

Italian Press Exposes Cheney-Authored Kidnapping and Torture of Abu Omar

by Claudio Celani

Dramatic new evidence has been published, exposing the Nazi-like practices authorized by Vice President Dick Cheney's legal counsel, involving the kidnapping and torture of foreign citizens. An affidavit by Abu Omar, an Egyptian Imam who resided in Italy, was published in the Italian media Nov. 9. The affidavit, written in Arabic, was smuggled from an Egyptian prison where Abu Omar has been held under barbaric conditions since a CIA commando kidnapped him in Milan on Feb. 17, 2003. The affidavit was delivered to prosecutors in Milan, who have issued warrants to the CIA station chiefs in Milan and Rome, 23 other Americans, and several Italian police and secret service officials who participated or indirectly helped the abduction operation.

Abu Omar's affidavit, published almost in its entirety by the daily *Corriere della Sera*, has been confirmed as authentic by prosecutors. It is a frightening shock for those who believe in the dignity of man and in constitutional law, and realize that in the 21st Century, the most brutal practices of the Spanish Inquisition have been revived by a government squatting in the Homeland of Liberty, the U.S.A.

"Testimony by the Islamist kidnapped on a Milan street. This is how they kidnapped me from Italy and tortured me in Egyptian jails," is the headline of the affidavit.

"The undersigned, Osama Mustafa Hassan Nasr, known as Abu Omar, an Islamist kidnapped in Milan on February 17, 2003, and still detained in the Tora prison in Cairo, is writing this statement from inside this grave of mine: I am emaciated, my sickness has worsened, and I am in very critical condition. My face has been transformed as a consequence of torture.

"I shall explain my kidnapping. I was walking from my apartment, in via Conte Verde 18/A, on Monday, February 17, 2003, going towards the Mosque for the Midday prayer. . . . In my pocket, I had 450 Euros (400 to pay the rent), my Italian refugee passport, my residence permit, my mobile phone, my social security card, my watch, and house keys. All these things are now in the office of the Egyptian secret services, in the 'Copa garden, in front of the People's Castle.' . . . When I left home, I saw a white van drive in front of me . . . in front of a public garden, I saw a red Fiat. The driver ran towards me. He pulled out a card. 'I am a policeman.' I gave him my residence permit and my Italian passport.

He pulls out his mobile phone and places a call. He looked like an American: blond hair, light skin, about 1.70 meters tall."

The person described by Abu Omar is actually an Italian policeman: Giuliano Pironi, a Carabinieri junior officer nicknamed "Ludwig" because of his Teutonic appearance. Pironi had been recruited by Robert Seldon Lady, CIA station chief in Milan, because the kidnapers needed Italians on the scene, to protect the kidnapping operation from unwanted disturbances, including from police patrols.

Abu Omar's affidavit goes on:

"Then, the white van stopped close to the sidewalk. I did not understand what was going on, I just saw two persons who literally lifted me up: they certainly looked like Italians, at least two meters tall or more, about 30 years old. My kidnapping was also witnessed by an Egyptian lady." She was an eyewitness who has been interrogated by prosecutors, has confirmed the story, and has since strangely disappeared.

"When they threw me inside the van, I tried to react, but they began to punch me in the stomach and all over my body. They threw me into the back and covered my face. It was completely dark. They tied my hands and feet. . . . I was trembling because of the punches and foam was coming out of my mouth. . . . Then I heard two Italians arguing; one of them shouted. They tore my clothes off and practiced a heart massage on me. . . . After four hours, with my hands and feet still tied together, they moved me to another vehicle. . . ."

"After another hour travelling, I recognized that we had come to an airport, because of the airplane noise. I heard steps: seven, eight people, walking towards me. They cut my clothes off with knives and put something else on me with incredible speed. They also took my blindfold off for a few seconds, to take some pictures; there were a lot of people in commando uniforms. They wrapped my entire head and face with large tape, and cut holes over my nose and face so I could breathe. . . . The plane took off."

Abu Omar described how he was taken to the U.S. air base in Aviano. From there he was flown to the Ramstein Air Base, in Germany, and from there to Cairo.

"It was damned cold. . . . I was immobilized and could not breathe. Then, they fastened a breathing machine on me. . . . When we landed, my hands were bleeding. In Cairo, an Egyptian official told me: in this room there are two pashas, i.e.,



Egyptian Imam Abu Omar, in an undated photograph before he was kidnapped in Italy in February 2003. His affidavit describes the horrendous conditions in which he is still being held in Egypt. Italian prosecutors have issued warrants against CIA officers and Italian Carabinieri in the case.

two high secret service officers. Only one spoke, in Egyptian, saying only: ‘Do you want to cooperate with us?’ The other one, who was probably an American, did not speak, but after a while I understood what he said: ‘If Abu Omar accepts, he comes back to Italy with us.’

“My prison cell was two meters long and one meter wide, with no lights. It was in a secret service building. They fastened my hands and one foot, had me walk and, since I fell down, they laughed. They went on with electric shocks, punches, slaps. They brought paper and a pen, asking me to write down everything about my life outside of Egypt. They showed me photos of Egyptians, Tunisians, Algerians, and Moroccans residing in Italy. . . . I had pains in my bones and breathing problems. The interrogations went on for seven months, until September 14, 2003, but to me it seemed like seven years.”

The Cell Is a Grave

“After another trip, they carried me to another building where a lot of hands beat me all over my body. They told me: ‘Inside here, not even the blue fly enters.’ When I asked about the toilet, they told me that it was my cell. . . . There was a terrible smell. . . . I stayed in that place for six and a half more months, Amn-El-Dawla. . . . The cell had no air circulation. Roaches and rats walked across my body. . . . When the guard entered, I had to fall on my knees. Otherwise he would zap me with an electric stun gun. . . .

“They gave me only bad bread for food, which had sand

in it and caused my teeth to fall out. . . . You cannot dunk it or reject it, as they must keep a skeleton alive. . . . They interrogated me in the office near the cells, so that the other detainees could hear the shouts and cries from the torture. . . . My hair and my beard turned white.

“At the beginning, the guards undressed me until I was naked, threatened to rape me, gave me shocks with an electric stun gun. One of them held my private parts and squeezed them if I didn’t speak. . . . Then they lay me on an iron door called ‘the Bride,’ where I receive kicks, electric shocks, and cold water.

“They never gave me the Koran: the cell was always dark, but I wanted it only to kiss it and keep it in my arms. Because of the beatings, I became totally deaf in one ear. . . . I also underwent a torture called ‘the Mattress.’ In the torture room, they put a wet mattress on the floor, connected to an electric current. Then they bound my hands and feet behind my back. One person sat on my shoulders on a wooden chair, and the other plugged the electricity in. I was always afraid, and I often fainted. Now, I no longer have the strength to go on writing about these tortures.”

The State of Investigation

Besides Robert Seldon Lady, the former CIA station chief in Milan, warrants have been issued against his superior, Jeff Castelli, a former CIA station chief in Rome, along with the other U.S. citizens. On the Italian side, initial warrants have been issued against Carabinieri officer Pironi and a former chief of counterespionage of the military intelligence agency (SISMI), Marco Mancini, a friend of Pironi. Recently, however, prosecutors have issued a warrant also against current SISMI head Niccolo Pollari, who has claimed that he had rejected CIA requests for assistance in kidnappings.

For his defense, Pollari has now filed a request to prosecutors, to seize papers in the hands of the Italian government, proving his innocence. The government is not releasing such documents, contending that they contain state secrets. An anonymous government official has declared to the press that such documents endanger relations with a foreign government. He didn’t say that it was the government of the Cheney/Bush Administration, but it does indicate that the papers document a deal between Italy and the United States on precisely such illegal activities.

The deal was signed under the previous Italian government, led by Silvio Berlusconi, but the current government, led by Romano Prodi, is sticking to the same arrangement, showing that some things might have changed, but not the cowardness typical of a certain brand of political class. But Prodi is under tremendous pressure from public opinion and parts of his government itself, to authorize extradition requests in the Abu Omar case. Whatever the Italian government decides, the Abu Omar case is an urgent case which the U.S. Congress, under the new Democratic leadership, must address.