

CIA network in Europe exposed

By Clare Pedrick
Washington Post

ROME — A secret army created by the CIA during the 1950s to organize resistance in the event of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe has finally come in from the cold, and the disclosures of its actions are producing a political flap that stretches across the continent.

The existence of a clandestine paramilitary network code-named Operation Gladio was disclosed last Thursday by Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti in a speech to his Senate. Since then, European officials have described similar operations in most other NATO countries.

The CIA-backed paramilitary network included units in Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, West Germany and the Netherlands, according to European newspaper and news service reports.

"The operation was expanded to all of Western Europe by 1959," including neutral Sweden and Switzerland, according to an article yesterday in the German newspaper Die Welt.

European officials have come forward in the last several days and described stockpiles of weapons and explosives hidden in Western European countries since the start of Cold War, news services have reported. The arms were to be used by hundreds of resistance fighters trained to counter a Soviet invasion, the officials said.

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ed Press on Tuesday said at least six arms caches were spread over the countryside in his nation until two months ago. Also, the AP quoted a former Dutch defense minister who said that large weapons dumps also existed there and that some were discovered over the last decade.

Andreotti told the Italian Parliament that at the height of Cold War tensions in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Italian unit hid arms caches throughout the country. The operation has now been scaled down, Andreotti said, but more than 600 people remain on the payroll.

He said the operation should be dismantled, given the new "climate which has freed us from the nightmare of wars and divisions."

In Washington, a U.S. government official familiar with Operation Gladio — Italian for "sword" — said the continued existence of the force in Italy was "solely an Italian operation. We have no control over it whatsoever." The official would not comment on allegations that Gladio was part of a broad resistance network

throughout Western Europe.

Andreotti disclosed the operation after a Venetian magistrate, Felice Casson, stumbled on its existence during an investigation into an 18-year-old neo-fascist terrorist attack.

The investigation revealed that the explosives used in a 1972 car bombing came from one of the 139 secret weapons depots kept for the use of Gladio forces. The bomb, which killed three policemen near the town of Gorizia in northeast Italy, was placed by neo-fascist activist Vincenzo Vinciguerra, who was sentenced to life in prison.

Andreotti said the 139 arsenals were broken up in 1973, but arms from 12 were never recovered.

Casson and fellow magistrate Carlo Mastelloni are investigating possible links between Operation Gladio and right-wing terrorists who are thought to have been responsible for a string of bombings in Italy during the 1970s and early 1980s.

In Washington, the U.S. official familiar with Gladio said, "If there are

allegations that the CIA was involved in terrorist activities in Italy, they are absolute nonsense."

Andreotti said the United States first approached Italy as early as 1951, when the CIA broached the idea of mounting what it called a "stay behind" organization, one of several in postwar Europe.

The U.S. and Italian intelligence agencies worked together, he said, to establish a network of crack troops, most of them concentrated in the northeast near the Yugoslav border, where the threat of a communist invasion seemed most credible. In 1959, Operation Gladio came under the umbrella of NATO, he added.

Yesterday, the prime minister of Luxembourg, Jacques Santer, told his parliament that NATO "was the initiator and the coordinator, [but] each member nation was master of its own operation." He said the network was recently disbanded in Luxembourg.

NATO officials have refused to comment on the alliance's role.

OUR
CLASSIC



Cold War's secret army surfaces to ignite furore

CIA created it to fight east bloc invasion

CLARE PEDRICK

Special to The Washington Post

Rome

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Giulio Andreotti

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out Western Europe.

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In This Corner, Another Italian Government

By CLYDE HABERMAN
Special to The New York Times

ROME, March 27 — Italian politics is often described as Byzantine and difficult to fathom, but in fact there are a few basic rules that anyone can understand:

If political language has entered high-decibel range, it means that a Government crisis is under way. If not, it means that a Government crisis will be under way before long.

This time, there has been a bit of rule-bending. While Italy's political leaders are already in polemical overdrive, they are still a step short of a full-blown crisis, which means that a

Government has fallen once again.

There is little question, though, that Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti has a shaky grip on power, and it may be only a matter of days before he must either yield to a new government, which would be Italy's 50th since World War II, or accept early parliamentary elections, which few parties really want. Commentators say elections might be called for June, a year ahead of schedule.

To outsiders, all this may have the feel of what the Italian-American philosopher Yogi Berra once referred to as déjà vu all over again.

Italian governments are born to die.

At 20 months, this one has already lasted twice as long as the average, and it might have expired months ago had it not been for the domestic unity imposed by two unrelated events: Italy's turn last year as President of the European Community and the onset of the Persian Gulf crisis.

Mr. Andreotti was given a hard shove toward the exit on Tuesday when the Socialist Party, the main partner in his five-party governing coalition, announced that Italy needed a new government with a new program for 1992.

Until this announcement, the Prime Minister had expected to get by with a more modest redistribution of Cabinet

posts. While his position now looks bleak, he could still get his way in coalition negotiations that are scheduled to begin on Thursday. He has not endured in Italian politics for four decades, including six terms as Prime Minister, by being unresourceful.

The Socialist leader, former Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, has ambitions for a return to high office that he apparently feels would be served by a crisis. But his party couches its unhappiness in substantive terms, blaming the Andreotti Government for not dealing with pressing matters like public-service inefficiency, constitutional change, the anti-Mafia struggle and Italy's chronic budget deficits.

Yet as the crisis has blossomed, those critical issues are being sublimated in public debate to backroom intrigues that have almost nothing to do

with Italians' real lives.

For many months, parliamentary discourse and newspaper columns have chosen to focus more on a parade of scandals, political plots and unsolved terrorist attacks. That pattern reached a peak with disclosures last summer about the existence of Operation Gladio, the code name for a NATO-sponsored guerrilla force created 40 years ago to prepare for a possible Communist invasion.

Despite the absence of supporting evidence, some Italians see Gladio as the key to explaining long-unsolved mysteries that are among this country's specialties. And that has produced, notably from Communists, a demand for the resignation of President Francesco Cossiga, who supervised Operation Gladio 25 years ago when he was Assistant Defense Minis-

ter, and is proud of it.

Mr. Cossiga has become a central figure in this crisis. He complains that Mr. Andreotti and other fellow Christian Democrats have been slow to defend him against what he calls a campaign to undermine him. Over the last year he has been increasingly outspoken on other issues as well, to such a degree and at times with such vituperation that some politicians openly ask if he is losing his grip.

The doubts grew several weeks ago after he angrily, and publicly, questioned the lineage of a Reuters correspondent who had described the Italian presence in the gulf as a "token force." After that, a weekly magazine ran a devastating cover photograph in which Mr. Cossiga indeed seemed to be ranting. "Out of Control," the accompanying headline said.

Italy Discloses Its Web Of Cold War Guerrillas

By CLYDE HABERMAN
Special to The New York Times

ROME, Nov. 15 — In Europe's new order, they are the spies who never quite came in from the cold, foot soldiers in an underground guerrilla network with one stated mission: To fight an enemy that most Europeans believe no longer exists.

There is a tale of secret arms caches and exotic code names, of military stratagems and political intrigues.

At best, their tale is no more than a curious footnote to the cold war. The question is if, at worst, it could be the key to unsolved terrorism dating back two decades. Nowhere do the darker suspicions burn more intensely than in this capital whose appetite for conspiracy theories is insatiable and whose Parliament today began an investigation into where reality may lie.

The focus of the inquiry is a clandestine operation code-named Gladio, created decades ago to arm and train resistance fighters in case the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies invaded. All this week, there have been disclosures of similar organizations in virtually all Western European countries, including those that do not belong to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

An Italian Creation

As disclosed in recent days by the Italian Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, Gladio, named after the short, wide, double-edged sword used by gladiators in ancient Rome, came into being during the most gelid days of the cold war.

It was originally an Italian creation, said Mr. Andreotti, who is scheduled to testify on Friday before a parliamentary commission studying bombings and massacres that claimed scores of lives in a terrorism wave that inundated Italy from 1969 to the early 1980's.

The Prime Minister said last week that Gladio later evolved into a branch of an extensive network, operated within NATO and abetted by a 1956 agreement between the United States and Italian secret services. Over the years, he says, 622 Italians belonged to the operation — civilians who were trained by intelligence operatives and who had fought in World War II or served in the peacetime forces.

Preparing the Guerrillas

Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and Luxembourg have all acknowledged that they maintained Gladio-style networks to prepare guerrilla fighters to leap into action in the event of a Warsaw Pact invasion. Many worked under the code name Stay Behind. Greece called its operation Red Sheepskin.

News reports in recent days assert that similar programs have also existed in Britain, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Turkey and Denmark and even in neutral countries like Switzerland and Sweden. The British newspaper The Guardian today quoted a former Commander in Chief of NATO forces in northern Europe as saying that the purpose was to have a secret organization in place for guerrilla warfare if Britain were overrun by Communist troops.

"The original plan was to establish a network to arm guerrillas from the civil populace while conventional forces were occupied elsewhere," said the former commander, Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley.

Diplomats in Rome and other European capitals say the network was inspired by anti-Nazi resistance movements in World War II, but that it was hoped these new clandestine units would be better organized. "You have to remember," a highly placed Western European official said, "that at the time everyone was praising the French resistance, the Italian resistance, and everyone had to be prepared."

These would-be fighters had stocks of weapons and explosives, officials say. Henk Vredeling, the Netherlands' Defense Minister in the 1970's,



Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti of Italy, who is to testify today about a secret anti-Communist organization formed during the cold war years.

said he had known of weapons caches that were to be used for behind-the-lines sabotage. The German newspaper Die Welt reported that among secret stores of weapons in what used to be West Germany were grenade launchers, pistols and explosives.

In Rome, Mr. Andreotti disclosed that secret arms deposits were dismantled as far back as 1972 but that the secret services could not find 12 of them. Their disappearance has fueled speculation here that the weapons ended up in terrorist hands. Contributing to this conjecture are press reports that some of the underground "gladiators," as they have been dubbed, had close links to neo-Fascist groups and to intelligence organizations.

But the chief of Italian military intelligence, Adm. Fulvio Martini, insisted today that Operation Gladio had no ties to right-wing groups and that its only purpose was to resist invasion.

"Not one of the 622 was ever involved in any conspiracies or plots," Admiral Martini said in testimony before the parliamentary commission.

Varied From Country to Country

It appears that Gladio operations varied from country to country. Many worked within a NATO framework, but some — the Netherlands, for example — say their resistance fighters were

The Gladiators were formed to resist Soviets.

organized purely as a national force.

In some countries, the networks were shut down years ago. Greece's Socialists say that they discovered their when they took power in 1981, finally abolishing it and rounding up weapons in 1985. In France, President François Mitterrand said this week that it was he who eliminated the French branch, but he did not say when.

Even in countries like Italy where Gladio remains in force, its members seem to have little fighting spirit left.

New "gladiators" are still recruited, and two members of Parliament say they visited a military base on the island of Sardinia where guerrilla training exercises were held last spring. But Admiral Martini told the investigating commission that nearly three-fourths of the 622 members were over the age of 50, or were dead.

Nevertheless, the network continues, and several officials reported that a supervisory committee of European secret services met in Brussels only a month ago.

Nourishing conspiracy theories are assertions from key European leaders that they knew nothing about the operation until recently. Joseph Luns, who was NATO secretary general from 1971 to 1984, said he had never heard of it. Belgium's Defense Minister, Guy Coeque, told a radio station today that "things were hidden from me."

Admiral Martini told the lawmakers that some Italian Prime Ministers were also kept in the dark. Indeed, as the Gladio story began to unfold, Italy's only two postwar Prime Ministers not to come from the conservative Christian Democratic Party — Bettino Craxi, a Socialist, and Giovanni Spadolini, a Republican — insisted that the disclosures came as news to them.

Agreement With U.S. Agencies

There were other disturbing developments for Italian politicians and journalists, who as a group demonstrate a cultivated taste for intrigue and a slender faith in coincidence.

There was Mr. Andreotti's mention of the 1956 agreement with United States agencies, whose aim for decades was to make sure that the Italian Communist Party, the largest in the West, never got a foothold in the Government. And there were long-reported links between Italian secret services and neo-Fascists.

And there is the fact that the major unsolved acts of terrorism that rocked Italy in the 1970's are all presumed to be the work of people on the far right. Left-wing terrorists like the moribund Red Brigades somehow were caught and imprisoned.

Swept up in the dispute is President Francesco Cossiga, who declared recently that it had been his "privilege" to help organize Gladio when he was in the Defense Ministry in the 1960's. Some Independent Left members of Parliament have since demanded his impeachment, but Mr. Cossiga remains unflappable.

Fact is, he said, "I admire the fact that we have kept the secret for 45 years."

Yugoslavia's Disintegration



Slovenia and Croatia are Yugoslavia's most developed republics, and Serbia the most populous.

Markovic's Reform Party is facing stiff competition in each race from a host of nationalist parties.

Today, about 25,000 Macedonians protested in the republican capital Skopje, asserting that ethnic Albanians in the republic's western districts prevented Macedonians from casting ballots in last Sunday's first round of parliamentary elections.

While final first-round vote tallies are still not available, election officials in Macedonia have declared last Sunday's vote null and void in 54 precincts because of irregularities, according to a Yugoslav press agency report. A new vote in those precincts is set for Nov. 15, and a second round of voting has been postponed until Dec. 9.

Parliamentary elections are set for Sunday in Bosnia-Herzegovina and for Dec. 9 in Serbia and Montenegro. Runoffs are scheduled in each republic.

Secret agents, freemasons, fascists . . . and a top-level campaign of political 'destabilisation'

Ed Vulliamy in Rome on the 'strategy of tension' that brought carnage and cover-up

I CAN say that the head of the secret services has repeatedly and unequivocally excluded the existence of a hidden organisation of any type or size," the Italian Minister of Defence, Giulio Andreotti, told a judicial inquiry in 1974 into the alleged existence of a secret state army.

Four years later, the scene repeated itself in front of judges investigating a fascist bombing in Milan.

Last month, however, Andreotti — now Prime Minister — confirmed the now infamous Gladio organisation had indeed existed since 1958, with the sanction of the political authorities, as a paramilitary "clandestine network" prepared to fight a Warsaw Pact invading army.

The Gladio saga resulted from two sources unhappy with Andreotti's 1974 explanation. The first was a group of judges examining letters uncovered in Milan during October in which the murdered Christian Democrat leader, Aldo Moro, said he feared a shadow organisation, alongside "other secret services of the West . . . might be implicated in the destabilisation of our country".

His words were taken to point to the "Strategy of Tension" in the 1970s, violent and usually fascist-inspired outrages designed to justify increased state power and isolate the Left.

Meanwhile, two judges in Venice were investigating one such outrage — the murder of three policemen by a fascist car bomb in Peteano in 1972. Felice Casson and Carlo Mastelloni had stumbled across Gladio.

Testimonies collected by the two men and by the Commission on Terrorism in Rome, and inquiries by the Guardian, indicate Gladio was involved in activities which do not square with Andreotti's account.

Links between Gladio, Italian



Denials, doubts and then the truth: Prime Minister Andreotti and assassination victim Moro

secret service bosses and the notorious P2 masonic lodge are manifold. The chiefs of all three secret services — Generals Santovito (SISMI), Grassini (SISDE) and Cellosi (CESSIS) — were members of the lodge. In the year that Andreotti denied Gladio's existence, the P2 treasurer, General Siro Rosetti, gave a generous account of "a secret security structure made up of civilians, parallel to the armed forces".

There are also overlaps between senior Gladio personnel and the committee of military men, Rosa dei Vent, which tried to stage a coup in 1970.

A briefing minute of June 1, 1959, reveals Gladio was built around "internal subversion". It was to play "a determining role . . . not only on the general policy level of warfare, but also in the politics of emergency".

In the 1970s, with communist electoral support growing and other leftists looking menacing, the establishment turned to the "Strategy of Tension" — with Gladio eager to be involved.

General Gerardo Serravalle, a former head of "Office R", told the terrorism commission that at a crucial Gladio meeting in 1972, at least half of the upper echelons "had the idea of attacking the communists be-

fore an invasion. They were preparing for civil war."

Later, he put it more bluntly: "They were saying this: 'Why wait for the invaders when we can make a pre-emptive attack now on the communists who would support the invader?'"

The idea is now emerging of a Gladio web made up of semi-autonomous cadres which — al-

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though answerable to their secret service masters and ultimately to the Nato-CIA command — could initiate what they regarded as anti-communist operations by themselves, needing only sanction and funds from the existing "official" Gladio column.

General Pietro Corona, head of the "R" office from 1969-70, told the Venice inquiry about "an alternative clandestine net-

work, parallel to Gladio, which knew about the arms and explosives dumps and who had access to them". General Nino Lugaresi, head of SISMI from 1981-84, testified on the existence of a "Super Gladio" of 800 men responsible for "internal intervention" against domestic political targets.

The Venetian judges identified two arms dumps referred to by Andreotti. One, hidden beneath a cemetery near Verona, contains 18 453-gram bundles of the potent C4 plastic explosive officially confirmed last week as used at Peteano.

Gen Serravalle testified to irregularities at another dump, near Trieste. There, he says, Gladio had logged seven containers of C4. When the Carabinieri dug up the arsenal in February 1972 — two months before the Peteano attack near by — there were only four containers left; three had been inexplicably removed.

An extraordinary testimony remains in the labyrinth of paperwork surrounding the "Strategy of Tension". Vincenzo Vinciguerra, a member of the fascist group Avanguardia Nazionale, is serving life for his part in the Peteano bombing.

In 1984, questioned by judges examining the 1980 Bologna

station bomb in which 82 people were killed and for which two secret service agents were convicted, he said: "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." The structure, he said, "lies within the state itself".

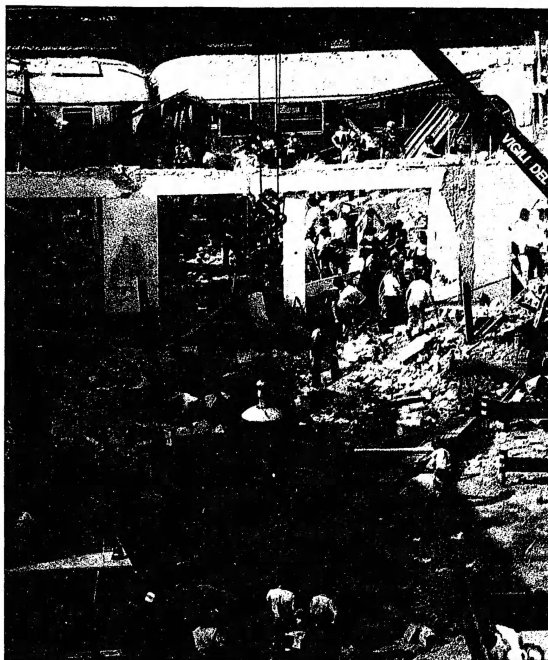
"There exists in Italy a secret force parallel to the armed forces, composed of civilians and military men, in an anti-Soviet capacity — that is, to organise a resistance on Italian soil against a Russian army . . . A secret organisation, a super-organisation with a network of communications, arms and explosives, and men trained to use them . . ."

"A super-organisation which, 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 . . ."

Vinciguerra has now made this statement to the Guardian: "The terrorist line was followed by camouflaged people, people belonging to the security apparatus, or those linked to the state apparatus through rapport or collaboration. I say that every single outrage that followed from 1969 fitted into a single, organised matrix . . . Avanguardia Nazionale, like Ordine Nuovo (the main right-wing terrorist group active during the 1970s), were being mobilised into the battle as part of an anti-communist strategy originating not with organisations deviant from the institutions of power, but from within the state itself, and specifically from within the ambit of the state's relations within the Atlantic Alliance."

Late last Thursday, the current head of the Secret Services, General Paolo Inzerilli, announced that Gladio had been disbanded two days earlier. The official closing of the Gladio book, however, is unlikely to abort the plot.

OBSERVER REVIEW



A key figure in the 'stay-behind' operation, P2 Lodge head Licio Gelli, and (right) fascist terrorist Vincenzo Vinciguerra. Was Gladio involved in the bombing of Bologna railway station? (centre) Photographs by Vladimir Sichov and Graham Macindoe.

THE codename was Gladio and it was the most ambitious and secret operation in Western Europe since the Second World War. But now, with the Cold War over, it is ending on notes of pure farce.

The Belgian authorities have lost the code for getting in touch with their most secret agents, men who would have gone into action when the Soviet army swept into Flanders; they have no means of working it out again. One Belgian officer, Colonel Bernard Legrand, knows some of the names but he won't co-operate: it's confidential, he says. The British and the United States governments know how to break the code but won't tell the wretched Belgians.

At 10.15 on the morning of 31 January last year Colonel Jean Bodart of Belgian military intelligence landed in a Belgian air force plane at RAF Northolt. He collected 13 packages filled with cyphers and an old Remington typewriter from British intelligence and two hours later flew back to Brussels. The packages contained the names of the members of the Gladio network in Belgium. The Remington typewriter was part of the decoding equipment. But Belgian intelligence, whose skills at cryptography have sadly been allowed to get rusty, have wrestled in vain with the task of deciphering the names in the packages.

One day in 1984 a party of US Marines set out from an airport north of London. Highly trained men, each fluent in one Eastern European language, they parachuted to their secret rendezvous and were met by an agent, a local bank manager, who offered them guidance. They lived off the land for a fortnight, hiding from the local civilian population as they stalked towards their prey. Stealthily they approached their objective and opened fire, killing a warrant officer. One of the Marines lost an eye in the operation.

Their language skills were not much use: the objective was the police station in the sleepy southern Belgian town of Vlietsalm and none of the Marines spoke French. If they had, they could have saved one man's life and another man's eye.

The object of the exercise had been twofold: to join the local Belgian police into a higher state of alert and, no less important, to give the impression to the population

at large that the comfortable and well-fed Kingdom of Belgium was on the brink of red revolution. Since used in the operation were later planted by a shadowy Belgian intelligence outfit in the Brussels squat used by a Communist splinter group.

On such notes of opera buffa is Gladio being wound up. Meticulously for the reputations of all concerned perhaps, the farce is overlaying memories of large-scale incursions into terrorism and crime which transformed a clever plan to defend Western democracy into a scheme which, according to startling new evidence unearthed by *Observer* researchers in many countries, struck at the very roots of Western values of freedom and the rule of law.

Starting as an unexceptionable piece of forward planning, it moved on to unauthorised political surveillance and then, fatally, to the mounting of a series of outrages with the far Right which cost the lives of hundreds of innocent Europeans. The dead include at least one Western European leader, Aldo Moro of Italy. Much still remains to be investigated, particularly about Gladio's operations in France's Spain.

THE strategy behind Gladio when it was set up in the late 1940s was impeccable. As Stalin consolidated his political and military power in Eastern Europe and promoted his version of totalitarianism where he could, the Western allies came together to prevent any recurrence of the debacle at the beginning of the Second World War when democracies were knocked over like ninepins by the Wehrmacht.

In 1939 and 1940 the German army had been able to overrun its European neighbours with supreme ease. Polish cavalry was no match for German tanks, the Dutch surrendered after Rotterdam had been destroyed from the air, the only British soil Hitler's Paris was taken without difficulty, scarcely a shot was fired as the Nazis conquered Denmark. The Channel Islands, the only British soil Hitler's Paris was taken without difficulty, scarcely a shot was fired as the Nazis conquered Denmark.

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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. Hugh O'Shaughnessy reports.

laborate with the Allied forces of liberation.

Such a lack of foresight, it was agreed in Western capitals, was never to be permitted again in the face of Stalin's threat, particularly after the Communist putsch in Prague in 1948. Under the aegis of Britain and the US, a secret network of recruits was to be set up all over the continent. They were to be provided with caches of radios, money and weapons.

If the Red Army did overrun Western Europe and were defeated and forced to flee, there would be someone left with intimate local knowledge who could receive orders from abroad, send out information and go into action against the Soviet occupation forces. They were not to be so many Captain Mainwaring's, openly organised in Dad's Army outfits around the local drill hall, who could be easily rounded up by the Russians. Their role was to be serious and totally clandestine. They were to be known as 'stay-behinds'.

This continent-wide operation, which became known as Gladio, also had the task of keeping an eye on what were considered domestic threats to Western democracies by agents of the Soviet Union. In the post-war years when

Moscow-line Communist parties were strong, particularly in France and Italy, that task was challenging. It was to lead to particular abuses.

Although the networks were initially set up at the initiative of democratically elected national leaders, they soon took on an independent life of their own so that even commanders-in-chief, defence ministers, prime ministers and presidents were unaware of what they were doing.

The network and their caches were to remain ultra-secret until 1990. General Bernard Rogers, the former US commander of Nato, for instance, says he was unaware of the details. 'The organisation of any stay-behinds must have been at the national level and not at the Nato level,' he comments.

The lid was lifted a little in November 1990 by the Italian Prime Minister Giulio

Andreotti, who had strongly denied the existence of Gladio for well over a decade. In a statement to parliament in Rome, Andreotti became the first major politician to talk publicly of the project.

IT ALL started at the end of the last war. On 27 January 1949 Sir Stewart Menzies, head of MI6, set out the grand strategy in a top secret and personal letter to Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Socialist Prime Minister who was later to become secretary-general of Nato. As the idea took shape, Sir Stewart wrote of Anglo-Belgian collaboration in particular:

The present object of this collaboration should be directed to two main aims:

a) The improvement of our information on the subject of Cominform and potential enemy activities in so far as they concern our two countries.

b) The preparation of appropriate intelligence and action organisations in the event of war.

At the same time the letter, a copy of which is in *The Observer's* possession, throws light on what became an increasingly important factor in the Gladio operation — the rivalry between the British and the Americans.

Menzies continued:

I have always regarded American participation in the defence of Western Europe as a matter of capital importance. I am, however, convinced that all excluded, must be integrated into an harmonious whole. Should, therefore, the Americans wish to pursue with your Service certain preparations to meet the needs of war, I regard it as essential — and I understand that I have your agreement — that these activities should be co-ordinated with my own. Such co-ordination, moreover, will prevent undesirable repercussions with the Western Union Chiefs of Staff. I have already indicated to the Head of the American Service that I am ready to work out plans for detailed co-operation with him on this basis, and I therefore suggest that any

projects formulated by them should be referred back to Washington for subsequent discussion between the British and American Services in London.

The correspondence should, Menzies suggested, be regarded as 'highly secret'.

Early the following month Spaak wrote back to Menzies agreeing with his ideas but begging Britain and the US to get their act together.

I agree with you that it would be highly desirable that the three services (British, American and Belgian) should collaborate closely. If two of them, the American and the British, refuse that collaboration, the situation of the Belgian service would be extremely delicate and difficult.

Thus I feel it is indispensable that at the highest level there should be negotiations to settle this question...

In the event both powers helped to pay for the Gladio operations in Belgium. Senator Roger Lallemand, head of the parliamentary inquiry into Gladio set up in Belgium after Andreotti's revelations, recalls: 'What was striking about the Belgian stay-behinds was that the financing at the beginning was in part undertaken by the British and the Americans. We were able to note that the Belgian stay-behinds had received gold coins... The sums were quite large and in fact were stored away since they couldn't have been used.'

As the years went by, the stay-behind network, which ended up as a semi-detached operation of Nato, extended across Europe: the British taking the lead in Belgium, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and the Iberian peninsula, the Americans elsewhere. The fact that various powers involved were not members of Nato — such as Switzerland — did not hinder Gladio being extended to their territory.

The names of all the stay-behinds were lodged for safe-keeping in London and Boston, Massachusetts.

THE extreme secrecy and lack of supervision of the Gladio networks by elected governments meant that time and again they were to fall victim to right-wing extremists inside and outside the Western security services, who set their own political agendas and acted on them. The way down that slippery slope was typified by the atti-

tude of James Jesus Angleton, the CIA's chief of counter-intelligence. According to his biographer Tom Mangold, Angleton was convinced that Harold Wilson and Willy Brandt were Moscow agents.

His black list of pro-Communists also included Henry Kissinger, the Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson and Averell Harriman, a former US Ambassador in Moscow and Governor of New York.

A US military field manual published for the guidance of its officers stated: 'There may be times when host-country governments fall into passivity or indecision in face of Communist or Communist-inspired subversion and react with inadequate vigor to intelligence estimates transmitted by US agencies... In such cases US army intelligence must have the means of launching special operations which will convince host-country governments and public opinion of the reality of insurgent action and assess the counter-action.'

Although doubt has been cast on the authenticity of the text, Ray Cline, a former deputy director of the CIA who joined US intelligence as a young man during the Second World War, has no doubt it is genuine.

In Belgium, for instance, all evidence points to the fact that a US-born Gladio agent, Wood Gardner, infiltrated the Belgian pacifist movement and persuaded some of its members in 1984 to steal shells from the missile base at Florenne. When the theft was discovered it did the pacifist cause no good at all.

More important were the apparently random shootings in Belgium supermarkets which ended with a particularly nasty incident in 1983 in the town of Aalst, a few miles from Brussels, which became known as the 'Brabant-Walloon massacres'. Senator Lallemand has linked the killings to 'the work of foreign governments or of intelligence services working for foreigners, a terrorism aimed at destabilising democratic society'.

Martial Lekeu, a former member of the Belgian gendarmerie who was close to the investigation of the atrocities, that members of his own force were involved in the murders and that official inquiries into it were aborted.

The British authorities, leaders with Washington in the scheme, are refusing all comment on Gladio. But continued overleaf

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The secrets of Gladio

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information about Britain's role has come from parliamentary and other investigations carried out elsewhere in Europe.

Belgian documents, starting with Spaak's letter of 1949, show what a major role Britain has constantly played. Papers presented to the parliamentary inquiry set up in Belgium on Gladio show that in Belgium in 1981 and in Britain in 1982 Belgian personnel received training from British instructors. In April 1982 Belgians prepared for a Gladio exercise involving Britain and the US, codenamed Blackbird, which was called off at the last minute when Argentina invaded the Falklands.

In 1990 Colonel S. Schwabach of Belgian intelligence reported to his Defence Minister that an exercise called Waterland had taken place the previous year. In it, members of the Royal Marines Special Boat Squadron parachuted into the sea off the coast of Flanders, were guided ashore by Belgian civilians and went on to simulate the dynamiting of the massive canal locks at Zeebrugge.

There were even reports, so far unconfirmed, in Belgium that Belgian personnel had been part of a recent Gladio exercise in Britain aimed at demonstrating that Dover docks could be put out of action were the Russians to occupy Kent.

Britain was active too in the Gladio operation in Switzerland. Effrem Cattalan, who headed the Swiss P26 intelligence organisation and helped to organise Gladio in his country, told us how his organisation 'has English colleagues who instructed them in general training, like covert operations and parachute jumps at night in which England has had exceptionally good experience since the war'.

The British also collaborated, he said, with his predecessor at P26, Colonel Albert Bachmann, for the possible evacuation of the headquarters of a Swiss resistance movement to Britain, known as Operation Edelweiss. The report of the Swiss official

investigation into the Gladio affair, led by Judge Pierre Cornu and published last September, shows that, with admirable meticulousness, a supply of Swiss army buttons and other insignia was lodged, against the day they might come in useful, in the safe of the Swiss embassy in Bryanston Square.

Discussions, the Swiss inquiry revealed, had also taken place between 1976 and 1979 about the evacuation of a Swiss government-in-exile to Ireland if the Russians had come over the Alps.

Unlike the Nato countries, Cattalan claimed, the Swiss banned British or other foreign military personnel from taking part in exercises on Swiss soil. According to the Swiss report, however, such exercises did take place, some codenamed Targum, probably annually between 1973 and 1979, certainly from 1982 to 1988. Others, called Cravat and Susanne, were held in 1976, 1978, 1983, 1986 and 1988.

The report frankly confesses that such were the links between the Swiss and the British officials and agents who dealt with the Gladio scheme that British intelligence knew more about Swiss plans than the Swiss government and high command.

No detail was too small for the Swiss judges. Their report expressed concern, for instance, that the issuing by Swiss officials of false documents to Swiss agents of Gladio who went abroad infringed federal law. It went on to point out that one Swiss Gladio agent who had used his false identity card to obtain a fishing licence in Britain had contravened Article Six of the Swiss penal code, which covers the punishment in Switzerland of crimes committed by Swiss abroad.

Meanwhile, at least one British family still mourns a victim of the darkest chapter of Gladio, a series of bombings a decade ago which were at first attributed to the Red Brigades.

The largest, at Bologna railway station on 2 August 1980,

claimed 86 lives. Harry Mitchell, a civil servant, and his wife Shirley, of Bloomfield Road, Bath, lost their daughter Catherine, who was 21. She died in the blast with her 22-year-old fiancé John Kolpinski, from Bristol. Her body was so disfigured that it was identified only by the Miss Selfridge label on her blouse.

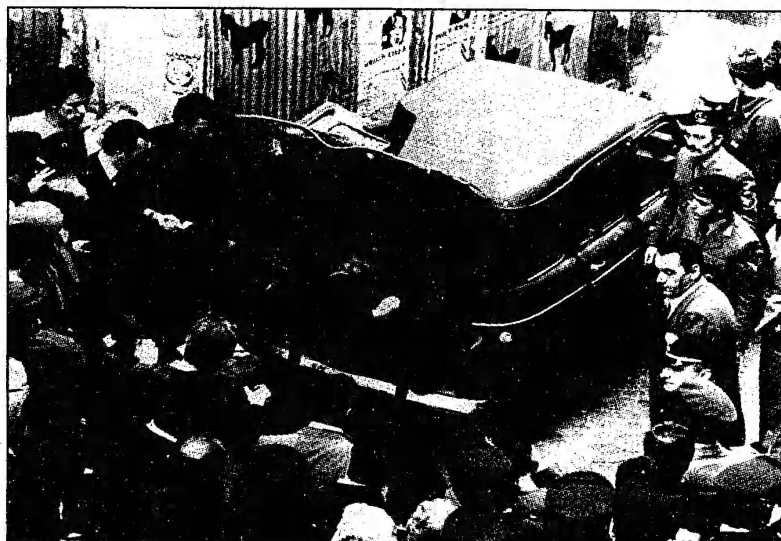
This explosion was part of a series of atrocities which left at least 300 dead as bombs went off in the Piazza Fontana in Milan, on trains at Brescia and on the Naples-Milan express in a tunnel south of Bologna. The Mitchells are outraged that Britain is refusing to extradite back to Italy one of those sought for questioning in Italy about the crime, Roberto Fiore.

Fiore, now 33, has lived freely here in Pimlico since 1980, running a prosperous accommodation agency and mixing in extreme right, anti-semitic circles. There is a strong suspicion that M16 is grateful for information Fiore was able to give them about Lebanon, where he learnt some of his terrorist techniques, and is blocking efforts to question him.

The Mitchells got no satisfaction when they wrote about the Fiore affair to Mrs Thatcher in Downing Street in June 1985. But the other day they were brought up to date on British government thinking. On 29 March, Sir Patrick Mayhew, then Attorney-General, explained in a letter to the Mitchells' MP, Chris Patten, how British justice could do nothing about sending Fiore back.

The Italian railway bombings were blamed on the extreme Left as part of a strategy to convince voters that the country was in a state of tension and that they had no alternative to voting the safe Christian Democrat ticket. All clues point to the fact that they were masterminded from within Gladio.

Francesco Cossiga, who stepped down from the presidency of Italy in April, helped to organise Gladio when he was Interior Minister. He recalls



Aldo Moro's body is found in Rome in 1978. Could the secret services have prevented his kidnap?

how Britain and the US collaborated in setting up the network in Italy in 1951, 'concerned with what might happen to Europe if it were invaded'.

He traces the official formalities at the inauguration of Gladio by the principal figures of the Atlantic Alliance. At the instigation of the Supreme Commander Allied Forces Europe, the first statute of the clandestine planning committee to oversee Gladio was approved.

'It was agreed that three countries, the US, France and Britain, would be permanent members and the rest would be associate members — that meant Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Turkey. Italy was invited to become an associate member. Italy turned down this invitation and instead asked to become a permanent member, but did not get an answer at the time. In 1956 Germany joined.' Cossiga adds: 'It was standard policy of Nato to deny the existence of anything that it had been agreed to keep secret.'

He described how he was Interior Minister when Moro was kidnapped. He contacted

Merlyn Rees, then Britain's Home Secretary, for help and together they visited the SAS headquarters in Hereford. Thus Gladio in Italy was seeking help from British forces involved in training Gladio personnel so that the Italians could put an end to an Italian terrorist action launched with the knowledge of Gladio itself.

Decimo Garau, an army doctor and friend of Cossiga, told us how he had a week's training at Poole with British special services, practising parachute landings in the English Channel before visiting the SAS at Hereford.

No less important were the continuing concerns about the political strength of the Communists. Senator Libero Gualtieri, head of the Italian parliamentary inquiry into Gladio, told us: 'When Gladio was started, the Americans would often insist in their briefings, their meetings, that the organisation also had to be used to counter any insurgencies.'

Gualtieri explained how the secret service tail soon began to wag the government dog. He cites the case of Amintore Fanfani, Prime Minister six times,

and Giovanni Spadolini, also Prime Minister and Defence Minister, neither of whom was informed of Gladio. 'To a large extent Gladio was hidden from the politicians because we allowed a situation in which the secret services had the task of informing those in power and not vice versa.'

LICIO GELLI, head of the P2 freemasons' lodge, who fought for Franco in the Spanish Civil War, was one of the greyest eminences in post-war Italy. He later became enmeshed with the Vatican in the Banco Ambrosiano swindle. After the war, he was recruited by Canadian occupying forces to work in the 'stay-behind' operation being set up throughout Italy. There were, he told us, 250 Gladio squads, each consisting of nine men.

'Many came from the ranks of the mercenaries who had fought in the Spanish Civil War and many came from the fascist republic of Salo. They chose individuals who were proved anti-Communists. I know it was a well-constructed organisation. Had Communist strength grown in Italy, America would have assisted us, we would have

unleashed another war and we would have been generously supplied with arms from the air.'

He is convinced that the Italian authorities let Aldo Moro go to his death. 'I think Moro could have been saved. Everything can be salvaged in Italy if someone wants to salvage it.'

Vincenzo Vinciguerra, a convinced Fascist who was a member of the extremist Ordine Nuovo organisation and had close links with Gladio, has testified to us of his personal involvement in such schemes. Now serving a long sentence in Parma prison for his part in the killing of three carabinieri in the village of Peteano, he talked despite the Italian authorities' efforts to prevent access to him.

'You had to attack civilians, the people, women, children, innocent people, unknown people far removed from any political game,' he said. 'The reason was quite simple. They were supposed to force these people, the Italian public, to turn to the State to ask for greater security. This is the political logic that lies behind all the massacres and the bombings which remain unpunished, because the State cannot convict itself or declare itself responsible for what happened.'

Vinciguerra recounted how the authorities covered the traces after the killing of the three carabinieri. 'A whole mechanism came into action — that is, the carabinieri, the Minister of the Interior, the customs services and the military and civilian intelligence services accepted the ideological reasoning behind the attack.'

The commanders of the carabinieri foiled a thorough investigation of the Peteano affair for years, he claims. 'It was more convenient to cover it up than to turn on those who killed their comrades. All the members of the Red Brigades were known by the police, the carabinieri and the intelligence bureaux and no one made any attempt to stop them. So you see, "revolutionary warfare" should not be seen as being directed against Western democracy but rather as the means of defence adopted by Western democracies and implemented cynically and indiscriminately.'

The gravest charge against the Gladio project is that it co-operated in — or at least did nothing to prevent — the kidnapping and killing of Aldo Moro, a former Prime Minister of Italy. Moro, a Catholic and Christian Democrat, was known for his view that the Italian Communist Party should be brought closer to government.

It is well known that Moro died in March 1978 at the hand of the Red Brigades. What is less understood, but borne out by a number of well-informed witnesses, is that the Red Brigades were deeply infiltrated by Western intelligence. At the time of Moro's killing the principal leaders of the Brigades were in prison. Colonel Oswald Le Winter of the CIA, who served as a US liaison officer with Gladio, goes as far as to say that the planning staff of the Brigades was made up of intelligence agents. From his prison cell, Vinciguerra agrees.

How was it that Colonel Guglielmi, a senior figure in Italian intelligence, was on hand in the Via Fani in Rome when Moro was kidnapped and his bodyguards were murdered? Why did Guglielmi say he was there by accident on the way to lunch with a friend when the kidnapping happened at nine o'clock in the morning? Why was it that the bullets which killed the bodyguards were of a type only used by the Italian special forces?

As Gladio winds down and governments on the continent declare they have shut down their parts of the operation, the silence in Whitehall and the almost total lack of curiosity among MPs about an affair in which Britain was so centrally involved are remarkable. Perhaps John Major's new commitment to more openness in government will eventually produce some answers to the many Gladio riddles.

'The Ringmasters', the first of three weekly Observer Film Company programmes on Gladio in the 'Timewatch' series, will be shown on BBC2 on Wednesday at 8.15pm. They are directed by Allan Francovich and produced by Kimi Zabihyan.