



The “Borghese Golpe” in Italy as Seen from Andreotti Diaries

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Abstract: The diaries of important historical figures have always been a great source of information for scholars. Giulio Andreotti was one of these. A world-famous Italian politician involved in many Italian and international events. His diaries have recently been published in Italy. The author has read them and carried out a careful analysis of them. They shed light on many Italian and international events. In this article the author has limited himself to considering what these diaries say about the attempted coup that took place in Italy in 1970 organized by Prince Borghese. The author presents the results of his analysis and some final considerations also valid for the present time.

Keywords: History of Italy, diaries, Giulio Andreotti, history of Europe, fascism, coup d'etat, scret services.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's Italy is a democracy, member of NATO and the EU. But in the past it was a fascist regime allied with Nazism Germany. This happened from 1922 to 1945. According to the opinion of historians, journalists, scholars, an opinion partially confirmed by trials, Italy in 1970 took the risk of becoming a fascist regime again because of a coup attempt organized by Prince Junio Valerio Borghese. A lot [1-5] has been written about this fact. Recently the confidential diaries of Giulio Andreotti have been published [6, 7]. Andreotti was one of the most important Italian politicians of the 20th century. Reading these diaries and using a direct knowledge of that period, the author reviews what has been ascertained about the Borghese coup, coming to the conclusion that it was a real, even if unrealistic, attempt to change the Italian political situation. This attempt had precise international encouragement.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used by the author will not be explicitly described because it will be clarified during the reading of the article.

THE BORGHESE COUP AND ITS BACKGROUND

Italy from 1922 to 1945 was ruled by a fascist regime led by Benito Mussolini. The term "fascism" was born in Italy with reference to the *fasci littori* [8] used in ancient Rome. Fascism, unlike Nazism and Communism, did not have an ideology but relied on a mentality that pervaded all social life. In practice, society and its structures (family, school, university, companies and the Catholic Church) were conceived as entities organized in a hierarchical manner with a clear difference between who commanded and who obeyed. In the family, the husband was the head as explicitly indicated by the law [9] and the parents were in charge of the children. In the companies the employer commanded the workers and the unions were only appendages of the fascist party. In the Church Pope commanded the bishops who commanded the individual priests who commanded the faithful at least in the area of Catholic morality. In the school the Minister commanded the *presidi* (directors of the single schools) these commanded the professors (and at the end of the year they gave in total autonomy judgments on them) [10] and the teachers

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commanded the students who could not discuss the grades. The programs of the matters were rigidly indicated by the Ministry. A racist view of the world was accepted [11]. Northern Italians were thought to be better than Southern Italians and Europeans were thought to be more civilized than Africans and Asians. The police force was seen both as a force to fight criminals and as a force to repress anything that wanted to change society. Criminals themselves were seen as people not to be re-educated but to be punished. Even in the 70's there were many people in favour of the death penalty [12], who wanted discipline in schools, who complained that children did not obey their parents: the author has lived those years and has witnessed many episodes that demonstrate this. The law that established the husband's command in the family was abolished only in 1973 with the introduction of the new family law [13] and only in 1974 the law [14] that established the democratic school where decisions were not taken by the preside but by the Assembly of every teacher, was approved.

This tendency to maintain the fascist mentality was also helped by a crisis of image that in the 50s and 60s affected both the American democratic-capitalist model and the communist model and that was affirmed in a well-known book [15] published in Italy in the late 70s. The protest of American blacks and other minorities against racial segregation and similar laws, showed legal disparities there were in democratic America. The American policy of alliance with African and South American dictatorships in an anti-communist function was highly criticized by European democratic circles. Democratic Europe and Italy discovered the attachment to money in American society, denounced in books such as *The Great Gatsby*, and the huge inequalities between the salaries of workers and managers too. It was understood that the armed and violent criminality of gangsters did not exist only in the movies.

On the other hand, the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia made it clear USSR was repressive towards its allies, the break between the USSR and China split the communist front in two and brought out nationalist rivalries between communist countries. From the accounts of those who had been in the USSR it was clear that wage inequality and poverty existed in that nation as well. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes negatively impressed the whole world and forced the leader of the Italian Communist Party, Togliatti, to distance himself from an importation of the Soviet model [16].

While this was happening countries such as Spain, Portugal, Iran and several South American nations there were that were governed by fascist

regimes. It seemed that in those nations no crime, no great inequality there was. In many of these countries, the 1950s and 1960s were years of economic progress. Private property and foreign investment were safeguarded and there were no racial laws of any kind.

In addition, in the 50s many facts happened that were much appreciated by Italian people. The end of the war, the return to democracy and the economic miracle, with their benevolent consequences: the great development of industry and cities, the fact that with the increase in wealth many people could buy luxury goods that their fathers did not even know existed, the opening of the school to sons and daughters of families with few moneys and the consequent expansion of culture facilitated by freedom of speech happened. But the situation changed in the 60's and 70's for a series of reasons which we will return on. This created a great climate of dissatisfaction.

This set of facts helped to create a nostalgic climate of Fascist Italy, especially in the descendants of the small and medium bourgeoisie that had been able to appreciate some of the achievements of Fascism as evidenced by the author in one of his Youtube popular video [17]. Keep in mind, at the time of the Borghese coup, Mussolini had been dead for just 25 years and many leaders of the Armed Forces and public administration had begun to work or had done the military academies under Fascism.

A demonstration of this cultural climate took place at the beginning of 1965. In those days, a conference on the theme of unconventional ways of fighting against communism was held in Rome at the Hotel *Parco dei Principi* [18]. Politicians, military personnel, journalists and scholars attended and listened. A journalist gave a speech on "the counter-revolution of Greek officers". Two years later the Greek military carried out a coup d'etat that brought fascism back to Greece.

In the beginning of 1971, the Italian newspaper *Paese Sera* published an article entitled "Grave rischio" (Serious risk). In this article, citing sources covered by journalistic secrecy, it was stated that on the night between 7 December and 8 December 1970 there would have been an attempted coup d'etat in Italy, then aborted. Head of this attempt was Prince Junio Valerio Borghese. Several facts were cited including two military movements that actually happened. The allegations were serious and circumstantial and therefore the judiciary opened an investigation. Initially the accusations seemed unfounded because the Italian intelligence services of the time, led by General Miceli, said nothing had happened and the military

movements were normal exercises. In the following years, two other officers of the same secret service, General Maletti and Captain Labruna, published a dossier in which they affirmed that a coup attempt had indeed taken place and accused General Miceli of having covered up the protagonists of the coup. This is not the space to report on the long and complex story of the investigations and statements regarding the coup. We can refer to the Wikipedia entry of the same name and its bibliographic references. We only note that Prince Borghese at the beginning of 1971 fled to Spain (there was a warrant for his arrest) and that he died in a strange car accident in Spain in 1974. The judiciary concluded with a sentence issued at the end of the 80's there had not been a serious attempt at a coup, only some "chatter among sixty years old" on the need for an authoritarian turn there had been. It was concluded that the military manoeuvres were only exercises too.

But from the 90s onwards, numerous exponents of the Mafia and other Italian criminal organizations claimed Prince Borghese contacted the heads of some of these organizations just to get support in men and weapons to make the coup. In more recent times, declassified CIA documents cited in ref have revealed that in the summer of 1970 CIA was informed through the American Embassy in Rome there were Italian circles that had asked the support of the U.S. for an authoritarian turn in Italy similar to the colonels coup in Greece. From the U.S. there was a clear refusal and the Americans warned of these contacts the Italian authorities who did not take any action. It should be noted that in the second half of 1970, Nixon administration was committed especially with Kissinger [19] to build a policy of détente with the USSR and China clearly incompatible with support for any anti-communist coup.

Two words on the character of Prince Borghese. A complete biography of him can be found in the relevant Wikipedia entry. We only remember that he was a Roman nobleman of ancient family who during the Second World War crowned several submarines including one that participated in the enterprise of Alexandria in which raiders of the Italian Navy sank two British battleships. He obtained the gold medal and was entrusted with the command of a flotilla of torpedo boats (Decima MAS). He fought alongside the Germans from September 8, 1943 until the end of the war. After the war he retired to private life, but for his actions he remained a point of reference for nostalgic fascists because he showed himself not as a "fascist" but as an nationalist Italian. Borghese never had an anti-Semitic attitude.

ANDREOTTI AND ITS DIARES

Giulio Andreotti confidential diaries have recently been published. A biography of Andreotti is available on Wikipedia in Italian. Here we just remember that Andreotti was one of the great protagonists of Italian history of the twentieth century. Seven times Head of Government, for many years Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Treasury, Budget, or Finance. Already in 1943 he participated in the Camaldoli Week, a semi clandestine meeting (there was still the fascist regime) in which a document was written that was the basis of the political program of the Christian Democratic Party (from now DC) the largest Italian party from 1946 to 1992. In this period, DC was always a party of government. The diaries cover the period of time from October 1969 until the summer of 1999. Exactly the first book (but the second to be published) covers the period 1969-1979 and the second the following ten years. So they cover the entire period of the investigation of the Borghese coup. They however don't cover every time of Andreotti political life.. In addition, journalistic voices linked Andreotti to the Borghese coup. Andreotti for many years was considered a right-wing politician because contrary to the alliance with the socialists and favourable to an alliance with the liberals. When in 1972 Italy returned to governments within the right with the liberal party but without leftist parties Andreotti was the president of that government. According to these rumours the purpose of the Borghese coup was precisely to move the axis of Italian politics to the right with a government of public health chaired by Andreotti. Andreotti refusal would have caused the failure of the Borghese coup. The author has then made a careful reading of the contents of the diaries from which actually emerge interesting details about the coup and the attitude of many people starting with General Miceli. The following is a summary of the various statements made by Andreotti with comments by the author. It must be said, however, that the publication of these diaries did not have any space in the Italian newspapers and mass media because the news about Covid19 occupied a lot of space and probably things written in those diaries may be uncomfortable for certain people and / or political movements. The author has known about the publication of these diaries because several months ago the sons of Andreotti presented one of the two books constituting the diaries in the city of Viterbo, where the author lives, and the thing has been reported by a local information site tusciaweb.it of Viterbo.

The first hint, albeit very indirect, that something anomalous was happening or could happen in Italy goes back to a note of June 30, 1970 - Andreotti reported, without comment, that the

president of the Italian Republic, Saragat (Social Democrat) had learned from Ingrao (a communist representative) many politicians of the Italian Communist Party were sleeping outside their homes in unknown places. In the following years this habit would have been linked precisely to the fear of being arrested by military coups.

From December 2 to 7, 1970 Andreotti makes a trip to the United States. Some rumours cited in [20] later years linked this trip to the Borghese coup in the sense that Andreotti would have discussed with American circles the prospect of an action of force to bring Italy to the right. He would have been advised against doing so. Andreotti does not speak of these things in his diaries, but it is clear that the trip was not a private one. Andreotti claims to have attended the meeting of an organization called "clubino" (little club) where the world political situation would have been discussed. Moreover, in that trip Andreotti met several important Italian and American personalities. Therefore, the rumours linking Andreotti to Italian political intrigues with American support receive a partial confirmation.

On January 19, 1971 Andreotti reported with annoyance an article in the New York Times comparing the Italian political situation to that of Chile. Three years later there would be the Pinochet coup in Chile. On March 29, 1971, the Roman judge De Andreis reported to Andreotti on the investigation into the Borghese coup. It should be noted that De Andreis may have violated the "investigative secret" that in Italy covers the results of investigations that are in progress. On April 8, 1971 Andreotti wrote that the barracks of a department of the *Guardie forestali* (the Italian equivalent of the American Rangers) mentioned by those who had denounced the coup was literally full of weapons. According to the newspaper *Paese Sera*, a group of armed forest rangers had marched from Cittaducale (a small town about one hundred kilometres from Rome) to the centre of Rome and would stop very close to the headquarters of RAI (Italian state radio and television).

On April 17, 1971 a representative of a neo-fascist party (Italian Social Movement MSI) reported to Andreotti that on December 13, 1970 in a meeting of the party political secretary of the MSI Almirante (who headed this party) had spoken of the Borghese coup as an event really happened. Almirante also complained that Borghese had proselytized in the headquarters of the MSI to get men willing to act.

In August 1971 Andreotti made a real private trip to the U.S. where he did not participate in any meeting, did not meet any personality and

together with his wife and children visited only tourist sites.

On September 18th 1971 the judge Vitalone told Andreotti that an agent of the SID (the acronym that identified the Italian secret services) had told him that he had warned Miceli about the Borghese coup. Miceli, however, had said nothing to the judiciary. Vitalone was an important magistrate who later became a senator of the Christian Democrats, politically close to Andreotti.

On November 4, 1971 Vitalone told Andreotti that Colonel Berti, head of the column of forest rangers already mentioned, had a reputation for being exalted and was photographed wearing the uniform of the Nazi army. On October 8, 1973 Andreotti commented negatively on the acquittal of Borghese in the first trial for the coup. At that time Andreotti was Minister of Defense.

On June 29, 1974, General Jucci of the secret service informed Andreotti of Maletti dossier against Miceli. It should be noted that General Jucci, as can be seen on Wikipedia, had a wife who was the cousin of Andreotti wife. The same general appears from other notes in the diaries as a trusted man of Andreotti.

On July 2, 1974, Maletti spoke directly with Andreotti. It should be noted that reading the diaries you understand that Andreotti in 1972 (he was prime minister) did not trust General Miceli at all. This general had warned Andreotti of the need to expel from Italy 30 Soviet diplomats because they were a group of spies. But Andreotti made his investigations and ascertained that they were normal diplomats in normal contact with men of the Italian Communist Party. Andreotti, did not take any measure of expulsion.

On July 7, 1974 the judge Vitalone told Andreotti that Miceli had not given him any answer to his request for information. That Andreotti wrote on July 12, 1974 is particularly important. On that date, USA ambassador in Italy, John Volpe, reported that CIA had been warned in the summer of 1970 that Borghese was preparing something in Italy. Reading the Diaries it can be seen Volpe had a very friendly and correct attitude towards Italy.

On July 14, 1974, Miceli, speaking with Andreotti, admitted to having had contacts with Prince Borghese. Previously he had denied them. On August 29, 1974 Andreotti clearly expressed his conviction that SID had lied about the Borghese coup and that there had been at least one protection of the coupists. On September 16, 1974 the Italian Ministry of Defense (Minister was still Andreotti)

sends to the judiciary three papers one of which concerns the role of the SID in the Borghese coup. As a result of this information the Italian judiciary will issue an order of capture for General Miceli of which Andreotti will be informed on October 31, 1974.

In the following weeks a government crisis there was and the DC warned Andreotti that he would not be reconfirmed as Minister of Defense. Andreotti reaction, made explicit in his diaries on November 24, 1974, was very negative as Andreotti pointed out to his party colleagues that Italian public opinion could have interpreted his exit from the Ministry of Defense as a revenge of General Miceli and of those who had protected the coup plotters. On May 22, 1975 Andreotti will return to the Borghese coup, defining the actions of the coup leaders as "vague but real".

In June 1975 important and widespread administrative elections in Italy there were. DC lost many votes and exceeded only slightly the Italian Communist Party that went to government in many local authorities. Andreotti on June 10 of that year reports on the diaries a precise political analysis of that vote with a list of reasons because Italians were dissatisfied with the government of the DC (the dissatisfaction which we have spoken on). Andreotti cites as reasons for dissatisfaction 1) the difficulty in finding a house to buy 2) the high inflation 3) the worry of losing one's job 4) the slowness of the bureaucracy 5) the spread of corruption and the numerous financial scandals 6) the increase in common criminality against which the response of the State was not seen 7) the poor functioning of public health.

On October 20, 1975, Vitalone will tell him of another coup attempt by the right in 1974. It would have been a maneuver organized by military circles and by the liberal deputy Sogno, a former anti fascist partisan, to implement not a real coup d'état but a strong political maneuver to bring Italy back to government without leftist parties. This maneuver was then called "white coup".

In the following years Andreotti will only make occasional references to the Borghese coup, as when on March 23, 1977 he critically remember the USA ambassador in Italy, Martin, who "helped the right-wing groups". Andreotti, however, will always confirm his conviction that the Borghese coup had really happened and he will repeat it on January 9, 1978 when he will testify at the second trial against Borghese, who in the meantime had died in Spain.

We remember only two other facts. On October 12, 1984 Andreotti was assaulted with a cap pistol by a right-wing extremist in the city of Trieste.

The boy linked his gesture to the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty of Osimo [21], which the Italian right wing saw and still sees as a surrender of Italy to communist Yugoslavia. It should be borne in mind, however, that members of the extreme right had heavily criticized Andreotti, calling him a traitor precisely because he had helped to reveal the complicity in the Borghese coup and other events. Moreover, diaries do not give any information for the period before 1969. Andreotti was an important politician since 1947 and from the summer of 1959 to the summer of 1966 Andreotti was Minister of Defense. Rumors about coups, and a habit of SIFAR (as it was called the Italian secret service before the SID) to compile dossiers with confidential information, often scandalistic about the private life of military, political and other, there were in those years too. Andreotti did not prevent the participation of senior officers at the conference of the Hotel *Parco dei Principi* nor reproached them. So suspects that Andreotti has "tolerated" certain attitudes anti democratic system within the Italian armed forces cannot be ruled out.

CONCLUSION

After what has been reported, it is necessary to make some final conclusions both as history scholars and as citizens. From Andreotti diaries, information can be drawn not only on the Borghese coup, but also on many other aspects of Italian life in that period, such as Italy-US relations, the so-called "strategy of tension", Andreotti connections with the Mafia, the internal struggles within the Vatican and others. The author has already made a series of popular Youtube videos in Italian language, on these topics [22-24] Furthermore, what is written in the Diaries reinforces the belief that Italian democracy has really run the risk of suffering a military coup in the period between the mid-60s and mid-70s. What can be considered ascertained is the lack of loyalty to the democratic institutions of many leaders of the armed forces and secret services of the time. All this in a situation characterized by dissatisfaction for the present situation and nostalgia for past models. In addition, international sympathies for the prospect of a return of Italy to governments without left-wing parties are highlighted.

The fact that all this could happen in a nation where the dictatorship did not exist since thirty years is a warning for us as citizens. If freedom is not free, obviously democracy is not assured.

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