



Operation Smeraldo, when the Navy Raiders were close to Moro's hideout

Published on 16/03/2024

The memory of Aldo Moro's kidnapping, which occurred exactly 46 years ago, on March 16, 1978, remains an unresolved issue in Italian history. The intricate events surrounding this incident continue to raise questions and reflections. Among the many revelations and little-known details, a crucial episode emerges: the moment when the [Navy Raiders](#) approached the alleged hideout of the kidnappers.

On a night filled with tension, news spread that the place where Aldo Moro was held prisoner might have been identified, the then president of the Christian Democracy kidnapped by the Red Brigades in via Mario Fani, Rome. A rare act of heroism also emerged: a doctor from COMSUBIN, the Navy's raider unit, volunteered to protect Moro with his own body, if necessary.

The revelations about this operation came on June 10, 1991, thanks to the words of President Francesco Cossiga. The latter, during the fiftieth anniversary of the assaults carried out by underwater raiders against the British navy during World War II, revealed the existence of Operation Smeraldo. It was the activation of COMSUBIN's special forces to free Moro, based on

information indicating the location of his kidnapping.

[Documents filed with the Chamber of Deputies \(click here, page 19\)](#) confirm that on March 21, 5 days after the kidnapping, a joint operation was held between Cerenova, Sasso, and Furbara, on the Roman coast. Paratrooper Carabinieri and agents from the Rome police headquarters, supported by helicopters, tried to verify the reliability of information from confidential sources. The outcome was negative, and the intervention of COMSUBIN, the most equipped unit Italy had for hostage rescue, was not mentioned by Cossiga until thirteen years later. However, as we will see later, there are many doubts.

COMSUBIN had been on alert since the beginning of the kidnapping, ready to intervene in different areas, [as recalled in the hearing of April 11, 2014 \(click here, page 4\) by retired Admiral Oreste Tombolini \(then a very young officer\)](#) "...we were taken to different areas, a forest, a farmhouse but we didn't know where we really were and if it was an exercise or a real operation." "The order would come, we would take up arms and leave from Varignano - he would explain to investigators - It must have happened at least seven or eight times to board, even in the middle of the night." Despite the proximity to the presumed hideout of the kidnappers, the operation did not proceed, and the raid was canceled. When the president of the second Moro commission, Giuseppe Fioroni, asked him to clarify whether the March 21 event seemed like a real anti-terrorism intervention, he glossed over the details. Yet Cossiga thanked COMSUBIN with an enigmatic phrase: "We were not lucky, but our misfortune does not detract from your generosity and preparation."

Subsequent investigations into Moro's murder revealed traces of sand compatible with those of the coast between Ladispoli, Palo Laziale, and Fregene, on the clothes and the vehicle used to transport the body. **Who and why asked to cancel the COMSUBIN operation on March 21, 1978?**

The kidnapping of Aldo Moro remains a dark chapter in Italian history, marked by unresolved mysteries and unanswered questions. The events related to the Navy Raiders, ready to storm the kidnappers' hideout, are just part of a complex picture that continues to arouse interest and debate after 46 years.