

When Moro refused to abet Mideast war

by Umberto Pascali

In 1973, the European NATO countries, and Italy in particular, found themselves in a strategic situation very similar to the present one. The U.S. administration, through Henry Kissinger, had demanded that they do their part in the Yom Kippur War between Israel and the Arab countries.

Kissinger had asked the Italian government for the immediate use of military bases in order to resupply Israel, even if that would be understood by the Arab countries as an act of hostility. Contrary to today's situation, 17 years ago, the Italian foreign minister had the guts to say no. He was Aldo Moro, the statesman who was kidnaped and killed by the Red Brigades five years later, after having been threatened in no uncertain terms by Henry Kissinger.

Not a NATO crisis

In one of his last statements before he was assassinated in 1978, Moro dwelt on that incident. "Although risking frictions with our powerful ally, we explained that we refused the bases that were requested, above all because of no forewarning and no adequate explanation of why this was to be considered a NATO crisis. The new pro-Arab or at least more balanced orientation of Europe and Italy continued to be badly digested by the Americans who continued to interfere in the existence, the modalities, and the preconditions of the European-Arab dialogue, with the effect of somewhat slowing down the pace of that dialogue and partially emptying it of its content."

But Moro was not talking about Americans in generic terms. A few days before dying he pointed his finger at a precise individual. "This was in large part the position of Henry Kissinger who did not make a mystery of it and cultivated an animus against the Italian position and me personally. As it was explained to me by objective sources and as some very unpleasant episodes confirmed, I was portrayed as bent on an indiscriminate agreement with the Italian Communist Party."

Moro also revealed that Kissinger tried an overt coup inside the leadership of his party, the Christian Democracy (DC). He was excluded from very important parties at the American embassy in Rome "by directive of the then secretary of state" who tried also "with extreme simplicity and a

certain dose of rudeness" to replace the DC old guard ("the more traditional and unsophisticated group to which I belonged") with a younger set.

Mediterranean: lake of peace

It was the foreign policy of Moro, especially concerning the Mediterranean basin, and not the planted story that he was "a Communist agent," that provoked Kissinger's fury. The lesson of what happened is extremely useful now, when George Bush is forcing the Europeans to carry out a suicidal Middle East policy comparable to (or worse than) the Kissinger's diktats in 1973.

In those years there was still the possibility of overcoming the tragic conflict in the Middle East and the confrontation between Israel and the Arab countries. Moro was also establishing close contacts with Japan to implement a common economic plan for the area. In Moro's strategy, the Mediterranean had to become a "lake of peace," and Italy was supposed to be the bridge between Europe and Africa. Opportunities to develop the southern part of the Mediterranean were immense. An exchange of oil for technology would have been a powerful economic engine for all the parties involved.

Even more important, Moro was known as the politician closest—personally and politically—to Pope Paul VI, who was very outspoken in his desire to make out of that area a model of development and peace for the world. One of his most cherished initiatives was to turn Jerusalem into the living symbol of ecumenism among the three monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The last 12 years have witnessed a progressive destruction of the potentialities which that strategy tried to actualize, including the existence of leaders who could respond favorably to that strategy inside Israel. Paul VI died a few months after Moro's assassination. He had tried every means to save his protégé, including a humiliating public appeal to the "men of the Red Brigades."

Mossad contacts Red Brigades

In this context, an interview released at the beginning of December to the Catholic magazine *Il Sabato*, by former Red Brigades terrorist Alberto Franceschini is of dramatic importance. Franceschini is one of the founders, with Renato Curcio, of the organization. Asked about contacts between the Red Brigades and intelligence services, Franceschini talks about meeting with Israeli secret services. "They said they did not want to steer us. What they told us is more or less this: 'We are going to help you as much as we can, your presence is helpful to us.'" The former terrorist stresses that his understanding was in fact that "they were trying to steer us."

Franceschini said that the Red Brigades were not strong or organized enough to be able to conduct the whole Moro operation—an elaborate kidnap that overcame a large armed escort and eluded police authorities for months while Moro was kept in captivity—without "outside" help.