

The Vatican and the Papal State

Joseph Stalin was once told that the Pope would be upset by an action retorted "how many divisions does he have?" In this he was correct that the papacy (the world's smallest country) had little military power. What he overlooked was the influence that was held over church members.



Illustration 1: Pope John Paul II visits Poland in 1979

When the Sino-Soviet War erupted the Pope tried to act as an intermediary. Links with the Orthodox Church were used but little was achieved. As the conflict spread to Europe the Catholic Church had more of an influence with the Poles in particular (Poland was the only Pact country that had a military chaplains department). Nothing was achieved but many worried Poles seeing the Polish Pope trying to promote peace turned to the church for solace. The strain of all the effort (including flights to Washington and Moscow) was too much for the ailing pope. In 1996 as a fake alert of a nuclear attack resulted in his flight by helicopter to the papal retreat at Castle Gandolfo, he suffered a major heart attack (the 1982 bomb shelter was not felt to be secure enough

unless evacuation was impossible in the time available). Despite the best efforts of his doctor and the escorting Swiss Guard (including an ex-special forces medic) he was pronounced dead shortly after arrival.

With the death of Pope John Paul II, the conclave hurriedly met to elect a new pope. After much debate the compromise candidate Italian Cardinal Camilo was elected Pope. Taking the name Pope John XXIV, he considered his position. A conservative theologian he was a practical man who had spent much of his early pastoral work in the rural parts of Italy. In his youth he had been called up by the army and had spent six months fighting in Russia before a leg wound sent him home. Feeling that the Church needed to act decisively he took the opportunity to act when the nuclear exchanges devastated Italy. Appealing to the remnants of the police and military to join him, he also expanded the Swiss Guard (an offer many Swiss were eager to accept). This force was one of the few organised groups in central Italy. Combined with the network of small churches, monasteries and nunneries which form the backbone of a welfare state, the Vatican easily fills the power vacuum.



Illustration 2: Cardinal Camilo's official portrait 1995 (Vatican)

Using the Church network the Vatican had developed an excellent intelligence network (in particular the Jesuits were active in this). Hit by the communication difficulties of the present this network was less effective as information was difficult to get back to the centre. This was balanced by an ease of gathering information as most priests and many lay members feel a loyalty more to the church than state (especially in these troubled times when life is short and brutal).

Portrayals of Pope John provide an interesting contrast. To supporters he is seen



Illustration 3: Satirical portrayal of Pope John from a local Italian Socialist newspaper also prior to his elevation

as a stabilising influence on a shattered world and a leader of one of the few places where order can still be found. To detractors he is portrayed as an opportunist militarist who was betraying the spiritual legacy of the Church for temporal gain. His quiet non-public life prior to becoming pope leads to much discussion as to his character.



Illustration 4: Catholic staff distributing soup to refugees in Milan. This support has given Italians a stronger link to the Church than the fragments of the country.

He has since coming to power spoken out against the Communists and in particular the Italian government. Critics have said that this was purely an attempt to discredit his biggest rival for power (indeed many Italians have flocked to his banner), others however have suggested that this was due to his service in World War Two.

He has also created a programme to deal with orphans with care and schooling being provided to all those left in the Church's care or passed for adoption to Catholic families. Many of these would go on to join the military of the Vatican replacing many of the foreign troops by 2010.

His long term goals were also unknown.

At present he controls the central part of Italy centred around the natural defensive Perugia and south towards the ruins of Rome. Movement north would gain control of the more industrial Po region (although it has been thoroughly devastated) under the control of the Venetian based Nuova Italia, whilst movement south would probably bring conflict with the Mafia. What was known was that the French have offered him a home in France but as yet no response has been made to these.



Illustration 5: The Basilica of San Domenico

In Perugia he has made the Basilica of San Domenico the new St Peter's (they share a large number of architectural similarities as they were both re-designed and renovated by Carlo Maderno) and the remains of Pope Benedict XI housed there have become a major source of pilgrimage for Italians. The Università degli Studi (University of Perugia) has become a major site for Catholic scholars and teams are regularly sent south to Rome's Catacombs in search of stored records from the Vatican (the Chief Archivist died in the nuclear attack and many of the storage site's locations have been lost). It appears that at least some archives have been found as at least some art work believed to have been in the Vatican have now surfaced in Perugia. (these may however have come from a

reported secret convoy spotted leaving using the underground railway just before Rome was hit). The former Church of Santa Guilania had been turned into a military hospital but has now returned to the church but has remained a hospital. The Swiss Guard have adopted the Templar church of San Bevignate as their spiritual home.

As an interesting aside rumours persist that the body of Pope John Paul II has been returned to his home county of Poland under the escort of a select team of Papal Guard. It was unknown if this rumour was accurate.

At least one alternative Pope with a reasonable claim was known to exist. This was Pope Alexander who was currently based in France. He claims that the election was flawed as few cardinals from

places such as South America could get to the election in time and that this was his main block of supporters. The French have carefully trod a line that means they back him without offending Pope John (at least until the results of offering him a home were apparent). Nuova Italia are known to have sent envoys to France to see him (possibly with a view to recognising him as the Pope) but the result is not yet known.

Despite having a less credible claim, Pope Pious XIII is still a power to be recognised. Based in Sicily he has behind the scenes backing from the Mafia and as a result he has supported their candidates publicly. His claim is also based on the flawed elections but uses the grounds that he was prevented from being put forward by procedural actions created by supporters of Cardinal Camilo. Careful removal of select non-Mafia bribed police and para-military forces have given him a small military which the Mafia are careful he never really becomes the leader of, only a figurehead. As his self-belief grows there may be trouble in store.

Other popes were known to exist but none have any real claim to legitimacy.

See also:

Foreign Troops – gives details of the Swiss Guard and other Papal Troops