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The Pentagon's 'NATO Option'

by **Lila Rajiva**

Washington is shocked by [Seymour Hersh's scoop](#) about the Pentagon's "Salvador Option," an ambitious plan to deploy secret special forces in friendly and unfriendly countries to spy, target terrorists and their sympathizers, and conduct "hits," all without Congressional oversight. Its model is the American counter-insurgency program in Salvador in the 1980s which funded nationalist death squads to hunt down insurgents. What's new today is that the program would be run by the Pentagon, not the CIA, and it would be much broader in scope. According to Hersh, the Pentagon's gremlins are already at work in Iran prepping targets for possible US or Israeli strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.

But Washington's shock is misplaced. There's nothing new about the "Salvador Option." At the end of last month, Frank Cass in London released a new book by Dr. Daniele Ganser of the Center for Security Studies at the Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich called, "NATO's Secret Armies. Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe," which offers plenty of evidence that there was also a "Salvador Option" in post-war Europe. It turns out that during the Cold War, European governments and secret services conspired with a NATO-backed operation to engineer attacks in their own countries in order to manipulate the population to reject socialism and communism.

It was called "the strategy of tension" and it was carried out by members of secret stay-behind armies organized by NATO and funded by the CIA in Italy, Portugal, Germany, Spain, and other European countries. The strategy apparently involved supplying right-wing terrorists with explosives to carry out terrorist acts which were then blamed on left-wing groups to keep them out of power.

Only three countries, Italy, Belgium, and Switzerland, have had a parliamentary investigation into NATO's role and a public report. The US and UK, the two nations most centrally involved, are refusing to disclose details, so crucial pieces of the story are missing. Still, Ganser's book offers some disturbing insights into a hidden aspect of the Cold War.

It all began during WWII when British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, ordered a secret army to be created to fight communism. Allen Dulles, the first chief of the CIA, worked out the original plan, and British MI6 and special forces teamed up with the CIA to train "stay-behind armies" in Western Europe to counter a possible Soviet invasion. It was all very James Bond - only grim - with forged passports, dead letter boxes, and parachute jumps over the channel, according to some of the trainees.

It turns out that what Washington meant by counter-terrorism, might often have been, well, terrorism.

Here's the money part from one of the field manuals (FM 30-31B):

"...when the revolutionaries temporarily renounce the use of forceUS army intelligence must have the means of launching special operations which will convince Host Country Governments and public opinion of the reality of the insurgent danger..."

That's to say, if there wasn't any terrorism to speak of, the secret armies were prepared to get some going.

According to Ganser, the secret army was behind waves of attacks in Italy in the 1970s. In Spain, it worked with Franco and may have supported over a 1000 attacks. In Germany, it had standing plans to murder leaders of the Social Democrat party in case of a Soviet invasion. It carried out terrorist actions against President de Gaulle and the Algerian peace plan in France. It seems to have been involved in the assassination of Amilcar Cabral and Eduardo Mondlane, prominent leaders in African liberation in the Portugese colonies. It was involved in the coup against Greek Prime Minister Papandreu and fomented terrorism against the Kurds in Turkey. In the Netherlands, Luxemborg, Denmark, and Norway, however, the secret networks don't seem to have been linked with terror.

The secret armies were first outed in August 1990 when then Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti confirmed the existence of Gladio, Latin for sword, a super secret group squirreled away in the military secret service, that had been manipulating the public with terrorist acts that it blamed on the Italian left.

NATO's reaction to Andreotti's revelation was first denial, then stone-walling, and finally a closed-doors admission to the ambassadors of the European countries. Since then, although a former CIA director William Colby has confirmed the creation of the stay-behind command centers and networks, NATO itself has withheld details. Asked about Gladio in Italy in 1990, former CIA director Stanford Turner angrily ripped off his microphone and shouted: "I said, no questions about Gladio!"

Today, with the Pentagon's "Salvador Option" on the table, it's time to revisit this hidden history of European counter-terrorism. While the Washington press corps seems convinced that the main problem with the "Salvador Option" is that the Pentagon is taking over what's always been the CIA's turf, the story of NATO's stay-behind armies suggests that whether the CIA or Pentagon runs it, the new program will be a very ugly business.

As one of Gladio's operatives said, "You had to attack civilians, the people, women, children, innocent people, unknown people far removed from any political game. 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."

Despite repeated requests from researchers, the CIA, like MI6, refuses to release its files on the subject. Before the government begins the new "Salvador Option," though, isn't it time for the world to learn about the very first one?

Lila Rajiva (lrajiva@hotmail.com) is a free-lance analyst and writer. She is the author of "[The Language of Empire: Abu Ghraib and the American Media](#)" (Monthly Review Press, 2005)

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