

Threat to Pope's life increases after assassination of security chief

by Claudio Celani

On the evening of May 4, the head of the Pope's Swiss Guard security, Col. Alois Estermann, was found murdered in his apartment in Vatican City, together with his wife and a member of his corps, Vice Corporal Cedric Tournay. All three had been shot with a 38 mm "Sig 75" pistol. The three bodies were lying in positions such as to suggest that Tournay had first killed Estermann and his wife, and then shot himself. Such a reconstruction was later supported by the discovery of a letter written by Tournay a few hours before the murder, in which he pointed to an injustice which he allegedly suffered at the hand of Estermann. However, several elements of the evidence conflict with this reconstruction of the murders, indicating that the killer, or killers, could have been other than Tournay.

Estermann's death has created an added danger to the life of Pope John Paul II, in a situation in which there is already a serious threat. As one of Italy's most famous prosecutors, Rosario Priore, told the May 8 issue of *Corriere della Sera*, the Pope's life has often been in danger, but now this danger "is aggravated," especially because in the recent period a renewed threat to the Pope's life has been signalled from many sides. Indicative of the seriousness of the situation, is that CIA head George Tenet had paid a visit to the Vatican last December, to communicate information on that threat which his agency had collected.

Referring to Tenet's visit, Priore stated that it reminded him of "the mission carried out, before the May 13, 1981 attempt against the Pope, by emissaries of the head of the French secret services, who had received information about a possible attempt." Priore's words have to be taken very seriously. He conducted the investigation on the 1981 assassination attempt, when terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca shot the Pope in St. Peter's Square, seriously wounding him. On that occasion, Estermann was unable to prevent Agca from firing his weapon, but he was the first bodyguard to throw himself on the Pope, to protect him from further bullets. Since then, Estermann and Priore collaborated and came to know one another well.

"Estermann's role was essential," said Priore. "He was a person who had been beside the Pope for almost 20 years, he knew deeply his habits, his ways of moving, of acting. In

such cases, between the bodyguard and the protected person a relationship is established, of maximum trust on one side, and of maximum loyalty on the other."

Now, Priore said, "the level of protection, after the death of Colonel Estermann, has deteriorated. The weakening of the security structures providing protection to the Pope is serious. And this occurs exactly when signs of possible attempts are intensifying."

Priore mentioned three major attempts against the Pope's life which were discovered in the course of 12 months: a car-bomb in St. Peter's Square in Rome, at a site where the Pope was scheduled to drive by; a powerful bomb under a bridge in Sarajevo, which the Pope was supposed to drive over, during his visit to the Bosnian capital; the arrest of 14 Algerian terrorists in Bologna last summer, a few days before the Pope visited the city for the National Congress of the Italian Catholic Church. The danger, Priore warned, is going to increase as the celebrations for the 2000 Jubilee approach, which "offer myriad opportunities for a possible terrorist attempt."

To corroborate the picture, the Italian press published an Italian secret service report, warning about an increased threat to the Pope's life from "religious fundamentalist" groups, in the context of the Jubilee celebrations.

Furthermore, on the same day as Estermann's murder, a threat was phoned into the Vatican, claiming that there was a bomb in the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. A security search ascertained that it was a false alarm. Two days earlier, however, a similar threat to the Vatican Museum had forced authorities to evacuate the building, posing the danger that panic could have broken out and some of the visitors could have been injured.

Missing links

Whereas in the hours immediately after Estermann's murder, Tournay's "temporary insanity" seemed to be the motivation for the triple murder, one week later the Vatican "Single Judge," Luigi Marrone, admitted that "there are still obscure elements" in the case.

These elements include:

1. In Estermann's apartment, four glasses were found on

the table, suggesting that there was a fourth person with the Estermanns and Tournay.

2. Neighbors declared that they heard "loud noises," but not exactly shots, suggesting that the pistol had a silencer. But why would Tournay have used a silencer? And why was it not found?

3. Tournay apparently resented Estermann because Estermann had allegedly "victimized" him. Why, then, also kill his wife?

4. The scenario presumes that Tournay would have formed the decision to kill Estermann over many days. But one of Tournay's Swiss friends produced a letter from him, inviting her to Rome during mid-May, for which he had already arranged a hotel room.

The murders in the Vatican resemble, in some aspects, the deaths of Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed. In both cases, an "easy" official explanation, supported by apparently strong evidence, conflicts with much contrary evidence and, above all, political consistency.

Especially suspect is a story circulated by a Berlin daily, and picked up by a Polish magazine, accusing Estermann of having been an agent of the Stasi, East Germany's secret police. Such a story would even further obfuscate the truth, by providing Tournay with an ostensible moral justification. Above all, if this allegation were true, then the head of the CIA, Italian intelligence, and expert prosecutors like Priore would be totally wrong about their warnings of a threat to John Paul II, because a permanent threat to him had just been eliminated!

Instead, such rumors are reminiscent of the circumstances of the 1981 attempt against the Pope, when U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) flew to Rome and announced, at a press conference, that it was the KGB, and only the KGB, that was plotting to kill the Pope.

Who is threatening the Pope?

In reality, as *EIR* reported in 1981, the "KGB" networks which the evidence showed were accomplices of would-be assassin Agca, intersected a network of drug- and weapons-traffickers controlled by the P-2 freemasonic lodge: a "Western" operation. The center of the P-2 was in London, where most "Islamic" and other terrorists, including those making threats against the Pope's life, are headquartered.

Why is the Pope's life threatened? Why would London plot to eliminate the life of a great spiritual leader such as Pope John Paul II?

The answer lies in the character of the Pope's ministry. Aside from the fact that many aspects of his ministry have a very high "political" profile, such as his ceaseless campaign for a just world economic order, and his attacks on free-market economics and neo-Malthusianism, the Pope has been one of the main forces in opposition to London's strategy for a "Clash of Civilizations," e.g., warfare between Christianity and Islam. The Pope has led a successful effort for dialogue among the three great monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and among nations dominated by such religions. A further boost to the Pope's strategy for reconciliation is the coming "Millennium" encyclical, a paper with which the Pope wants to give directions to Catholics at the beginning of the next millennium, selections of which have been leaked by some press. In the new encyclical, the Pope, according to his collaborators, will give "powerful encouragement to man's reason," and will promote the unity of religion and philosophy. There is no place for irrationalism in religion, says the Pope, thus inviting all other confessions to address the issue.

Whoever works to undermine John Paul II's security, is aiming to destroy his work, and to undermine the continuity of his ministry under his successor.

Propaganda-2 head Gelli flees from house arrest

Licio Gelli, head of the infamous Propaganda-2 (P-2) secret freemasonic lodge, has been a fugitive from Italian justice since at least May 4, when police agents arrived at his house in Arezzo, to take him into custody. Gelli is to serve a jail term, since the appeal of his conviction was denied.

Gelli had been sentenced to an eight-year jail term for complicity in the Banco Ambrosiano failure. Gelli cannot be tried for other, more serious crimes, such as conspiracy, because of the conditions under which he was extradited

from Switzerland. Officially said to be suffering heart disease, Gelli nonetheless has been fully active and, according to sources, is still pulling some strings in the P-2 networks.

Gelli's most visible initiative has been the launching of several "Lega Sud" (Southern League) projects, beginning no later than 1993, which apparently have not generated strong electoral support. The Southern League groupings, some of which include known Mafiosi, are all part of a British-controlled separatist scheme to break up Italy, which includes Umberto Bossi's Northern League. One such Southern League formation is led by British-controlled convicted felon Giovanni Di Stefano, and, although connections to Gelli are not proven, Di Stefano's group is openly financed by "Major Arkan," the Serbian death squad leader who is currently deployed in Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic's "ethnic cleansing" operations in Kosova.