both surprisingly new and predictably traditional elements. Bloody battles like Campomorto and Argenta were interspersed with periods of manoeuvre and stalemate; Albanian stradiots and Turkish janissaries, retained in his service by the Duke of Calabria after the fall of Otranto, fought alongside heavily armed veterans of the wars of the 1450s; Venetian gunners experimented with gas shells and shrapnel while their traditional river fleets were blown out of the water by Ferrarese guns massed on the banks of the Po; tortuous and treacherous peace negotiations alternated with the extraordinary summit strategy conferences of princes at Cremona in February 1483 and Milan in January 1484. Through it all the suspicions and rivalries amongst the allies remained and Venice emerged beleaguered, outnumbered, but with the main gains at the peace of Bagnolo in August 1484.²

I have deliberately avoided placing too much emphasis on the role of Lorenzo de' Medici in the events I have been describing, partly because he was the subject of the brilliant Italian Lecture given four years ago to the Academy by Nicolai Rubinstein,³ partly because I think that, at least for this period, his political pre-eminence in Italy has been somewhat exaggerated. Guicciardini's identification of him as the 'ago del bilancio' has been enormously influential in later writing, and one's view of the judgement must be conditioned not only by one's perceptions of his actual political contribution but also by one's understanding of the whole nature of the balance of power and the possibility of it being influenced or controlled by individual statesmen. However, as a well-documented example of the relationships between one

¹ For lists of the troops prepared by the various states for the early stages of the war, see Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, Magl. xxv. 161.

² C. Bonetti, 'La Dieta di Cremona', *Archivio storico lombardo*, 4th ser. x (1908); R. Cessi, 'La pace di Bagnolo dell' agosto 1484', *Annali triestini di diritto, economia e politica*, xii (1941).

³ N. Rubinstein, 'Lorenzo de' Medici: the formation of his statecraft', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, lxiii (1977).

Italian political leader and the ambassadors of his state, his case obviously has a great relevance to any discussion of the role of diplomacy.

What exactly was Lorenzo's role in the formation of Florentine foreign policy? How did he relate both to the formally appointed ambassadors and to the official foreign-policy committees of the Republic? Through what other mechanisms did he or might he have operated to influence that policy and the political affairs of Italy? The answers to these questions cannot be the same throughout his career, nor, I suggest, can they be along the lines of steadily tightening control. In my view, a growing authority in the 1470s was to some extent interrupted and reduced in 1480, and was only gradually recovered in the later years of the decade with Lorenzo's important links with Rome and Naples.

Lorenzo's role in Florentine foreign policy depended on a number of factors. It depended, of course, on his natural position as one of the leaders of the oligarchy, a man whose opinions were influential in the *pratiche* and whose personal influence affected the way others thought and voted. This influence was increased by his carefully cultivated and well-known contacts outside Florence and by his position at the head of Florence's leading bank, with all that that meant in terms of economic standing and access to commercial and political information passed back by Medici banks agents. Equally carefully cultivated were his contacts with the foreign ambassadors in Florence all of whom tended to regard him as their main contact within the city and some of whom would bring the letters and instructions which they received from their governments to him to see before taking them to the official foreign-policy committees of the Republic. But, there is a danger in attaching too much importance to this essentially 'external' view of Lorenzo's pre-eminence in Florence. Princes, and the ambassadors of princes, disliked dealing with republican committees and were always anxious to find a leader in Florence, a stable point with which to negotiate, and through which to influence and control the city. The Milanese ambassador, Sacramoro Sacramori, reported in 1471: 'The affairs of this city have reached the point where everything depends on a nod from Lorenzo, and nobody else counts for anything.'¹ This was patently untrue but it was the way Milan wished to see it, and the way that Sacromoro, who had Lorenzo's ear, wished to see it. But in

¹ A. Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala (1430-97); Chancellor of Florence* (Princeton, 1979), p. 68: 'sono reducte le cose di questa città in locho che tutto consiste in uno cenno di Lorenzo, ne crediate che altri ce siano se non per uno zero . . . '.

practical terms such contacts were clearly important for Lorenzo's reputation as knowledgeable about foreign affairs.

Lorenzo also relied to some extent on personal envoys for particular missions and negotiations. But, up to 1484 at least, he does not seem to have made much use of any system of permanent personal agents and secretaries within the embassies abroad, as Guicciardini suggested.¹ Ambassadors selected their own secretaries in this period and there is very little evidence of Lorenzo corresponding with individuals in the embassies other than the ambassadors themselves.

But, finally, Lorenzo's role did depend heavily on his personal contacts with Florence's ambassadors and the extent to which they corresponded with him while on their missions. The ambassadors during the years 1480 to 1484 can be divided into three broad categories in terms of their relationship with Lorenzo. There were those who can be best described as 'Lorenzo men', whose careers depended very largely on their links to Lorenzo and whose appointment as ambassador was presumably owed to his influence. Men such as Francesco Gaddi and Baccio Ugolini come into this category and clearly regarded themselves as primarily his agents and only formally accredited by the Republic.² Their correspondence with Lorenzo tended to be detailed and comprehensive; all important information was passed to him. Then there was a middle group of men who were clearly closely linked to Lorenzo and on terms of intimacy with him—either through family ties, shared interests, or neighbourhood relationships within the city—and yet who had a role and an influence in the

¹ Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, ed. R. Palmarocchi (Bari, 1931), p. 79.

² Francesco d'Agnolo Gaddi, a noted humanist and literary figure, was one of Lorenzo's most trusted envoys. He was sent to the French court in 1479, and again in May 1480 when he remained for nearly two years, first as Lorenzo's personal envoy and from Dec. 1480 as accredited ambassador of the Republic. He had the same dual role on a mission to Naples and the Duke of Calabria in the autumn of 1482. For fuller details of his diplomatic career, see L. Sozzi, 'Lettere inedite di Philippe de Comynes a Francesco Gaddi', in *Studi di bibliografia e di storia in onore di Tommaso de Marinis* (Verona, 1964). For his letters to Lorenzo during his second mission to France which indicate his very divided allegiances, see ASF, Signoria, Otto, Dieci; legazioni e commissarie, missive e responsive, 75 *passim*.

Baccio di Luca Ugolini was another of the literary figures of the Platonic Academy and the Lorenzan circle. He was sent to France and Germany in Aug. 1478, and to the abortive Council of Basle in Sept. 1482. He was also a confidant of the Gonzaga and was frequently in Mantua (A. Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze* (Florence, 1902), pp. 796–800).

oligarchy of their own right. Pierfilippo Pandolfini, Bernardo Rucellai, and Bernardo Bongirolami fit naturally into this category.¹ Such ambassadors tended to be more selective in the material which they sent to Lorenzo; letters to him would contain the more confidential information and news which the writer thought would be of particular interest to him personally—but referring him to their reports to the official organs of the Republic for more standard information. Finally, there were the envoys who owed nothing to Lorenzo, who stood entirely on their own feet in the oligarchy and whose attitude to him was one of differing degrees of personal friendship. Such men tended to come from an older generation—like Antonio Ridolfi, Guidantonio Vespucci, and Luigi Guicciardini.² The correspondence of this group of ambassadors with Lorenzo tended to be intermittent, in so far as we can tell, and rather arbitrary in the issues which were discussed.

For all these men, however, prior to 1480, there was a tendency

¹ Pierfilippo di Gianozzo Pandolfini was described by Antonio da Montecatini as 'la mano drita cum la quale se segna Lorenzo, et praecipue ne le cose de fora' (ASMo, Carteggio degli ambasciatori, Firenze 2; 6 Feb. 1481). But he was also a leading member of the Florentine oligarchy and the Republic's ambassador in Milan (Oct. 1479–July 1480), Naples (Nov. 1481–Mar. 1482), Rome (Feb.–May 1483), and at the peace negotiations at Bagnolo in Aug. 1484. His surviving correspondence both to Lorenzo and to the Otto is very extensive. Bernardo di Giovanni Rucellai was Lorenzo's brother-in-law and another noted humanist (G. Pellegrini, *L'umanista Bernardo Rucellai e le sue opere storiche*, Livorno, 1920). He was ambassador in Milan from Feb. 1482 to Oct. 1483.

Bernardo di Giovanni Bongirolami was a lawyer and a relative newcomer to the Florentine political élite, and hence perhaps more dependent than some on Lorenzo's support. He also was ambassador in Milan from Nov. 1483 to June 1484, following on important embassies to Naples and Rome in the early 1470s.

² Antonio di Lorenzo Ridolfi came of the older generation of Florentine politicians and had a distinguished record of public service in the 1460s and 1470s. He was chosen as ambassador to Rome in Apr. 1480 because he was known to be on good terms with Sixtus IV (ASF, Signoria, missive originali, 4, 67–8; 16 May 1480). He remained in Rome until Dec. 1480.

Guidantonio di Giovanni Vespucci was a lawyer and very experienced diplomat. He was ambassador in France in 1479 and 1480, and in Rome for much of the period between 1481 and 1484. His letters to Lorenzo, many of which survive in ASF, MAP, are notable for their selectivity in the matters discussed, and a tendency to draw a clear distinction between his official duties as ambassador and the private business of the Medici which he handled.

Luigi di Piero Guicciardini was, like his brother Jacopo, one of the most experienced politicians in Florence and a man whose prestige and seniority made him something of a rival to Lorenzo. He was ambassador in Venice in the first half of 1480, and together with Pandolfini negotiated the *condotta* with Federico da Montefeltro in Mar./Apr. 1482.

to use Lorenzo as a sort of filter for secret and confidential information, for unverified rumour and gossip, and for expressions of opinion by the ambassador himself. At this time dispatches were addressed to the Signoria in peace-time and were frequently discussed in the Pratica and read out to ambassadors of the foreign powers.¹ These were not the best forums for the discussion of confidential issues and the revelation of the secrets which the Florentine ambassadors had learnt. So, such information was sent to Lorenzo in the knowledge that he would know how to insert it into the policy-making process. Up to 1480 Florence lacked a small semi-permanent foreign-policy committee which could appropriately handle confidential business and long-range policy like the Consiglio Segreto in Milan, and so 'the secret affairs of this government will now pass through the hands of Lorenzo, as they passed through those of his father' as the Ferrarese ambassador put it in 1469.²

However, part of the constitutional reforms of April 1480 was the setting up of such a foreign-policy committee—the Otto di Pratica.³ Eight leading members of the new Council of Seventy held the responsibility for six months and ambassadors were specifically encouraged to report fully on confidential and secret affairs to the new committee.⁴ The development was seen as an extension of the special authority and continuity which the Dieci di Balìa had in war-time to a period of peace.⁵ The Otto, indeed, had responsibility for all military affairs as well as foreign policy but could always refer particularly controversial issues to a full debate in the Council of Seventy. The impact of the setting up of the new committee on ambassadorial reporting was immediate. The ambassadors clearly felt freer to report confidential matters direct to the Otto and this accounts in part for the more intermittent

¹ For discussion of the conduct of Florentine foreign policy and the role of ambassadors, see E. Santini, *Firenze e i suoi oratori nel Quattrocento* (Florence, 1922) and G. Pampaloni, 'Gli organi della Repubblica fiorentina per le relazioni coll'estero', *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, xx (1953).

² Rubinstein, 'Lorenzo de' Medici', p. 87.

³ N. Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici, 1434 to 1494* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 199–201.

⁴ ASF, Signoria, Legazioni e commissarie, 21, 7–8^v (to Antonio Ridolfi and Piero Nasi, 2 May 1480), and ASF, Otto di Pratica, Legazioni e commissarie, 1, 7 (to Luigi Guicciardini, 2 May 1480).

⁵ *Memorie e ricordi di Ser Giusto di Giovanni Giusti d'Anghiari*, in Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, II. II. 127, 135^v: 'Quelli trenta della Balìa di Firenze elessono otto cittadini di Firenze che havessino la cura del governo loro per di fuori della terra che si può dire sieno in luogo de' Dieci di Balìa' (19 Apr. 1480).

quality of the letters of some of the senior ambassadors to Lorenzo in this period.¹ Lorenzo was not a member of the first two groups of the Otto di Pratica, and although he continued to be consulted on all major issues and he clearly had access to the official ambassadorial reports, one gets the impression of him dropping a little into the background in this key area of Florentine policy-making. Undoubtedly there were many occasions within the following two years when there were fierce debates over foreign policy and military affairs; Lorenzo frequently found himself defending a minority position, both inside the Otto and outside, against hardliners who disliked the way in which Florence was seeming to be manipulated and exploited by its allies.

These insights into Lorenzo's role in foreign policy-making within Florence in these years obviously have some bearing on one's view of his influence in Italy as a whole. Foreign observers, in this period, frequently remarked that Lorenzo's reputation and authority within Florence depended to a large extent on his links with other Italian and foreign powers, and that without these his position in the city would be considerably weakened. But it is equally true that the reputation and influence of Lorenzo outside Florence depended on the extent to which he was seen by the powers to have control of the Republic's foreign policy. However, the influence of Lorenzo in the wider 'concert' of Italy was also dependent on the economic and military strengths of Florence itself. But militarily it was clearly the weakest of the five major powers and its growing reluctance actually to contribute money to the leagues in which it was involved tended to nullify its economic strength. The lack of regard for Florentine opinions and interests which was clearly apparent in the intrigues and negotiations of this period tended to negate the value of Lorenzo himself as a sort of arbiter in Italian politics, although this was a role for which both Milan and Naples occasionally cast him.

The fusion of diplomatic and military affairs in peace-time and the need for small long-serving committees that could discuss such

¹ The impact of the change in foreign policy direction is most apparent in the letters of Pierfilippo Pandolfini in May 1480 (ASF, Signoria, Otto, Dieci; legazioni e commissarie, missive e responsive, 10, 196-224). When Antonio da Montecatini approached Lorenzo to seek his help in persuading both the Florentine *signoria* and, more importantly, King Ferrante that Ercole d'Este's *condotta* should be agreed before the League was redrafted, Lorenzo referred him to the Otto di Pratica which had been specifically set up 'per fare le cose loro più segrete'. He refused to write direct to Naples because this would 'rompere lo ordine di questo governo apena cominciado' (ASMo, Carteggio degli ambasciatori, Firenze 2, 24 May 1480).

matters in confidence and with the benefit of continuity of experience was summed up in the establishment of the *Otto di Pratica* in Florence. Exactly the same process was taking place in Venice with the gradual involvement of the Council of Ten in such matters. Here the development was more gradual and informal, but it was in 1480 that the Council first began to get involved in secret diplomacy while at the same time it was extending its authority over many aspects of military organization.¹ Foreign policy, diplomacy, and war, were thus playing their parts in that crucial consolidation of power which was so much a feature of the Italian political scene in the later fifteenth century.

¹ Zaccaria Barbaro, sent to Rome at the end of May 1480, was the first Venetian ambassador to write extensively to the Consiglio de' Dieci (ASV, Dieci, misti, 20, 4^v-5 f.). For an extended discussion of the growth of the power of the Dieci in military affairs, see J. R. Hale and M. E. Mallett, *Venice: the Military Organisation of a Renaissance State, 1400-1617* (Cambridge, forthcoming). Other recent discussions of the role of the Dieci are G. Cozzi, 'Authority and the Law in Renaissance Venice', *Renaissance Venice*, pp. 303-8; M. Knapton, 'Il Consiglio dei Dieci nel governo della Terraferma: un' ipotesi interpretativa per il secondo '400', *Atti del convegno 'Venezia e la Terraferma attraverso le relazioni dei rettori'* (Milan, 1981).