

Gladio, Turkish Counter-Guerilla and Ergenekon, a devilish trio



In August 1990 Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti openly admitted for the first time what had long been denied: the existence of a secret army inside the Italian Secret Service (SIFAR) codenamed "Gladio," Latin for "double-edged sword."

Moreover, Andreotti also claimed that a network of secret, unofficial armies controlled by NATO and the US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been set up all across Europe. The British secret service, MI6, as Andreotti revealed, was also involved.

Up until today, a full investigation into these secret NATO armies, some of which also seem to have been linked to terrorism and crime, has not been carried out -- and Swiss historian and security expert Daniele Ganser says this is neglect with serious consequences. "Ergenekon could be an outcome of the old Turkish Counter-Guerilla," he says. In an exclusive interview with Today's Zaman, he explains the structure of these secret armies, what the "tension strategy" was during the Cold War and what it could be today.

"What we can definitely prove nowadays is the existence of these secret armies. And we have a good amount of knowledge on how they were structured," Ganser says.

Facing an increase in the popularity and strength of communist and socialist parties in some countries, like Italy and France, worries emerged in Washington and London that these countries' inner security could no longer be ensured. Secret, unofficial armies were then set up, Ganser says and adds: "NATO was simply afraid of being weakened from within."

Secret armies all across Europe

The network of secret armies, he says, spread across Western Europe in its entirety, including Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Luxemburg, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Greece -- and Turkey.

According to Ganser, in the event of a Soviet invasion, these secret, anti-communist soldiers would have operated behind enemy lines, strengthening and setting up local resistance movements in enemy-held territory, evacuating shot-down pilots and sabotaging occupying forces' supply lines and production centers.

The strategic planning came from London and Washington. NATO assumed the general coordination of all such behind-the-scenes organizations on an international level under the Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC) and the Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC),

linked to NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), which is always commanded by an American general, Ganser asserts, adding, "It is absolutely obvious that there were these meetings, even if NATO refuses to comment on Gladio today."

The secret armies were trained by British and US special forces. To ensure their anti-communist commitment, some members of the secret armies were recruited from the extreme-right margins of society. In Germany, former Nazis were active in the unofficial armies. The codenames for the armies varied from country to country; "Absalon" in Denmark, "Gladio" in Italy, "P26" in Switzerland, "ROC" in Norway and "SDRA8" in Belgium.

Gladio-like structures in Turkey

In Turkey a secret army was set up and codenamed "Counter-Guerrilla." "Today we definitely know about its existence," says Ganser.

Gen. Kemal Yılmaz, the chief of the special forces in Turkey at the time, officially confirmed on Dec. 3, 1990 the existence of Counter-Guerrilla. He explained that the "stay-behind" army was under the command of the Turkish Special Forces and had the task "to organize resistance in the event of a communist occupation."

"But though we know a lot of things, many of this secret army's activities and involvements remain in darkness," Ganser says. How strongly NATO and US intelligence backed and supported the use of terror in the countries in order to discredit the political left during the Cold War remains a subject of ongoing research. "Nonetheless, it is certain that at least some massacres ... [and] military actions had been organized, promoted or supported by men inside state institutions," Ganser states.

An "important source of evidence" supporting the theory that Counter-Guerrilla also engaged in torture, he points out, comes from Talat Turhan, a former Turkish general who said he had been tortured in a villa in Istanbul's Erenköy district by a team led by retired officer Eyüp Ozalkus, chief of the National Intelligence Organization's (MİT) interrogation team for the combat of communism. "They blindfolded me and bound my arms and feet. Then they told me that I was 'in the hands of the Counter-Guerrilla unit operating under the high command of the army outside the Constitution and the law.' They told me that they 'considered me their prisoner of war' and that I was 'sentenced to death'," Turhan later revealed.

However when Bülent Ecevit, after the Italian revelations of 1990, implied to the press that Counter-Guerrilla units might have been involved in domestic terror and announced he suspected Counter-Guerrilla involvement in the Taksim Square massacre in Istanbul in 1977 -- where half a million citizens had been fired upon by snipers during a protest rally on May 1, leaving 38 dead and hundreds injured -- acting Turkish Defense Minister Savaş Dönmez snapped, "Ecevit had better keep his ... mouth shut!"

Terrorist attacks were backed by state authorities

"Terror is an unbelievably strong means to manipulate and frighten the population," Ganser underlines. "The real victims of a terrorist attack are not those left dead -- the real victims are those people who are affected by becoming afraid. The public [will then] ... turn to the state to ask for greater security." Several Italian sources have confirmed this, among them Vincenzo Vinciguerra, a convicted right-wing terrorist who himself took part in this so-called "tension strategy" in which terror was manipulated to influence the political climate. "This is the political logic that lies behind all the massacres and the bombings which remain unpunished because the state cannot convict itself or declare itself responsible for what happened," Vinciguerra says.



It can be the state itself or a private group of people who try to force the government to act according to their will, to legitimize a war, for example, Ganser explains, adding that he “could well imagine” that Ergenekon is a kind of successor organization of the Turkish Counter-Guerilla of those days. “We know that these groups recruited heavily among the Turkish Grey Wolves [a youth group linked to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)],” he states. “As long as this original phenomenon is not fully examined, its subsequent structures will remain [a mystery], too.”

He also says he would “not be surprised” if some of the attacks allegedly perpetrated by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) are later revealed to have been the work of some clandestine Turkish organizations to legitimize Turkish military intervention. “Terror is a very powerful weapon for constructing enemies,” Ganser emphasizes.

However, he says, these are assumptions that need further investigation and what is really missing to that end is a parliamentary fact-finding commission. “Neither journalists nor scientists can do this work properly; what is really needed is the state’s engagement in the investigations. It is the legislature that must investigate the executive, it’s the job of the parliamentarians to shed light on this,” he concludes, saying that examining these kinds of secret armies is therefore the natural first step in approaching the problem of the “deep state.”

Who is Daniele Ganser?

Swiss historian Daniele Ganser currently teaches in Basel University’s history department and in previous years researched foreign and security policy at the renowned Swiss Federal Institute of Technology’s (ETH) Center for Security Studies and Military Academy. His important book “NATO’s Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and terrorism in Western Europe” was recently translated into Turkish. www.danieleganser.ch

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KRISTINA KAMP □ STANBUL