

# Bin Laden allies suspected of Vatican plot

*From the Italian edition of [The Telegraph](#)*

Italian police said on Friday they had dismantled an Islamist network they have linked to Osama bin Laden, one of Pakistan's deadliest attacks and, more loosely, a possible plot to bomb the Vatican.

A total of 18 people were ordered arrested following a six-year investigation that began with a probe into an illegal immigration racket allegedly run from the island of Sardinia. Only nine of the suspects had been detained by Friday afternoon.

Prosecutor Mauro Mura told a press conference in Cagliari, Sardinia that members of the network had been in contact with two potential suicide bombers who came to Italy in 2010 and discussed the possibility of attacking the Vatican, when Pope Benedict XVI was head of the Roman Catholic Church,

Mario Carta, an officer in the DIGOS anti-terrorism unit that carried out the investigation, acknowledged there was no firm evidence of a conspiracy to kill the pope, only "strong suspicions" based on wiretapped conversations in which the suspects had spoken "in ironic terms" about the leader of the world's Catholics.

The extremist network may have been planning to launch a suicide bomber against the Vatican. Police intercepted telephone conversations between the suspects which gave "signals of some preparation for a possible attack" against the Holy See, he said.

In the wiretaps, the suspects discussed launching "a big jihad in Italy", said Mario Carta. They also used the word "baba" – a

possible reference to the Pope.

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi played down the significance of the incident. "This concerns a 2010 scenario that didn't materialise. It has no relevance today and there is no reason for particular concern," he told reporters.

Pietro Paroli, who as Vatican secretary of state is the de facto prime minister of the tiny sovereign country, said: "We are all exposed and we are all afraid but the Pope is very tranquil in this, you just have to see him meeting people with great serenity. The biggest fear is that innocent people may be affected. But I don't seem to perceive great concern in the Vatican, although of course you have to be careful."

The alleged key figures in the network were Khan Sultan Wali, a shopkeeper and long-term resident of Olbia, Sardinia and