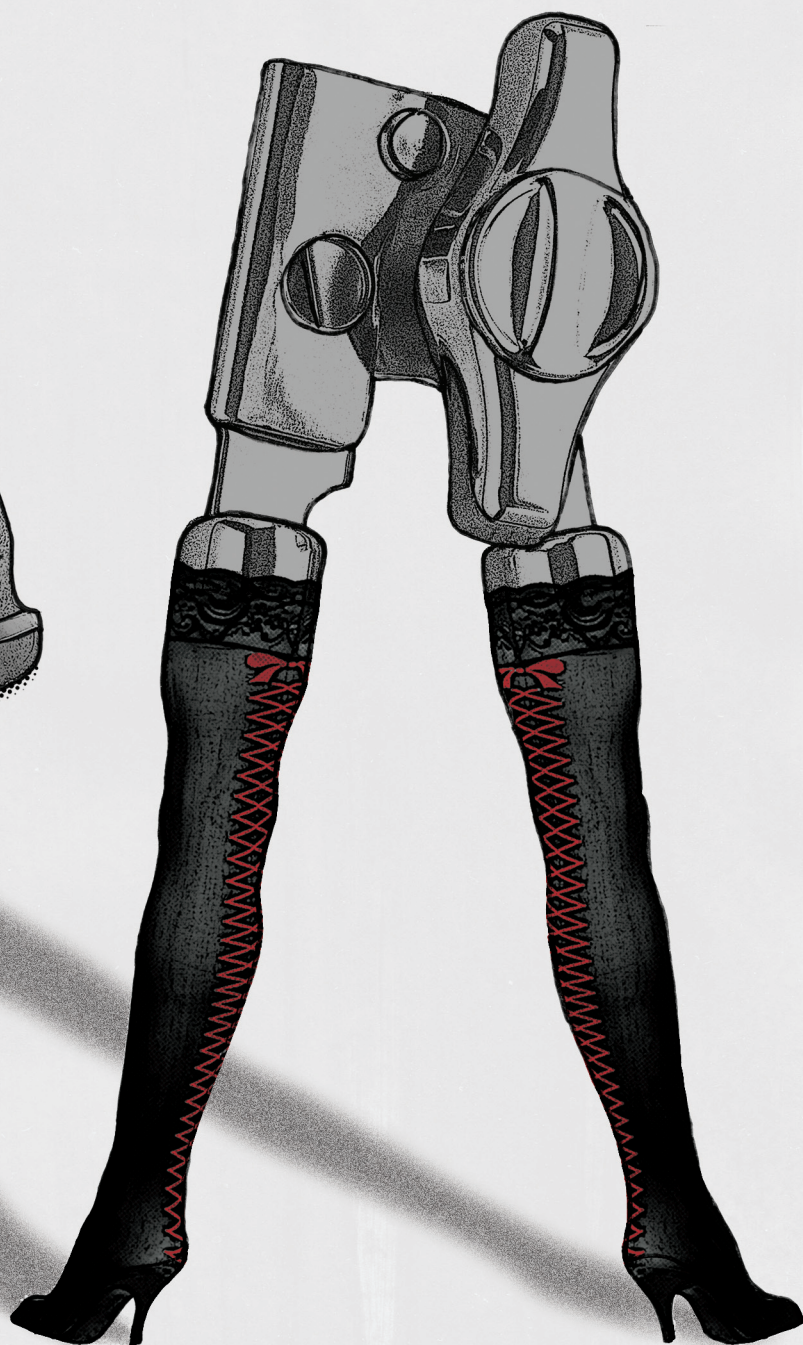
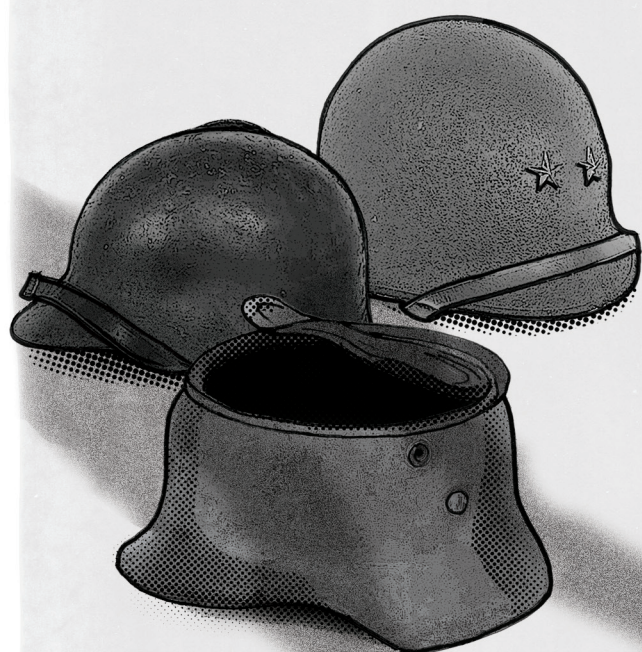


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by Martin Haidinger

*Daniele Ganser, Mats Deland*

## NATO'S SECRET ARMY IN NEUTRAL SWEDEN

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Zusammenfassung:

### **DIE GEHEIME ARMEE DER NATO IM NEUTRALEN SCHWEDEN**

Während des Kalten Krieges existierten in enger Verbindung mit der NATO diverse Geheimarmeen quer durch Westeuropa. Dieser Artikel rekonstruiert erstmals auf wissenschaftlicher Basis die Geschichte einer solchen Geheimarmee in Schweden. Er beruht auf kürzlich freigegebenen Akten der schwedischen Sicherheitspolizei sowie auf Erinnerungen einstmals führender Militärs und Politiker. Eingangs werden die Aufdeckung dieser sogenannten stay-behind Armeen 1990 sowie die Reaktionen der betroffenen neutralen Staaten und des EU-Parlaments dargelegt. Danach schwenkt der Beitrag auf Schweden, wo nach Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges organisierte schwedische Nazis und frühere Soldaten der Waffen-SS durch die schwedische Armee rekrutiert wurden, um ein Widerstandsnetzwerk aufzubauen. In diesem Zusammenhang geht der Artikel auf die Verwicklung amerikanischer Geheimdienste ein und folgt den Spuren des geheimen Netzwerks bis zur Ermordung des schwedischen Premierministers Olof Palme 1986. Die hier ausgebreiteten Quellen illustrieren einige jener Gefahren, welche der schwedischen Demokratie durch das geheime bewaffnete Netzwerk drohten; ferner wird die zweifelhafte politische Orientierung einiger Protagonisten belegt. Obwohl der Gegenstand zweifellos noch intensiver Erforschung bedarf, schlussfolgern die Autoren, dass die Geheimarmee – wenngleich ursprünglich zur Verteidigung des Landes im Fall einer feindlichen Invasion eingerichtet – letztlich alles andere als ein sicheres Netzwerk, sondern vielmehr eine Bedrohung für Schweden sowie eine Kompromittierung von dessen Neutralität darstellte.

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## THE DISCOVERY OF THE GLADIO NETWORK IN ITALY IN 1990

During the Cold War secret armies linked to NATO have existed across Western Europe. This remained a closely guarded secret until 1990, when the first branch of the international network was discovered in Italy. It was code-named “Gladio”, the Latin word for a short double-edged sword. It was Italian judge Felice Casson who discovered Gladio during summer 1990 in Rome while researching acts of right-wing terrorism in the archives of the Italian military secret service. Casson, to his great surprise, found out that Gladio had linked up with right wing extremists who had carried out terrorist operations which they had blamed on the Italian Communists and the political left in general. This “strategy of tension”, Casson explained to the BBC, aimed “to create tension within the country to promote conservative, reactionary social and political tendencies. While this strategy was being implemented, it was necessary to protect those behind it because evidence implicating them was being discovered. Witnesses withheld information to cover right-wing extremists.”<sup>1</sup> Amidst sharp public criticism Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti was forced to confirm the existence of Gladio. Andreotti explained that the network would be dissolved and insisted that similar secret armies existed in all other NATO countries. This allegation proved correct and subsequent research confirmed the existence of secret armies across Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The British press claimed the NATO secret armies were “the best-kept, and most damaging, political-military secret since World War II”.<sup>3</sup> Yet public attention at the time was not focused on Gladio, but on the Persian Gulf, as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein had just invaded Kuwait in August 1990. In the context of the Kuwait War the Gladio affair only made headlines for a very short time, and therefore still today many people are not aware that during the Cold War NATO operated secret stay-behind armies.

## PROTESTS FROM THE EU-PARLIAMENT

NATO’s stay-behind networks were run by the European military secret services in close cooperation with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also MI6). Members of the stay-behind networks trained together with US Green Berets and British Special Air Service (SAS).<sup>4</sup>

The stay-behind soldiers were armed with underground arms caches and prepared against a potential Soviet invasion and occupation of Western Europe. Furthermore the stay-behind networks prepared to fight the coming to power of Communist parties and other domestic “emergencies”, as a document dated June 1, 1959 of the Italian military secret service SIFAR confirmed.<sup>5</sup>

While the preparation for a Soviet invasion, the principal task of the stay-behind networks, has found much support in a Cold War context, the internal task, namely the interference with domestic affairs, has met sharp criticism when the stay-behind networks were discovered in 1990. The European Parliament on November 22, 1990 passed a very critical resolution on the Gladio affair. The parliamentarians said they were surprised by the revelations “by several European governments of the existence for 40 years of a clandestine parallel intelligence and armed operations organization in several Member States of the Community” which had “escaped all democratic controls”. The parliamentarians expressed their fear “that such clandestine networks may have interfered illegally in the internal political affairs of Member States” and therefore sharply condemned “the clandestine creation of manipulative and operational networks” and called “for a full investigation into the nature, structure, aims and all other aspects of these clandestine organizations or any splinter groups, their use for illegal interference in the internal political affairs of the countries concerned, the problem of terrorism in Europe and the possible collusion of the secret services of Member States or third countries.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the EU-Parliament had protested “vigorously at the assumption by certain US military personnel at SHAPE and in NATO of the right to encourage the establishment in Europe of a clandestine intelligence and operation network”, its call for a full investigation was never fulfilled, as both CIA and NATO refused even to comment. First, on November 5, 1990, senior NATO spokesman Jean Marcotta at SHAPE in Mons, Belgium had categorically denied any involvement: “NATO has never contemplated guerrilla war or clandestine operations; it has always concerned itself with military affairs and the defence of Allied frontiers.” Then, on November 6, another NATO spokesman admitted that NATO’s denial of the previous day had been false. The spokesman left journalists with a short communiqué, which said that NATO never commented on matters of military secrecy and that Marcotta should not have said anything at all.<sup>7</sup>

  
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 SERVIZIO INFORMAZIONI DELLE FORZE ARMATE  
 - Ufficio "R" - Sezione "SAD" -

Roma, li 1 Giugno 1959

LE "FORZE SPECIALI" DEL SIFAR E L'OPERAZIONE "GLADIO"

I. L'eventualità di una situazione di emergenza che coinvolga, in tutto o in parte, i territori dei Paesi della NATO ad opera di sovvertimenti interni o di forze militari di invasione è da tempo oggetto di studio e di conseguenti predisposizioni, alcune sul piano NATO, altre sul piano nazionale.

Sul piano NATO si registrano:

1. l'attività del C.P.G di Parigi (Clandestine Planning Committee) emanante da SHAPE, con funzione consultiva per il tempo di pace, rivolta a definire le possibilità di concorso, in tempo di guerra, alle operazioni di SACUR da parte dei servizi speciali delle Nazioni Alleate nel settore delle operazioni speciali;
2. alcuni incontri tra lo S.M.D. italiano e AFSOUTH in vista di studiare le possibilità di pianificazione delle forze clandestine in Italia;
3. l'invito rivolto anni addietro da SHAPE agli SS.MM. Na

~~VIETATA DIVULGAZIONE~~ ~~SEGRETTISSIMO~~  
 TOP SECRET

This formerly top secret Gladio document of the Italian military secret service SIFAR of June 1, 1959 confirmed that the secret army had the twofold task to fight a domestic enemy in case of "emergencies" as well as a potential Communist occupation of the country by the Red Army.

## THE SECRET ARMY IN SWITZERLAND

Following the discovery of stay-behind armies in NATO countries the sensitive question arose whether such stay-behind networks had also existed in the neutral countries Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and Finland. The evidence available shows that this was indeed the case. In Switzerland the stay-behind army was code-named P26. It had prepared for a Soviet invasion and occupation of Switzerland and cultivated close contacts to the British MI6.<sup>8</sup> Secret arms caches were spread across the country. When the network

was discovered in 1990 the Swiss Parliament carried out a parliamentary investigation and published a public report on the history and structure of P26. The investigation revealed that the Swiss military secret service UNA (Untergruppe Nachrichtendienst und Abwehr) had set up the stay-behind with the support of the Defence Department. Chief of Staff Hans Senn, the highest military officer of Switzerland, defended the secret army and explained that "the Chief of Staff is responsible for war readiness on operative and material levels", and argued that "resistance preparations are only beneficial if total

secrecy can be guaranteed.” They had only acted with the best of motives, Senn stressed: “We have done it. Had we not done it, we would have been accused of dereliction of duty in case of an emergency.”<sup>9</sup>

Senator Carlo Schmid, the President of the Swiss parliamentary investigation into P26, had a different perspective. He did not doubt the noble motives of Hans Senn, but nevertheless stressed that it is not admissible to set up secret armies in a democratic country which operate outside the control of parliament: “I feel sorry for the Chiefs of Staff and the Federal Councillors, who certainly only wanted the best for our nation, and who now have to recognise that there has been considerable wrongdoing”, Schmid concluded.<sup>10</sup>

### THE SECRET ARMY IN FINLAND

In August 1991 a Swedish radio station revealed that also Finland had had a stay-behind resistance organization. Finland’s Defence Minister, Elisabeth Rehn, called these revelations “a fairy-tale”, adding cautiously “or at least an incredible story, of which I know nothing.”<sup>11</sup> Others who knew more on stay-behind in Finland included CIA officer Dave Whipple, who from 1970 to 1976 had headed the CIA station in Helsinki. In 1995 Norwegian journalists Gerhard Helskog and Finn Sjøe visited the retired CIA officer in Washington, where Whipple confirmed that he had helped running the Finnish stay-behind network with “money, equipment, communication and support” in order to be ready in the event of a Soviet invasion. That the Finnish Defence Ministry knew little of the secret army did not come as a surprise to Whipple who claimed that “as a rule it was not the host governments who organised the networks, but intelligence people with whom we had close contact and cooperation.” These people kept the secret: “The people who joined these networks were personally recommended by leaders of the local intelligence service. They knew how to keep their mouths shut”, said Whipple. “They knew how to live according to the ‘need to know’ principle, and not to talk about what they were dealing with.”

According to Whipple “these stay-behind networks developed into a very, very good assurance” and could also have been activated in case of a domestic emergency situation. The CIA was “worried what would happen if the Communists would gain power in any of the countries where we had erected

stay-behind networks. If people in the government knew of these networks, and if the government surrendered to the Communists, then the government could identify the members of the network. But if the networks were only known by the people of the secret service, then there was little probability that this would happen.”<sup>12</sup>



Finland’s Defence Minister Elisabeth Rehn called the revelations “a fairy-tale, or at least an incredible story, of which I know nothing”. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

### THE SECRET ARMY IN AUSTRIA

When in 1990 in other countries secret armies were discovered, the Austrian Government firmly insisted that such a secret network did not exist in Austria. “Does your ministry have any knowledge on activities of a Gladio secret service or some other NATO-linked secret service on Austrian territory?” parliamentarian Peter Pilz of the Austrian Green Party had asked the Austrian Chancellor, the Austrian Minister for Home Affairs, the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Austrian Defense Minister. This important question was answered with a short but misleading “No” by all authorities. Only Defense Minister Werner Fasslabend cautiously added that “in the interest of national security, matters of the intelligence services are generally not suited to be dealt with publicly in the context of an answer to a parliamentary inquiry.”<sup>13</sup>





Austrian Defence Minister Werner Fasslabend argued against discussing the work of intelligence services in public. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Five years later the US daily *Boston Globe* revealed that also Austria had been part of the Gladio network and that secret CIA arms caches were still hidden in Austrian mountain areas. US Ambassador to Austria, Swanee Hunt, offered her apologies to the Austrian Government and declared that “in the context of the Cold War” the CIA arms caches “would make perfectly good sense”, stressing how sorry she was that “the Austrian Government, through our bureaucratic error, had not been officially informed.”<sup>14</sup> Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky was not amused and sharply criticised the violation of Austria’s permanent neutrality.<sup>15</sup> Yet Richard Helms, Director of the CIA from 1966 to 1973, rejected this criticism and claimed that the Austrian Government had been well informed of the top secret operation. “The entire Austrian Government from Chancellor Leopold Figl [in office from 1945 to 1953] onwards knew of these arms caches and the whole operation. What the Americans have done here was highly welcome to the Austrian Government. The government was not only informed of the arms caches but also [...] of the stay-behind operation.”<sup>16</sup>

## THE CREATION OF THE SWEDISH FASCIST STAY-BEHIND SVEABORG

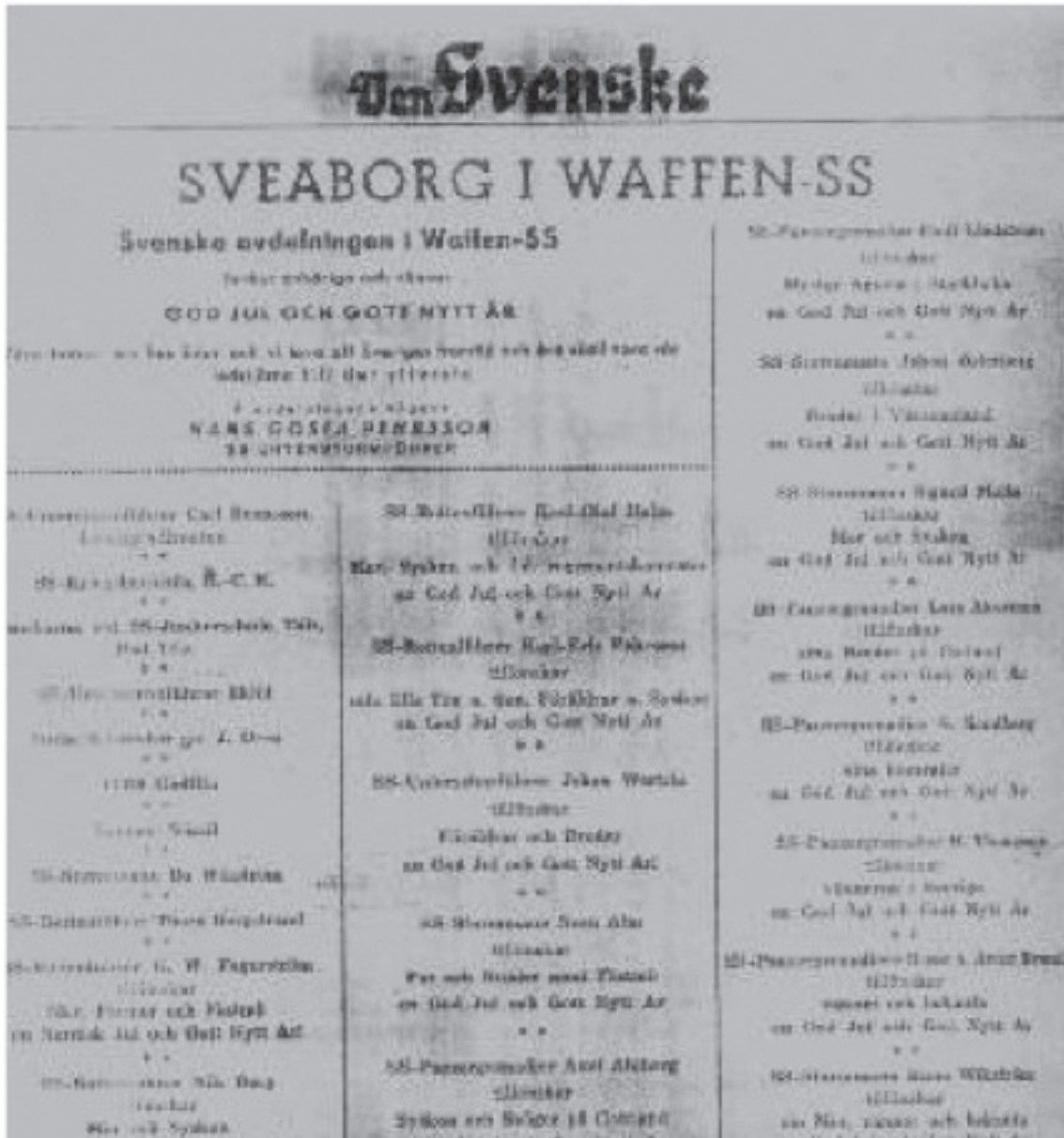
Neutral Sweden was never invaded during World War II, yet fear of invasion from both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany was widespread. Already during the war some Swedes had taken part in Finland’s two wars against the USSR. The roots of the Swedish stay-behind army reach back to a group among these Swedish veterans, who took part in the attack on the Soviet Union 1941-1944 (the so-called Continuation War). On August 3, 1941, this group of Swedish volunteers in the Finnish army had gathered near a grenade crater on the Finnish front at Hangö where they had formed a Kameraden-society called Sveaborg. All members were convinced anti-Communists, many had sympathies for Nazi Germany and some subsequently even joined Hitler’s Waffen-SS divisions to fight against the USSR.<sup>17</sup>

Next to their anti-Communist orientation the members of Sveaborg shared a racial ideology. Sveaborg was a subsidiary of the Swedish Nazi Party *Svensk-socialistisk samling*, also called the Lindholm Nazis after their leader, Sven-Olof Lindholm. Its members were racists in the strict sense of the word as they were convinced of the Nazi ideology which stressed the superiority of the Nordic race, a subsection of the “Aryan” white European population. According to the Nazis the white Europeans of the Nordic race – which next to the Germans included the Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, Icelanders, English and the Dutch – were superior to all other races and as the “master race” were entitled to world domination. The name Sveaborg, meaning “Swedish fortress”, highlighted the anti-Communist orientation of the group and was taken from a Swedish fortification on an island near Helsinki built in the 18th century which had been besieged and conquered by the Russians in 1808. During the Civil War in Finland in 1918 Sveaborg had served as a concentration camp for Finnish Red Guardists, many of whom had died on Sveaborg of starvation and illnesses, and in the Finnish-Soviet War Soviet forces had bombed the fortress.

When World War II was over and Hitler was defeated, the members of Sveaborg went underground and set up a secret stay-behind army in neutral Sweden. Otto Hallberg was the first leader of Sveaborg and served also as the representative of the party leadership among the top Sveaborg activists.<sup>18</sup> Hallberg edited

the party's paper *Den svenske folksocialisten* and in the years after the war travelled through Sweden and met both veterans from the Finnish and German wars and other persons that shared his ideology and had been recommended as trustworthy anti-Communists in order to recruit them into the secret stay-behind

army.<sup>19</sup> In its underground continuation Sveaborg “considered itself to be a secret unit whose foremost task was to fight the enemy within and without”, according to Heléne Löw of the History Department of Uppsala University. The enemy had always been clearly identified as Communism.<sup>20</sup>



Otto Hallberg, the first leader of Sveaborg, recruited Nazis into the Swedish secret army and edited the newspaper *Den svenske folksocialisten*. The picture shows the Christmas Greetings from the Sveaborg detachment in Waffen-SS, published in December 1941.

At the same time Army Major Anders Grafström, an adventurous anti-Communist and hard-boiled officer, had been appointed by the Swedish Defense Staff to set up an official secret army as part of the Swedish military. Grafström knew Hallberg from the war. He had led the company where Hallberg had served at the Hangö front, and subsequently had functioned as a link between the Swedish Defence Staff and the Finnish and German intelligence units

in the north of Finland and Norway. Like Hallberg he travelled throughout the country, backed by the state, and set up arms caches for the Swedish secret army. The individuals recruited by Grafström were found within the same ideologically rather narrow circle of anti-Communist veterans from the Finnish wars and Waffen-SS, where also Otto Hallberg had been recruiting his men. Unsurprisingly, it did not take long before the two networks were entangled.

When across Western Europe the secret armies were discovered in 1990 some observers criticised the fact that in Sweden the secret army had had its origins in a Nazi Party. An unnamed former NATO intelligence operative criticised in the anti-Fascist magazine *Searchlight* that “right-wing extremists in Sweden were part of the stay-behind set-up and I cannot understand why the Swedish authorities never took a closer look at the organization.”<sup>21</sup>

### THE DISCOVERY OF THE SWEDISH SECRET ARMY AND THE HALLBERG TRIAL OF 1952

Historians Lars Gyllenthal and Lennart Westberg have been able to carry out interviews with former members of the Swedish stay-behind network. One of their sources is Elis Höglund, a veteran of the war. Höglund explained that he and Anders Grafström and other former Waffen-SS volunteers had taken part in a meeting in 1947 in the localities of the Manhem Society in Stockholm. The Manhem Society was at this point well known as a Swedish center for the surviving parts of the Nazi movement all over Europe.<sup>22</sup> At this secret meeting the former company officer of the SS-division “Nordland”, Hans-Gösta Pehrsson, had according to Höglund been designated as leader of those about ten Swedish SS-veterans who had been contacted by the Defence Staff to be included in the stay-behind movement.<sup>23</sup> It is not fully clear how the Swedish Defence Ministry judged the presence of Fascists in the stay-behind and how well the Defence Ministry was informed. Of course, as in all other countries of Western Europe, the idea had been that knowledge about the secret armed anti-Communist groups should be kept within a very limited circle.<sup>24</sup> Yet already in May 1950 the Swedish security police was well-informed of the networks and came to the conclusion that the Swedish stay-behind was operational. The security police recorded in a secret memorandum: “Since a short while ago an organization exists, which is hostile to Communists and which has taken upon itself on the one hand to discover the fifth column activities of Communists and Communist agents, and on the other to prepare for guerilla warfare if the Russians would occupy our country.”<sup>25</sup>

When the security police questioned Grafström about the secret army, Grafström said that the movement would be abolished, “as it has been shown that

it can not be kept secret. Information about it has come to the knowledge not only of the police but also others.” At the same time Grafström stressed that originally the idea had been “that the movement would receive weapons as well at training from the Army Staff” and that it would thereafter function as a secret branch of the Defence Ministry.<sup>26</sup> Yet some officials within the Swedish Interior Ministry and the Defence Ministry seem to have had their doubts about the secret anti-Communist Nazi groups. When in January 1951 a branch of the Swedish stay-behind was discovered in Karlskoga, Minister of the Interior Eije Mossberg gave the order to close it down immediately, adding that “if the Communists would get wind of this, they would use it without end.”<sup>27</sup> And also the Defence Staff in May 1951 was worried when it concluded in a secret memorandum that “an organised resistance movement already is in place, mostly recruited from ‘Swedish’ ex-SS-men and Nazis. If this is the only organised resistance movement left in an emergency situation, we run the risk that such elements will take the lead in the struggle against the occupation power.”<sup>28</sup>

In early 1952 the Security Department at the Defence Staff received a complaint about Otto Hallberg, who in his home in Uppsala was lecturing students at the army NCO Academy. The complaint led to an order to start bugging his home.<sup>29</sup> It seems that the military had placed an informer among the students, because on May 13 a full report on Hallberg’s activities was delivered to the police. Hallberg was also brought in for questioning, but set free again.<sup>30</sup> While the security police continued its routine surveillance of Hallberg and his stay-behind army, County Prosecutor Åke Pontén in Uppsala contacted Hallberg and asked him to write a declaration of considerable size about the aims of the secret organization, which Pontén then passed on both to the Defence Staff and to Interior Minister Gunnar Hedlund. These contacts to the government seem to have boosted Hallberg’s already quite considerable self-confidence as he judged them as a sign of support for his secret network. In a conversation with the security police in September 1952, Hallberg bragged that his contact was extremely influential: “This man almost dominates over [Minister of Defence Per Edvin] Sköld and is very powerful. The man puts it in this way about Sköld: ‘Otto, I can very well speak with Sköld, but he will have the same view, yes the same idea about this that I have.’”<sup>31</sup>



The scarce data available suggests that by mid-October 1952 Otto Hallberg was considered a security risk for the Swedish state. Security police Lieutenant Otto Danielsson reported that Hallberg was both entertaining plans of taking over power in Sweden (in the event that the “Government would play the role of a puppet in a string”), and was performing intelligence activities.<sup>32</sup> The day after he was called in for questioning by Pontén in Uppsala and immediately arrested, on October 15, 1952. Hallberg was not sent to prison. Instead, after five days of questioning, the Swedish authorities let him go. The decision to let him get away with the whole affair had been taken already before the trial, with the decision not to prosecute him for illegal intelligence gathering. The law that was chosen for the trial, the ban against paramilitary organizations from the early 1930s (Criminal Law 9:7), was almost impossible to convict with. The primary court simply concluded that there had not been any organization in a legal sense.<sup>33</sup> The secondary court had a slightly different opinion, acknowledging that actually there had been an organization, but focused instead on its aims. Although it concluded, “this organization easily could have found itself in opposition to activities conducted by the state, and since this is not desirable from the perspective of the general interest”, it could not be legally proven that an armed uprising actually had been intended.<sup>34</sup> Although Hallberg walked off free, his fall from grace was hard, and many claimed that after the trial he was a broken man. Hallberg died in 1986.<sup>35</sup>

### THE CIA AND WILLIAM COLBY IN SWEDEN IN THE EARLY 1950s

For the period after Hallberg’s trial the sources on the secret army become scarcer. This may, but must not indicate that loosely talking right-wing extremists were less dominant within the movement. An important source for the 1950s are the memoirs of William Colby who in 1973 had been nominated by US President Richard Nixon to become Director of the CIA. Amidst Nixon’s Watergate crime, the CIA putsch in Chile and the exposure of CIA assassinations operations, Colby was forced to resign prematurely and in an attempt to enhance the compromised image of the CIA in his memoirs in 1978 described the stay-behind operation in Sweden in some detail. According to Colby it had been CIA Covert Action

Director Frank Wisner who had sent young CIA agent Colby in April 1951 to the Swedish CIA headquarters in the US embassy in Stockholm, then headed by US Ambassador Walton Butterworth. From there Colby operated until summer 1953 and helped in the clandestine erection of stay-behind networks under the command of CIA Western Europe Chief Gerry Miller, and Lou Scherer, Head of CIA’s Western Europe Division’s Scandinavian Branch.<sup>36</sup>

Miller informed Colby that in Sweden “some initial planning” had already been done while insisting that the task had to be carried out “with the utmost secrecy”. Operating from Stockholm Colby, as he described it, at all times limited “access to information about what I was doing to the smallest possible coterie of the most reliable people, in Washington, in NATO, and in Scandinavia”.<sup>37</sup> Colby, according to his own testimony, set up training programs for resistance leaders, developed scenarios for a variety of guerilla actions and figured out how long it would take to put the nets into operation and how much the whole thing would cost, so the amounts could be budgeted. “I made enormous demands on CIA’s logistics and procurement offices during those months”, Colby relates. The secret hand of the CIA had to remain hidden as much as possible and thus Colby developed plans on “the training to be given Scandinavian trainers, who in turn would train guerrillas so they would not know of the American participation”. Obviously, as Colby describes it, the CIA “stay-behind preparations in Scandinavia might be exposed if I was too readily identified as a CIA employee there”, and hence as most CIA officers in US embassies across the world a cover name was designed and Colby officially worked as a “Foreign Service Reserve Officer” in Stockholm.<sup>38</sup>

Colby in his memoirs does not say whether he recruited Swedish Nazis into the secret armies. But an unnamed former NATO intelligence officer in the 1990s explained that right-wing extremists were dominant in stay-behinds in so many countries because they knew how to use arms and explosives and were militant anti-Communists. “The choice of Sveaborg was a logical one for the CIA”, said the NATO intelligence officer, “because elsewhere in Europe Nazis were also being recruited as the most reliable anti-Communists.”<sup>39</sup>



William Colby (center), Director of the CIA 1973-76, was directly involved with setting up the stay-behind armies in Sweden. The picture shows him with President Gerald Ford (right) and incoming DCI George Bush (left). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

### WHO CONTROLLED THE SECRET SOLDIERS?

As the Swedish Parliament was not informed about the stay-behind networks, there existed no parliamentary control of the secret soldiers. Thus it was left to the CIA and selected Swedes to control and supervise the network, yet it was not always clear who was in charge. In 1953, upon replacing Smith as Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles came for a short visit to Scandinavia and inspected, among other things, also the CIA stay-behind net and controlled the cooperation with the local secret services. At the time one of the primary contact officers of the CIA in Sweden was Thede Palm, since 1946 the Chief of the Foreign Section of Sweden's military secret service (Militära Utrikespionaget/T-Kontoret). The scarce data available shows that relations between the CIA and the local secret service were not always free of troubles, above all because also in Sweden the CIA insisted to be in control of the right-wing soldiers. It was in this context that Colby specifically requested that the Swedish military secret service should come under the umbrella of the CIA. But Thede Palm, according to Colby, strongly objected to this, above all because he "did not want that the Swedish stay-behind organization should come under CIA control". As the tensions heightened, Palm criticised that Colby had travelled to Washington in order to brief CIA headquarters on the Swedish secret army and clandestine operations without informing Palm. After this criticism Palm was expelled from the Swedish stay-behind group.

Palm himself explained in his memoirs two decades later that it had been the US which had started the building of stay-behind networks in Sweden after the war. "Håkan, not the correct name, was an officer in the reserve. As it seemed, he had met me during the war, although I could not recall this", Palm relates in his memoirs. "He came looking for me in 1946, or possibly the year after. During a journey he had met an American. He had been contacted by this man and someone else and they wanted to hire him to build up some kind of resistance movement in Sweden. The idea was to establish a net of contacts in Sweden – which doubtlessly was supposed to be occupied by the Russians – in order to take care of American airmen that had been shot down over Swedish territory. They would get help to get away from the Russians and back to the West, perhaps Norway would suffice. Håkan probably understood the difficulties but considered it to be a good thing to do this and he was willing to try. It was the first time that I heard about this system, which the American Air Force had put very high on its list of priorities, among its preparations for war."<sup>740</sup>

Officer Palm, who meanwhile has died, was interviewed in the 1990s on his relationship with the CIA. He clearly remembered his expulsion but said the concerned officer "did this in such a stylish manner that we remained friends also during all those years which followed."<sup>741</sup> In the end, as in Norway, control over the secret armies was given to the CIA and the Pentagon in Washington. Colby in his memoirs confirmed that the chiefs of the Scandinavian stay-behind networks "agreed to turn over heavily sealed lists of the members of their nets" to the CIA "for safekeeping in the event they were forced to destroy their own copies to keep them from the Russians." "I made it clear to Washington", Colby highlighted with reference to the lists, "that these must be kept away from our 'flaps and seals' experts, who claimed that they could open and reseal such material without ever showing a trace, since we could not risk any violation of the confidence we had built, despite the hard-nosed professional doctrine that all is fair, or at least done, in intelligence work."<sup>742</sup>

### ALVAR LINDENCRONA AS NEW HEAD OF SWEDISH STAY-BEHIND

Colby left Stockholm in summer 1953 for Rome and continued his non-orthodox warfare against

the Communists in Italy. According to journalists Oscar Hedin and Thomas Kanger it was Anders Grafström, who after the Hallberg verdicts made sure that the Swedish stay-behind was strengthened. Allegedly “after the clean-up the build-up of the network came into full swing” and the Swedes attempted to wrestle control over the secret army at least partly back from the CIA. In order to do this the Swedish stay-behind network was divided into three branches. Major Grafström headed the first department and dealt with military questions, including the arms caches, the recruitment and the training. Thede Palm led the second department and organized the evacuation routes and the exile bases. A third person on the operational staff level, not known by name, was responsible for propaganda and psychological warfare.<sup>43</sup> On top of this structure a new stay-behind council was created presided by private businessman Alvar Lindencrona. Lindencrona as new head of the Swedish stay-behind seems to have watched over the three stay-behind commanders and decided upon the strategic guidelines. Money was raised through private donors from the main corporates, in what was called “fadderrörelsen” (The Godfather Movement).<sup>44</sup>

Leading a double life, Lindencrona publicly was a well-known businessman, while he secretly occupied the highest position as Director of Sweden’s most secret army. Until 1964 Lindencrona was Vice-Director with Thule Assurances, and thereafter sat on the managing board of several prominent large Swedish firms including Saab-Scania. His work for the International Chamber of Commerce made it possible for him to travel inconspicuously to the United States and Britain for briefings and instructions from CIA and MI6. Lindencrona seems to have directed the Swedish secret army until 1978 when he retired. He died three years later. He allegedly was succeeded by businessman Curt Steffan Giesecke who directed the Swedish secret army until it was exposed in 1990.<sup>45</sup>

“One of the most important functions of the resistance organization was to secure, in case of occupation, radio contact with the big CIA headquarters in London”, Hedin and Kanger, based on interviews with military officials, reported in 1990. Other tasks included the preparation of exile routes and an exile base in London, where the Swedish Royal Family and segments of the Swedish Government and military command would have been transferred in case of invasion. Resources includ-

ing aeroplanes, submarines and cars were ready for this task. “The most important thing was that CIA remained in contact with the Swedish resistance organization”, an unnamed source commented the delicate relationship of the neutral country with the world’s most notorious secret service. “Only the CIA had access to military warfare material and means of transport to such a degree, that the Swedish resistance could have been supplied.” The British, as another unnamed source revealed, did not have the same material strength: “MI6 is, after all, a smaller organization which could not have spared such a lot of material for Scandinavia only.”<sup>46</sup>

Under the direction of Lindencrona, secret stay-behind meetings were held in the offices of Thule/Scandia Assurances in Stockholm in today’s Scandia House, and in Lindencrona’s private flat at Stockholm’s posh central Stureplan square. The conspirators included members of the Swedish business, political, and military elite. Among them was Tage Erlander, Social Democrat Swedish Prime Minister from 1946 to 1969. It was Erlander who in 1957 handed political responsibility for the Swedish stay-behind to Social Democrat Minister of the Interior, Rune Johansson.<sup>47</sup> During the clandestine stay-behind meetings Rune Johansson was regularly accompanied by his secretary Carl Persson, who later became the chief of the Swedish national police. Other conspirators participating in Lindencrona’s meetings included members of the Swedish military such as Stig Synnergren and Carl Eric Almgren, as well as members of the union and business elite including LO (Swedish TUC) Chair Arne Geijer, TCO (white-collar union) Chair Valter Åman, and Director of Employers’ Organization Bertil Kugelberg.<sup>48</sup> The decisions taken during the clandestine meetings were forwarded to the headquarters of the Swedish secret army located at Bergsgatan 16 in Stockholm. A door hidden behind a mirror was the entrance to the secret rooms from where Colonel Grafström directed much of the recruitment and training, assisted by military officers Sune Gladh and Gunnar Areskoug and several secretaries.

## SECRET SOLDIERS DON’T TALK

As there has been no parliamentary investigation into the Swedish stay-behind army nor a public governmental report, it is very difficult to reconstruct the history of the Swedish secret army which existed in a parallel world unknown to ordinary citizens. In most



cases the secret soldiers did not talk and took their secrets to their graves. Many of those involved are dead now. Yet the few exceptions which exist allow for some insights into the recruitment and training. Among the few secret soldiers who testified publicly about their time in the Swedish stay-behind is Reinhold Geijer. A former Swedish military professional, Geijer as of the 1950s not only directed the Storlien Mountain Hotel but also secretly operated as a local stay-behind commander. Almost 80 years-old Geijer in 1996 on Swedish television revealed how he had been recruited into the Swedish secret army. In 1957 officer Stig Waldenström had called him, who together with Axel Brunnström had functioned as a recruitment officer for Colonel Anders Grafström. A meeting followed the phone call on the next day. "I met Anders Grafström personally. He wanted me to become regional leader of the three areas Jämtland, Härjedalen and Västerbotten", Geijer remembered. "And I agreed. Later I was also responsible for Västernorrland."<sup>49</sup> At the stay-behind headquarters in Stockholm, Geijer in clandestine meetings met with other Swedish regional network leaders. They were allegedly at least a dozen men, all of whom had cover names, the one of Geijer himself being Robert Axelsson. In order to keep secrecy as tight as possible the secret soldiers knew each other by cover names only. Geijer himself had only limited knowledge about the entire operation. He knew that the clandestine headquarters in Stockholm also employed four communication specialists. "One of them was always present, when I came by", Geijer remembered. "With whom they were in contact I do not know. But I assume that it was the command centre in England."<sup>50</sup>

While some secret soldiers like Geijer spoke out publicly, others planted information to be discovered after their death. Relatives of a Swedish businessman of the Småland area were mightily surprised when after his death they found out about his double life as a secret soldier of which they had been completely unaware. They discovered a letter and a series of documents which they could hardly understand on the Småland and Östergötland stay-behind branches, with sketches of geographic areas and arms caches, as well as lists of stay-behind members and potential recruits. Furthermore the relatives of the deceased discovered secret rooms, well hidden behind fake walls, in two of the country houses of the family, designed and equipped as local resistance headquar-

ters from where exfiltration and sabotage operations could have been directed. "I always thought that all these Sunday excursions were for our benefit", the daughter of the secret soldier explained to the press with disappointment and disbelief. "And now I learn that these excursions have not been mere amusement. And although what he did was honourable, I now feel misled. My father had other sides, of which I have never heard." Another secret soldier who had served in the fire brigade in Skåne left his daughter in similar disbelief. "I have never learned anything of all this", she declared to the press and insisted that the name of her father must remain secret: "Who knows where the discovery of military secrets will lead to?"<sup>51</sup>

The documents found revealed, that the Småland businessman had headed a clandestine unit supported by a staff of seven to nine men, who included a radio transmissions expert, a police expert, and a journalist. With this staff he ran five regional subgroups, each responsible for a large territory. In order to keep the network as secret as possible, these five subgroups were again each subdivided into three local units, which were four to ten men strong. His network in the Småland and Östergötland region hence featured a maximum of ten members in 15 subgroups and thus a total strength of 150 men. "We worked in the same manner, but I had fewer groups under my command", Geijer explained upon seeing the documents of his fellow secret soldier. "I had eight cells amounting to a total of 60 to 70 men. My people were also less well trained." According to Geijer, the recruits of the deceased were rather old: "The men he chose, there were no women at all, often had a scout background, and were rather old, some around 45, to be future guerilla fighters." The combined networks of the deceased secret soldier and that of Geijer hence amounted to over 200 men. As there had existed at least a dozen Swedish regional network leaders like Geijer and the deceased businessman the total national strength of the Swedish Gladio network can be estimated to have counted between 1,000 and 2,000 men. Some say this figure is too high: "I estimate that there have been a total of 300 to 400 members in the whole country", Carl Erik Almgren claimed upon the exposure of the conspiracy.<sup>52</sup> As most stay-behind members took their secrets to their graves, we still do not know how many men and maybe also women were members of the Swedish stay-behind. As of now, no list with all the names of the members, dead or alive, is publicly available.

Whether the Sowjets had a list of the members of the Swedish stay-behind and whether the Soviet Secret Service KGB had been able to infiltrate the Swedish stay-behind, is still not clear. A British MI6 agent, stationed at the British embassy in Stockholm, as of 1968 was suspected to have been a Soviet spy. With some probability this double agent had betrayed the Swedish stay-behind to Moscow, which of course in the case of invasion would have been a catastrophe. The Swedes took this potential betrayal very seriously and carried out an effort which “led to a total restructuring of the Swedish stay-behind”, according to Hedin and Kanger.<sup>53</sup>

### **WAS THE SWEDISH STAY-BEHIND LINKED TO NATO?**

The most sensitive dimension of the Swedish secret army was that despite the neutrality of the country it had, according to CIA planning, been linked to NATO. “These nets had to be coordinated with NATO’s plans, their radios had to be hooked to a future exile location, and the specialized equipment had to be secured from CIA and secretly cached in snowy hideouts for later use”, William Colby explained in his memoirs. Aware of the sensitivity of the affair, Colby, with implicit reference to Sweden, relates that he could only proceed with this secret task “alone or with, at best, ‘unofficial’ local help, since the politics of those governments barred them from collaborating with NATO, and any exposure would arouse immediate protest from the local Communist press, Soviet diplomats and loyal Scandinavians who hoped that neutrality or nonalignment would allow them to slip through a World War III unharmed.”<sup>54</sup>

The discoveries of the stay-behind armies in many countries of Western Europe led to the exposure of NATO’s formerly top secret Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC) and the Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC). NATO, to this very day, refuses to comment on Gladio, ACC and CPC. But according to the accounts of former members of the Italian military intelligence service, representatives of the European secret armies met regularly in the clandestine NATO groups to discuss unconventional warfare. Italian General Paolo Inzerilli, who commanded the Italian Gladio stay-behind force from 1974 to 1986 and later wrote a book on the topic, highlighted that the “omnipresent United States” dominated the CPC. The CPC, as Inzerilli related, had been founded “by

order of the Supreme Commander of NATO Europe”, traditionally a US General. “It was the interface between NATO’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and the Secret Services of the member states as far as the problems of non-orthodox warfare were concerned.”<sup>55</sup>

The ACC, which was created after the CPC, seems to have been a much less formal and hierarchical organization. Inzerilli claims that “relations in the ACC (Allied Clandestine Committee) were completely different” from those in the CPC. “The atmosphere was clearly more relaxed and friendly compared to the CPC”. The ACC, founded by “a specific order from SACEUR to CPC”, supposedly “became a sub branch” of the CPC.<sup>56</sup> Apparently, the body served above all as a forum in which know-how on stay-behind operations and secret warfare was exchanged between the numerous heads of intelligence. “It was of reciprocal interest. Everybody knew that if for an operation he lacked an expert in explosives or in telecommunications or in repression, he could request them from another country without difficulty, because the agents had been trained in the same techniques and used the same materials.”<sup>57</sup> The data available now suggests that also stay-behind soldiers from neutral Sweden seem to have participated secretly in NATO’s Gladio command centre ACC. “The Swedish leaders have participated in the meetings of the ACC/SOPS”, Hedin and Kanger related without revealing their sources – the interviewed veterans were at the time still bound by secrecy regulations. “But they had a sort of observance status only. As for Sweden this was no disadvantage, because NATO contributed anyway with material and training to its organization.”<sup>58</sup> Allegedly, Alvar Lindencrona, highest directing member of the Swedish Gladio, as well as P. G. Näss, the Chief of the Operative Department (B) of the Swedish security police, participated for Sweden in the ACC meetings.<sup>59</sup>

### **OLOF PALME WANTS TO BAN NUCLEAR ARMS IN SCANDINAVIA**

In 1969, amidst students’ protests across Europe against the US war in Vietnam, Social Democrat Olof Palme was elected Swedish Prime Minister. Unlike his predecessor Erlander, who himself had been closely involved with the setting-up of the Swedish secret army after World War II, Palme embarked upon a radical anti-military course. A high-ranking

military member of the Swedish stay-behind, wishing to remain anonymous, recalled that “Olof Palme had lost interest in the stay-behind upon becoming Prime Minister in 1969.”<sup>60</sup> Speculations remain that Palme had the clear intention to close down the Swedish secret army and end the clandestine cooperation with NATO. When working in the Swedish Ministry of Defence in the 1950s, Palme had learned of the existence of the secret network when he had been involved with the investigation into the stay-behind organization following the Hallberg trials in 1952.<sup>61</sup> Later as Prime Minister, a documentary film in 1999 suggested, Palme participated in the meetings of the leaders of the stay-behind organization in the Scandia House in Stockholm, as Tage Erlander had done before him.<sup>62</sup>

It is well known that relations between Prime Minister Palme and the United States were strained in numerous cases as pacifist Palme criticized strongly both the US invasion of Vietnam as well as the covert US war in Nicaragua. Paranoid CIA Counter-Intelligence Chief James Jesus Angleton concluded that Palme was a Soviet asset and communicated this conviction to acting CIA Director William Colby.<sup>63</sup> Palme, who also strongly criticized the Soviet Union for her invasion of Afghanistan, attempted to distance Sweden from NATO and the United States whereupon tensions developed between him and the Swedish security apparatus.<sup>64</sup> Most significantly, Palme considered expelling NATO from all Scandinavian countries in order to transform the area into a nuclear arms free peace zone. It was in this context that in summer 1985 Palme received an informal invitation from Michail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991. During the Swedish election preparations the invitation was made public and in December 1985 Palme officially confirmed that he intended to travel to Moscow. Both the White House and the Pentagon were greatly alarmed as NATO intelligence anticipated that reformer Palme intended to discuss strategic issues with reformer Gorbachev, including above all his Scandinavian peace plan, which allegedly would have involved the withdrawal of Denmark and Norway from NATO, the removal of two strategically placed NATO Signals Intelligence stations from the Swedish bases Muskö and Karlskrona, as well as the step-up of Finland's demilitarization.<sup>65</sup>



Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was killed in Stockholm in 1986. Rumours suggest that the secret army was involved. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

None of these plans were carried out, however, as Palme was stopped by a killer. On February 28, 1986 Olof Palme and his wife Lisbet had dismissed their bodyguards and left Stockholm's Grand Cinema at 11:15 pm. Free to travel home by public transport, they walked towards the underground station. Ten paces from the station entrance they walked past the doorway to an artists' supplies shop near Scandia House, the former Thule House, where secret stay-behind meetings had been held under Lindencrona's direction. A man emerged from the doorway and shot Palme once from behind, at a distance of less than an arm's length. Palme died instantly. The assassin fled into the darkness. The world was shocked and Sweden fell into a national trauma comparable to that which had followed the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy in 1963 or the death of Princess Diana in a car crash in Paris in 1997.<sup>66</sup>

#### **WAS THE STAY-BEHIND ARMY INVOLVED IN THE MURDER OF OLOF PALME?**

According to the data available today, NATO's stay-behind armies had a twofold function: First, to become active as a guerilla in case of a Soviet invasion and occupation of Sweden. Second, in the absence of an invasion in case of a domestic “emergency”. Was Palme a threat to NATO and did his political plans represent an “emergency”? Was therefore the stay-behind army involved in the murder of the Swedish Prime Minister? Former CIA Director William Colby has not offered the criteria when the secret networks could have been used for domestic operations. “I enjoyed the work in Scandinavia”, Colby recalled in 1978, “I had the feeling that I was doing something valuable, was actually engaged in the



battle against the Communist threat.” Of course, as Colby knew, such a threat did not exist in Sweden and “the need for covert political or paramilitary action hardly existed in Scandinavia. The dominant Social Democrats excluded the Communists from all but a tiny percentage of the political spectrum through good and socially advanced government, leaving the Communists with few issues other than Scandinavia’s links, overt or secret with the West.”<sup>67</sup> At the time when Colby published his memoirs in 1978, Olof Palme was the leader of the political opposition. Colby made it clear that the secret network, although not needed at present, could become valuable in the future when he declared that “my work was less in the present than in building and training a CIA covert-operations framework for use in the future in the event that the current situation in Scandinavia was radically altered.”<sup>68</sup>

In post-war Europe, the Gladio network has been the subject of several criminal investigations. The Bologna bomb in Italy, the Oktoberfest bombing in Munich, Germany and the Brabant murders of Belgium are just a few examples. Only in a few cases perpetrators have been put to trial.<sup>69</sup> The Palme murder is another example where the network figured in the investigation, however in an inconclusive way. Under the code-name “Operation Tree”, an allusion to the “palm tree”, the CIA had allegedly through the NATO command centre Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC) directed a “Special Operations Planning Staff” (SOPS). The existence of NATO’s secretive SOPS, sometimes referred to as “Special Operations” or “Special Projects”, was confirmed by documents found in the Norwegian Defence Ministry in the context of stay-behind research.<sup>70</sup>

According to Hedin and Kanger, representatives of the intelligence services of the NATO member countries staffed SOPS.<sup>71</sup> The officers were as a rule staunch anti-Communist Cold Warriors. Among others, also the representatives of the Italian military secret service allegedly participated in the SOPS meetings. At the same time the Italian representatives, whose names are not known, were also members of the clandestine Italian anti-Communist organization P2. Headed by Licio Gelli, P2 was exposed in Italy in 1981 and revealed by the courts to have included at least 962 members, 422 of whom were powerful senior public servants, including directors of the secret services and the military. Italian right-wing terrorist and Gladiator Vincenzo Vinciguerra from

behind prison bars explained after the discovery of the secret armies across Western Europe that “The P2 wasn’t a hidden power. It was a real power. Hidden from the public, but not the state.” Vinciguerra stressed that together with NATO, P2 had operated in an anti-Communist Cold War framework. “It has played a very precise role in this battle against Communism. I consider the P2 to be one of those parallel structures that were part of Gladio. It did not have a military role, but rather a role in international subversion.”<sup>72</sup>

Shortly before the exposure of the Gladio armies in Italy, Richard Brennecke had in summer 1990 explained on Italian television that the CIA had funded the P2 and that it had been involved in the assassination of Olof Palme. “I knew the P2 ever since 1969 and have dealt with it until the beginning of the 1980s”, Brennecke claimed and said that he himself had worked for the CIA. “The government of the United States financed the P2 with up to 10 million dollars per month”, Brennecke claimed. “In some cases I met terrorists. They were seen as people who helped the cause of the United States”. “Palme was a fly in the ointment so we got P2 to rub him out”, Brennecke said, claiming that George Bush senior as CIA Director under Ronald Reagan had been directly involved in the secret operation. “Bush, then CIA Director, not only knew about these CIA activities but was the mastermind behind them.” The image and reputation of George Bush senior, who at the time of the Brennecke testimony was the acting President of the US, was not damaged by the claim that he was involved in the Palme assassination as the story was not reported in the United States and still today some observers question the reliability of Brennecke as a source.<sup>73</sup>



Richard Brennecke in 1990 claimed on Italian television that CIA Director George Bush senior was involved in the murder of Olof Palme. Source: Italian Television TG1.

In Italy the Brennecke testimony led to a public outcry. P2 Director Licio Gelli immediately sued Italian state television for 5 million Pounds in damages. The CIA denied the accusations as “absolute nonsense”. Italian President Cossiga ordered that the television tapes be brought immediately over to him to the Quirinal Palace, and, after he had seen them, openly wondered whether the CIA was indeed behind the Olof Palme murder. In a letter dated July 3 to Prime Minister Andreotti, Cossiga urged: “If these allegations are true, then a full legal investigation must follow. If the allegations are untrue and this is ‘creative journalism’, then the situation is no less serious and the courts must intervene.”<sup>74</sup> Only a few months later Prime Minister Andreotti had to confirm the existence of the formerly top secret Gladio stay-behind in Italy. Yet after the Brennecke testimony he still strongly rejected the claim that the US had supported P2 to destabilize Italy. In front of an agitated Italian Parliament the Prime Minister claimed that “it is totally nonsensical to imagine that the US Congress could have authorized or even tacitly supported an operation of destabilization conducted against a friendly and allied country like Italy.”<sup>75</sup> In Sweden police officials explained the day after the Brennecke testimony that they had long been on a track which implicated the CIA and the powerful Italian Masonic Lodge P2 in the Palme assassination. “The statements that someone linked with P2 was involved in the murder are not new”, Hans Ölvebro, head of the Swedish police task force investigating the assassination, said, lamenting that the Swedish investigators had for years attempted in vain to locate people for interviews concerning the P2 track.<sup>76</sup>

To this very day it has been impossible to find credible and named sources from the international stay-behind network which confirmed that NATO wanted Palme dead and were involved in the killing. But the story nevertheless surfaced several times in Sweden. “A top-secret intelligence network within NATO is behind the death of Olof Palme”, the leading Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* headlined in 1992. Among the sources only alleged CIA agent Oswald Le Winter was named, a notorious source that had misled American journalists during the Iran-Contra affair where he did a cover-up for the CIA. Two other sources, “both with secret services background”, wished to remain unnamed, but one claimed “that he had been able to see and photograph the document according to which NATO was behind

the assassination.” According to the research of the Swedish press, “the NATO organ allegedly linked to the assassination is SOPS, a part of ACC”.<sup>77</sup>

The *Dagens Nyheter* report suggested that “SOPS is the operative branch of ACC. Its tasks are to plan and to hide secret operations. A third organ, called ITAC, is supporting SOPS with information and intelligence means. The delegates of ACC and SOPS met regularly every month in different European capitals. Headquarters allegedly were in Brussels, but the meetings also took place in Mons (Belgium), as well as in cities in Denmark and Norway.” The Swedish daily furthermore claimed that they were “in the possession of information that also Sweden at times regularly participated in ACC/SOPS meetings. The representative of the former Social Democrat government has confirmed this information. Also a source within the Swedish military secret service has confirmed the existence and the activities of the ACC/SOPS”. According to the sources of the Swedish press “During several meetings of the ACC/SOPS allegedly an assassination plot was made [...] code-named ‘Operation Tree’. *Dagens Nyheter* is in possession of an alleged SOPS document which laconically states ‘project management is local, technician imported.’”<sup>78</sup>

The theory that SOPS as a sub-branch of ACC had planned and carried out the assassination of Palme has been investigated by the Swedish police, without any conclusive results. Yet, as the Belgian Senate investigation into the secret army had found, the stay-behind networks certainly possessed the logistic capability to carry out such an assassination operation and “import a technician”, hence a killer. The Belgian Senators emphasized that “we are dealing here with an international network which could evacuate clandestinely a person from Norway to Italy. This implies a very close collaboration and strict co-ordination on an international level between a series of secret services. What is also astonishing is the perfect technical infrastructure which the stay-behind was equipped with: The persons and the material were moved on or intercepted by sea, by air, by parachute. Their arrival zones were marked and controlled. The persons were housed in secure buildings.”<sup>79</sup> If nothing else, the allegations have put the finger on the fact that such a scenario could have been true, which is an alarming fact in itself.

Distinguished investigative journalist Allan Francovich, who in 1992 on BBC had presented what until

today remains clearly the best documentary on the Gladio secret armies in Europe, in 1997 started to investigate the thesis that the Swedish secret army and NATO had supported the Palme assassination. *Intelligence Newsletter* reported that Francovich had gotten hold of minutes of SOPS meetings marked “Cosmic”, the highest security grading in NATO, which proved that a joint CIA and MI6 operation targeting Palme’s immediate circle had resulted in NATO “obtaining a copy of the Swedish Prime Minister’s secret agenda for a meeting in Moscow in the first quarter of 1986.” The clandestine SOPS report concluded that Palme presented a threat to NATO’s northern flank and sensitively enough stressed that the “current situation makes it imperative that ‘Operation Tree’ be carried out successfully”. The documents indicated that “SOPS has been assured that arms length will be maintained in order to ensure deniability.” The involvement of NATO and the Swedish secret army was not to become apparent as the professional killer would be foreign.<sup>80</sup>

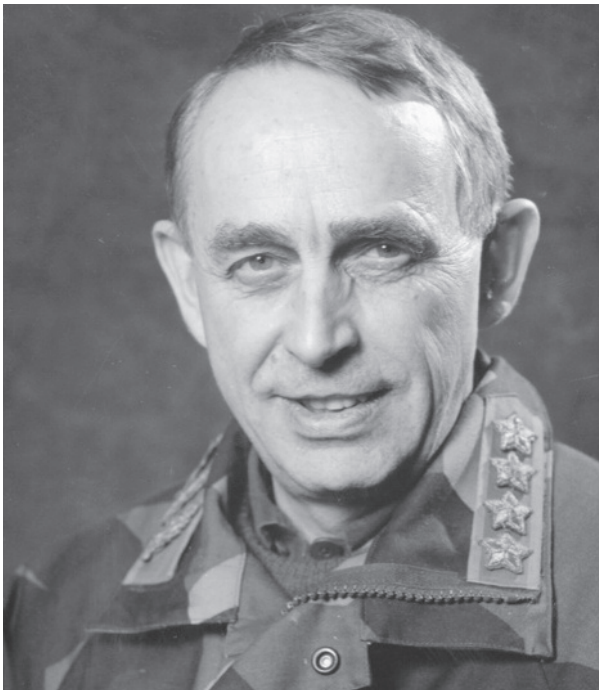
“Drawing his conclusions from documents and many direct, highly placed sources”, *Intelligence Newsletter* reported, “Francovich was about to reveal that Operation Tree (code-name for Palme’s murder) was mounted during a series of meetings staged in late 1985 by SOPS (Special Operations), an ultra secret organization within NATO on which sit representatives of the intelligence services of member countries and even from certain neutral nations like Sweden.” Francovich was about to put the pieces of the assassination puzzle together. In January 1986, SOPS had allegedly met in a house in Wiltshire in the United Kingdom and during the clandestine meeting of the Gladio commanders also the representative of the Italian secret services in a reference to the Italian anti-Communist organization P2 of Licio Gelli had confirmed “GM/P2’s interest in the solution”. In Italy magistrates, investigating the secret illegal P2 among the many confiscated documents, had found a telegram which P2 boss Gelli had sent both to his fellow P2 member Philip Guarino and to the United States Republican National Committee. The telegram, sent three days before Palme’s death, was dated February 25, 1986 and read: “The Swedish tree will soon fall. Tell that to our good friend Bush.”<sup>81</sup>

The case seemed watertight to Francovich who was determined to prove that Palme had been assassinated by a professional killer on NATO’s order whom the secret stay-behind network had clandestinely infiltrated and exfiltrated of Sweden. The killer of Palme, the sources Francovich indicated, lived in the United States, was CIA-trained and had become a professional assassin after he had joined SAVAK, the notorious former Iranian secret service. Francovich had the man’s name, address and picture and was about to reveal the darkest secrets of both NATO and the Swedish secret army. Yet Francovich could never finish his documentary. When passing through customs at Houston airport in Texas on April 18, 1997 on his way to the alleged assassin, Francovich died, allegedly from a heart attack.<sup>82</sup>

#### **NO PARLIAMENTARY INVESTIGATION INTO THE SWEDISH STAY-BEHIND**

Only four years after the assassination of Prime Minister Palme the secret stay-behind armies were discovered across Western Europe and caused considerable embarrassment, confusion and panic also in neutral Sweden. First Jonas Mauritzson, spokesman for the Swedish Defence Staff, explained in November 1990 to the press: “The staff of the Defence Minister has no knowledge on this affair. I have asked several persons about it, and got the reply that we have no knowledge on the whole affair.”<sup>83</sup> The Swedish Government was embarrassed and surprised as the secret NATO army of the CIA compromised Swedish neutrality greatly. Above all the Department of Defence was at odds to explain the contradictions between the governmental statements and the reports in the press. Swedish Assistant Undersecretary of Defence Nils Gyldén insisted that despite the reports in the press he was completely unaware of any secret resistance network in Sweden.<sup>84</sup> But as the confusion and pressure mounted, the Department of Defence finally decided to take a public stand. General Bengt Gustafsson, Sweden’s Chief of Staff, confirmed shortly before Christmas 1990 that Sweden indeed had set up a secret underground resistance group during the Cold War. Attempting to limit the damage General Gustafsson unwisely insisted that the CIA had not been involved.<sup>85</sup>





General Bengt Gustafsson, Sweden's Chief of Staff, confirmed in 1990 that Sweden had set up a secret underground resistance group during the Cold War. Source: Swedish Defence Staff.

The lie was soon unmasked when in the United States the periodical *The Nation* interviewed former CIA officer Paul Garbler, who had served two tours of duty in Sweden, of which the last one had ended in 1976. Garbler confirmed that the CIA had run stay-behind operations in Western Europe, including Sweden. "I'm not able to talk about it without causing the Swedes a good deal of heartburn", Garbler insisted and confirmed only that the Swedish Government was a "direct participant" in the operation, as well as "local people outside of politics, but of some standing in the country."<sup>86</sup> The Swedish Parliament understood the delicacy of the affair and in 1990 refrained from asking sensitive questions. There was no parliamentary investigation into the Swedish secret army and no public stay-behind report. A few years later, hopes as to an official clarification of the stay-behind phenomenon in Sweden were rising, when the Swedish Parliament formed a "Commission on Neutrality Policy" to investigate "Preparations for the Reception of Military Assistance 1949-1969". The commission investigated how closely Sweden had cooperated with NATO and presented its 268 pages thick final report in 1994.<sup>87</sup> Yet unfortunately no single document was available on the whole (stay-behind linked) structure, so the parliamentarians claimed, and hence a debate on the secret army did not take place.<sup>88</sup>

## CONCLUSION

After the end of the Cold War, Sweden has moved closer to NATO and in 2002 even deployed 500 soldiers to Afghanistan to fight under NATO command. At the same time investigations into NATO's secret armies have remained very scarce. We know today that NATO operated stay-behind armies in most countries of Western Europe during the Cold War and coordinated them through the ACC and CPC linked to SHAPE. We also know, as detailed in this paper, that such secret stay-behind armies also existed in Sweden. It is known that during the early years members of the Swedish stay-behind were recruited in the right-wing anti-Communist Sveaborg organization. It is also known, that the CIA played an active role in the recruitment and training of the stay-behind members and planned to activate the secret soldiers both in the event of a Soviet invasion as well as in the case of a "domestic emergency".



Around 500 Swedish soldiers are fighting under NATO command in Afghanistan. Source: Swedish Armed Forces.

Many questions, however, still remain still unanswered. It is unclear how many people exactly were active in the Swedish stay-behind during the Cold War and what their political orientation was. It is possible that the majority of the Swedish secret soldiers were moderate Conservatives who prepared for a Soviet invasion but would never have taken part in any domestic illegal operation, let alone political murders. We do not have a list of all commanders of the Swedish stay-behind armies, nor do we know which former members of the Swedish stay-behind are still alive today and where they live. It is furthermore unclear why the Swedish Parliament has been very reluctant to investigate the history of the Swedish stay-behind and why no public report was published after the EU-Parliament had explicitly asked all countries in Europe to carry out such investiga-

tions. Finally, and most dramatically, it also remains mysterious whether the secret army played a role in the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme, and if so, what exactly the role of the secret network was. The reason why so many important questions remain to date without an answer derives from the poor quality of the data available on the subject. As historians we only possess a number of interviews given by previous members of the army at the end of their lives, in the 1980s and (mainly) the 1990s. Some of these scattered interviews were, together with some information from governmental inquiries analyzed in a research report by Oscar Hedin, later on popularised in a series of newspaper articles together with journalist Thomas Kanger. Hedin today is an acclaimed documentary producer, yet at the time when he carried out these interviews he was just a student of political science. It seems a bit odd that in Sweden, despite the importance of the subject, it is left to students to shed some light on the entire affair.<sup>89</sup> Of course, also the memoirs of Colby are an important source on the Swedish stay-behind. Yet also Colby, who had commanded death squads in Vietnam, is a difficult source as he had every reason to boost his importance as a defender of democracy, as he defined it, in early Cold War Europe. At the same time, as a former agent, he had to be very cautious about the information he disclosed, as the Cold War at the time (1978) was far from finished.

We come to the conclusion that the lack of sources is the main problem when it comes to researching NATO's stay-behind armies. Book length studies which try to present the international structure on the stay-behinds are rare and often say little or nothing on the specific case of Sweden.<sup>90</sup> Since information often can not be checked against documentary evidence, it is hard to evaluate the value of the interviews that were made with veteran soldiers. That notwithstanding, it is probably useful to be careful about how these persons characterize the activities which they participated in and their importance, and also to bear in mind that the army had the character of cells, which means that individuals had little chance to evaluate the overall structure of the endeavour. What remains is the use of sources at hand in order to at least get as good a picture as possible of the secret armies. We are two authors, a Swedish and a Swiss historian, who have written this paper together, and we both consider this work a democratic exercise which hopefully will help other researchers interested in the topic. We were surprised that the *Scandinavian Journal of History* was not willing to publish our article. It seems important to us that the destruction of written sources does not prevent historians from investigating difficult and controversial subjects in general and the history of the Swedish stay-behind army in particular.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Newsnight* on BBC1 on April 4, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Daniele Ganser, *Nato's Secret Armies. Operation GLADIO and Terrorism in Western Europe* (London-New York 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *The Observer*, November 18, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Compare the investigation of the Belgian Parliament into the stay-behind armies: *Enquête parlementaire sur l'existence en Belgique d'un réseau de renseignements clandestin international. Rapport fait au nom de la commission d'enquête par MM. Erdman et Hasqueuin, October 1, 1991* (Brussels 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Compare the formerly top secret document "Le Forze Speciali del SIFAR e l'operazione Gladio", June 1, 1959. During the Gladio discovery this document had been leaked to the press and can now be found in the book of Mario Coglitore, *La Notte dei Gladiatori. Omissioni e silenzi della Repubblica* (Padova 1992). For a translation and interpretation of the document compare Daniele Ganser, The Ghost of Machiavelli. An approach to operation Gladio and terrorism in cold war Italy, in: *Journal for Crime, Law and Social Change* (December 2006), 111-154.

<sup>6</sup> Resolution of the European Parliament on the Gladio Affair, November 22, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> *The European*, November 9, 1990. It seems that the NATO official who issued the correction was Robert Stratford. Compare Regine Igel, *Andreotti. Politik zwischen Geheimdienst und Mafia* (Munich 1997), 343.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Daniele Ganser, The British Secret Service in Neutral Switzerland. An Unfinished Debate on NATO's Cold War Stay-behind Armies, in: *Intelligence and National Security* 20 (2005), 553-580.

<sup>9</sup> Chief of Staff Hans Senn, Pressekonferenz P26: Kurzfassung der Vorgeschichte, in: *Bulletin Vereinigung Schweizerischer Nachrichtenoffiziere* No. 1 (1991), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Urs Buess, Rolf Wespe, Mir tun die Generalstabschefs und Bundesräte leid, in: *Tages Anzeiger*, November 24, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> *Tageszeitung*, August 17, 1991, quoting *Dagens Nyheter*, August 14, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Bye, Finn Sjøe, *Norges Hemmelige Haer – Historien om Stay Behind* (Oslo 1995), 84.

<sup>13</sup> No author specified, Minister antworten Pilz – Kein Gladio in Österreich, in: *Der Standard*, April 15, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> *Reuters*, January 22 and 29, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> *The Guardian*, January 22 and 27, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Es muss nicht immer Gladio sein. Attentate, Waffenlager, Erinnerungslücken, in: *Zoom*, No. 4/5 (1996), 18. Compare

Daniele Ganser, Secret Warfare in Neutral Austria during the Cold War, in: *Internationale Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie und Gruppendynamik in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* 34, Heft 119 (2009), 3-19.

<sup>17</sup> Säkerhetspolisens arkiv på riksarkivet (SÄPO), Swedish National Archives, P 3646R, Hearing of Anders Fredrik Falk October 15, 1952, 81-82.

<sup>18</sup> Schön, Bosse, *Hitlers svenska soldater* (Stockholm 2005), 315.

<sup>19</sup> P 5184, SÄPO.

<sup>20</sup> *Searchlight Exclusive: The Gladio Conspiracy. Operation 'Stay-Behind'*, in: *Searchlight. The International Anti-Fascist Monthly*, January 1991, 4. Compare Heléne Lööw, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven. En studie av nationalsocialismen i Sverige 1924-1950* (Gothenburg 1990).

<sup>21</sup> *Searchlight Exclusive*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Heléne Lööw, *Nazismen i Sverige 1924-1979. Pionjärerna, partierna, propaganda* (Stockholm 2004), 132-140.

<sup>23</sup> Lars Gyllenthaal, Lennart Westberg, *Svenskar i krig 1914-1945* (Stockholm 2004), 372. The interview with Höglund was made on October 4, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Grafström may, or may not, have been the already mentioned "Håkan".

<sup>25</sup> P 5184, Memo October 28, 1950, SÄPO.

<sup>26</sup> P 5184, 5, SÄPO.

<sup>27</sup> P 5184, Memo April 3, 1951, 5, SÄPO.

<sup>28</sup> P 5184, 49-8, SÄPO.

<sup>29</sup> Svea Hovrätt Archive, Swedish National Archives, B 436/53, appendage 26.

<sup>30</sup> P 3646, 9-12, SÄPO.

<sup>31</sup> P 3646S, 136-15; citation 116, Memo September 25, 1952, SÄPO. It later became clear that the person in question was Gunnar Lange, administrative head of department under the Minister of Defence, and from 1954 the Minister of Trade. Hallberg had first also talked with his colleague at the Department of Interior, Folke Thunborg: "In this matter he at first had a negative view but after I had come up and talked to him, I think he changed his view and I don't think that he will make that much resistance. He is not positive, rather passive." *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> P 5383, Inr 2, Memo by Otto Danielsson, October 14, 1952, SÄPO.

<sup>33</sup> Svea Hovrätt Archive B 436/53, Uppsala Rådhusrätt DB 131/53, April 15, 1953.

<sup>34</sup> Svea Hovrätt Archive B 436/53, November 11, 1953, SNA.

<sup>35</sup> The trial documents are in their entirety kept in the National Archives as Svea Hovrätt Archive, B 436/52. Compare also Jens Mecklenburg (ed.), *Gladio: Die geheime Terrororganisation der Nato* (Berlin 1997), 21.

<sup>36</sup> William Colby, *Honorable Men. My Life in the CIA* (New York 1978), 81f.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Searchlight Exclusive*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Thede Palm, *Några studier till T-kontorets historia* (Stockholm 1999), 81.

<sup>41</sup> Anders Sundelin, Om hur försvarsminister Björck 1994 åkte till Östergötland på statsminister Bildts hemliga uppdrag. Var är Palms papper? in: *Expressen*, December 8, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Colby, *Honorable Men*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Kanger, Oscar Hedin, Erlanders hemliga gerilla. I ett ockuperat Sverige skulle det nationella motståndet ledas från Äppelbo skola i Dalarna, in: *Dagens Nyheter*, October 4, 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Nils Swedlund Archive, Swedish War Archives, PM March 23, 1950 and September 1, 1949.

<sup>45</sup> Bjarne Stenquist, CIA skulle stödja Sverige vid krig, in: *Dagens Nyheter*, December 18, 1990.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Kanger, Hedin, Erlanders hemliga gerilla.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Colby, *Honorable Men*, 82f.

<sup>55</sup> Paolo Inzerilli, *Gladio. La Verità negata* (Bologna 1995), 61.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Kanger, Hedin, Erlanders hemliga gerilla.

<sup>59</sup> John Foster Lemay, Schweden: Die schwedische Stay-behind Truppe wurde vom Botschaftsattaché, CIA-Offizier und späteren CIA-Chef William Colby organisiert, in: *Zoom*, No. 4/5 (1996), 58.

<sup>60</sup> Kanger, Hedin, Erlanders hemliga gerilla.

<sup>61</sup> For a recent discussion of Palme's brief career as an intelligence officer, see Kjell Östberg, *I takt med tiden. Olof Palme 1927-1969* (Stockholm 2008), 167-175.

<sup>62</sup> Annika Annerud, Palme hade nära samarbete med IB. Avslöjande i TV4-film. Statsministern bagatelliserade sin roll i svensk underrättelsetjänst, in: *Dagens Nyheter*, April 16, 1999; Östberg, *I takt*, 171.

<sup>63</sup> Tom Mangold, *Cold Warrior James Jesus Angleton: The CIA's Master Spy Hunter* (London 1991), 280.

<sup>64</sup> On Palme's criticism of the United States in the late 1960s, see Östberg, *I takt*, 264-315.

<sup>65</sup> *Intelligence Newsletter*, April 30, 1997. This is a bi-weekly professional newsletter in English and French, edited by Olivier Schmidt until 1994, from then on by Maurice Botbol. Schmidt currently publishes the e-mail newsletter *Intelligence Online*.

<sup>66</sup> Alexandra Duval Smith, 15,000 leads to nowhere. Inspector Clouseau would have done a better job than the Swedish police in finding Olof Palme's murderer. Seven years after the assassination, the Swedish police still haven't got a clue, in: *The Guardian*, February 26, 1993.



<sup>67</sup> Colby, *Honorable Men*, 103.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ganser, *NATO's Secret Armies*, 63-83, 125-147, 189-211.

<sup>70</sup> Olav Riste, Arnfinn Moland, *The Norwegian Intelligence Service 1945-1970* (London 1999).

<sup>71</sup> Kanger, Hedin, Erlanders hemliga gerilla.

<sup>72</sup> Allan Francovich, *Gladio: The Puppeteers*. Second of total three Francovich Gladio documentaries, broadcast on BBC2 on June 17, 1992.

<sup>73</sup> Italian television TG1 between June 28 and July 2, 1990 broadcasted the four interviews with CIA agent "Zero One", later exposed to be CIA agent Richard (Dick) Brennecke. The Brennecke statements thereafter appeared in numerous media outlets. Compare *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1990; *Reuters*, August 1, 1990; *Der Standard*, July 24, 1990; *The Times*, July 24, 1990.

<sup>74</sup> A copy of Cossiga's letter to Andreotti, as so often in Italy, was leaked and reached the press. The Italian political magazine *Panorama* published it and the Presidential Palace confirmed that it was genuine. Quoted in *The Times*, July 24, 1990.

<sup>75</sup> *Reuters*, August 2, 1990.

<sup>76</sup> *Reuters*, July 23, 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Göran Beckerus, Ett topphemligt underrättelseorgan inom den västliga försvarsalliansen Nato lag bakom mordet på Olof Palme, in: *Dagens Nyheter*, April 28, 1992.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> *Enquête parlementaire*, 47.

<sup>80</sup> *Intelligence Newsletter*, April 30, 1997.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Bjarne Stenquist, CIA's nätverk i Sverige, in: *Dagens Nyheter*, November 16, 1990.

<sup>84</sup> Lars Foyen, Neutral Sweden set up CIA backed resistance network, in: *Reuters*, December 18, 1990.

<sup>85</sup> *The Guardian*, December 21, 1990.

<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Kwitny, The CIA's Secret Armies in Europe. An International Story, in: *The Nation*, April 6, 1992, 448.

<sup>87</sup> *Had there been a war ... Preparations for the reception of military assistance 1949-1969: Report of the Commission on Neutrality Policy* (Stockholm 1994).

<sup>88</sup> Kanger, Hedin, Erlanders hemliga gerilla.

<sup>89</sup> Oscar Hedin, *The Sveaborg and the Stay-Behind – the plans for resistance in Sweden against a Soviet occupation during the Cold War*. Intermediate Research Report, Intermediate Course, Spring 1995, Political Science Program (Stockholm 1995). The report was accepted years before the newspaper articles were published but largely represents the same facts. It can very well be considered the scientifically approved version of Hedin and Kanger's articles – at the same time as their articles can be seen as an expanded version of the report.

<sup>90</sup> Ganser, *Nato's Secret Armies* details the history of the stay-behind networks in the NATO countries only.