



Farewell to General Paolo Inzerilli, head of Gladio between 1974 and 1986

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The passing of General Paolo Inzerilli, announced in recent hours by the Italian volunteer association "Stay Behind", marks the end of a central figure in the history of Italian intelligence services. Inzerilli, who served as Chief of Staff of SISMI and commanded the Gladio structure in Italy, left us at the age of 90. His legacy, although complex, was characterized by a constant commitment to national security and the defense of democratic principles.

Born in Milan on November 15, 1933, Inzerilli had a distinguished career in the Italian armed forces, becoming a member of the Alpini and assuming key roles in both SISMI and Gladio. From 1974 to 1986, he commanded Gladio, a secret paramilitary organization established to prepare Italy to resist potential invasions or uprisings by countries linked to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Subsequently, from 1989 to 1991, he was Chief of Staff of the Military Intelligence Services (SISMI).

What was the Gladio organization

Gladio was a paramilitary organization born from an agreement between the CIA and the Italian intelligence services, part of the operation of the same name aimed at preventing a possible Soviet or Warsaw Pact invasion in Western Europe. The group was distinguished by its sabotage, guerrilla, and psychological warfare operations behind enemy lines, acting in close synergy with intelligence services and other entities.

Beyond the threat of the Soviet Union, Italy and the Western bloc saw the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito and politically independent from the USSR, as a greater danger. Yugoslavia, in fact, aimed to expand its territory at the expense of Italy since 1943, particularly targeting the region of Venezia Giulia and the city of Trieste.

Although the term Gladio specifically refers to the Italian initiative within the broader "Stay-behind" program, the press has sometimes extended the use of this name to other similar operations in Europe. The network of stay-behind groups, conceived to act behind enemy lines in case of invasion, was widespread in almost all Western European countries during the Cold War period.

Structure of Gladio

On October 1, 1956, marked the birth of the V Section within the "R" Office of SIFAR, renamed S.A.D. (Special Studies and Personnel Training), with the specific mission of coordinating Operation Gladio. This section remained operational even with the subsequent evolution of SID, transforming in 1980 into the VII Division of SISMI, led by [General Giuseppe Santovito](#).

Under the aegis of S.A.D., the Saboteur Training Center (C.A.G.) and the secret Stay-behind Gladio structure were established. The latter was organized into various units and nuclei, including the Command Unit, information, propaganda, evasion and escape, and guerrilla nuclei, distributed across different Italian geographical areas, such as Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trieste, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, and the Lombardy Lakes, in addition to five Ready-to-Deploy Guerrilla Units positioned in strategically important regions.

A distinctive element was Gladio's equipment with a Dakota C47 aircraft, known as Argo 16, intended for transporting members to the C.A.G. of Capo Marrargiu for training. The aircraft crashed in 1973 in Porto Marghera under mysterious circumstances, which some attributed to sabotage, although it was officially considered an accident.

Between 1985 and 1987, new Special Training Centers (C.A.S.) were created, including the Libra Center in Brescia, the Pleiadi Center in Asti, and the Scorpione Center in Trapani. Originally intended for the training of Gladio members, these centers were later recognized as suitable for intelligence activities related to terrorism and organized crime, under the directive of Admiral Fulvio Martini, then director of SISMI.

In 1986, on the initiative of Paolo Inzerilli, then colonel and director of the VII Division of SISMI, the Special Operations Group (G.O.S.), also known as "Nucleo K" or "Italian Service Special Operators" (O.S.S.I.), was established. This group selected specialists in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla from the Armed Forces to train civilian members of Gladio, but was also mobilized for escort missions to prominent figures and during critical events, demonstrating the wide range of action and the various operational capabilities of Gladio in the context of the Cold War and beyond.

A complex legacy

The death of General Paolo Inzerilli closes a significant chapter in the history of Italian intelligence and defense. While his connection with Gladio remains a distinctive element of his biography, it is important to consider Inzerilli's entire career in the broader context of the security challenges Italy faced in the twentieth century. His legacy, like that of Gladio, is an integral part of the complex web of events that characterized the Cold War in Italy.