

Calipari Death: Is Negroponte To Blame?

by Claudio Celani

An Italian Senator has accused U.S. Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte of having planned the context in which Italian military intelligence official Nicolà Calipari was killed in Baghdad, on March 6. Calipari was killed by a U.S. patrol while escorting a liberated hostage, Giuliana Sgrena, to the Baghdad airport. Luigi Malabarba, chairman of the Senate group of the leftist party Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation), accused Negroponte in a speech in the Senate on May 5, of having planned the setting of the incident.

The U.S. Embassy in Iraq, headed at the time by Negroponte, had tried to sabotage the hostage rescue by Calipari. By following his cell phone frequencies, his car was located, said Malabarba. At that point, it was decided to establish the checkpoint, to prevent the rescue of the hostage. Calipari's death was accidental, said Malabarba, but Negroponte is responsible for it.

Malabarba, who is a member of the Parliament Oversight Committee on Intelligence Services (Copaco), says that his belief is supported by Italian intelligence sources, and is based on knowledge of similar cases he witnessed in El Salvador. "I accuse John Dimitri Negroponte, Ambassador in Iraq until a few weeks ago (before he became chief of the 15 intelligence agencies of the U.S.A.), who was just a few hundred meters away from Checkpoint 541, at the moment of the shooting, as being responsible for the conscious planning and implementation of the context which led to the assassination of Nicolà Calipari," and the wounding of journalist Sgrena and another Italian intelligence official, Malabarba charged.

"I say in this forum what many analysts think but find it difficult to pronounce, and assume the full responsibility of political deductions," Malabarba said.

Malabarba pointed to the decision to deploy a mobile checkpoint for the planned arrival of Negroponte at the Baghdad airport, and the fact, documented in the final committee report, that the checkpoint was maintained for 55 minutes, despite the fact that Negroponte: 1) used a helicopter; 2) had landed a few minutes after the deployment of the checkpoint.

Unanswered Questions

The Italian government report on the accident raises the question of why neither those responsible for the patrol deployment, nor the head of the airport security, who had been

informed about Calipari's arrival, ordered the patrol to lift the checkpoint.

Instead, according to the Italian witnesses, the patrol failed to warn the car, and started to shoot immediately. "Global preventive war and non-conventional action against terrorism, defined in the so-called 'Salvador Option' by Negroponte . . . as based on counterinsurgency manuals applied in Central American by Negroponte himself, does not admit ambiguities by allies," Malabarba said. "I saw personally the killer-checkpoints, without supervision, working in El Salvador, and the concrete dynamic of facts between 8:00 and 8:55 p.m. of March 5, represents a dramatic confirmation of the manual."

In articles and interviews following his Senate intervention, Malabarba accused a faction in Italy of having played the insider role in the plan to assassinate Calipari. This faction, he said, is represented by the newspaper *La Repubblica*, by police chief Gianni De Gennaro, who played a filthy role during the 2001 Genoa riots, and a group in the Carabinieri military police. This faction is supporting the preemptive war policy, and the use of the military in police functions, whereas the military intelligence agency SISMI (including SISMI head Nicolò Pollari), represents a different view.

In a conference on May 17, Malabarba repeated his allegations and added details on how U.S. forces had tried to sabotage earlier hostage rescues led by Calipari. For instance, in the case of two girls kidnapped last September, the place where the hostages were supposed to be released was bombed by U.S. helicopters. During the release of Sgrena, Calipari switched his cell phone off, in order to avoid signalling his position to the American "allies." Nevertheless, the release was delayed by two hours, as a U.S. helicopter was on the scene.

Malabarba is critical of both the U.S. and Italian official reports on the Calipari case. The U.S. report acquitted all members of the patrol, and although the Italian report dissented from this decision, neither, Malabarba said in an interview to the daily *Liberazione*, faced the real issue, that is, the checkpoint itself. "It was there because Negroponte was supposed to drive by, but Negroponte had passed through almost an hour before . . . and the checkpoint was still there. The explanation, that radio communications did not work, does not convince even Ambassador Ragolini," one of the two Italian members of the investigating committee. Negroponte is the "mastermind, in the sense that he had planned the 'special' checkpoint, which was useless for him, but was maintained until it impacted Calipari's car. Mine is a political deduction, pegged to this fact, and to two observations: Since the 1980s, Americans have used checkpoints in Salvador to eliminate people, and then say, 'It was an accident.' Negroponte . . . is the ambassador of the 'dirty war,' not accidentally termed the 'Salvador Option.' Negroponte accuses Italy of financing, through ransoms paid to kidnappers, Iraqi 'terrorism.' That is no small thing."