

Secret Warfare: From Operation Gladio to 9/11

An Interview With Dr. Daniele Ganser

Dr. Ganser is the author of NATO's Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe (London: Frank Cass, 2005). He is leading a research project at the Center for Security Studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. He was interviewed on March 3 in Basel, Switzerland, by Michael Liebig and Claudio Celani. See EIR, Jan. 7, 2005 for a commentary on Ganser's book.



EIR: How did you come to the idea of writing a book on *NATO's Secret Armies*? Who encouraged you and who discouraged you?

Ganser: I had finished my university studies in history in 1998 and I was looking for a Ph.D. research topic. At that time, I did research on the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, with a specific focus on whether the United Nations, the world peace organization so to speak, could have done anything to prevent the "cold" nuclear confrontation, which almost turned "hot." When I compared the role of the United States government in diplomatic terms, with the parallel covert operations of the CIA, I discovered that the United Nations was helpless, when confronted with covert actions. So, by 1998, I was very interested in covert actions. William Blum, who has written on secret warfare in the United States, advised me to look at Operation Gladio. To do this, said Blum, one would need to have worked on covert operations, and one would have to be able to speak not only English, but German, Italian, French, Spanish, and more languages. I said: "I'll do it." And, nobody discouraged me.

Prof. Georg Kreis of Basel University, my dissertation advisor, was initially skeptical on researching secret warfare, especially covert operations during the Cold War. As the relevant data are classified, I might not have enough primary data for my research. So, we decided to look at how democracies react when they discover a military-intelligence scandal like Operation Gladio. That would give us some data, and from this, I would proceed.

EIR: Your requests to NATO, the CIA, and MI6 for information on the Stay Behind/Gladio structure were met with incredible reactions. Sixteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, they are still denying the existence of the SB/Gladio structure. Why, do you think, are they doing so?

Ganser: Well, first I checked how NATO, the CIA, and MI6 reacted in 1990, because that was the year when Gladio's existence was revealed to the public. As for NATO, first they came out in a press conference declaring: NATO has never engaged in secret warfare; unorthodox warfare is none of our business. But the next day, they had another NATO spokesman declaring: What had been said the previous day is wrong, but we cannot provide further information, because it's all classified. So, NATO in 1990 actually admitted that they had engaged in secret warfare, but refused to provide any details.

In the late 1990s, I contacted NATO Archives on SB/Gladio, and they told me they had no relevant records. Then I requested very specific information, because I had done a lot of research by then. NATO Archives responded they had no records on the Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC) and Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC). I got back to them and said: You must have something; but they repeated: No, we do not have anything. Then somebody advised me to hand in a request for archive material on Gladio through the Swiss

Embassy, because Switzerland, in the context of Partnership for Peace, has a link to NATO. They actually did, but, again, the answer was negative.

After this disappointing experience, I looked at how the CIA handled Gladio in 1990. In Italy, former CIA director Stansfield Turner was asked by a journalist about Gladio, and answered “No questions on Gladio.” When the journalist insisted, he ripped off the microphone and walked out of the room. The *Washington Post* had an article in 1990 on Operation Gladio, which quoted an unnamed CIA representative who said: We have nothing to do with it, this is just an Italian mess. He also said that allegations that Gladio existed also outside Italy are wrong, and any link to terrorism was pure fantasy. I contacted the National Security Archive in Washington, whose people are very well known for specializing in FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] requests. Indeed, there had been an FOIA request on Gladio already in 1990; they got the reply you often get when you ask about covert operations: The CIA cannot confirm nor deny any specifics as to your request.

In 2000, ten years later, I handed in my request, asking the CIA for data on Gladio; I provided ample documentation that I knew that the CIA was involved, because in the meantime, several CIA operatives, some of whom I met in Washington, had spoken out. Basically, the reply I got was: No, we cannot give any details, but you have the right to appeal. So, I appealed and the appeal was accepted, then they wrote back: Your appeal will be handled on a “first come, first served” basis. Three years later, I’m still waiting; nothing has come from the CIA.

Now, as concerns MI6: In 1990, the MI6 officially “did not exist.” I talked to Christopher Andrews, Nigel West, and others in the British academic community, who had written on MI6. It was perfectly clear that MI6 had been active in SB/Gladio, but it was not possible to get any information from MI6 headquarters in London. When I was in London in 2000, I went to the MI6 headquarters and I said I wanted to talk to someone who knows about Gladio; it was more of a joke, because I knew they would say “No.”

But, there’s a funny thing. At the Imperial War Museum in London, they opened a special exhibition in 1995, “The Secret Wars,” in which there are displays on the Stay Behind operation. So I got in touch with the man who had set up the exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. He told me there was no way I would get anything from MI6. You may look at Special Operations Executive (SOE), Britain’s “secret army” which Churchill had created during World War II, he advised me. SOE was closed down after the war but remained a sort of a blueprint for NATO’s Stay Behind structure.

So, if you want me to summarize: NATO said “no comment,” the CIA said “no comment,” and MI6 said “no comment.” They did not specifically say, “We never did it.”

EIR: Why are they stonewalling today, more than a decade



Dr. Ganser's book broke the coverup on Operation Gladio's secret warfare, which EIR had hitherto been virtually alone in exposing. "Not many people dare speak about these issues," he said.

after the end of the Cold War?

Ganser: The core problem really is terrorism. One of NATO's “new missions” today is fighting terrorism; look at Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. But, the SB/Gladio data show that at least elements of some of the “secret armies,” in which NATO was involved, were linked to sponsoring terrorism. So, SB/Gladio is a very delicate issue for NATO. So delicate, that NATO simply does not want to talk about it. Some NATO officers did speak off the record on SB/Gladio. Their first point is: What's wrong with preparing for a Soviet attack? But their second point is: If, indeed, there had been links to terrorism, in the sense of Strategy of Tension manipulations, that would be buried very, very deep.

EIR: Could you elaborate on the problem of documentary evidence on one side, and off-the-record, “oral” sources on the other side? You do have to rely on circumstantial evidence in your work on Gladio. How would you define the methodology of your work?

Ganser: The core data was from Parliamentary investigations: 1) in Switzerland, the Parliamentary Committee on P26, the Swiss Stay Behind organization; 2) the Italian Parliamentary Investigating Committee on Gladio; and 3) the Belgian Senate Investigation into SDRA8 and STC Mob. As a rule, these parliamentary reports are dumped in cellars and rarely does anybody look at them. They are written in a dull style, there are no pictures, no colors, and it's difficult to find them in the first place. Dusty old stuff for historians like me, therefore. But, I have read them very carefully and I have compared the data they contain.

In the second step, I ran computer checks through digital media archives, using keywords from the parliamentary re-

ports. This kind of work could not have been done before media archives were digitalized. I ran my keywords through the digital archives of the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, Italian magazines, *El Pais* in Spain, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* [NZZ] in Switzerland, and some 20 other newspapers. With names, figures, and very specific terms. This took me almost two years: cross-comparing and analyzing data from 15 countries. I had a map in my office, where I put colored pins on the countries, where various forms of SB/Gladio operations had existed. My approach started with the data from Italy, Belgium, and Switzerland, but progressively I found a network all over Europe.

What I discovered was not nice at all. You know, I was not exactly happy to discover that the phenomenon I was researching was much bigger than I had thought in the first place, for I was just a Ph.D. student. Also due to the many different languages, 12 or 13, I became somewhat worn out. For whenever I had to add yet another country to my map, in each case, I had to study 50 years of post-war history of that country, while I realized at the same time that I could not possibly be an expert in the, at times, highly complex history of all these countries.

EIR: What was the significance of oral sources, off-the-record discussions for your work?

Ganser: I focussed on written documents and the literature—that's 90% of my work; 10% is discussions with people I thought would give me more information. I have talked to CIA operatives in Washington, but mostly to academic experts. In any case, there are not many people who know something about Gladio and want to speak about it publicly.

EIR: How would you describe—you use this formulation in your *NZZ* article—the “double nature” of the Stay Behind/Gladio structures?

Ganser: Indeed, that's the core issue. It can be firmly stated that the Stay Behind structures trained for operations after a Soviet invasion and occupation of Western Europe. This cannot be disputed; all my data confirm this. But there's a more difficult, far-reaching question: Was there a *second function* of the SB/Gladio structures? And some sources say: Yes, there was a second function, and this function was to “influence” the democracies of Western Europe, irrespective of the threat of a Soviet invasion. So, the one function, which I called the “post-invasion task,” was a military task within the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union; whereas the “second task” was a domestic manipulation or “control” operation in the absence of an invasion. It was very difficult to pin down the “second task,” really.

EIR: What is the significance of the Field Manual 30-31B,¹

1. Field Manual 30-31B, issued in 1970, emphasized that military and other secret service leaders in various host countries should be recruited as U.S.

which the CIA said was a Soviet forgery?

Ganser: The Field Manual 30-31B is a Pentagon document, so the Pentagon should comment—not the CIA. It was produced in 1970, during the Vietnam War, and signed by General Westmoreland. Field Manual 30-31B very much reflects the idea that the whole globe is a war zone. What it said, is that some Western or pro-Western governments might not adequately stand up to the Communist threat. This document does not name countries, and does not specifically focus on Europe. In countries where the government is, so to speak, “asleep,” U.S. military intelligence must link up with local military intelligence. The task at hand is to make the local government “wake up.” To that end, special units that secretly cooperate with the Pentagon can covertly stage terrorist attacks. These terrorist attacks, within a Strategy of Tension, would then be attributed—in a “false flag” mode—to the Communists. And, there are clear indications that this is what happened in at least some European countries. So, this Field Manual 30-31B seems like a blueprint for the “domestic control task”/Strategy of Tension, utilizing SB/Gladio structures.

EIR: You have documented that SB/Gladio assets were used in Strategy of Tension operations in Italy, Belgium, Greece, and Turkey. What is the role of the formal, official SB/Gladio command structure at NATO and at the national level—defense ministry, military command bodies, intelligence services—in Strategy of Tension operations?

Ganser: Not an easy question. What is clear is that military establishments have a top-down, hierarchical command structure—whatever happens. As far as the SB/Gladio organization was concerned, the top level was the Pentagon, hence the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and, if you want, the President above them. Then, below the Pentagon, in the U.S. command chain came the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) at NATO headquarters in Brussels. At NATO headquarters, further down, you had the military intelligence representatives of Western European states, who gathered in the Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC) and in the Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC). All this is documented.

Below that level, each country pursued its own policy in respect to its SB/Gladio structure. The national military intelligence service would approach people and recruit them for the network. A lot of these people were just very conservative, anti-communist patriots, who would never get involved in a terrorist operation. Many were not even aware that the Pentagon or the British Ministry of Defence was their ultimate master. Their point of reference was the local military intelli-

(or NATO) agents, but that if the host country governments “show passivity or indecision in the face of communist subversion,” then U.S. Army intelligence may launch top-secret “special operations” to convince public opinion of the reality of the “insurgent danger.” No English original of the Manual was ever found, only Italian translations of parts of it, and some investigators doubt its authenticity—ed.