

Vatican Peace Effort Grows, Despite Italian Government Betrayal

by Claudio Celani

A major role in the global war-prevention effort is being carried out by Pope John Paul II, who sent his special envoy, Cardinal Roger Etchegarray, to Baghdad on Feb. 9, soon after the Pope and his collaborators conferred with visiting German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in Rome. The Pope was the first to learn from Fischer about the new Franco-German proposal for strengthening the inspections in Iraq, subsequently supported by Russia and China. The mission to Baghdad by Cardinal Etchegarray, the chairman emeritus of the Justitia and Pax Council, was to convince Saddam Hussein to accept it. Next, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, a Christian, is expected to visit Rome, to bring word of Iraq's decision.

The Pope seems to be rejuvenated by the effort to stop the war, wrote a London *Times* correspondent on Feb. 10.

Fischer came out visibly impressed by his audience on Feb. 7 with the Pope, Vatican "Prime Minister" Cardinal Sodano, and "Foreign Minister" Monsignor Tauran. He told the press: "We have a common preoccupation with the war in Iraq. My interlocutors were interested in knowing the various positions on [U.S. Secretary of State Colin] Powell's report in order to study the situation"; that is, to prepare for the battle at the Security Council.

The Pope's Divisions

Everybody knows Stalin's famous quote: "How many divisions does the Pope have?" Without military divisions, but with the strength of human reason and faith in God, the Pope is mobilizing against the war. In the days preceding and following the diplomatic catastrophe of Secretary Powell's Feb. 5 appearance at the UN, the Pope's divisions moved onto

the battlefield.

The artillery fire was led by a major editorial document published under Vatican imprimatur by the Jesuit magazine *Civiltà Cattolica*, which demolished the so-called doctrine of "pre-emptive war" and the arguments given for its application against Iraq. The document blasted Washington's "sort of messianic vocation in favor of the human race" shown by its pursuit of "the creation and the buildup of the 'Kingdom of Good' "—overthrowing dictatorial states which allegedly threaten U.S. security, including its economic security and energy supplies. It is argued, the magazine wrote, that Iraq is such a threat because it has concealed weapons of mass destruction from UN inspectors. "In reality, the reason to militarily attack Iraq is seen as weak by many."

Civiltà Cattolica added that of the 91 violations of UN resolutions so far, 59 have been committed by U.S. allies: Israel 32, Turkey 24, and Morocco 16.

The Vatican-authorized article pointed to the real reason for an attack against Iraq: the insane "Chicken-hawks" and their utopian doctrine. This "seems to be the geopolitical position occupied by Iraq in the Middle East," first of all "the necessity on the side of the U.S.A. to have secure access to Iraqi oil." But "for the U.S.A., some remark, it is not only a matter of having access to the immense reserves of Iraqi oil but rather also of 'stabilizing' the whole Mideast region." According to "a position in the U.S. administration, prominently represented by R. Perle, chairman of the Defense Policy Board, and by P. Wolfowitz, Deputy Defense Secretary, 'the occupation of Iraq should be the occasion of democratizing and introducing Iraq to modernity and globalization. This would catalyze a deep reform of the entire Arab world.' "

But, the article warned, a "pre-emptive war" is justified only if there is "an actual aggression or at least an imminent one. . . . As concerns Iraq, there is neither an actual military attack against the U.S.A., nor is the threat of an imminent military attack plausible. One must instead say, that it is Iraq which is the object of American and British air attacks in the two no-fly zones."

The argument that Iraq could supply terrorists with weapons of mass destruction and therefore this must be "prevented," *Civiltà Cattolica* wrote, is "a very dangerous argument, because it would open the way to endless war. . . . If every country that feels threatened were, in order to 'prevent' the threat of being attacked, to militarily attack first the threatening country, there would be endless wars all over the globe. . . . Think only about the controversy between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. . . . Under a moral profile, pre-emptive war, like any other war, is to be morally condemned."

A Lesson in Global Strategy

Civiltà Cattolica reminded its readers that the U.S. Catholic Bishops, in a letter sent by their chairman, Wilton D. Gregory, to President George Bush on Sept. 12, 2002, condemned a war on Iraq. The article concluded with a lesson in global

strategy: "A war against Iraq will necessarily involve the invasion of Iraqi territory and, because Iraqi defenses are concentrated in the large cities, . . . battles in these cities will provoke a large number of civilian victims." It continued, "On the other side, if it is predictable that the U.S. will win the war," it "will not win the peace. The whole destabilization of the Middle East can be foreseen, since the attack against Iraq will be considered by politicized Islamic masses, which already nurture a deep hatred against the West, as an act of war against Islam and Arab and Islamic countries. This cannot avoid creating serious troubles for 'moderate' countries. . . . Osama bin Laden himself, or whoever has replaced him, aiming at seizing the Saudi oil, would see his objectives at hand."

The article cautioned: "However, the most serious consequence of a war against Iraq would be a revival of terrorism against the United States and allied Western countries. . . . Thus, the 'crusade' proclaimed by President Bush after Sept. 11, 2001, not only will not defeat terrorism . . . but it would give it new energy. It has become evident that terrorism is not fought and defeated through war, but through other means, such as intelligence services and diplomacy. In conclusion, we cannot but repeat what John Paul II said when, in November 1991, President Bush's father unleashed the first war against Iraq: 'War is an adventure with no return.' "

100,000 Bodybags

On Feb. 6, the day after Colin Powell's UN performance, Archbishop Renato Martino, head of the *Justitia et Pax* Council, stressed in an interview with the monthly *Thirty Days*, that "there is no clear and evident demonstration that Iraq is among the responsables of international terrorism, nor that it possesses weapons of mass destruction, such as to constitute an imminent danger for humanity."

Martino then revealed that "during the first days of February, in the Sigonella military airport," the NATO base near Catania, Sicily, "100,000 bodybags and 6,000 coffins have been delivered."

On Feb. 10, U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican and Bush's campaign supporter Jim Nicholson organized a conference for Michael Novak, the notorious neo-pagan "Catholic" economist, who was flown in from the United States. Evidently finding it impossible to defend the concept of "pre-emptive war," Novak changed tactics, defining the war against Iraq as a "defensive war," because it would be a continuation of the prosecution of the 1991 war, waged in defense of Kuwait! Not daring to attack the Pope, Novak complained that the Jesuits and "the Curia" unfortunately are not sophisticated enough to understand such subtleties.

Upon his arrival in Rome, Novak was summoned to the Vatican and questioned by Sodano, Tauran, and Martino. As a Vatican source told the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, the high Church representatives got a bad impression of Novak because of his "apparent lack of will to listen."

However, the Anglo-American pressures have negatively

affected a factor which, in the past, was a major element of the strength in the Vatican diplomacy: its decades-long close collaboration with Italian foreign policy. Traditionally, Vatican and Italian diplomacy have run on parallel tracks, the former moving where the latter could not, and vice versa, according to a commonly shared view of international affairs. Suddenly, after Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's visit with President Bush on Jan. 31, the Italian government "betrayed" the Vatican policy. Berlusconi signed, together with seven other European countries, a paper in "solidarity with the United States," in counterposition to the French, German, and Vatican position.

Berlusconi's about-face was even more surprising because, one day earlier, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini had signed a common statement of all European foreign ministers on the necessity of seeking a solution to the Iraq conflict through a continuation of UN inspections. Even on the day when Berlusconi left for Washington, Monsignor Tauran had stated that "Italy has a very reasonable position, which we share. We have a permanent, very profitable dialogue, and many coincidences on international issues."

Accordingly, the disappointment of the about-face of the Italian government, epitomized by Berlusconi's nodding while Bush was saying "the game is over," and Berlusconi's later attempt to pull Russian President Vladimir Putin on board the war drive in a visit to Moscow soon after. Berlusconi's friendship with the Bush family is not a surprise, and neither is his effort to play the "U.S. card" in order to gain more political weight in European affairs. But so far, this had occurred within the boundary of Italian traditional foreign policy, which had never caused a split with France and Germany.

Italy's Government Under Pressure

The Italian government is now facing not only massive opposition at home (four out of five Italians are against the war), but even within its ranks. Significantly, 50 members of Parliament belonging to the government coalition had already signed a letter, called "a signature for peace," against an attack on Iraq. One of its initiators, Deputy Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies (Congress) Alfredo Biondi, a former Justice Minister, explained on Feb. 1 that the backers of peace are continuing to organize support for the letter despite the government about-face. "Friendship with the U.S.A.," Biondi said, "is not a rule of submission. . . . I, as an old European [a sarcastic reference to Rumsfeld's outburst against France and Germany] who has seen the [Second World] War, who has lost relatives and friends under the bombs, I tell the U.S.A.: Before using your weapons, you must prove that an enemy is threatening us."

Also, on Feb. 9, the chairman of the Chamber of Deputies, Pierferdinando Casini, openly criticized the Italian government position. Casini is the most prominent Christian Democrat in the government coalition, and his statements reflect

the Vatican organizing. Similar to Biondi, Casini is helping the government he supports save face, and therefore he must formally criticize Franco-German “unilateralism.” But, he said, referring to Berlusconi’s “Eight Dwarves” statement of backing for war, “both methods are wrong. . . . Bush said that the game is over, but the cause of peace deserves extra game-time. The European peoples and the rest of the world are demanding this from us.”

Another prominent Catholic politician, Lombardy Gov. Roberto Formigoni, also expressed disagreement with the government position. Formigoni, who met with American Civil Rights heroine Amelia Boynton Robinson during her recent visit to Italy, is a member of Berlusconi’s party, Forza Italia.

Blair Holds Berlusconi by the Balls

There is reason to believe that concrete threats—that he would share a similar fate as his old friend Bettino Craxi, who was hounded out of politics by the “Clean Hands” attack on Italy’s political system during the 1990s—played a role in Berlusconi’s shift. In fact, a corruption trial currently ongoing in Milan against Berlusconi, suddenly became a threat to the Italian Prime Minister when his lawyer’s request to transfer the trial to another jurisdiction was unexpectedly rejected on Jan. 28 by the appeals court. This means a possible indictment by the Milanese judges (whom Berlusconi accuses of political bias against him) and the threat of an impeachment.

The consensus was broken. By whom? The fact is, that the prosecution machine against Berlusconi is historically tied to Anglo-American networks: Transparency International and the U.S. Justice Department. The main prosecution witness is a British subject, one David Mills; who, it has been revealed, is the husband of British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Minister for Culture Tessa Jowell. Mills allegedly built up the offshore holding network used by Berlusconi’s media concern Fininvest to illegally channel money abroad. But when Milan prosecutors, after the Cassazione sentence, arrived in London to interrogate Mills, it was revealed that Mills is not compelled to be a witness because he is under investigation in Britain for the same crimes. The British investigation was opened last Summer, but it was revealed only now! In the meantime, of course, Berlusconi had signed the “Eight Dwarves” statement. Now, Mills’ lawyers have announced that their client is going to decide in four weeks whether he will appear as a witness, thus hanging a sword of Damocles’ over Berlusconi’s head.

The Anglo-Americans are using not only the stick, but also the carrot. During his meeting with Berlusconi, Bush announced that the U.S. government is in favor of appointing Italian Defense Minister Antonio Martino as the new head of NATO. Martino is a neo-conservative economist, the only Italian member of the oligarchical Mont Pelerin Society, and is on record for having endorsed the concept of “pre-emptive war” as a “wise” policy.