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Sword Play: Attacking Civilians to Justify "Greater Security"

Isly's "Operation Gladio"

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'You had to attack civilians, the people, women, children, innocent people, unknown people far removed from any political game. The reason was quite simple: to force … the public to turn to the state to ask for greater security."

This was the essence of Operation Gladio, a decades-long covert campaign of terrorism and deceit directed by the intelligence services of the West — against their own populations. Hundreds of innocent people were killed or maimed in terrorist attacks — on train stations, supermarkets, cafes and offices — which were then blamed on "leftist subversives" or other political opponents. The purpose, as stated above in sworn testimony by Gladio agent Vincenzo Vinciguerra, was to demonize designated enemies and frighten the public into supporting ever-increasing powers for government leaders — and their elitist cronies.

First revealed by Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti in 1991, Gladio (from the Latin for "sword") is still protected to this day by its founding patrons, the CIA and MI6. Yet parliamentary investigations in Italy, Switzerland and Belgium have shaken out a few fragments of the truth over the years. These have been gathered in a new book, "NATO's Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe," by Daniele Ganser, as Lila Rajiva reports on CommonDreams.org.

Originally set up as a network of clandestine cells to be activated behind the lines in the event of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, Gladio quickly expanded into a tool for political repression and manipulation, directed by NATO and Washington. Using right-wing militias, underworld figures, government provocateurs and secret military units, Gladio not only carried out widespread terrorism, assassinations and electoral subversion in democratic states such as Italy, France and West Germany, but also bolstered fascist tyrannies in Spain and Portugal, abetted the military coup in Greece and aided Turkey's repression of the Kurds.

Among the "smoking guns" unearthed by Ganser is a Pentagon document, Field Manual FM 30-31B, which details the methodology for launching terrorist attacks in nations that "do not react with sufficient effectiveness" against "communist subversion." Ironically, the manual states that the most dangerous moment comes when leftist groups "renounce the use of force" and embrace the democratic process. It is then that "U.S. 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." Naturally, these

peace-throttling “special operations must remain strictly secret,” the document warns.

Indeed, it would not do for the families of the 85 people ripped apart by the Aug. 2, 1980 bombing of the Bologna train station to know that their loved ones had been murdered by “men inside Italian state institutions and … men linked to the structures of United States intelligence,” as the Italian Senate concluded after its investigation in 2000.

The Bologna atrocity is an example of what Gladio’s masters called “the strategy of tension” — fomenting fear to keep populations in thrall to “strong leaders” who will protect the nation from the ever-present terrorist threat. And as Rajiva notes, this strategy wasn’t limited to Western Europe. It was applied, with gruesome effectiveness, in Central America by the Reagan and Bush administrations. During the 1980s, right-wing death squads, guerrilla armies and state security forces — armed, trained and supplied by the United States — murdered tens of thousands of people throughout the region, often acting with particular savagery at those times when peaceful solutions to the conflicts seemed about to take hold.

Last month, it was widely reported that the Pentagon is considering a similar program in Iraq. What was not reported, however — except in the Iraqi press — is that at least one pro-occupation death squad is already in operation. Just days after the Pentagon plans were revealed, a new militant group, “Saraya Iraqna,” began offering big wads of American cash for insurgent scalps — up to $50,000, the Iraqi paper Al Ittihad reports. “Our activity will not be selective,” the group promised. In other words, anyone they consider an enemy of the state will be fair game.

Strangely enough, just as it appears that the Pentagon is establishing Gladio-style operations in Iraq, there has been a sudden rash of terrorist attacks on outrageously provocative civilian targets, such as hospitals and schools, the Guardian reports. Coming just after national elections in which the majority faction supported slates calling for a speedy end to the American occupation, the shift toward high-profile civilian slaughter has underscored the “urgent need” for U.S. forces to remain on the scene indefinitely, to provide security against the ever-present terrorist threat. Meanwhile, the Bushists continue constructing their long-sought permanent bases in Iraq: citadels to protect the oil that incoming Iraqi officials are promising to sell off to American corporations — and launching pads for new forays in geopolitical domination.

Perhaps it’s just a coincidence. But the U.S. elite’s history of directing and fomenting terrorist attacks against friendly populations is so extensive — indeed, so ingrained and accepted — that it calls into question the origin of every terrorist act that roils the world. With each fresh atrocity, we’re forced to ask: Was it the work of “genuine” terrorists or a “black op” by intelligence agencies — or both?

While not infallible, the ancient Latin question is still the best guide to penetrating the bloody murk of modern terrorism: Cui bono? Who benefits? Whose powers and policies are enhanced by the attack? For it is indisputable that the “strategy of tension” means power and profit for those who claim to possess the key to “security.” And from the halls of the Kremlin to the banks of the Potomac, this cynical strategy is the ruling ideology of our times.

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