

1958-1990: Operation Gladio, Italy



The history of the secret neo-fascist army in Italy set up ostensibly to resist Soviet invasion, but in reality to be used in the event of the working class growing too strong once again.

Following the end of [World War II](#), the Italian workers' movement was rapidly gaining strength. In some towns the fascists had been kicked out by [Resistance forces \(as before the war\)](#), these were usually led by socialists and anarchists), and embryonic workers' councils were governing. The Communist Party in particular won mass support for its involvement in this movement.

When Allied forces swept across the country, destroying this fledging power of ordinary people was next on the agenda after finishing Mussolini's regime.

When the liberal Italian state was reconstructed, mechanisms were put in place to make sure that workers did not take power. In addition to the already-existing powerful secret society, P2 which was heavily involved in the anti-working class [Strategy of Tension in the 1960s and 70s](#) the covert and yet official organisation 'Gladio' ('sword' - its logo is pictured, above) was set up.

Gladio was founded in 1958 by S.I.F.O.R. (Italian secret service, later replaced because it was suspected of involvement in a 1964 coup plot) and the CIA. Its 15,000 members were recruited from fascist [WWII](#) veterans groups and had access to 151 secret arms dumps. The purpose of Gladio was, (it was apparently disbanded in 1990, despite not officially existing until then) we are told, to act as a resistance group in the event of a 'Warsaw pact invasion', a 'Soviet takeover'.

Why any Russians would want to take over the radiation desert Italy would have become after a nuclear war, which would have been the result of any Warsaw pact invasion of Italy or any other N.A.T.O. state is questionable however. In fact by the time it would have taken for 'Soviet' tanks to have reached Italy there would have been no more Pentagon or Kremlin to give orders.

Secret Gladio documents made public in 1990 tell a different story, however - the danger of 'internal subversion'; i.e. the growing power of ordinary people over their lives - a powerful working class. According to General Gerardo Serravalle, commander of Gladio during the 1970s, it was concerned with:

"Internal control, that is our level of readiness to counter street demonstrations, handling nationwide strikes and any internal uprising"

and Gladio's role was to:

"Fill the streets, creating a situation of such tension as to require military intervention"(1)

In other words, to carry out a ['Strategy of Tension'](#) and create chaos as a pretext, a justification for repression.

This was all made public as the result of a lone magistrate's inquiries into the slaying of three police officers by a car bomb in 1972. Dusty, dated secret service records show that the bombers were members of Gladio. They had even used Gladio explosives. One of the bombers, Vincenzo Vinciguerra, has claimed that the fascist group thought responsible 'Ordine Nuovo' ('New Order') was a secret service invention.

Gladio was part of a Europe wide network of secret armies of the night established under N.A.T.O. auspices and in Greece, Turkey and Belgium they are believed to have been involved in terrorism and coups d'etat. The German section was comprised of Waffen S.S. veterans who drew up plans to assassinate Social Democrat politicians in the event of a 'Warsaw pact invasion'.

According to Mike Peters writing in Lobster no.32:

"Few citizens of N.A.T.O. countries are aware of the whole apparatus which to membership commits them e.g. Plans 10-G and 100-1 under which in 'emergency situations' special U.S. units would be activated to suppress any movement 'threatening to U.S. strategic interests'"(2)

It must be remembered that these events took place against a backdrop of unprecedented [American intervention](#) in Italy's political life, including \$100 million in covert funding of right-wing political parties and a fine example of gunboat democracy during the first post-Mussolini election when the U.S. Mediterranean Fleet was poised off the coast near Rome ready to send in the Marines should the electorate make the wrong decision and vote for communist candidates. Although the 'venerable master' Gelli was a regular visitor to the U.S. Embassy and has had rumours of CIA links surface around him it is not clear, what, if any role was played by the CIA in these events - in the least benevolent neutrality was more than likely their attitude.

Whatever the case may be, the ghosts of the Greek military coup of 1967 hang over the murky shadows where Italy's secret state and fascist underground meet. This coup and subsequent military regime enjoyed full U.S. backing and was headed by one Colonel Papadopoulos, a CIA agent. Shortly before this during a dispute with the Greek Ambassador over American proposals to partition Cyprus, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson delivered the following tirade:

"Fuck your parliament and your constitution. America is an elephant, Cyprus is a flea, Greece is a flea. If these two fellows continue itching the elephant, they may just get whacked by the elephants trunk, whacked good . . . If your Prime Minister gives me more talk about democracy, parliament and constitution, he, his parliament and his constitution may not last very long" (3)

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Footnotes

1. Quoted in 'The Beast Reawakens' by Martin Lee page 206.
2. Lobster 32 page 3 (footnote)
3. Quoted in 'Turning the Tide' by Noam Chomsky