

Pope's Trip: Again, Full of Surprises

by Claudio Celani

Pope John Paul II, at 82, surprised the world again with his May 22-26 trip to Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. The Pope was able to achieve “results beyond expectations, in the ecumenical dimensions, on the minorities questions, and on clearing up the Bulgarian question,” Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro Valls commented.

In Azerbaijan, an Islamic country with a total of only 120 Catholics, the Pope praised its tolerance as being Islam's true teachings—allowing this tiny minority of Roman Catholics to practice their religion in full freedom. In Bulgaria, a step forward was made toward the desired reconciliation with the Moscow Orthodox Patriarchate, when “the Orthodox Metropolitan of Sofia [Bulgaria's capital] decided to participate in the Mass celebrated by the Pope. This is of enormous historical importance, if you consider that he is subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate,” which has opposed a meeting with the Pope, Navarro Valls explained. Despite his evident physical frailty, the Pope “has incorporated his physical limits in the pastoral instrument. The people have understood that, and he has opened many hearts,” concluded the Vatican spokesman.

But the biggest surprise was John Paul's statement, unexpected by everyone, on the alleged involvement of Bulgarian communist authorities in the assassination attempt against him on May 13, 1981. Although it is the Carlist and imperialist factions within and around the Catholic Church who now, and for some years, have publicly wished this Pope out of the way, nonetheless the dominant story of his near-assassination has been that the Soviet leadership had ordered it.

“I never believed in the Bulgarian Connection,” said the Pope, and his comment was included in a joint release issued by the Vatican and the Bulgarian government, now cleared at the highest level from the infamous allegations.

The Pope probably knows the whole truth, since he visited and spoke with his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, in prison, and pardoned him. His official statement, however, also has implications for the present strategic situation. If one goes back to the real connections of Mehmet Ali Agca, one finds the same utopian “perpetual war” faction in the West, which is currently pursuing the Clash of Civilizations “policy of Sept. 11,” a policy to which the Pope has made himself clearly and passionately opposed.

History of the ‘Bulgarian Connection’

Former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, a close friend of the Vatican who was Foreign Minister at the time

the Pope was nearly killed, dedicated a chapter of his 1988 book about the Soviet Union to the “Bulgarian Connection.” He wrote: “From the investigation and the trial, not many elements of evaluation emerged to understand the motive, seek out the possible collaborations, go back to possible string pullers. . . . Presenting everything in the light of a desperate Islamic fanaticism . . . it seems that no effective research had been made on the nature of the numerous travels made by the culprit; on the origin of the financial means at his disposal; on his Romantic escape from Turkish prison, dressed—apparently—as an Army officer.”

One year later, Andreotti continued, “Ali Agca introduced a Bulgarian responsibility, exposing a protection—and even worse—by the Bulgarian embassy in Rome, through an alleged familiarity with the head of the Bulgarian Airline in Fiumicino, Mr. Sergei Ivanov Antonov. . . . Antonov was arrested, and a worldwide media and political campaign started about a so-called Bulgarian Connection. Particularly in the United States, the echo was loud, and not only through newspapers and radio stations, because New York Sen. Alfonse D’Amato came to Rome and, on his return, gave a speech to his Capitol Hill colleagues, presenting the ‘Bulgarian Connection’ as demonstrated and certain.”

In his second trial for the assassination attempt, Agca said that he had gotten the “assignment” to kill the Pope from one Bekir Celenk, a Turkish drug and arms dealer managing a hotel casino in Sofia. Celenk died in a Turkish prison awaiting extradition to Italy. Andreotti described the arguments of the Italian prosecutors, entirely constructed by assigning geopolitical motives to the Polish communist government, the Soviet Russian government behind it, and the likely use of Bulgaria for dirty operations. But as for evidence, “the fragility of the evidence emerged in all its impressive crudity. . . . People had the feeling of machinations started by unknown parties, into which, unfortunately, the prosecutors who prepared the trial had fallen.”

In a 1991 presentation in Rome, Andreotti added a precious detail, speaking of “a foreigner close to Western secret services, who lived in the flat below Sergei Antonov’s flat.” This was Father Felix Morlion, a Belgian Dominican whose apartment—and not Antonov’s—corresponded exactly to the diagrams drawn by Agca when he “fingered” Antonov. Morlion came to Italy from the United States, and built up an “information center,” called Pro Deo. Antonov was acquitted on the basis of insufficient evidence, but the media campaign on the Bulgarian Connection did not stop. Andreotti concluded:



Pope John Paul II, defying the illness which has some media watching expectantly for his “retirement,” continued to advance the dialogue of religions in his latest trip to Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. He also pulled a significant one-sentence surprise.

“I declare the un-bizarre suspicion that those secret forces which operate to hinder [U.S.-Russian] agreements, had played this card, fooling Italian justice.”

The Cover-Up

A third investigation on the Agca case, started by prosecutor Rosario Priore in 1985 and concluded in 1998, revealed that the same people who had launched the media campaign, were responsible for suggesting to Agca, everything he said to the Italian prosecutors. The main operative in this respect was Claire Sterling, an American intelligence-connected journalist living in Rome, who published in the August/September 1982 issue of *Reader’s Digest*, the first sensational “investigative report” on the Bulgarian Connection. Sterling, however, as prosecutor Priore has proven, based her article on a draft written for her by Paul Henze, a member of the Anglo-American intelligence community and the key figure in the whole Agca case.

Henze can be described as a member of the “invisible government” of the United States, belonging to the utopian faction characterized by ideologues such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel Huntington. Henze was CIA station chief in Turkey from 1974-77, when Brzezinski, the real head of the Carter Administration, called him onto the National Security Council as an expert on Turkey and Iran. When Ronald Reagan took office, Henze left the National Security Council (NSC) and joined the Rand Corp. Already in September 1981, long before Agca said anything about his alleged Bulgarian masters, Henze gave a speech at a conference of the European-American Institute for Security Research in Naples, in which

he put forth that the attempted murder of the Pope was connected with “Soviet-directed terrorism” in Italy and Turkey. One year later, both Henze and Sterling were featured in a major NBC-TV broadcast which launched the Bulgarian Connection theory for the United States public.

Henze himself, as coordinator of the “stay behind” network in Turkey (intelligence slang for Anglo-American military-intelligence networks perpetuated in European countries after the end of World War II), had overseen the training and the “special operations” conducted by right-wing Turkish elements, including Agca’s Grey Wolves organization. The “stay behind” network in Turkey was organized under the Division for Special War Operations, and was called “Contra-Guerrilla”—which should remind one of Iran-Contra. These Turkish Contras’ assignment was to launch terrorist actions against Turkish communist and pro-Kurdish elements.

The existence of NATO “stay behind” networks, created in 1949 and trained by the British Army, was only revealed officially in 1991 in Italy—not accidentally, by Giulio Andreotti. The Italian “stay behind” section was called Gladio (“by the sword”). In 1978, former Prime Minister Aldo Moro, writing from the prison where he was being held by Red Brigades terrorists, had mentioned—without using the specific word—such structures. And a few days after Agca’s assassination attempt, May 31, 1981, the Italian weekly *Europeo* had tied Agca’s escape from the Turkish prison in 1979, to the “Contra-Guerrilla.” Current Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, who only learned of the Division for Special War Operations from his own military as his first Prime Ministership was coming to an end in 1977, told a Turkish journalist: “I am convinced that the Contra-Guerrilla has played a decisive role in the military coups in 1971 and 1980. Also the massacre of May 1977 must be attributed to the Contras.”

The Afghansi Connection

In Turkey’s capital, Ankara, people will say, in private, who is behind the Contra-Guerrilla: the CIA station chief in Ankara, who, in 1977, was Paul Henze. The CIA as such, however, was not involved in the Agca operation. When Henze and Sterling launched the Bulgarian Connection cover story, the CIA wrote two successive reports which denied its credibility. Though CIA director William Casey and deputy Robert Gates put the CIA staff under pressure, open dissent against the Bulgarian Connection broke out in the Agency.

Under the Brzezinski-Carter government, when Paul Henze worked at the NSC, U.S. policy in Asia developed the training and arming of Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas, who were sent to fight against the Red Army occupation of Afghanistan. This is the operation out of which Osama bin Laden was created. Ali Agca was part of that network. His superior was Abdullah Catli, number two in the Grey Wolves terrorist organization. Catli could travel undisturbed in Germany, France, and the United States, where once he was arrested and soon released, although he was accompanied by famous Italian neo-fascist Stefano delle Chiaie, at the top of the Inter-

pol list of fugitives. Catli, who also worked for the Turkish secret service MIT, died in a spectacular car accident in Turkey in 1996, when a giant truck cut across the road and smashed his armored Mercedes. In the car with this wanted drug and weapons smuggler and murderer, was the former Istanbul deputy chief of police, Husein Kocadag, and a member of Parliament.

The accident prompted the formation of a parliamentary investigating committee, where the past of Catli and his gang (including Agca) as members of the Contra-Guerrilla, and as agents of several Western intelligence agencies, was revealed. Interestingly, in 1985 Catli had been extradited from France to Italy in order to testify at the second Agca trial in Rome, to claim that his protégé Agca had turned from a neo-fascist into a “commie.”

Targetting the Pope

The election of Karol Wojtyla to the Papacy in 1978, and his visit to his homeland Poland as Pope in 1979, had unleashed a patriotic awakening of that country, which culminated with the mass strikes of 1980 and the establishment of Solidarnosc as the first independent anti-communist organization in the socialist bloc. But the idea of Pope Wojtyla leading a revolution in Poland which would challenge the Kremlin and provoke Moscow to react, is false. When Solidarnosc called for a general strike in March 1981—a move which could have had uncalculable consequences—Wojtyla sent a telegram to Cardinal Wyszynski, the Primate of Poland, saying: “From all parts of Poland, voices of large masses of workers are heard, who express their willingness to work and not to strike.”

In reality, Wojtyla, a vigorous opponent of communism, was also a staunch adversary of the Western brand of materialism, neo-liberalism. He made this clear from the beginning of his pontificate, in his speech at the United Nations in September 1979. He showed that he interpreted the concept of “human rights,” not in the Aristotelian sense of freedom of expression, but rather in the Platonic sense, as the right for all men to have access to the resources of the planet, food, work, and education. He indicated a third way between Western neo-liberalism and Eastern materialism, very much in line with what his predecessor Paul VI had done in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (“On the Progress of Peoples”).

The Pope’s encyclicals have never detoured from this direction. Even when illness struck him, he never ceased preaching for a dialogue of civilizations, taking his stance against Anglo-American policy in the war against Iraq in 1991, the practice of retaliation of the Sharon government against Palestinian civilians, and the policy of the Bush Presidency in the aftermath of Sept. 11. His statements in Bulgaria should be an occasion to repair the 20 years’ media manipulation with the Bulgarian Connection story, and to have them dedicate at least a fraction of that effort to publishing the real version. This will help the fight for peace in the world.