

## Report from Italy by Umberto Pascali

### 'Papandreotti!'

*Why does the Italian foreign minister want friends like Syria and the Soviets? The answer lies with the Vatican State Secretariat.*

**P**'apandreotti"! This was the title of a front page editorial that appeared on Nov. 23 in the daily *Il Giornale*. "Papandreotti" is an amalgam of the names of Greek Prime Minister Papandreou and Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti. "Andreotti is Papandreou," explains the editorial, "and it seems he wants to stay in the Atlantic Alliance, just as Papandreou does, in order to sabotage it from the inside." In view of Andreotti's political line since he was nominated foreign minister in the Craxi cabinet, the evaluation is extremely accurate.

On Nov. 18 in Venice, Andreotti started a process that, if not blocked immediately, will lead to the withdrawal of Italian peacekeeping troops from Lebanon. That day French President François Mitterrand was officially received in Venice by Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi. The meeting took place in the context of the French action against Shi'ite terrorist center in Lebanon. As soon as the news reached Italy, Andreotti called a press conference and condemned in the most drastic way the French action, stressing that it was unilateral and will put into question the presence of Italian troops in Lebanon. A few days later, Andreotti declared that it is necessary to keep "the linearity of Italian foreign policy that allowed us to have no enemies, to understand others, and to not impose anything on anyone: that is the secret of why we enjoy so much esteem from every side." "Every side" includes the Druzes, the Syrians, and even the Soviets.

Andreotti's declarations led Pietro Longo, Budget Minister and General Secretary of the Social Democratic Party (PSDI), to accuse Andreotti of pro-Soviet sentiments. From the other side, Andreotti was supported not only by the Communist Party, but by every leader of his own party, the Christian Democracy (DC), to the point that DC secretary Ciriaco De Mita stood up to say that it is time to reconsider the Italian participation in the peacekeeping forces.

No DC leaders protested. Quite the contrary: the major Catholic organizations came out publicly with statements supporting Andreotti's neutralism. This included the leaders of Caritas, of the Catholic workers association (ACLI), of Lega Democratica and so on. Support to Andreotti and De Mita also came from many Italian bishops.

Although on Nov. 24 the Supreme Council of Defense, which includes the head of the General Staff, the defense minister, and the President of the Republic, issued a statement underlining the necessity for Italian troops to remain in Lebanon, the process of disengagement has begun.

But the Venice gambit of Andreotti was just the last act of a tragicomedy the foreign minister has been playing for a long time, to the point that among certain military circles in Italy he is considered "the most dangerous man for the West in Italy." He has de facto endorsed the Syrian position on Lebanon, and paid a visit to Syrian President Assad in Damascus in October at a time when the Syrians and the

Druzes were on a full rampage against Lebanon and the United States. After that visit, Andreotti declared that the Syrians have vital interests in Lebanon that must be recognized by the West; he was not sure at all that the Syrians were involved in the attacks against the PLO or that the PLO was really being massacred, he said.

Why is a leader that until a few years ago was considered the spokesman for Atlantic interests in Italy de facto joining the "other side"? The first answer you get in Italy is that he is running for the post of President, and badly needs the support of the PCI. This is credible and consistent with the total lack of morality characteristic of Andreotti's policy. But it is only a partial explanation. In reality Andreotti is the spokesman for the powerful interests expressed by the Vatican State Secretariat, the group of Cardinal Agostino Casaroli and Monsignor Silvestrini. This group has decided to accept a compromise with Moscow. They see Soviet political expansionism in Western Europe as inevitable. They are ready to strike an accord, as they did with Mussolini and Hitler, in order to save themselves as an institution.

This is the reason why the Mutually Assured Survival beam-weapons defense policy launched by President Reagan has been neglected, to say the least, by the Vatican, and this is why someone wrote a speech for the Pope that appeals to scientists to refuse to conduct military research; and finally this is why the peace movement in Italy is supported by every major Catholic organization, by religious orders, and even by the Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Ugo Poletti.

But as important Vatican insider put it, "from a moral Catholic standpoint, a beam-weapons defense strategy is no doubt to be preferred to the equilibrium of terror."