

above 40 km per hour. In the middle of the curve, a very strong light was turned on, similar to a spotlight, in a higher position with respect to the car, and at a distance of about 10 meters, probably on the right side of the road. After the car slowed down and stopped almost immediately, there was a shooting action, probably from several automatic weapons, lasting 10-15 seconds; the shots hit the car on its right side and the driver saw tracer shots—which were thus visible—pass in front of his chest and over his legs.

"Immediately afterwards, he was ordered by some U.S. soldiers, surrounding the car, to get out. Our officer was made to kneel at about 10 meters from the car and, although he spoke English, he had difficulty presenting himself and his colleague as belonging to the Italian embassy, adding that the woman in the car was the kidnapped journalist. In particular, during this hasty and tragic phase, two young American soldiers approached our official and, in a dejected manner, repeatedly apologized for what had happened. . . . [A]fter a not short lapse of time, Giuliana Sgrena was put in an American military vehicle and driven towards the hospital. . . .

'Clarity Must Be Reached'

"The [Italian] Government has the duty to stress that the reconstruction of the tragic event . . . does not coincide fully with what has been so far communicated by the U.S. authorities," Fini said. He added that the Italian government holds the "hypothesis of an ambush," which has been put forward by Sgrena, as "absolutely groundless." "But this does not prevent, and rather makes it necessary to demand, that clarity be reached," he said, "that light be shed on still obscure aspects, to identify the responsibility for what happened and, if such responsibility is identified, to demand and obtain punishment of those guilty."

Prime Minister Berlusconi repeated Fini's reconstruction of the event the next day, speaking in front of the Senate, and added a few details on Calipari's communications with U.S. security officials. "On their way [to the Baghdad airport], Berlusconi said, "Dr. Calipari called up State Secretary Dr. Gianni Letta and SISMI director, Gen. Niccolò Pollari, communicating the successful liberation. Dr. Calipari, then, informed, through our liaison officer (the one who we initially thought was a fourth passenger in the car, who instead had stayed close to an American colonel in the airport), American military authorities about the immediate arrival in the airport area."

Berlusconi also stressed that the Italian reconstruction of the event is different from the American one: "This reconstruction results from what has been witnessed by our intelligence official, who was together with Dr. Calipari and was wounded in his arm, but does not coincide fully with what has been so far communicated by U.S. authorities." He added, "only a frank and mutual acknowledgment of those responsible will bring to a close an incident of which we feel the full unreasonableness, and we bear all the suffering."

Interview: Luigi Ramponi

Italy Paid No Ransom To Kidnappers

Regardless of the Italian version of the Calipari incident, on March 10 some neo-con and right-wing U.S. media published nasty attacks on the Italians, indicating that Rumsfeld's friends intend to run a coverup of what happened on March 4, to make the case that there is no reason to change any aspect of U.S. military occupation policies in Iraq. Leading the charge was the Wall Street Journal, which suggested that the Italians had paid a ransom for Sgrena's realease, a "policy of deliberately aiding terrorists." The Journal also repeated the lie that the car was speeding up to the checkpoint.

In an interview with Claudio Celani on March 11, the head of the Defense Committee of the Italian House of Representatives (Camera dei Deputati), Rep. Luigi Ramponi, rejected the Journal's allegations. Ramponi knows what he is talking about: He is a four-star general and was the head of SISMI in 1991-92. Given his institutional role, Ramponi cannot be too outspoken, and some of his thinking must be read between the lines.

EIR: Mr. Ramponi, how do you answer the *Wall Street Journal* allegations that a ransom was paid to liberate Giuliana Sgrena?

Ramponi: I answer by saying that Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini has publicly stated yesterday that neither the Italian government nor anyone on



*Representative:
Ramponi: "The Italian
government has been
against any form of
blackmail."*

its behalf has paid a ransom. This is the official truth, supported by all Italian political forces, who do not challenge it. It is also known that the Italian government position has been firmly against any form of blackmail.

That having been said, it is clear that intelligence agencies open contacts with all possible channels. Italian agencies do that, all other agencies do that, including U.S. intelligence agencies, as I know personally from my past experience as head of SISMI, and as such, a collaborator of allied intelligence services. This is done in order to open all avenues which could lead to a solution of the problem.

EIR: What do you think, when U.S. media repeat the initial U.S. version, even after Fini and Berlusconi reported a different reconstruction of events in the Italian Parliament?

Ramponi: In my opinion, all versions are premature. The shooting occurred at night, many things are unclear, and facts cannot be hastily interpreted. We will know the truth when the protagonists confront one another. In my opinion, those who choose a version do that in an imprudent way.

Italian Foreign Minister Fini, in his speech in front of the Parliament, stated that "there are contrasts between the Italian and the American version." This is a fact. However, if the U.S. authorities were so sure about the facts as they have reported them, why have they started a "supplementary investigation," as they did?

EIR: Some media report that there is indeed a communications and security foul-up, but that this was the case long before Calipari's death, and concerns the results of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's centralization of those functions in the Pentagon, rather than the CIA. Somebody says that SISMI informed the CIA, according to procedure, but that the CIA did not inform the Pentagon.

Ramponi: It is true that there is a lack of coordination among U.S. agencies. It is also true that, as the Americans know very well, the Commission report on 9/11 proposes a coordinator for U.S. intelligence bodies.

It is true that the CIA, being in charge of foreign intelligence, runs the main contacts with agencies with similar functions in other countries. In Italy, it is SISMI which has a preferential relationship with the CIA. When I was head of SISMI, and I travelled to Washington, I spent one hour at the FBI, half an hour at the DIA, one hour at the Pentagon, and . . . four hours at the CIA.

It is true, there is a lack of coordination among U.S. intelligence and security agencies. It is certainly possible that what occurred at the Baghdad airport on March 4 is the result of a lack of coordination and communication between what the CIA knew and what the Pentagon agencies knew.

However, I am very cautious, because it could be that Calipari directly contacted the military. The investigation shall find that out.

Dirty-Money Scandal Points to Sharon, Mega

by Dean Andromidas

On the morning of March 6, Israeli police raided Branch 535 of Bank Hapoalim, Israel's largest bank, and arrested 22 bank employees and top managers, in what Israeli police are calling the largest money-laundering case in the nation's history. Meanwhile, on the other side of town on March 6, police raided the offices of exiled Russian oligarch Vladimir Guzinsky, in search of incriminating evidence of money laundering. In addition, it was announced that the Israeli Ambassador to London, Zvi Hefetz, Guzinsky's former business partner, will be questioned about his possible role in the affair.

An Israeli economics professor told *EIR* that everyone knew that Branch 535 was one of Israel's top money-laundering centers; "the question is, why does this happen now?" He commented that the targeting by the police of Guzinsky and Hefetz points directly to Sharon. "Hefetz was nominated to become ambassador to London by Sharon," despite the fact that he speaks only rudimentary English, and everyone knows that Guzinsky is close to Sharon. The case exposes to the world the "nexus between crime and politics in Israel."

But there is much more to this than the exposure of Sharon's infinite corruption. An Israeli intelligence source told *EIR*, "This is not a local case but international; it's the biggest development in Israel today."

U.S. statesman Lyndon LaRouche linked the scandal to the imminent collapse of the dollar. Parallel to this dollar collapse, British and Swiss financial sources point to the Bush Administration's blowing up of the Middle East, and certain other developments that have unleashed a major shake-up in international money-laundering centers. When these shake-ups occur, cars blow up, major players are killed, and banks get raided.

A senior City of London source connected the Bank Hapoalim case to the recent assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, saying: "My view on what is happening in Israel and Lebanon is that it has not only a geopolitical dimension, but a financial one. The background to these developments is the fact that Greek Cyprus joined the European Union in May 2004. What has followed is a phasing-out of Cyprus as a financial center for organized crime, drug traffickers, and money launderers, especially the Russian side of this business. Thus, alternative centers have to be found. In the region, Beirut and Tel Aviv become attractive alternatives, which could explain recent events in those two cities."

Hariri's brutal assassination not only doomed the peaceful