

INTERVIEW: *Pino Arlacchi*

The Ugly Truth About Terrorism in Russia and Gaza

Pino Arlacchi is a former Member of the European Parliament, former member of the Italian Senate, and former head of the UN Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODC) in Vienna. He is currently a professor of sociology at the University of Sassari in Italy. Since his collaboration with an anti-Mafia prosecutor, he has specialized in working against organized crime, and has written several books on the subject. He has also served as president of the IASOC (International Association for the Study of Organized Crime) and of the Giovanni Falcone Foundation.

During his time at the UN, Mr. Arlacchi succeeded in getting the Afghan Taliban government to stop almost all poppy cultivation in 2001. He is currently running for a seat in the European Parliament again.

This is an edited transcript of an interview conducted by EIR's Claudio Celani on March 29, 2024. The original video of the interview can be viewed [here](#).

Claudio Celani: Pino, good morning. I'm happy to have you with us. You just created a big controversy in Italy with an article you wrote, where you present your analysis of what happened in Moscow last week—the terrible terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall. Can you tell us what you wrote, and what the reactions were?

Pino Arlacchi: I advanced three interpretations, or hypotheses, on the slaughter. The first is that this was a crime committed only by ISIS without any external support, and without any superior order. Second, it was a crime committed by the Ukrainian secret service, who recruited Islamic terrorists—ISIS or whatever—to show that Putin and his government are not able to guarantee the security of the Russian population. And also that Russia's security services and law enforcement system are not able to control the situation or prevent a terrorist act like this.

The third one, that raised all the criticism, but also a lot of consensus—I would say it was 80% consensus, and 20% criticism, but the criticism was done in a ma-



Schiller Institute in Denmark

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for Italian newspaper, so it made much more noise. The third hypothesis is that the CIA and Ukrainian secret service were involved, with Islamic terrorists as the executors of the slaughter at the Crocus.

For me, these are the hypotheses; I don't know the truth. But the reaction was very strong on the third hypothesis, claiming that: first, I had no evidence of this; and second, that the Americans—CIA and so on—had warned the FSB (the Russian secret service) about the possible attempt in Moscow and beyond. Generally speaking, we all know exactly the message that arrived to the Russian authorities, but in Italy my interpretation went too far for some, because it was not logical. It is like a thief phoned you two days before coming into your apartment, warning you that he was going to do that. It's a bit stupid to put the issue in these terms, because it is clearly possible that between the two security services of two countries that are at war with each other, one of them made a wrong or distorted warning to the other services in order to send the other services in the wrong direction, or to be considered not credible. In this case, the FSB did just nothing. This is a practice that is very common—to build an alibi before

a crime. We say *preconstituire un alibi*, which does not occur only in big terrorism cases but occurs also in normal crimes.

Anyway, it is a matter of fact that this was a big fiasco for the FSB, for the Russian secret service, because they did not understand the real meaning; they did not prevent the slaughter. And in my opinion, this is an extremely serious blow. The reaction by the Russian public was completely different; it was the opposite probably of what had been hoped by the perpetrators.

The second objection to my hypothesis was that I had no evidence. First of all, there was an interpretation and a piece—not of evidence—but a piece of good information, that should have been taken into account. There were two big investigations made by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*—the *New York Times* last February, the *Washington Post* last October—in which they describe in detail the relationship between the CIA and the Ukrainian secret service. The CIA has basically run the Ukrainian secret service for ten years. It's been transformed into an extension of the CIA. They built their headquarters, they controlled recruitment; they control operations and so on. Of course, the agents that have been asked say, “No, in areas that are very sensitive or lethal, we don't want to participate. We don't want to know anything about it,” and so on. This is a standard denial by practically all secret services all over the world. But, these two investigations said that there are two divisions inside the Ukrainian secret services devoted to assassinations in Russia. They quote five or six cases, among which the [assassination of the] daughter of [Alexander] Dugin, Darya Dugina, had been done by these units. So, we are talking about hundreds of people devoted to assassinations in Russian territory. So for them to organize a slaughter in a theater using this kind of Islamist fanatics, paying the killers and so on, was not really a big thing.

What went wrong was the effect of this slaughter. Former CIA officer, Mr. Phil Giraldi, writes a lot about all these issues, because these people have a megalomaniac mentality; they thought they could dictate to Putin the agenda of war. Basically, to push Russia to start a direct confrontation with NATO, which did not occur; and in my opinion will not occur unless things happen that are impossible to foresee now. So, if the idea was to make a huge terrorist attempt in Russia which would oblige Russia in some way to start a direct confrontation with NATO, that was not achieved at all. In my opinion, it will not be achieved.

On both sides, I don't think NATO will attack Russia starting a Third World War, because NATO, in order to do that, needs total unanimity of its members. And there are major countries in NATO saying that they are not willing to do it. They are not planning to do it.

Second, you need a very large consensus of the population in Europe and also in the United States on something that could end up with their own annihilation. I believe, as a European, I don't want to be annihilated! And like me, 90% to 95%—maybe there are a couple of percent that want to die that way—but I believe that most Europeans and most Americans don't want to die by an atomic bomb. I don't see as realistic a big confrontation, unless sometimes there is a dynamic of tit-for-tat that brings you gradually, even without your knowledge or consent, to that point. But we are still quite far from that, and I believe we must work to avoid that.

On the side of Russia it's the same. Even more, because Russia knows very well that it cannot militarily prevail against NATO. The Russian military budget is \$70 billion. The NATO budget is more than ten times this—\$840 billion. So, it would be suicidal for Putin and for Russia to confront the whole of NATO. So, unless you have a nuclear war; nuclear war is an equalizer, in the terms that it is so-called Mutually Assured Destruction. So, there is no winner; everybody dies; everybody is annihilated. This is the price to pay.

Celani: You touched an issue I wanted to ask you about. This is the danger that we slide into a war that nobody wants. For example, if there is an escalation like President Macron wants to have when he says we will have boots on the ground—maybe he wants to send French troops there, maybe he will send the Foreign Legion, who knows? But as he walked into the EU summit last week, the Hungarian Prime Minister, [Viktor] Orbán, said, “I felt I was in another galaxy.” Because of these people talking about rearmament, Macron talking about boots on the ground. And on the other side, we have Pope Francis who says negotiate; a white flag doesn't mean surrender, but negotiation is the only way out. So, do you think these people are in another galaxy? And do you think what Pope Francis said is correct?

Arlacchi: I believe Macron is just a fool. He's a very small politician; he's not a statesman. He's a very small and mean politician, whose career is ending, and

he is trying to find a space for his future career. The reactions to his irresponsible statement were very clear; not just Hungary, but Germany and Italy, who are the two main countries in Europe, said “no way.” And even the Secretary General of NATO said that there will not be an attack on Russia that way.

Macron speaks without any knowledge of the real situation. You cannot even send 100,000 NATO troops to the border of Russia, let alone 300,000, without an air cover, otherwise Russia will destroy them. They need an air cover; no general will move so many men without an air cover. But an air cover means starting the war. And this is not the intention of almost any of the NATO countries nor their populations.

Pope Francis is the most reasonable and highest authority that we have at this moment in the world. He said what is obvious and logical to say: there must be a negotiation. Ukraine should admit that they have lost the war, and try to take advantage of a situation which is going in a bad direction day-by-day from a Ukrainian point of view. So, Ukrainians should be awed. The countries that support Ukraine—particularly the United States—if there was no intervening election, for sure the President of the United States would stop the war and start a negotiation. Because it is foolish to continue this way, killing so many young people on the battlefield. If we have to wait until the American elections, we will have another 100,000 people dead on the battlefield. Why, when it is very clear that Ukraine cannot prevail? It has lost on every possible front, and if we wait there will be a big advantage for Russia. If Russia makes a counteroffensive, they will take on another three oblasts—Odessa included—and will control directly almost 40% of Ukraine. Now it is 20%; if Russia does another big offensive, it can take another 20%. This is not to the advantage of European countries nor the United States, and of course, not Ukraine.

Israel Commits ‘State Terrorism’ in Gaza

Celani: Well, from Ukraine to Gaza. There is another slaughter going on there. And we agree with those who call it genocide. As a matter of fact, the UN court has accepted the idea that the genocide should be investigated. I think yesterday they even issued a warning or an order to Israel to stop the genocide in Gaza. At the same time, a few days ago, we had the UN Security Council resolution where, for the first time,

the United States did not veto, which tells the Israeli government to implement a ceasefire immediately. Do you think something will happen in this direction now?

Arlacchi: Yes, but I’m not so optimistic about it. Israel will continue to kill innocent civilians, because they have state terrorism. Yes, it is a genocidal attempt, but the method they use is so-called state terrorism. State terrorism is ten times more cruel and dangerous than private terrorism. By private terrorism I mean Islamic fighters, single terrorist fanatics, and so on. Terrorism is a method of political struggle; it is not a political party, it is not a position; terrorism can be right-wing, left-wing, it can be whatever. But it is a method. We have a private terrorist, that is the only one taken into consideration at the international level. We have more than ten international agreements against the method of terrorism, but no agreement on what is terrorism. Private terrorism is the less dangerous aspect of this method.

Vis-à-vis state terrorism: When the state starts to use its power, its lethal power of armaments and so on, in order to terrorize or to destroy a population, the effects are not comparable with so-called private terrorism. And Israel is making a perfect case of it. The Hamas slaughter on October 7th killed 1,200 people. In Gaza, they killed already 32,000. And this number could be more. This is the difference between private terrorism, which is rather small in terms of damage and so on—I mean 1,200 lives is not small, but we are talking about numbers now—and the quasi-genocide in Gaza, which is much bigger, because this is state terrorism. State terrorism can make millions of victims; it did in the past. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia killed 2 million people. And we can quote many other episodes of fanatical regimes that used terrorism as a way to subjugate a population. Israel is moving exactly in that direction.

If this continues, it can be a reason for a clash with the United States. But what is really shameful here to me—I’m a European and an Italian—is the almost complete silence of the European Union. From time to time, [High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep] Borrell says something like [UN Secretary General António] Guterres against it, but they don’t act. They talk, but they don’t act; even if they have all the instruments to act. The European Union shows again its basic weakness. Its *raison d’être*, which was peace and cooperation and distinction among all countries, is in tatters.



Schiller Institute

Pino Arlacchi addresses the Nov. 6-8, 2023 conference in Kabul titled, “Operation Ibn Sina: The Coming Afghan Economic Miracle,” sponsored by the Ibn Sina Research and Development Center.

Celani: I forgot to mention that you are running as a candidate for the European Parliament with a new slate created by the well-known journalist Michele Santoro. Will you bring this issue up in the election debate?

Arlacchi: Yes, of course. This is, for me, a lifelong commitment that started with justice against a criminal power like the Mafia in the south of Italy, and extended with time logically to a fight for international justice and peace, which is almost the same thing. The Parliament is the proper place to fight this battle, which is not a minority battle. It is a big majority battle. Most—80% to 90%—of world public opinion is against war; in particular these two wars that are occurring in our vision; Gaza and Ukraine.

But in the long term, I’m not a pessimist. I believe that the real European mission, which was the original mission of the EU, can be revived, can still have meaning in a reformed European Union. Now in this moment, the EU is at its lowest point in its history. It is silent or it is complicit with international acts of genocidal war.

Celani: Anything more about this slate [*Pace Terra Dignità, Peace Earth Dignity*]?

Arlacchi: The list for me is like a tired dress, because it says exactly what I think, and what I say and

write since 20 years. So, it is an obvious outcome for me. I’m not particularly interested; I’m not craving to go again into Parliament. For me, it is more of a sacrifice than an award. But I cannot subtract, I cannot look the other way in a moment that is extremely difficult for the EU and for world peace. So, for me this *lista*, this coalition that we are building for the European election, is an instrument for peace that I hope will be shared by as many people as possible.

A New Afghanistan

Celani: Last year, Pino, after many years, you came back to Afghanistan, thanks to an event which the Schiller Institute organized together with the Afghan Diaspora, for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. What country did you find in Afghanistan?

Arlacchi: A very different country. I’ve been following Afghanistan for 25 years. I was there the first time in 1997, and I’ve continued to follow it. I was back there again in 2010 when I was a member of the European Parliament, and I was a rapporteur for the European strategy on Afghanistan, which was approved by the Parliament afterwards. After 14 years, I returned last October, thanks to the invitation of the Schiller Institute.

The country, after the Americans withdrew, improved a lot. It improved a lot, but it was done on an extremely low level of resources. The Taliban brought security to the country. Afghanistan is not a platform anymore for international terrorism. It was not even in the past; that was a big exaggeration. The Taliban never was a terrorist movement; they never made a single attempt abroad outside Afghanistan. But, there was a lot of terrorism. The two biggest terrorist groups, al-Qaeda and ISIS, were there. Al-Qaeda has been destroyed; ISIS almost. So, the Taliban control the country and they give security to the country; that is a huge improvement.

Now they have established taxation, and survive on this, which is really a new thing in Afghanistan. There was an embryonic taxation before, but corruption was so widespread that no money arrived to the central state. All the agents for tax collection were keeping the money for themselves. So now there is no corruption, and they have a couple of billion euros coming into

the central state, through which they guarantee a very minimal, basic level of state services. Then, you have a small international support—mainly by the United States. That can be paradoxical, but the United States is the only country which is substantially supporting them, spending more than \$1 billion every year through the United Nations, particularly through the World Food Program, in order to support state programs against hunger, poverty, and for development processes.

The other countries do not financially support Afghanistan almost at all. The EU spends a couple of hundred million euros. China is investing in Afghanistan, but more on industry, mining, and other sectors, but not in direct humanitarian help. This means that almost 40 million live in an extremely bad situation. We have almost half of the population that suffers from a survival point of view; there is a lack of basic services, starting with food.

The other issue is a smaller issue from the point of view of Afghanistan, but for us it's big. That is narcotics—opium production. Afghanistan has been the source of 97% of heroin used in Europe and Russia. When the Americans withdrew and the Taliban came back into power, they abolished it. They prohibited the entire cultivation of the opium poppy last year. And now, they are doing it for the second year. This could be an historic change. Starting in the fall of this year, there will be a big lack of raw material, heroin, all over the streets of Europe and Russia. For us it is an extremely good thing; we have one million addicts in the European Union, and around half a million in Russia, not counting the millions in the countries surrounding Afghanistan. There are one million in Iran; almost one million in Pakistan, and so on. But these are markets that are not really important, because economically they are extremely small. Heroin on the streets of Tehran costs \$1 or \$2; on the streets of any German city, it costs \$30-\$40, and the same all over Europe, so these are the real markets.

The problem is that you have half a million peasants who have to survive without cultivating opium. Some of them have already changed their crop to wheat; but the price difference between wheat and opium is 1 to 10. I worked with the first Taliban government more than 20 years ago when I was the executive director of the UNODC [UN Office on Drugs and Crime], when I succeeded in persuading the Taliban to prohibit opium and to ban the cultivation. This worked very well in 2001—there was no production of opium. Then the

Americans arrived, and everything went back as before.

But now, they asked me to help them again in sustaining the prohibition of opium cultivation, because, as I said, there are half a million farmers who must have some alternative to survive. I'm starting to work with them to elaborate a plan for at least five years, with the help of the United Nations, with the help of technical experts, and the Schiller Institute and its representation in Afghanistan will be brought into this process. But we are just at the beginning; we have to see. I am trying also to persuade European countries and the other countries interested in Afghanistan to contribute to this plan for alternative development, which is not just crop substitution, it's development at large. So, my work is basically this: to persuade international donors to put resources into this plan, guaranteeing them of course that the resources will be correctly used, correctly spent, and so on. We have an impasse now that must be broken. The Taliban is not recognized by any country; and this narcotics program, the issue I am raising, can be the area, the space to develop an agreement that can bring recognition to the Taliban.

Celani: Which government offices would be interested in this? For example, the agriculture ministers of the EU countries?

Arlacchi: No, my idea is to create a steering committee of all ministers involved. That means agriculture, of course; but also finance, economy, interior, and foreign affairs. This steering committee should work on the different aspects of this problem with a unified strategy. Up to now, this is not occurring. There is only an opium remediation, which up to now has been done with a minimum use of force, because the areas where opium is cultivated are areas tightly controlled by the Taliban; which means Kandahar province and Helmand province. So, at this point there is just a prohibition, there is not a positive intervention. To do this plan for development, you really need this kind of steering committee that will also be able to collect resources.

Celani: Well, I hope you are successful. Among those who are listening to us, there may be some who want to help and contribute to this. Thank you, Pino, for this interview. With this then, I say good-bye until next time.

Arlacchi: Thank you very much. Hope to see you soon.