

# Terrorism in Western Europe: An Approach to NATO's Secret Stay-Behind Armies

by Daniele Ganser

## INTRODUCTION

Recent research has revealed secret armies have existed across Western Europe during the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Coordinated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), they were run by the European military secret services in close cooperation with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British foreign secret service Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also MI6). Trained together with US Green Berets and British Special Air Service (SAS), these clandestine NATO soldiers, armed with underground arms-caches, prepared against a potential Soviet invasion and occupation of Western Europe, as well as the coming to power of communist parties. The clandestine international network covered the European NATO membership, including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey, as well as the neutral European countries of Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland.<sup>2</sup>

The existence of these clandestine NATO armies remained a closely guarded secret throughout the Cold War until 1990, when the first branch of the international network was discovered in Italy. It was code-named “*Gladio*,” the Latin word for a short double-edged sword. While the press claimed the NATO secret armies were “the best-kept, and most damaging, political-military secret since World War II,” the Italian government, amidst sharp public criticism, promised to close down the secret army.<sup>3</sup> Italy insisted identical clandestine armies had also existed in all other countries of Western Europe. This allegation proved correct and subsequent research found that in Belgium, the secret NATO army was code-named SDRA8, in Denmark *Absalon*, in Germany TD BDJ, in Greece LOK, in Luxemburg Stay-Behind, in the Netherlands I&O, in Norway ROC, in Portugal Aginter, in Switzerland P26, in Turkey Counter-Guerrilla, and in Austria OWSGV. However, the code names of the secret armies in France, Finland, Spain, and Sweden remain unknown.

Upon learning of the discovery, the parliament of the European Union (EU) drafted a resolution sharply criticizing the fact:

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*these organisations operated and continue to operate completely outside the law since they are not subject to any parliamentary control [and] called for a full investigation into the nature, structure, aims and all other aspects of these clandestine organisations.<sup>4</sup>*

Yet only Italy, Belgium, and Switzerland carried out parliamentary investigations, while the administration of President George H. W. Bush refused to comment, being in the midst of preparations for the war against Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf, and fearing potential damages to the military alliance.

After World War Two, the idea to create secret armies was based on the fear of a communist invasion and occupation, or the take over of power by the Communist parties in Western Europe. The network was designed after the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), created by Winston Churchill in 1940 to assist resistance movements and carry out subversive operations in enemy held territory. According to the investigation of the Belgian Senate, preparations for unorthodox warfare continued after World War Two and preceded the creation of NATO.<sup>5</sup> As of 1948, the so-called Clandestine Committee of the Western Union (CCWU) united senior officers of European military secret services in order to coordinate secret anti-communist warfare. After the creation of NATO in 1949, the CCWU was secretly integrated into NATO, and as of 1951, operated under the label Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC). Next to the CPC, a second secret army command center, labeled Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC), was set up in 1957 on the orders of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR). This military structure provided for significant US leverage over the secret stay-behind networks in Western Europe as the SACEUR, throughout NATO's history, has traditionally been a US General who reports to the Pentagon in Washington and is based in NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium. The ACC's duties included elaborating on the directives for the network, developing its clandestine capability, and organizing bases in Britain and the United States. In wartime, it was to plan stay-behind operations in conjunction with SHAPE.<sup>6</sup> According to former CIA director William Colby, it was "a major program."<sup>7</sup>

In order to guarantee a solid anti-communist ideology of its recruits, the CIA and MI6 generally relied on men of the conservative political Right. At times, former Nazis and right-wing terrorists were also recruited. With the beginning of the "war on terrorism," in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, secret extremist networks with a potential for violence are attracting renewed attention. Islamist terrorist organizations such as the Jemaah Islamiah in Indonesia, the Hamas in Palestine, or variations of the international Al Qaida of Osama Bin Laden, as well as terrorist left-wing organizations such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia are once again in the spotlight. In this context, the secret NATO armies are also being rediscovered. Two questions dominate the research. First, in which countries did the secret armies exist? And second, were they or are they linked to terrorist operations? Above all, the second question is very difficult to answer, as researchers are faced with numerous obstacles, including the classification or destruction of relevant documents. What

follows can therefore by no means be an exhaustive analysis of the NATO secret armies, but rather a very general first overview of the different national branches, as well as a summary of reports concerning the potential links of these armies to terrorism.

## ITALY

Italian judge Felice Casson discovered the secret NATO army in summer 1990 in Rome while researching acts of right-wing terrorism in the archives of the Italian military secret service. He concluded that in Italy there were clear links to terrorist operations. During the Cold War, the United States and Great Britain feared the strong Italian Communist Party (PCI), in alliance with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), might weaken NATO from within. Therefore, as Judge Casson explained in a British Broadcasting Corporation documentary on Gladio, a strategy of tension was employed to weaken the political parties on the left, in Italy, and beyond.<sup>8</sup> Casson added,

*That's to say, to create tension within the country to promote conservative, reactionary social and political tendencies. While this strategy was being implemented, it was necessary to protect those behind it because evidence implicating them was being discovered. Witnesses withheld information to cover right-wing extremists.<sup>9</sup>*

According to Casson, the best documented case of this complicated and demonic strategy of tension occurred in the village Peteano in 1972 where three members of the Italian paramilitary police, the Carabinieri, had been killed by a car bomb. For many years, this terrorist attack was blamed on the Italian left-wing terror organization Red Brigades until Casson reopened the case and found right-wing terrorist Vincenzo Vinciguerra had carried out the crime. Casson arrested Vinciguerra, who on trial in 1984 testified it had been comparatively easy for him to escape and hide because large segments of the Italian security apparatus had shared his anti-communist convictions, and therefore silently supported crimes that discredited the Left. After the bombing, Vinciguerra recalled,

*A whole mechanism came into action...the Carabinieri, the Minister of the Interior, the customs services, and the military and civilian intelligence services accepted the ideological reasoning behind the attack.<sup>10</sup>*

Vinciguerra explained at his trial in 1984,

*With the massacre of Peteano and with all those that have followed, the knowledge should by now be clear that there existed a real live structure, occult and hidden, with the capacity of giving a strategic direction to the outrages. [This structure] lies within the state itself. There exists in Italy a secret force parallel to the armed forces, composed of civilians and*

*military men, in an anti-Soviet capacity, that is, to organise a resistance on Italian soil against a Russian army.*

With this far-reaching testimony, Vinciguerra revealed the existence of the Gladio secret army and linked it to terrorism, insisting what he was describing was “a secret organisation, a super-organisation with a network of communications, arms, and explosives, and men trained to use them.” As a right-wing terrorist, Vinciguerra insisted this

*super-organisation, lacking a Soviet military invasion which might not happen, took up the task, on NATO's behalf, of preventing a slip to the left in the political balance of the country. This they did, with the assistance of the official secret services and the political and military forces.<sup>12</sup>*

Based on this testimony of Vinciguerra and the findings of Casson, numerous Italians, above all on the political Left, are convinced today that Gladio was a terrorist organization and both the CIA and NATO have promoted terror in their country. Supported by Judge Casson, a group of Italian parliamentarians under the presidency of Senator Giovanni Pellegrini, investigated Gladio and in 1995 presented a 370 page long public report in which they cautiously confirmed that the “CIA [had] enjoyed maximum discretion” in Italy during the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> In 2000, a second parliamentary investigation into Gladio carried out by the leftist Gruppo Democratici di Sinistra concluded in a more outspoken fashion the strategy of tension had been supported by the United States in order to “stop the PCI, and to a certain degree also the PSI, from reaching executive power in the country.”<sup>14</sup>

*Those massacres, those bombs, those military actions had been organised or promoted or supported by men inside Italian state institutions and, as has been discovered more recently, by men linked to the structures of United States intelligence.<sup>15</sup>*

General Giandelio Maletti, a former head of Italian counterintelligence, in March 2001, confirmed the CIA might have promoted terrorism in Italy. After the so-called *Piazza Fontana* massacre, which in 1969 had killed sixteen and wounded eighty, parts of the bomb had been planted in the villa of well known leftist editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in order to blame the terror on the Communists. “The impression was that the Americans would do anything to stop Italy from sliding to the left,” Maletti explained. He concluded,

*The CIA, following the directives of its government, wanted to create an Italian nationalism capable of halting what it saw as a slide to the left, and, for this purpose, it may have made use of right-wing terrorism...Don't forget that Nixon was in charge and Nixon was a strange man, a very intelligent politician, but a man of rather unorthodox initiatives.<sup>16</sup>*

## TURKEY

During the Cold War, Turkey guarded a third of NATO's total borders with Warsaw Pact countries and operated the largest armed forces in Europe and the second largest in NATO after the United States. Several years before Turkey joined NATO on April 4, 1952, a secret stay-behind army was set up in the country under the code-name "Counter-Guerrilla." The Counter-Guerrilla was operative throughout the Cold War and carried out some of the most sensitive missions of the Turkish military.<sup>17</sup> Following the Gladio revelations in Italy, General Kemal Yilmaz, chief of the Turkish special forces, on December 3, 1990 officially confirmed the existence of this secret NATO network. He explained the stay-behind army was under the command of the Turkish special forces and had the task "to organise resistance in the case of a communist occupation."<sup>18</sup>

When questioned by the press, former Turkish prime minister Bulent Ecevit recalled he had learned of the existence of this secret stay-behind army and the special forces for the first time in 1974. At the time, the commander of the Turkish army, General Semih Sancar, had allegedly informed him the United States had financed the unit since the immediate post-war years.<sup>19</sup> "There are a certain number of volunteer patriots whose names are kept secret and are engaged for life in this special department," the Prime Minister was told, adding, "They have hidden arms caches in various parts of the country."<sup>20</sup> When Ecevit implied in front of the press that the Counter-Guerrilla units might have been involved in domestic terror, acting Defense Minister Giray snapped, "Ecevit had better keep his...mouth shut! [sic]."<sup>21</sup>

Yet Ecevit was not intimidated and declared he suspected Counter-Guerrilla's involvement in the Taskim Square massacre in Istanbul in 1977, during which a protest rally of half a million citizens, organized by trade unions on May 1, had been gunned down by snipers on surrounding buildings, leaving thirty-eight killed and hundreds injured. According to Ecevit, the shooting lasted for twenty minutes, yet several thousand policemen on the scene did not intervene. When he had phoned Turkish President Fahri Koruturk and suggested a potential link to Counter-Guerrilla, Ecevit noted "Koruturk relayed my fears to the then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel," who had succeeded Ecevit in office. Upon hearing the news Demirel

“reacted in a very agitated manner” but was unable to challenge the powerful Turkish military and the special forces.<sup>22</sup>

According to Talat Turhan, a former Turkish general, the Counter-Guerrilla had also engaged in torture, noting,

*In the torture villa in Erenköy in Istanbul the torture team of retired officer Eyüp Özalkus, chief of the [Turkish intelligence service] MIT's interrogation team for the combat of communism, blindfolded me and tied up my arms and feet. Then they told me that I was now 'in the hands of a Counter Guerrilla unit operating under the high command of the Army outside the constitution and the laws.' They told me that they 'considered me as their prisoner of war and that I was sentenced to death.'*<sup>23</sup>

Turhan survived the torture and became one of the most outspoken critics of the Counter-Guerrilla.

*When it was discovered in 1990 that Italy had an underground organisation called Gladio, organised by NATO and controlled and financed by the CIA, which was linked to acts of terrorism within the country, Turkish and foreign journalists approached me and published my explanations as they knew that I have been researching the field for 17 years.*<sup>24</sup>

Still today, Turhan insists that the EU should carry out an investigation, as the Turkish parliament and government had insufficient leverage over the Turkish military in the past. Turhan explained “in Turkey the special forces in the style of Gladio are called Counter-Guerrilla by the public.” He confirmed and lamented, “despite all my efforts and initiatives of political parties, democratic mass organisations and the media the Counter-Guerrilla has still not been investigated.”<sup>25</sup>

New York journalist Lucy Komisar found not only the EU, but also the US shied away from investigating the Counter-Guerrilla, revealing,

*As for Washington's role, Pentagon would not tell me whether it was still providing funds or other aid to the Special Warfare Department; in fact, it wouldn't answer any questions about it ... I was told by officials variously that they knew nothing about it, that it happened too long ago for there to be any records available, or that what I described was a CIA operation for which they could provide no information. One Pentagon historian said, 'Oh, you mean the stay-behind organization. That's classified.'*<sup>26</sup>

## SPAIN

During most of the Cold War, Spain was a right-wing dictatorship, ruled by Francisco Franco through his victory in the Spanish Civil War of 1939 until his death in 1975. Investigations into the Spanish stay-behind army cannot therefore be compared with similar inquiries, such as those in the Danish government, as Spanish diplomats correctly insisted in 1990. Calvo Sotelo, Spanish prime minister from February 1981 to December 1982, explained to journalists that during Franco's dictatorship, “the very government was Gladio.”<sup>27</sup> Defense minister under the Sotelo government, Alberto Oliart, thought it would be childish to investigate alleged acts

of terrorism of an anti-communist secret army in Spain in the 1950s because “here Gladio was the government.”<sup>28</sup>

Acting Spanish defense minister Narcis Serra found it more difficult to provide details to an inquisitive parliament. In November 1990, he misleadingly claimed Spain had never been a member of the secret stay-behind network, “either before or after the socialist government.”<sup>29</sup> He cautiously added he was basing his evaluation on documents which the Spanish military secret service, known as CESID, had provided to him, and that “it has been suggested there were some contacts in the 1970s, but it is going to be very difficult for the current secret service to be able to verify that type of contact.”<sup>30</sup>

While the Spanish parliament protested that its own government was not providing the data requested, a former Italian general offered more precise data. Gerardo Serravalle, commander of the Italian stay-behind force from 1971 to 1974, recalled in his book *Gladio* that Franco had attempted to establish contacts with the NATO secret army long before Spain became an official member of NATO in 1982. According to Serravalle, NATO's stay-behind command center CPC discussed the admission of Spain in 1973 to the CPC during meetings in Brussels and in Paris. The French military secret service and the dominant CIA had allegedly requested the admission of the Spanish network, while Italy represented by Serravalle, had allegedly opposed the suggestion. Representatives of the Spanish secret service, according to Serravalle, were not interested in the stay-behind function but wanted to gain a tool for domestic control. “In all meetings there is ‘an hour of truth,’ one must only wait for it,” Serravalle related about the meeting. He continued, stating,

*It is the hour in which the delegates of the secret services, relaxed with a drink or a coffee, are more inclined to speak frankly. In Paris this hour came during the coffee break. I approached a member of the Spanish service and started by saying his government had maybe overestimated the reality of the danger of the threat from the East. I wanted to provoke him. He, looking at me in complete surprise, admitted that Spain had the problem of the communists (los rojos). There we had it, the truth.<sup>31</sup>*

It was alleged thereafter, the Spanish stay-behind officers were welcomed by both the CPC and ACC.

## PORTUGAL

Under the headline “‘Gladio’ was active in Portugal,” the Portuguese press in 1990 informed a stunned national audience “a secret network, erected at the bosom of NATO and financed by the CIA ... had a branch in Portugal in the 1960s and the 1970s. It was called ‘Aginter Press.’”<sup>32</sup> Allegedly, the network had been involved in assassination operations in Portugal and in the Portuguese colonies in Africa.<sup>33</sup> While no parliamentary investigation was carried out in Portugal, the Italian Senate inquiry into Gladio found that Yves Guerin-Serac, a French specialist in secret warfare and



veteran of the French war in Vietnam, the US war in Korea, and the French war in Algeria, had directed the secretive *Aginter Press*.

*[This unit,] according to the latest documents acquired by the criminal investigation, was an information center directly linked to the CIA and the Portuguese secret service [Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado, PIDE], that specialized in provocation operations.<sup>34</sup>*

Whether Portugal's dictator, Antonio Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970), who had supported Spanish dictator Franco during the Spanish civil war and led his country into NATO as a founding member in 1949, had been aware of the existence of *Aginter* remains unclear. In November of 1990, Portuguese defense minister Fernando Nogueira firmly insisted he had no knowledge of the existence of any kind of *Gladio* branch in Portugal, and declared neither in his Defense Ministry, nor in the General Staff of the Portuguese Armed Forces existed, "any information whatsoever concerning the existence or activity of any 'Gladio structure' in Portugal."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, it was left to the Italians to confirm the reality of *Aginter*, which according to Italian judge, Guido Salvini, carried out secret military operations during the Cold War based on the "aims and values...which in their essence are the defence of the Western world against a probable and imminent invasion of Europe by the troops of the Soviet Union and the communist countries."<sup>36</sup> Anti-communist militant Guerín-Serac himself confirmed that many of their men were,

*officers who have come to us from fighting in Indo-China and Algeria, and some who even enlisted with us after the battle for Korea, [as well as] intellectuals who, during this same period, turned their attention to the study of the techniques of Marxist subversion.<sup>37</sup>*

Together they aimed,

*to dissect the techniques of Marxist subversion and to lay the foundations of a counter-technique ... During this period we have systematically established close contacts with like-minded groups emerging in Italy, Belgium, Germany, Spain or Portugal, for the purpose of forming the kernel of a truly Western League of Struggle against Marxism.<sup>38</sup>*

Operating on a global scale, militant *Aginter* terrorists allegedly participated in Guatemalan terror and counter-terrorist operations from 1968 to 1971 together with the CIA and US Green Berets, in which thousands were killed. They were also involved in the overthrow of socialist President Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973.<sup>39</sup>

Following Portugal's "Revolution of the Flowers" in May 1974, the *Aginter* headquarters in the Rua das Pracas in Lisbon were closed down and Guerín-Serac fled the country. Italian journalist Barbachetto of the magazine *L'Europeo* later recalled,



*[The Aginter documents] were destroyed by the Portuguese military, because obviously they feared diplomatic complications with the governments of Italy, France, and Germany, if the activities of Aginter in the various European countries would be revealed.<sup>40</sup>*

## GREECE

To prevent a communist-led Greek resistance from taking power after the end of World War Two, British prime minister, Winston Churchill ordered a secret army to be created in Greece in late 1944. It became known variously as the Greek Mountain Brigade, the Hellenic Raiding Force, or Lochos Oreinion Katadromon, (with its Greek acronym LOK). In order to guarantee its members were staunchly anti-communist, LOK commander, Field Marshall Alexander Papagos excluded, "almost all men with views ranging from moderately conservative to left wing."<sup>41</sup>

When Greece joined NATO in 1952, LOK, under the command of Papagos, was firmly integrated into the European stay-behind network. The CIA and LOK reconfirmed on March 25, 1955 their mutual cooperation in a secret document signed by United States General Truscott for the CIA, and Konstantin Dovas, chief of staff of the Greek military.<sup>42</sup> British journalist Peter Murtagh found,

*The Raiding Force doubled as the Greek arm of the clandestine pan-European guerrilla network set up in the 1950s by NATO and the CIA which was controlled from NATO headquarters in Brussels by the Allied Coordination Committee.<sup>43</sup>*

He also relates,

*The idea behind the network was that it would operate as a stay-behind force after a Soviet invasion of Europe. It would co-ordinate guerrilla activities between Soviet occupied countries and liaise with governments in exile.<sup>44</sup>*

In addition to preparing for a Soviet invasion, the CIA instructed LOK to prevent a leftist coup. According to former CIA agent Philipp Agee,

*The Greek-American CIA officer recruited several groups of Greek citizens for what the CIA called 'a nucleus for rallying a citizen army against the threat of a leftist coup' ... Each of the several groups was trained and equipped to act as an autonomous guerrilla unit, capable of mobilizing and carrying on guerrilla warfare with minimal or no outside direction.<sup>45</sup>*

In Greece, as in all countries of Western Europe, the stay-behind was equipped with light weapons hidden in arms caches. Agee maintains,

*These guerrilla groups were armed with automatic weapons, as well as small mountain mortars. The weapons were stored in several places. Most of the military supplies were cached in the ground and in caves. Each member of these paramilitary groups knew where*

*such cached weaponry was hidden, in order to be able to mobilize himself to a designated spot, without orders.*<sup>46</sup>

Agee, who was sharply criticized in the United States for having revealed sensitive information, insisted,

*Paramilitary groups, directed by CIA officers, operated in the sixties throughout Europe [and he stressed that] perhaps no activity of the CIA could be as clearly linked to the possibility of internal subversion.*<sup>47</sup>

There is a possibility the LOK was directly involved in the Greek military coup d'état on April 20, 1967, which took place one month before the scheduled national elections for which opinion polls predicted an overwhelming victory of the left-leaning Center Union of George and Andreas Papandreou.<sup>48</sup> Based on a NATO-designed response to a communist insurgency, the so-called Prometheus plan, the LOK under the command of paratrooper Lieutenant Colonel Costas Aslanides, took control of the Greek Defense Ministry. In the darkness of the night, tanks with flashlights rolled into Athens and under the command of Brigadier General Sylianos Pattakos gained control over communication centers, the parliament, the royal palace, and according to detailed lists, arrested over 10,000 people. Many of those arrested were later tortured. Phillips Talbot, the United States ambassador in Athens, disapproved of the operation and complained to the CIA chief of station in Athens, Jack Maury, that the coup represented, "a rape of democracy," to which Maury answered, "How can you rape a whore?"<sup>49</sup>

Those arrested and imprisoned by the military in 1967 included Andreas Papandreou and his father George. After years of exile in Canada and Sweden, Andreas Papandreou returned to Greece, won the 1981 election for prime minister, and formed the first socialist government of Greece's post-war history. According to his own testimony, he discovered the existence of the secret NATO army, then codenamed "Red Sheepskin," as acting prime minister in 1984 and had given orders to dissolve it. Papandreou's defense minister, Nikos Kouris confirmed he believed the secret deal with the CIA represented an "unacceptable pact."<sup>50</sup>

In 1990, the socialist opposition called for a parliamentary investigation into the secret army and its alleged link to terrorism and the 1967 coup d'état. Public order minister Yannis Vassiliadis declared that there was no need to investigate such "fantasies" as,

*Sheepskin was one of 50 NATO plans which foresaw that when a country was occupied by an enemy there should be an organised resistance. It foresaw arms caches and officers*

*who would form the nucleus of a guerrilla war. In other words, it was a nationally justifiable act.*<sup>51</sup>

## FRANCE

The first French secret stay-behind army, which had been set up immediately after the end of World War Two when both Washington and London feared strong French communists might seize power, was discovered and closed down very quickly. "Towards the end of 1946 we got to know of the existence of a black resistance network, made up of resistance fighters of the extreme right, Vichy collaborators and monarchists," French socialist minister of the interior Edouard Depreux declared to the public in June 1947. He asserted "They had a secret attack plan called *Plan Bleu*, which should have come into action either towards the end of July or on August 6, [1947]."<sup>52</sup> The secret army was closed down amidst public criticism of the plan's aim of installing a right-wing government in France.

Due to the persistent fear of the strength of French communists, the military secret service Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE) under Henri Alexis Ribiere set up a second secret army. "There were probably a lot of Frenchmen who wanted to be ready if something happened," retired CIA officer Edward Barnes later confirmed. Recalling his own work in France he stressed that a Soviet occupation was the primary motivation of the French secret army, while promoting anti-communist political activity in the country, "might have been a secondary consideration."<sup>53</sup>

When in the early 1960s, large segments of the French military and secret services started to strongly disapprove of President Charles de Gaulle and his intention to allow the former colony of Algeria to become an independent country, the secret army began to see the ruling government of de Gaulle as an enemy alongside the communists. Some "terrorist actions" against de Gaulle and his Algerian peace plan had been carried out by groups that included "a limited number of people" from the French stay-behind network, former director of the French military secret service DGSE Admiral Pierre Lacoste confirmed in 1990.<sup>54</sup> Lacoste, who resigned in 1985 after the DGSE had blown up the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* that was protesting French atomic testing in the Pacific, stressed that despite links to terrorism, he believed Soviet contingency plans for invasion nevertheless justified the stay-behind program.

Socialist François Mitterrand, French president from 1981 to 1995, was less enthusiastic and made all attempts to distance himself from the French secret army when questioned by the press in 1990. "When I arrived I didn't have much left to dissolve. There only remained a few remnants, of which I learned the existence with some surprise because everyone had forgotten about them."<sup>55</sup> Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, however, was not amused to see how the French played down their role in the stay-behind conspiracy, and mercilessly declared to the press that far from

having been closed down long ago, representatives of the French secret army had recently taken part in a secret ACC meeting in Brussels on October 24, 1990. When this was confirmed, it caused considerable embarrassment in Paris; Mitterrand refused any further comment.

## GERMANY

When socialist parliamentarian Hermann Scheer learned of the existence of a secret right-wing army in Germany in late 1990, he insisted this mysterious “Ku-Klux-Klan” had to be investigated at the highest levels,

*because the existence of an armed military secret organisation outside all governmental or parliamentary control is incompatible with the constitutional legality, and therefore must be prosecuted according to the criminal law.<sup>56</sup>*

Thereafter, Scheer was discretely informed that the socialists during their time in government had also covered up the secret army, whereupon his criticism faded away and led him to withdraw his request for an investigation.

Meanwhile, the press continued to claim that right-wing extremists and former Nazis had been recruited into the mysterious secret army with the help of General Reinhard Gehlen, director of the first German intelligence service. The service was tellingly called Organisation Gehlen (ORG) before it changed its name to BND. Gehlen had served under Hitler on the Soviet front in World War Two, and according to historian Christopher Simpson, had “derived much of his information from his role in one of the most terrible atrocities of the war: the torture, interrogation, and murder by starvation of some 4 million Soviet prisoners of war.”<sup>57</sup> The information he gathered made Gehlen a valuable asset, and, in 1945, United States President Truman saved him from the Nuremberg trials and installed him as chief of ORG in occupied Germany.

Under Gehlen, Germany had “incorporated the full espionage outfit” of the war into the secret army, an unnamed former NATO intelligence official recalled.<sup>58</sup> The official noted, “This is well known since Gehlen was the spiritual father of Stay Behind in Germany and his role was known to the West German leader, Konrad Adenauer, from the outset.”<sup>59</sup> Adenauer had allegedly

*signed a secret protocol with the US on West Germany's entry into NATO in May 1955 in which it was agreed that the West German authorities would refrain from active legal pursuit of known right wing extremists.<sup>60</sup>*

Documents supporting such a far-reaching claim have so far not been made accessible to researchers. But the data gathered in the wake of an early exposure of the German secret army in the 1950s indirectly supports the claim.

On September 9, 1952, former SS officer Hans Otto walked into the police headquarters of Frankfurt and, according to the German governmental records, “declared to belong to a political resistance group, the task of which was to carry out

sabotage activities and blow up bridges in case of a Soviet invasion.” According to Otto, some 100 members of the organization had been instructed in political ideology and secret warfare, and although,

*officially neo-fascist tendencies were not required, most members of the organisation featured them. The financial means to run the organisation had been provided by an American citizen with the name of Sterling Garwood.<sup>61</sup>*

Otto revealed that the secret army was codenamed Technischer Dienst des Bundes Deutscher Jugend (TD BDJ), commanded by Erhard Peters, and financed by the CIA. Otto claimed,

*The idea of the Americans was to have all members overrun by the Soviets, and to use them as partisans afterwards. However, this American plan could not be realized by Peters since all men interested in the organization under all circumstances wanted to escape to the West in case of a Soviet invasion.<sup>62</sup>*

The TD BDJ, as Otto revealed, had drawn up blacklists of persons, most of whom were communists or socialists according to the police, who were to be liquidated in case of an emergency.

August Zinn, Prime Minister of the German state Hessen, was furious when he learned of the secret army and pressed for a juridical investigation on the highest levels. Yet already on September 30, 1952, the highest German court, Bundesgerichtshof (BGH), in Karlsruhe ordered all arrested TD BDJ members to be released. The responsible BGH judges Schrübbers and Wagner had not even contacted the police in Frankfurt, or consulted the confiscated material beforehand. Prime Minister Zinn was completely baffled by the high level protection these Nazi secret soldiers seemed to enjoy and concluded, “The only legal explanation for these releases can be that the people in Karlsruhe declared that they acted upon American direction.”<sup>63</sup>

The German secret army and its links to right-wing extremists came back to haunt the German police when on September 26, 1980 a bomb exploded in the midst of the popular Munich Oktober festival killing thirteen and wounding 213. The bomb trail led to the neo-Nazi group named “Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann,” whose members already testified to the police one day after the massacre that forest ranger and right-wing extremist Heinz Lembke had provided them with the explosives. “Mister Lembke showed us different sorts of explosives,” Raymund Hörnle testified, adding, “He said that he had many caches full of such material buried in the wood, and that he could provide a lot of them...Mister Lembke told us that he was instructing people in the use of explosive devices.”<sup>64</sup>

This testimony was confirmed when on October 26, 1981, Lembke’s massive underground arms caches were discovered near the village of Uelzen in the Lüneburger Heide. The thirty-three caches contained automatic weapons, chemical combat equipment, 14,000 shots of munitions, fifty anti-tank guns, 156 kilo-grams of explosives, 230 explosive devices, 258 hand grenades, and may have been part of

the post-occupation supplies of the German stay-behind army.<sup>65</sup> Lembke was arrested and soon after found dead hanged in his prison cell. Socialist parliamentarian Herta Däubler-Gmelin thereafter asked the government, “Could you tell us now whether after the discovery of the arms caches and the arrest of Mister Lembke a new understanding of the...Munich massacre has arisen?” The question was to the point, but the answer was lacking as State Secretary von Schoeler replied, “There is no connection.”<sup>66</sup>

## AUSTRIA

The cover of the first Austrian secret army was blown two years after the end of World War Two, when a right-wing stay-behind network was discovered in 1947. The so-called Soucek-Rössner conspiracy led to the arrest of a number of right-wing extremists. During the trial, both Soucek and Rössner testified they had recruited and trained partisan units for the eventuality of a Soviet invasion, insisting they were carrying out the secret operation with the full knowledge and support of the US and British occupying powers. The judges found them guilty of conspiracy and sentenced them to death in 1949. Yet, thereafter, Theodor Körner, Austrian Chancellor from 1951 to 1957, pardoned the right-wing conspirators under mysterious circumstances.<sup>67</sup>

Living on a fragile Cold War border, senior members of the Austrian government decided that a stay-behind army would enhance the security of the neutral state, thus with the cooperation of MI6 and the CIA, Franz Olah set up a new secret army codenamed Österreichischer Wander-Sport-und Geselligkeitsverein (OWSGV). “We bought cars under this name. We installed communication centres in several regions of Austria,” Olah later explained and confirmed that “special units were trained in the use of weapons and plastic explosives.”<sup>68</sup> More than anything else, Olah feared that Austrian communists would take over power. He stated,

*It wasn't our intention to fight communism in the Soviet Union but to fight against the attempts of communism in our own country. We took weapons. We also had modern plastic explosives that were easy to handle. I had a small arsenal of weapons in my office. There must have been a couple of thousand people working for us. ... [O]nly very, very highly positioned politicians and some members of the union knew about it.*<sup>69</sup>

In 1990, when secret armies linked to NATO and the CIA were discovered across Western Europe, the Austrian government, fearing for the reputation of its neutrality, claimed that no secret army had existed in the country. Yet six years later, the United States newspaper, the *Boston Globe*, revealed the existence of secret CIA arms caches in Austria. Austrian President Thomas Klestil and Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky angrily insisted they had known absolutely nothing of the existence of the secret army and demanded that the United States launch a full-scale investigation into the violation of Austria's permanent neutrality.<sup>70</sup> The US administration of

President Bill Clinton strictly declined to carry out such a full-scale investigation and sent forward State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns who insisted,

*The aim was noble, the aim was correct, to try to help Austria if it was under occupation. What went wrong is that successive Washington administrations simply decided not to talk to the Austrian government about it.*<sup>71</sup>

In response to journalists' questions, Burns confirmed that similar networks with arms caches had also existed in several other European countries, which he could not name, however, "for fear of forgetting some countries."<sup>72</sup> In August 2001 President George Bush appointed Nicholas Burns as the United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization where, as ambassador to NATO, he headed the combined State-Defense Department United States Mission to NATO and coordinated the NATO response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

## SWITZERLAND

In neutral Switzerland, a parliamentary investigation into the defense department in November 1990 revealed a secret stay-behind army, first codenamed Special Service and then P26, had existed within the Swiss military secret service Untergruppe Nachrichtendienst und Abwehr (UNA) during most of the Cold War. The parliamentarians concluded,

*Irrespective of its members, whom the commission does not suspect of any intentions to harm the state, a secret organization equipped with weapons and explosives in itself represents a potential danger for the constitutional order as long as it is not factually controlled by the constitutional political organs...The commission has found that this factual control of the P26 organization through the highest national organs was not given [whereupon the secret army was dissolved].*<sup>73</sup>

Switzerland has neither suffered from any coup d'états nor from acts of terrorism throughout the Cold War. The parliamentarians, who had been surprised by the very existence of a secret army, were relieved they had found no links to terrorism from neither the P26, nor its predecessors. "I was shocked that something like that is at all possible," the president of the parliamentary commission Senator Carlo Schmid concluded, stressing that he was glad to leave "the conspiratorial atmosphere" which during the investigations had weighed upon him "like a black shadow."<sup>74</sup>

In a follow-up investigation, the parliament gave Swiss judge Pierre Cornu the task of investigating whether the secret army had been part of the NATO network, and thus violated Swiss neutrality. Cornu found that P26 cooperated very closely with the British MI6 and their special forces, the SAS, with P26 cadres training in Great Britain as well as British officers going to Switzerland for specialized trainings. Taking note of this close and secret cooperation, the Swiss government classified the Cornu report as top secret, and only published a short summary in which it claimed that Swiss neutrality had not been violated.<sup>75</sup>



## BELGIUM

Socialist defense minister Guy Coeme in the evening of November 7, 1990 revealed to a stunned national television audience that a NATO linked secret army had existed in Belgium during the Cold War. He added, "I want to know whether there exists a link between the activities of this secret network, and the wave of crime and terror which our country suffered from during the past years."<sup>76</sup>

Thereafter, a detailed parliamentary investigation of the Belgian Senate found that the Belgian secret army had consisted of two branches, known as SDRA8 and STC/Mob. SDRA8 was the military branch located within the Belgian military secret service Service Général du Renseignement (SGR) under the direction of the Defense Ministry. The members of SDRA8 were military men, trained in unorthodox warfare, combat and sabotage, parachute jumping, and maritime operations. In case of a Soviet occupation of the country, SDRA8 agents would have been in charge of accompanying the government abroad, establishing liaisons with the secret agents in Belgium, and fighting the enemy. STC/Mob was located within the civilian secret service, Sûreté de L'Etat (Sûreté), under the direction of the ministry of justice. The members of the civilian STC/Mob were technicians trained to operate a radio station with the task of collecting intelligence under conditions of enemy occupation which could be useful to the government in exile.<sup>77</sup>

The Belgian senators also found that the secret NATO armies had carried out international exercises at regular intervals. They found,

*One must note two points regarding these exercises. First of all, we are dealing here with an international network that could evacuate clandestinely a person from Norway to Italy. This implies a very close collaboration and strict co-ordination on an international level between a series of secret services.*<sup>78</sup>

The operations, according to the findings of the Belgian investigation, were carried out very professionally. The investigation noted,

*What is also astonishing is the perfect technical infrastructure which the stay-behind was equipped with: The persons and the material were moved on or intercepted by sea, by air, by parachute. Their arrival zones were marked and controlled. The persons were housed in secure buildings.*<sup>79</sup>

While the Belgian Senators were able to clarify the stay-behind dimension of the secret army, they faced insurmountable obstacles with respect to the terror investigation that Defense Minister Coeme had urged them to carry out. Between 1983 and 1985, Belgium had suffered from the so-called Brabant massacres in the area around Brussels which left twenty-eight people dead, many more injured, and a country in shock. In one of the attacks, three armed men with hoods over their heads had entered a supermarket and with pump-action shotguns opened fire at point blank range. In the ensuing massacre, eight people died and seven more were injured. The terrorists showed no mercy, killing one entire family at the supermarket checkout,

while a father and his nine year-old daughter who tried to flee were killed in their car. The money taken in the raid amounted to a meager couple of thousand pounds, found later in a canal in an unopened sack. In another attack on a food store, the terrorists first killed a couple and then, instead of fleeing, recklessly waited for the police to arrive who ran right into the ambush. The Brabant terrorists were never identified or caught.

In order to clarify whether members of the Belgian secret army had been involved in the brutal Brabant massacres, the senators ordered M. Raes (director of the Sûreté from 1977 to 1990 and chief of STC/Mob) and Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Legrand (chief of the Belgian military secret service, and chief of SDRA8) to provide them with the list of names, or at least the birth dates of the secret soldiers. Both refused to cooperate. This was illegal, for both Justice Minister Wathélet, the superior of Raes, and Defense Minister Coeme, the superior of Legrand, had explicitly and imperatively ordered their subordinates to cooperate, who furthermore were bound by the constitution to answer to the legislative branch.

Legrand declared,

*Whatever the Minister says, there remain very good reasons not to reveal the names of the clandestines...I will remain firm ...When I read the articles in the press, I can not believe that one can be so intensively interested in such problems, while there are so many other important things.<sup>80</sup>*

The Senators were baffled and kept up the pressure for three more months. In the end, they could not gain access to the names of the secret soldiers, nor could they identify the men behind the Brabant terror. Legrand celebrated his victory with an encoded statement in the leading Belgian daily, *Le Soir*:

*'Give us the names!' 'Never!' reply the 'Gladiators.' The hour of truth [l'heure du choc] has come. This is Brussels calling. Dear friends in Operation Stay Behind, section SDRA8 assures you of its very high esteem and thanks you for your devotion to your country. They guarantee that the pressures and threats will be empty and that undertakings will be honored. Adolphe is looking well!<sup>81</sup>*

## NETHERLANDS

As in neighboring Belgium, the Dutch stay-behind army was also made up of two branches. One branch was called Operations, or O for short. It was directed by Louis Einthoven, a cold warrior who died in 1973 and throughout his life had warned of the dangers of communism. Einthoven, who ran the O branch for sixteen years in secrecy, was also the first director of the Dutch post-war domestic security service Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD). "The double function of Einthoven as chief BVD and of O was of course very valuable for us," a former unnamed member of O recalled, for this helped to firmly integrate the secret army into the Dutch intelligence community.<sup>82</sup> The second branch of the Dutch stay-behind was called Intelligence, or I. It had been set up after World War Two by J. M. Somer, but

was commanded by J.J.L. Baron van Lynden after Somer was dispatched to the Dutch colony of Indonesia in 1948 to fight the independence movement there.

Within the Dutch version of Gladio, tasks were split. The Intelligence unit under Van Lynden was responsible for the collection and transmission of intelligence from occupied areas, preparations, running of exile bases, and evacuation operations of the royalty, the government, the security apparatus, and personnel of I and O. The O unit, under Einthoven, carried out sabotage and guerrilla operations, and was charged with strengthening the local resistance and creating a new resistance movement. O was also in charge of sensitizing people to the danger of communism during times of peace. Moreover, O was trained in covert action operations, including the use of guns and explosives, and possessed independent secret arms caches.<sup>83</sup>

Following the exposure of the secret armies across Western Europe in November 1990, Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, of the Dutch Christian Democratic party, told parliament, "Successive Prime Ministers and Defence Ministers have always preferred not to inform other members of their cabinets or Parliament," taking pride in the fact that some thirty ministers had kept the secret.<sup>84</sup> The Dutch parliament trusted Lubbers that the secret army had not abused its power and, unlike secret armies in other countries, had no links with terrorism. Therefore, no parliamentary investigation was carried out. "I don't particularly worry that there was, and perhaps still is, such a thing," parliamentarian Hans Dijkstal of the liberal opposition, voiced his reflections. "What I do have problems with," he continued, "is that until last night Parliament was never told."<sup>85</sup>

## LUXEMBURG

"The word Gladio is a term used for the Italian structure. The term used internationally and inside NATO is 'Stay-Behind,'" Luxemburg's prime minister Jacques Santer explained in front of his parliament on November 14, 1990. He added,

*This term reflects the concept of an organisation designed to become active behind the fronts of a military conflict, thus in case of enemy occupation of the territory. This concept has been designed by NATO. The idea has been derived from the experiences of World War Two, during which similar networks were established during occupation periods, thus in a particularly difficult environment and under enemy control.*

The prime minister argued that never again should a country be so ill-prepared before a war and a potential occupation. He explained, "to avoid the same preparation gap in the future, it was decided to prepare the foundations of such an organisation already in peace time."<sup>86</sup>

Santer stressed that "all NATO countries in central Europe have taken part in these preparations, and Luxemburg could not have escaped this international solidarity." He explained that the secret service of Luxemburg, the Service de Renseignements, had been running the network. Santer maintained,

*The agents of this stay-behind network were recruited by the secret service on a voluntarily basis and according to criteria relating to their profession and place of living ... The essence of their mission was to inform NATO on the political and military situation of their region, to organise escape routes out of the occupied territory, and to support the special forces of the military.*

Santer insisted there had been no links to terrorism and no abuses of power had occurred. However, when parliament asked him who had controlled the secret army he replied,

*I can answer that I did not have any personal knowledge of the existence of the network, and exactly like the Minister of Belgium, I was surprised to learn about its existence. I do not think that another member of the government could have guessed its existence. Obviously, I cannot make this declaration in my predecessors' name also, for I did not have the time to consult them before my answer.<sup>87</sup>*

## DENMARK

In Denmark, the anti-communist stay-behind army was codenamed Absalon after the medieval Danish Bishop who had defeated the Russians in the Middle Ages. Its commander, nicknamed *Bispen*, the Danish word for bishop, was E. J. Harder, who from 1966 to 1970 had worked at NATO headquarters. "Naturally, the organization was copied after the resistance movement," an unnamed member of the Danish network explained to the press. He claimed, "There were twelve districts, structured according to the cell principle, but not as tightly organized as during the War."<sup>88</sup> There were no alleged links to any terrorist operations, but the unit explicitly prepared against both a Soviet invasion and suspected danger emanating from the Danish communists. As a former member explained, "It was during the time of the Cold War and a Russian invasion or take-over of power by the Danish communists was—we felt—a clear and present danger."<sup>89</sup>

As in all countries, the Danish stay-behind army was also hidden within the military secret service Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste (FE). The special operations department directed by Gustav Thomsen supervised Absalon. "Ninety-five per cent were military people," an unnamed source revealed to the Danish press. Absalon members shared a conservative and strongly anti-communist political ideology, but they claimed this did not include right-wing extremists. "Not everybody could become a member," a former Absalon secret soldier told the Danish Press. "Among others, the right-wing activist Hans Hetler wanted to become a member. But we did not want him. He had been compromised and we did not think that he had the necessary qualities."<sup>90</sup>

When the stay-behind armies were discovered across Western Europe in late 1990, Danish defense minister Knud Enggaard awkwardly in front of parliament declared it was not true that any kind of NATO-supported CIA organization had

been erected in Denmark. He added, “further pieces of information on a secret service operation in case of an occupation is classified material, even highly classified material, and I am therefore prohibited from giving any further information in the Danish parliament.” Member of parliament Pelle Voigt, who raised the stay-behind question, thought the defense minister’s answer to be “contradictory and an indirect confirmation of the fact that Denmark, too, had its secret network.”<sup>91</sup>

## NORWAY

In 1978, a Norwegian policeman tracking illegally produced alcohol stumbled across a large underground arms cache containing at least sixty weapons including many machine guns, 12,000 rounds of ammunition, explosives, and sophisticated communications equipment.<sup>92</sup> Hans Otto Meyer, the owner of the property and a member of the Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS), was arrested. But to the surprise of the investigators his claim that the arsenal had been put up by the NIS for use by a resistance cell was eventually confirmed when Defense Minister Rolf Hansen declared in front of parliament that Norway needed a stay-behind army for its national security. Hansen claimed at the time that the Norwegian network was not answerable to NATO or other countries, and he dismissed any connection to the CIA while at the same time he insisted that he could not discuss details of the organization’s activities because they had to be kept secret.<sup>93</sup>

In the wake of the discoveries in 1990 of the secret armies across Western Europe, journalists pressed the Norwegian defense department for an explanation. Defense Ministry spokesman Erik Senstad replied, “What Hansen said then still applies.”<sup>94</sup> Subsequent research by Norwegian historian Olaf Riste revealed the Norwegian secret army was codenamed Rocambole (ROC), and run by the Norwegian secret service known as NIS. There are no proven links to any acts of terrorism, and as in Denmark, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and other countries, “the philosophy behind ROC was clearly based on the lessons learnt during the German occupation a few years earlier.”<sup>95</sup>

Vilhelm Evang, director of the NIS, and Jens Christian Hague, the Norwegian defense minister, had built up the stay-behind army after World War Two. Both were convinced that, Norway had to be better prepared for a potential invasion and occupation. With regard to a potential domestic front, Evang drew up plans to be activated in case of an internal coup d’état, and planned for missions to guard against “fifth-column” communist subversive activities.

Cooperation with the CIA, MI6, and NATO was intense, but not always without complications. In 1957, Evang learned that the United States was not respecting Norway’s sovereignty when a United States official was arrested. This official, operating on NATO’s orders, was secretly collecting data on Norwegian citizens who shared strongly pacifist convictions and a negative attitude towards NATO. Evang was furious and demanded that this affair had to be the first item on the agenda at the

next meeting of the Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC) in Paris on November 19, 1957. At the meeting, Evang threatened that Norway would leave the CPC if NATO continued to secretly violate the sovereignty of its members. He claimed “[a]s far as Norway is concerned, our interest in CPC planning as such has declined steadily since 1954 because there is no future in it for us. We are of the opinion that we are developing a Stay Behind which is to be used at home for the purpose of liberation from an occupation.”<sup>96</sup> Brigadier Simon, chief of NATO’s Special Projects Branch at SHAPE with responsibilities also for CPC, could not calm the anger of Evang, and NATO had to present a letter of apology and a promise that it would never again violate Norway’s sovereignty before Evang would agree that the Norwegian secret army ROC could continue to participate in the secret NATO operations.<sup>97</sup>

## SWEDEN

In 1990, the government of neutral Sweden found it difficult to face the fact that a secret stay-behind army linked to NATO had existed in the country during the Cold War. A few years later, in the absence of an official parliamentary investigation or governmental explanation, the Swedish secret soldiers spoke out themselves and added their perspective. “I have met, among others, Americans and Canadians during this work. Above all we cooperated with Great Britain. They were our masters in the art of running a secret resistance network,” Swedish stay-behind member Reinhold Geijer explained. He insisted the Swedish government must have been aware of the secret army, as the domestic security police Säkerhetspolis (SÄPO) had regularly helped with the recruitment of stay-behind soldiers.<sup>98</sup>

“We selected suitable individuals, had them checked by the SÄPO, and, if accepted, we cautiously approached them with defence questions, and in the end confronted them with a direct question,” Geijer recalled of the recruitment procedure. Thereafter, the key officers of the network were trained by the British secret service and special forces. “In 1959 I went via London to a farm outside Eaton,” Geijer recalled of such a training session. Geijer stated, “This was done under the strictest secrecy procedures, with for instance a forged passport. I was not even allowed to call my wife. The aim of the training was to learn how to use dead letter box techniques to receive and send secret messages, and other James Bond style exercises. The British were very tough. I sometimes had the feeling that we were overdoing it.”<sup>99</sup>

Some Swedes were greatly surprised to learn a member of their family had served in the secret army while preparing for a Soviet invasion. “I always thought that all these Sunday excursions were for our benefit!” the daughter of a secret soldier explained to the press after the death of her father with disappointment and disbelief. She added, “And now I learn that these excursions have not been mere amusement. And although what he did was honorable, I now feel misled. My father had other sides, of which I have never heard.” The daughter of another secret soldier declared, “I have never learned anything of all this,” and insisted the name of her father must remain secret. According to her, “Who knows where the discovery of military secrets will lead to?”<sup>100</sup>

Even today, the Swedish government has been very reluctant to comment on the secret army. In 1990, General Bengt Gustafsson, Sweden's chief of staff, confirmed that a stay-behind network had existed in the country, but incorrectly added that neither NATO nor the CIA had been involved.<sup>101</sup> CIA officer Paul Garbler, who had served two tours of duty in Sweden, corrected that Sweden was a "direct participant" in the network, adding, "I'm not able to talk about it without causing the Swedes a good deal of heartburn."<sup>102</sup> In the absence of an official governmental investigation into the Swedish secret army, it is impossible to judge whether the network against a Soviet invasion was also linked to acts of terrorism. Allegations in the press that the secret army had been involved in the assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 due to his intention to transform Scandinavia into a nuclear arms free zone remained unfounded.

## FINLAND

Finland is the only country in Western Europe which has been invaded and occupied by the Soviet Red Army. The so-called "Winter War," began in November 1939, where the Finns lost more than twenty percent of their soldiers in three months. They were forced to sign a peace treaty in Moscow, surrendering 16,000 square miles of their territory. The Finns then sided with Hitler's army in order to regain the lost territory, but when the Germans were defeated, the Finns were forced to pay war reparations to Moscow and promised to remain neutral after 1945.

The Finnish frontier with the Soviet Union, which runs for several hundred kilometers and passes through sparsely populated areas, was guarded by military men, fences, and land mines throughout the Cold War. At a stay-behind meeting in London in 1950, CIA and MI6 representatives lamented that Finland was "paralyzed through a friendship agreement with the Soviet Union." They made it clear any operations carried out on the territory had to be very quiet to prevent any provocation of the Soviet Union.<sup>103</sup> The CIA secretly approached Americans in Finland who in turn suggested the agency contact Finnish citizens who might be willing to join the topsecret stay-behind operation.

Finnish journalist Jukka Rislakki found that "there existed a secret resistance organization in Finland which had contacts to the West." His sources confirmed "the members of the network trained in secrecy and had arms caches. Several acting and retired officers of the Finnish army were part of the network, as well as men who still hold high functions." According to Rislakki's sources, the activities of the Finnish stay-behind allegedly increased after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Some Finns feared the same could happen to their country, "but already before that invasion there had been secret groups in Finland, and there were arms and training."<sup>104</sup>

Dave Whipple, CIA chief of station in Helsinki from 1970 to 1976, confirmed that the CIA had supported the Finnish secret army with "money, equipment, communication and support."<sup>105</sup> Allegedly, the networks were a major success for the CIA, because they "developed into a very, very good assurance" and could be



used against a Soviet invasion, as well as against a potential increase of power of the communist parties.<sup>106</sup> Whipple noted, "Something that worried us was what would happen if the communists would gain power in any of the countries where we had erected stay-behind networks." Therefore, secrecy was extremely tight. He added, "They knew how to keep their mouths shut. They knew how to live according to the 'need to know' principle, and not to talk about what they were dealing with."<sup>107</sup> Finnish defense minister Elisabeth Rehn arguably did not possess the need to know, labeling the secret army "a fairy tale" when approached by the press in 1991, adding somewhat more cautiously, "or at least an incredible story, of which I know nothing."<sup>108</sup>

## CONCLUSION

"Prudent Precaution or Source of Terror?" the international press pointedly asked when the secret stay-behind armies of NATO were discovered across Western Europe in late 1990.<sup>109</sup> After more than ten years of research, the answer is now clear: both. The overview above shows that based on the experiences of World War Two, all countries of Western Europe, with the support of NATO, the CIA, and MI6, had set up stay-behind armies as what was felt was a prudent precaution against a potential Soviet invasion. While the safety networks and the integrity of the majority of the secret soldiers should not be criticized in hindsight after the collapse of the Soviet Union, very disturbing questions do arise with respect to reported links to terrorism.

There exist large differences among the European countries, and each case must be analyzed individually in further detail. As of now, the evidence available suggests the secret armies in the seven countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Austria, and the Netherlands, focused exclusively on their stay-behind safety function and were thus not linked to any acts of terrorism. However, links to terrorism have been either confirmed or claimed in the eight countries, Italy, Turkey, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and Sweden, demanding further investigation.

In this age of global concern about terrorism, in which secret services are thought of as part of the solution and not as part of the problem, it is greatly upsetting to discover that Western Europe and the United States collaborated in establishing secret armed networks which in the majority of countries are suspected of having had links to acts of terrorism. In the United States, such nations have been called rogue states and are the object of hostility and sanction. Can it be that the United States itself, potentially in alliance with Great Britain and other NATO members, should be on the list of states sponsoring terrorism, together with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran? Or, alternatively, is it plausible to assume the secret NATO armies operated for years beyond the control of legitimate political authorities?

Today on both sides of the Atlantic, scientists and concerned citizens wonder what must be done in both the United States and the EU to prevent the future abuse of power and the continued manipulation of societies with terror. The data on

NATO's secret armies indicates some of the complexities involved in such questions. Future research will not only depend on an intensified global debate on fear, brutality, and manipulation, but also on courageous individuals who earlier in their life participated in such operations but now step out of the shadows, live up to their highest principles, and for the historical record before their unavoidable own death report their side of the story.

### Notes

All quotes, other than from English originals, have been translated by the author who bears responsibility for their accuracy.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed overview compare: Daniele Ganser, *NATO's Secret Armies. Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe*. (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005). An Italian translation will be published by Fazi in Rome in spring 2005.

<sup>2</sup> While the UK was directly involved with setting up the stay-behind network, the islands Cyprus, Malta, Ireland, Iceland, as well as the European mini states Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican were of limited strategic importance and are hence not included in this analysis.

<sup>3</sup> British daily, *The Observer*, November 18, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Debates of the European Parliament, November 22, 1990. Official transcripts.

<sup>5</sup> Senate de Belgique: *Enquête parlementaire sur l'existence en Belgique d'un réseau de renseignements clandestin international. Rapport fait au nom de la commission d'enquête par MM. Erdman et Hasquin*. Brussels. October 1, 1991. Hereafter quoted as "Belgian stay-behind 1991 Report."

<sup>6</sup> Belgian Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry into Gladio. Also summarized in Belgium periodical *Statenwatch*, January/February 1992.

<sup>7</sup> William Colby, *Honorable Men. My life in the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 81 and 82

<sup>8</sup> British television program *Newsnight* on BBC1 on April 4, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> British television program *Newsnight* on BBC1 on April 4, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh O'Shaughnessy, *Gladio: Europe's best kept secret - They were the agents who were to 'stay behind' if the Red Army overran Western Europe. But the network that was set up with the best intentions degenerated in some countries into a front for terrorism and far-right political agitation*, in: British daily *The Observer*, June 7, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Ed Vulliamy, *Secret agents, freemasons, fascists.. and a top-level campaign of political 'destabilisation': 'Strategy of tension' that brought carnage and cover-up*, in: British daily *The Guardian*, December 5, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> Ed Vulliamy, *Secret agents, freemasons, fascists.. and a top-level campaign of political 'destabilisation': 'Strategy of tension' that brought carnage and cover-up*, in: British daily *The Guardian*, December 5, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> *Senato della Repubblica. Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi: Il terrorismo, le stragi ed il contesto storico politico*. Redatta dal presidente della Commissione, Senatore Giovanni Pellegrino. Roma 1995, 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Senato della Repubblica. Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi: Stragi e terrorismo in Italia dal dopoguerra al 1974*. Relazione del Gruppo Democratici di Sinistra P'Ulivo. Roma June 2000, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Italian 2000 Senate report on Gladio and the massacres, as quoted in: Philip Willan: *US 'supported anti-left terror in Italy'. Report claims Washington used a strategy of tension in the cold war to stabilise the centre-right*, in: British daily *The Guardian*, June 24, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Willan, *Terrorists "helped by CIA" to stop rise of left in Italy*. In British daily *The Guardian*, 26 March 2001. Willan specialises on US covert action in Italy and published the book *Puppetmasters. The political use of terrorism in Italy* (London: Constable, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Selahattin Celik, *Türkische Konterguerilla. Die Todesmaschinerie* (Köln: Mesopotamien Verlag, 1999), 44. Under his pen name Serdar Celik published also a ten page summary of his book in English on the Internet entitled: *Turkey's Killing Machine: The Contra Guerrilla Force*. (<http://www.ozgurluk.org/mhp/0061.html>). I will quote hereafter both from his book (*Türkische Konterguerilla*) and his internet article (*Turkey's Killing Machine*).

- <sup>18</sup> Celik, *Turkey's Killing Machine*. His source is an Interview with the president of the Turkish General Staff Dogan Gures, in Turkish daily *Milliyet* 5./6. September 1992. The Turkish Special Forces changed their name repeatedly during the Cold War. First they were called "Tactical Mobilisation Group" (Seferberlik Taktik Kurulu, STK). STK headquarters were located in the building of the CIA organization American Yardım Heyeti (American Aid Delegation – JUSMATT) in the Bahcelievler district of the Turkish capital Ankara. In 1965 the STK was renamed "Special Warfare Department" (Ozel Harp Dairesi, OHD), and later changed its name to "Special Forces Command" (Ozel Kuvvetler Komutanligi, OKK).
- <sup>19</sup> Lucy Komisar, *Turkey's Terrorists: A CIA Legacy Lives On*. In: *The Progressive*, April 1997.
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- <sup>23</sup> Celik, *Türkische Konterguerrilla*, 151.
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