

Italy Is Drawing the Lessons From the Calipari Murder in Iraq

by Claudio Celani

If Niccolò Machiavelli were to write *The Prince* again, he would surely include, in the chapter “How a Nation Can Lose Its Best Allies,” a report on how the United States handled the crisis with Italy over the assassination of Italian intelligence official Nicola Calipari. As *EIR* readers know, Calipari was killed in Baghdad on March 6 by a U.S. patrol, which opened fire on the car in which Calipari was escorting Giuliana Sgrena, a liberated hostage, to the airport.

Calipari was a high-ranking official of the Italian military intelligence service, SISMI, and had concluded his third successful negotiation for the liberation of Italian hostages kidnapped in Iraq. He had closely coordinated the operation with the Italian Prime Minister’s office. Indeed, one minute before the U.S. patrol opened fire, Calipari had talked on the phone with Gianni Letta, the State Secretary to the Prime Minister in Rome, in the presence of Prime Minister Berlusconi himself.

The shock in Italy was enormous. Some speak of a deliberate “ambush” against the Italians, ordered by then-U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte, which resulted from a build-up of tensions over different approaches to the question of hostages (including Sgrena). The mildest judgment on the case is that U.S. forces in Iraq are out of control.

Two different versions of the event soon evolved: The Italian witnesses, the SISMI official and journalist Sgrena herself, reported that the car was driving at a low speed of about 40-50 kilometers per hour; that the lights inside the car were turned on to give maximum visibility to possible checkpoints; that the U.S. patrol did not give a warning before it opened fire, but turned a spotlight on the car and started to shoot at the same time; that the car then stopped immediately; and that the head of the airport security, U.S. Captain Greene, had been informed of the approach of the Italian car and its passengers at least half an hour before its arrival.

The U.S. command issued a report which claimed that the car was driving at about 95 kilometers per hour; that the driver did not stop at the warning light; and that U.S. authorities had not been informed about the arrival of the car.

As a friendly gesture, the U.S. military command invited two Italian officials to be part of the investigating committee in Baghdad. But it soon became clear that the Italian presence on the committee was only face-saving, and that the U.S.



Nicola Calipari, the Italian intelligence agent killed by U.S. troops while freeing a hostage. The U.S. “inquiry” admitted no wrongdoing, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and Italians are furious.

military panel was determined to stick to its first version of the incident, and acquit all patrol members. Furthermore, when Rome prosecutor Franco Ionta, who had opened a formal investigation of the murder case, made a formal request to the U.S. authorities that he be allowed to interrogate U.S. witnesses, his request was left unanswered.

Underground Intelligence Warfare

A crisis was already brewing between Rome and Washington, fed by what the Italian media described as “underground intelligence warfare” between Italy and the U.S.A., and by a growing sentiment of indignation among the Italian public. On April 29, the split between the two countries was acknowledged by a joint statement issued by the State Department and the Italian Foreign Ministry, which said that “investigators did not reach shared final conclusions. . . . Investigators will now report to the respective national authorities, in conformity with rules and procedures of their own countries.” The rest of the statement is a formal celebration of the “climate of cooperation,” “solid alliance,” and so on.

Soon after this, the official U.S. report was published, acquitting U.S. patrol members of any culpability, and accusing the Italians of having violated checkpoint rules and having failed to coordinate with their U.S. Intelligence counterparts. In a singular coincidence, CBS television broadcast a disin-

The Italian Government's Calipari Report

The government report on the Calipari murder, published May 2, states:

“The witness statements by the U.S. soldiers . . . on the speed of the Toyota vehicle, albeit similar to one another, appear to be contradictory and not identical, and they seem to be biased by emotional factors. The intuitive persuasion that, by crediting the vehicle with a higher speed, the risk of being charged with an error of evaluation would be reduced, seems not to be extraneous to such witness's statements.

“Conclusions reached by the early, summary investigation—which admitted the violation of the rule on light signals—were initially accepted by the chain of command, but eventually were rejected.”

The report then criticizes the destruction of evidence, the removal of the car from the scene, and “of particular significance, the removal and elimination of the cartridges.”

Among the singular elements of the patrol deployment, it is reported that: “at 20:45 the soldiers were in the same positions they had been occupying since 19:30,” a highly unusual and risky situation. “They were all worried about the long time spent by the soldiers at their checkpoints, because by leaving them in a static position for more than 15 minutes, they would be exposed to possible attacks.”

The U.S. patrol “did not place signals or obstacles, as prescribed by guidelines for Traffic Control Points. . . . When it was clear that there was no more reason to believe that the checkpoint would have a short duration, the second lieutenant did not take measures to improve in any way the efficiency of the post, by effectively signalling the presence of his men and their equipment, as well as the aim of the mission. Nor had he considered that, with the passage of time passing by, the attention threshold is lowered, and it would have been better to replace the gunners, since the

whole functioning of the checkpoint, as it was deployed, was based on the constant utmost attention to incoming cars by the gunners and on their reaction capabilities.”

Ineffective Procedures

The report refers to the fact that the patrol was not told that the alleged purpose for the deployment, the arrival of Ambassador Negroponte, had ceased to exist: “The ineffectiveness of procedures for monitoring events that occurred on the field [communications, signals and sharing of information] . . . has resulted in the fact that the [patrol] Battalion, remained at the checkpoint longer than was foreseen and necessary. . . . This explains but does not justify what occurred.”

Earlier, the patrol had provoked a car accident by forcing a car to drive backwards, on the one-way road. The report complains that the U.S. Commission conducted an independent technical experiment to check the average speed of vehicles on March 4 on the Alert Line, resulting in an average speed of 45 mph. If this is true, the questions are: 1) Why did the patrol build the checkpoint without the necessary distances for security; and 2) Why were all Iraqi drivers that evening able to stop in a few meters, when the Italian car could not?

The report also complains that the destruction of evidence has not allowed it to be conclusively established that it was only one U.S. soldier who shot at Calipari's car, and that the Captain of the Company ordered the removal of both the “roadblock vehicle” (the American armored vehicle) and the Italian Toyota, despite the fact that the Captain had “professional experience as a sergeant in the New York Police Department.”

And finally the report states: “Whereas it is possible that the competent U.S. authorities . . . were not formally informed of the specific content of the mission, it is indisputably certain and confirmed that they were informed of the arrival of Mr. Calipari and of Mr. Ita-1 [name of the other SISMI agent]. Mr. U.S.A.-B-2 [airport security head] had accompanied Dr. Calipari and Mr. Ita-1 [the car driver] to the Al Faw building in Camp Victory, where they had been provided with ID cards.”

formation report claiming that satellite evidence proved that the Italian car was driving too fast through the checkpoint. Such a claim is a travesty; the truth is that when the investigating committee requested satellite evidence from the U.S. National Security Agency, it was told that there was none, because the sky was cloudy that day.

On May 2, the Italian government published a report drafted by the two Italian members of the committee, diplomat Cesare Ragolini and Gen. Pierluigi Campregher (see

box). The report confirms the version originally reported by the Italians, and challenges the sincerity of the versions offered by the members of the U.S. patrol.

On May 5, Prime Minister Berlusconi reported to Parliament: “The discrepancy [between Italy and the U.S.A.] on the causes and the modalities of the tragic accident has proven to be irreducible and I will not be the one who minimizes the dimensions of the disagreement. . . . One does not need to be an expert in criminal law to understand that the absence of

the voluntary element does not exclude at all the guilt element, which is caused by negligence, imprudence, or even just un-cleverness.”

Berlusconi pointed to “the irregularity of a checkpoint which was lacking signal mechanisms that would make it clearly visible,” and to “a checkpoint placed in the dark, shortly after a curve, certainly in conditions barely indicated to guarantee security both of the soldiers and the incoming drivers.” This truth, Berlusconi said, has been implicitly recognized by the U.S. report, which recommends review of signals, rules of engagement, and post-accident procedures.

Berlusconi then tried to downplay the dimensions of the crisis, in order not to admit a defeat of his Iraq policy in front of the government opposition. “The result of the investigation has nothing to do with the quality of our relationships with the United States,” he said, and “we have no intention of establishing any connection between the evaluation of the events in which our official lost his life and the role of our country in Iraq.” Italy maintains 3,000 troops, mostly military police (Carabinieri), in the relatively peaceful Shi’ite area around Nassirya, in southwest Iraq. Those troops did not participate in the 2003 invasion and have a formal peace-keeping mandate. However, public opposition to the presence of these troops in a theater of war has increased so much in Italy, that opinion polls are no longer conducted.

‘Moral Reparation’ and Troop Withdrawal Demanded

The connection between the Calipari case and Italy’s presence in Iraq, nevertheless was noted by the opposition. On May 4, the day before Berlusconi’s statement, former European Union chairman Romano Prodi, who is a candidate for the premiership in the general elections next year, had urged his coalition to issue a joint call for the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq. During the Parliamentary debate May 5, this call was issued by Piero Fassino, who is the Social Democracy (DS) Secretary General and a leading member of Prodi’s coalition. Fassino also urged the government to “demand an act of moral and political reparation from the U.S. government,” as “a fact of dignity” for the nation and “of justice towards the Calipari family and Italy.”

“We believe that the U.S. government must offer its apology,” Fassino said. “So far, this expression from the U.S. government has not come.” Fassino was indirectly referring to a phone call between George W. Bush and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi the previous day, in which Bush expressed “regret,” but nothing more.

The request for a public apology had also come that day from the leading Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*, in a front-page editorial, in which columnist Ernesto Galli della Loggia used unusually harsh tones in condemning the “callous insensibility” with which the U.S.A. had so far managed the Calipari case. This left open, della Loggia wrote, “a question of enormous proportion: What is the sense of any country having

a close relationship of friendship with the United States?” In order not to confuse the alliance with a de facto feudal relationship, della Loggia said, “it is necessary that Washington has, among other things, constant concern for the public sentiment of the ally, starting from the latter’s sense of national dignity and the interests it represents.” He noted the several U.S. Presidents who were able to keep the standard even in the harsh times of the Cold War, stating that President Bush “does not seem either willing or able to do the same thing.”

Bush “must be therefore informed . . . that all this cannot continue without consequences, and if he is justly concerned for the morale of U.S. soldiers deployed in Iraq, for us Italians, the morale of our soldiers deployed in Afghanistan and Nassirya [Iraq] is at least as important; those soldiers, we have reason to believe, were not happy with the way the Calipari investigation was conducted on the American side. And we were not happy either.”

Corriere della Sera is not a leftist newspaper, but represents Italy’s traditionally pro-Atlanticist liberal establishment. Therefore, such an editorial is a serious indication of compromised relationships between the two countries.

Brig. Gen. Gerardo Serravalle, a former commander of the Stay Behind organization of the Italian military intelligence, agrees fully with the content of the *Corriere* editorial. Speaking with *EIR*, he criticized the U.S. decision not to hand over the names of witnesses and patrol members to Italian state prosecutors, and for a policy which is “first saving their men, then caring for the rest.” However, he also regrets that intelligence agencies of both countries did not conduct a “dialogue with each other.”

Serravalle indicated that a troop withdrawal from Iraq was the obvious consequence the Italian government should draw, in respect of national dignity. However, such a withdrawal could take place just by keeping the terms of the mandate, which expires at the end of this year. On Jan. 1, 2006, withdrawal could start. “That is the most ‘military’ solution,” Serravalle said, indicating that the contingent must necessarily be gradually pulled out, in order to maintain a framework of security.

On May 11, Italian Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini announced that Italy will withdraw its contingent in February 2006.

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