



Operation Wiseman: the raid by Italian Paratroopers in Kosovo in 2001 against subjects linked to al-Qaeda

Published on 17/09/2026

December 2001. Only three months have passed since the attacks of September 11th and the world has already changed.

In Afghanistan, war against al-Qaeda has begun. Western intelligence agencies are reconstructing networks, financing, contacts and organizations suspected of having supported, directly or indirectly, international terrorism.

Kosovo too, apparently distant from the images of the Twin Towers and the Afghan mountains, enters into that new hunt.

In Djakovica, in the western sector and in the area of responsibility of the Multinational Brigade West of KFOR, the **Task Force Falco** is deployed, constituted around the **186° Reggimento Paracadutisti "Folgore"**. The operational heart is represented by the men of the **5° Battaglione Paracadutisti "El Alamein"**, under the command of **Major Aldo Zizzo**.

They are Paratroopers who arrived in the Balkans for a security and stabilization mission.

But after September 11th the picture changed rapidly.

Information begins to circulate. Names, addresses, organizations. Some apparently humanitarian structures end up under observation by Western intelligence services.

One of these is the **Global Relief Foundation**, an Islamic charitable organization based in the United States and active in the Balkans as well, on which American authorities are focusing growing attention for possible links to jihadist extremism networks and environments.

Then the order comes.

14 December 2001: Operation Wiseman is launched

It is **14 December 2001**.

KFOR sets in motion a vast multinational operation.

The name is **Operation Wiseman**.

Italians, British and Spanish intervene against facilities and persons considered of interest in the context of investigations into international terrorism.

In **Djakovica** the Italian Paratroopers of the **5° Battaglione "El Alamein"** go into action.

It is not a normal patrol activity.

The objectives have already been identified. The facilities must be searched, documentation acquired and some persons detained.

One of the main objectives is the **Global Relief Foundation**.

The operation leads to the detention of **three men considered of particular investigative interest**.

Two are Iraqi citizens employed by the **Global Relief Foundation** and are detained at the organization's headquarters in Djakovica. The third is a Swedish citizen, linked to the **Kosovo Orphans Family Fund (KOFF)**, detained at the local headquarters of the organization, also in Djakovica.

For the Italian Paratroopers, however, the operation does not end with the detention.

First under Italian custody

The three are taken to the **Italian base in Djakovica**, headquarters of Task Force Falco.

It is there that they are initially taken into custody by Italian military personnel.

For several hours they remain inside the base of the Italian contingent, under the control of the Folgore men.

Then the Americans arrive, who take custody of the three detainees and transfer them to **Camp Bondsteel**, the main US military base of KFOR in Kosovo, in the area of **Uroševac/Ferizaj**, where they will be detained under US control for further investigations.

At the same moment, in the United States

What the Paratroopers are doing in Kosovo is not, however, an isolated episode.

While Operation Wiseman is launched in Djakovica, **in the United States federal authorities intervene simultaneously against the Global Relief Foundation.**

Always on **December 14, 2001**, the US Treasury Department orders the freezing of the organization's assets and documentation as part of an investigation into possible financial support for terrorist networks.

In the United States, offices are searched and documents are seized.

In the Balkans, at the same moment, KFOR intervenes on structures connected to the same organization.

It is therefore evident that Operation Wiseman does not originate as a local initiative.

It is part of a much broader and coordinated action, developed during the international mobilization following the attacks of September 11th.

Kosovo becomes one of the pieces of an investigation that crosses continents, apparently humanitarian organizations, money transfers and international contacts.

The Global Relief Foundation

The **Global Relief Foundation**, also known by the acronym GRF, was an American humanitarian organization active in numerous countries.

After September 11th, however, it came under the scrutiny of American authorities.

On December 14, 2001, its assets were frozen while investigations were ongoing.

The investigation continued in the following months.

In **2002 the United States formally designated the Global Relief Foundation as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist**, arguing that the organization had maintained financial and personal relations with individuals belonging to or close to al-Qaeda and other jihadist entities.

This element changes the perspective through which we read the operation.

Wiseman was therefore **a true counterterrorism operation against an organization that would subsequently be designated by the United States as a terrorist entity.**

The 5th Battalion "El Alamein"

For the men of the **5th Parachute Battalion "El Alamein"**, under the command of Major Aldo Zizzo, that day represents one of the least known episodes of the Italian mission in Kosovo.

Not a battle.

Not a firefight destined to enter the history books.

But an operation conducted in silence, at a moment when the entire Western security system was changing form.

The global war on terrorism had just begun.

The great military campaigns that would mark the following twenty years were still in their infancy.

Yet, in that December of 2001, Italian Paratroopers already found themselves within that new reality.

A story that remained in the shadows

Operation Wiseman remained almost unknown for years.

In public documents it appears as a brief search and detention operation conducted by KFOR against organizations suspected of links with international terrorism.

Behind those few lines, however, there were men, units, orders and a precise sequence of events.

The Paratroopers of the **186th Regiment "Folgore"** intervened in Djakovica.

They detained three men.

They brought them to the Italian base.

They held them at the **Task Force Falco**.

Then the Americans arrived and took them into custody.

On the same day, on the other side of the Atlantic, U.S. authorities intervened against the same organization that was at the center of the operation in Kosovo.

Almost twenty-five years later, this is perhaps the most significant aspect of Wiseman: it demonstrates how quickly, after September 11th, even a stabilization mission in the Balkans could transform itself into a piece of the new international offensive against terrorist networks.

Wiseman was a real counter-terrorism operation, against an organization that would later be designated by the United States as a terrorist entity.

And to remember an operation by the Folgore that remained, for almost a quarter of a century, at the margins of the news.