

Bin Laden: A Thoughtful Vatican and a Concerned Italy

Judith Harris (May 02, 2011)



May 1, while in Rome Pope John Paul II is beatified, Al-Qaida leader Osama Bin Laden is killed in Pakistan by US Forces. The reactions in the Italian political world

ROME - Fearing a possible reaction from Bin Laden's supporters, Interior Minister Roberto Maroni



today announced heightened anti-terrorist measures in strategic sites such as airports. Elsewhere in Italy the killing of Osama Bin Laden on May 1 in a fortress hideout just 90 miles from Islamabad, built three years ago near a military training school, raised thoughtful questions and a few eyebrows. "And we're to think that no one noticed a house with 16-foot walls?" asked one moderate Italian commentator. "Everyone knew that he was in hiding there all along," said another.

In a formal statement, official Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi said that, although Bin Laden had "sown hatred and division among peoples, causing the death of innumerable people, and had used religion for this purpose," no Christian rejoices in the death of any man. He also expressed the hope that Bin Laden's death would not spur further hatred, but become an occasion that works toward peace.

For Renzo Guolo, professor of sociology of religion and an Islam specialist, "a phase has come to an end." The charismatic Bin Laden was "a spiritual, caliph-like leader—an expression of the movement's leadership, who also brought funding to it, and this was important." His demise dealt Al Qaeda a hard blow, but nevertheless "more symbolic than strategic" since Al Qaedaism did not die with its leader. In recent years Bin Laden has had no territorial base from which to take action, but over the last two decades, and especially since September 11, his Qaedaism ideology has made notable inroads, Guolo said.

In addition, "This marks the end of the hypothesis that Al Qaeda was the locomotive of change in the Islamic world—it turns out this came from others, including the Muslim Brotherhood, seeking grass roots Islamism of the masses, a concept opposed by Bin Laden. The Islamist forces which are fighting against their regimes are not part of Al Qaedaism. Guolo's carefully reasoned video commentary can be seen at: <http://tv.repubblica.it/mondo/guolo-colpo-al-qaedismo> [2]

Veteran foreign policy analyst Vittorio Zucconi, who has U.S. as well as Italian citizenship, similarly makes the point that, "The head of a serpent was cut off, but the serpent is still there, and all the malignant cells, but now we'll see just how much Bin Laden counted, or if at some point he simply stopped counting." Ten years after Bush said they would take him out the U.S. did even though after a decade most Americans thought that he'd never be taken. "But let's recall that during the fire fight one of the two Navy Seals helicopters was damaged. Now we know too that Bin Laden himself participated. It's a symbolic victory, but let's wait and see what happens in the Arab piazzas." There's some reason to fear that there may be a vendetta, he concluded.

In an obvious reference to Italy's participation in the NATO raids in Libya, Antonio Di Pietro, the leader of the Italia dei Valori party, said: "The killing of Bin Laden, and the way it was conducted, shows that you fight terrorism with police operations, intelligence sources and professionalism. These are the tools, not war, and not with so-called 'intelligent' bombs that in fact land just anywhere."

For once Di Pietro found an unusual ally in Umberto Bossi. In the background is Premier Silvio Berlusconi's agreement, without informing Bossi's Northern League, to allow Italian planes to bomb Libya as part of a NATO force. An angered Bossi, whose party is Berlusconi's government partner, is forcing the issue to a vote in Parliament slated for Tuesday that would overturn Berlusconi's agreement for Italian participation. In an ultimatum, Bossi said that, if Silvio Berlusconi does not sign the League's motion opposing this extension of the Italian mission in Libya, "It means that he wants the government to collapse." The raids in Libya, said Bossi, "serve no purpose but to kill people. Poor people, who're forced to escape."

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