

CIA Organized Secret Army in Western Europe

*Paramilitary Force Created
To Resist Soviet Occupation*

11/14/90

By Clare Pedrick
Special to the Washington Post

ROME, Nov. 13—A secret army created by the Central Intelligence Agency 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 past 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 nation's Senate. Since then, European officials have described similar operations in most of the other NATO countries.

The CIA-backed paramilitary network included units in Belgium, France, Greece, 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 a story scheduled to appear Wednesday in the German newspaper Die Welt.

European officials familiar with the paramilitary network 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.

A former Belgian army intelligence official quoted by the Associated Press today said at least six arms caches were spread over the countryside in his nation until two months ago. In addition, the wire service quoted a former Dutch defense minister who said 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 had hidden caches of arms at depots throughout the country. The operation has now been scaled down, Andreotti said, but more than 600 people remain on the payroll.

Andreotti said he believes the operation should now 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."

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CIA Set Up Secret Army Across Western Europe

GLADIO, From A19

ever." The official would not comment on allegations that Gladio was part of a broad resistance network throughout Western Europe.

Andreotti disclosed the covert operation after a Venetian magistrate, Felice Casson, stumbled on its existence during an investigation into a neo-fascist terrorist attack that took place 18 years ago.

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 imprisonment. Andreotti said the 139 arsenals were broken up in 1973, but that weapons from 12 of them were never recovered.

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

In Washington, the U.S. government 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 post-war Europe.

The American and Italian intelligence agencies worked together, he said, to establish a network of crack military 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.

In Paris, the newspaper Liberation said the French arm of the secret network was dissolved only after disclosures of the Italian operation created a controversy. French Defense Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement on Monday confirmed France's involvement in the project.

The network was dissolved on presidential orders, Chevenement said, declining to specify when the order was issued. For most of its existence, the group had been "dormant," Chevenement said.

In Belgium, a former Belgian army intelligence official, Andre Moyen, told the leftist newspaper Le Drapeau Rouge he knew of "at least six arms caches" that existed in Belgium as recently as two months ago.

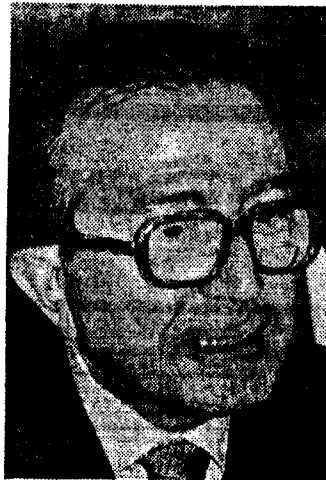
Henk Vredeling, the Dutch defense minister from 1973-77, told the Associated Press he had been briefed about the existence of weapons caches on Dutch soil destined for behind-the-lines sabotage.

Former Belgian defense minister Francois-Xavier de Donnea said paramilitary "exercises were scrapped, perhaps as long as one or two years ago." During his 1985-1988 tenure, he said he was briefed on network operations.

In Greece, where the anti-Communist network was known as Sheepskin, caches of arms, ammunition, flashlights and other equipment were dug up between 1985 and 1988, when the network was dismantled, the AP said.

In a television interview on Italy's Channel 4, former CIA director William Colby confirmed the U.S. role in Italy's secret army and described how he was sent to Stockholm in 1951 to set up a similar network in Scandinavia.

Colby, who headed the CIA from



GIULIO ANDREOTTI
... disclosed existence of operation

1973 to 1976, also revealed that U.S. intelligence agencies channeled large sums to Italy's right-of-center Christian Democrats and other "anti-Communist" political parties during the Cold War era—a connection that has long been alleged by Italy's left-wing parties. The money, said Colby, was used to ensure that Italy did not "fall into Communist hands."

Meanwhile, details have emerged of the role played by civilians in the secret operation. One of them, Verona businessman Roberto Cavallaro, told the Italian newsmagazine L'Espresso that he was recruited after taking part in anti-Soviet demonstrations. In the event of a Communist takeover, his task would have been to cause as much civil unrest as possible, Cavallaro said.

Cavallaro described how he was paid 700,000 lire (now worth \$635) each month, which was handed to him in a yellow envelope by one of the two intelligence officials who had recruited him. He left the organization in 1973, he said, after he heard of a plot to murder two former Communists, one male and one female. The plan was later abandoned.

Staff writer George Lardner in Washington contributed to this