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SPECIAL SECTION: PREPARING FOR A SOVIET OCCUPATION:
THE STRATEGY OF 'STAY-BEHIND'

Introduction - Strategy of 'Stay-Behind'

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Over 23 years have passed since Christopher Andrew and David Dilks published a seminal book in which they pointed to studies of the role of intelligence as the missing dimension of international history.¹ Since then many efforts have been made to fill that gap. A growing community of international scholars has developed a large body of literature that tries to grapple with this most elusive subject in a serious, rigorous fashion. Still there remains a certain uneasiness, not to say suspicion, among the broader community of students of international relations about incorporating the findings of intelligence specialists in the mainstream of international research. The subject is still regarded by many as slippery, replete with ambiguities, and often too prone to manipulations and misgivings.

The issue we have tried to discuss with this collection of essays is as good an example as any of all these difficulties. The existence, during the Cold War, of a stay-behind (SB) or occupation preparedness network in Western Europe was publicly disclosed by Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti in August 1990. This opened a veritable Pandora's box of allegations, accusations, and speculations which in several countries led to official investigations into the matter. In Italy, a country which had been ravaged by a dreadful series of terrorist attacks for almost 20 years, parliamentary committees were established to investigate possible connections between terrorist activities and the clandestine organization of the Atlantic Alliance.

In fact suspicions or allegations that such super-secret organs existed had been current for some time. In Norway, as Olav Riste mentions in his essay, questions in parliament in 1978 forced Defense Minister Rolf Hansen to provide a minuscule glimpse into the existence of 'stores of arms and other equipment' and 'units that can also carry out guerrilla operations against the enemy in areas that might come under occupation'.

Yet, in spite of the sudden proliferation of inquiries and of a flurry of journalistic explorations following Andreotti's revelation, few primary sources were actually disclosed, making it quite difficult to come up with adequate explanations of what the SB was all about and, above all, of its possible role in the Cold War. Statements by people who agreed to be interviewed ran the whole gamut from the sheepish, almost apologetic tone of those who minimized the importance of the initiative, to the somewhat patriotic and self-righteous declarations of those who praised their government's ability to keep the secret for all this time. Outside Italy allegations were often met with somewhat curt denials from those other governments who admitted the existence of the network and then brusquely said it had been disbanded, thank you, and that was it.

¹ Christopher Andrews and David Dilks (eds.), *The Missing Dimension: Government and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: Illinois UP 1984).

Some journalists kept delving into the matter for a while, then the issue disappeared from the attention of the media. After the initial curiosity had died down, very little scholarly research has been carried out on this topic, until Olav Riste and Arnfinn Moland published their history of the Norwegian Intelligence Service based on full access to the archives. More recently, a young Swiss researcher, Daniele Ganser, has published what purports to be the most comprehensive assessment so far of the whole stay-behind organization, in a book whose ambitious conclusions do not seem to be entirely corroborated by a sound evaluation of the sources available (Ganser, 2005).

The purpose of this collection, based in part on a workshop on stay-behind organized by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies in Oslo in 2005, is to try to stimulate new research on this subject by presenting a scholarly appraisal of the issue. The essays that follow are the results of the research carried out in four Western European countries by specialists of international and intelligence history, who have explored the origins and the development of the SB network in the context of each country's foreign and security policies. Caveats are necessary. Most of the countries involved still refuse access to the relevant archives to outside historians - Norway being the exception, but then only for the period up to 1970. What is presented here is therefore either the result of painstaking research, piecing together bits of evidence from available documents and reliable oral sources, or - as in the case of the Netherlands - based on reports by official commissions of investigation.

With those caveats in mind, these essays still enable us to draft some tentative conclusions about the origins of the stay-behind program. The first is that behind its creation there was clearly a very strong conceptual, even emotional influence of the events of World War II. The analogy between a possible future Soviet invasion and the recently experienced Nazi domination of Europe is overwhelmingly present in most of the documentation. The fear of a new invasion and occupation, the concern for yet another loss of national sovereignty, the need to stake out the survival of even a token symbol of national continuity under foreign occupation, all feature vividly in the reasoning behind the creation of the network. Planners were in a sense preparing to fight another version of World War II, only this time they would know better and would not allow their countries again to be caught unprepared: if the invasion was unavoidable and a temporary occupation of the homeland had to be taken into account before the final liberation, then the key structures of the future underground resistance against the occupant had to be carefully prepared beforehand, to avoid the long period of trial and error, ineffectiveness, and loss of life that had marked the build-up of resistance movements in the occupied countries of Europe during World War II.

The second common feature that seems to link all the countries examined here is also strongly connected with the experience of the World War. Clearly, the people who were entrusted with the setting up of the different networks and groups had to have some previous experience in the field: this in turn explains the large presence of many old hands of the World War II resistance, be they civilians turned into partisans and intelligence agents, or military officers who had worked underground. People who had already built and established networks of clandestine contacts, who had acquired firsthand familiarity with the techniques of clandestine activities and of intelligence gathering, became the key persons who were tasked with the creation of the new structures. Institutionally the networks tended more often than not to be anchored in the military intelligence service, since secrecy was of paramount concern.

This leads to what is perhaps the first critical issue, namely the existence of close connections between the new underground structures and foreign intelligence services. The US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) had built extensive networks with the European resistance during the conflict, and it was only natural that the new bodies either retained or reestablished already informal links with them - often

of a personal nature - before the formal ones were established in the Western European Union (WEU) and later in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the United States, however, the OSS was disbanded soon after the end of the war, and there was no suggestion that the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), its immediate successor, should involve itself in any kind of what the Americans preferred to call 'covert operations'. It was not before 1948, as Charles Cogan's essay explains, that things began to change. In the autumn of that year the new Central Intelligence Agency established the oddly named Office of Policy Coordination to plan and carry out a wide range of so-called clandestine activities.

The British, on the other hand, with their long experience in secret service activities abroad, and after running SOE during the war, ² were thinking ahead already before the end of the war, even if somewhat hesitantly. On 6 January 1945 Guy Liddell of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) noted in his diary that he had just heard that a post-war 'SOE will continue under the Foreign Secretary with the same allegiance as at present exists to the Chiefs of Staff in connection with paramilitary activities.'³ During the summer of 1945 it was then becoming clear that SOE was to be disbanded, but that its remit would to some extent be carried forth by a Special Operations Branch of the SIS. However, the Foreign Office through the autumn continued to pour cold water on the idea of any continuation of special operations activities in European countries. All the Foreign Office would agree to was the maintenance of an organization in the United Kingdom 'capable of quick and effective expansion in time of war'. Then, 'when we pass from a green to an amber light period, S.O.E. should then set up their organisation in approved countries abroad to meet the threat which has taken shape'.⁴ The final outcome of that dispute between the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office is not yet clear. In the meantime informal contacts were established between SIS and the organizers of stay-behind in the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, and probably others as well. The Dutch appear to have been the first to formalize such contacts.

The CIA appeared on the scene through the establishment in 1950 of the 'Tripartite Committee Holland'. In 1949 Norway's stay-behind organization established close contact with SIS, and in 1951 Belgium followed suit through a 'Tripartite Committee Belgium'. On the multilateral level the Western Union in 1949 established the 'Western Union Clandestine Committee', to which the United States became associated in 1950.⁵

By that time NATO was beginning to take an interest, possibly stemming from a draft memorandum prepared in the US State Department in January 1950 on the subject of an 'Atlantic Pact Clandestine Committee' under the Standing Group. It noted that the idea had already been suggested by 'officials of the British Secret Service', and that the French representative on the Standing Group had 'requested in general terms that the treaty members coordinate clandestine operations'. Moreover, the recently approved Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area (DC-6) had provided for 'cooperation, insofar as is practicable, in planning for the conduct of psychological and other special operations'. The memorandum stressed that the function of such a committee should be strictly that of coordination. The member services would retain 'the right of independent action', would be free to maintain bilateral relationships,

² According to one source Colin Gubbins, the incumbent chief of SOE, in the summer of 1940 became charged with setting up a stay-behind preparedness in preparation for a possible German occupation of Britain. See David Lampe, *The Last Ditch* (London: Cassell 1968), 65.

³ Nigel West (ed.), *The Guy Liddell Diaries*, Vol. II: 1942-1945 (London: Routledge 2005), 256.

⁴ London, National Archives, CAB 80/98, COS (45) 680 (O), Foreign Office to Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee 4 Dec. 1945. See also David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance, 1940-45* (London: MacMillan 1980), 203-4.

⁵ F. A. C. Kluiters, *De Nederlandse inlichtingen-en veiligheidsdiensten* (The Hague: sdu Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht 1993), 311.

and be free to abstain from 'actions or proposals with which it does not agree'.⁶ As we know, NATO in 1952 established such a committee under the name Clandestine Planning Committee (CPC).

In sum we see a series of overlapping, sometimes slightly rivalling, attempts to build up such collaborative arrangements. Another common thread seems to be a jealous effort, almost everywhere, to retain a close national control of the institution not only where one would expect it - in Sweden because of the official policy of neutrality, in France after 1958 because of the growing autonomy of the country's foreign policy - but also in Norway, in the Netherlands, or in Italy, where US attempts to steer the network in a different direction from the original one seem to have met with a certain degree of opposition. Clearly the extent of US, UK, or NATO attempts to influence or control these structures is one of the most difficult issues to be appraised in the absence of documentary sources, but the articles that follow seem to confirm the existence of a dialectical relationship between the US, the UK and their Western European partners, akin to that already suggested by the larger body of literature on Transatlantic relations.

Perhaps the most controversial and difficult question historians have to deal with is the possibility that the networks were involved not only in clandestine but in also in illegal activities, ranging from political espionage against 'domestic' enemies to downright terrorism. As Charles Cogan writes in his contribution, the 'amalgamation of staybehind with other forms of covert action' carried out in Western Europe during the Cold War was perhaps inevitable. The paramount need for secrecy and security, if the groups were to survive until called upon to function behind enemy lines, militated against the need for controlling organs - normally the military intelligence services - to maintain strict control over the entire network. In the early Cold War, when fears of a Soviet occupation were at their highest, the urgency of improvising some preparedness at short notice meant that clandestine networks sometimes overlapped, without clear demarcation lines as to missions and functions.

In dealing with this aspect the only sound methodological approach had to be to explore what the available and reliable sources tell us. Clearly this approach yields very different results from one country to the other: for Norway, where Olav Riste was given full access to the whole archive of the Norwegian Intelligence Service, he could show convincingly that the stay-behind networks stayed clear of any involvement in covert operations. In a few other countries, where research has so far had to be based on limited primary sources, conclusions may be less clear-cut. In the case of Italy, for example, the possible implication of the clandestine structure in illegal activities or even worse cannot be excluded. Thus, one of the anonymous sources interviewed stated that 'In Italy in the 1970s, some of the people went a little beyond the charter that NATO put down.' Future documentary releases might confirm this allegation or disprove it; but the fact of the matter is that for the time being the available primary documentation does not allow any firm conclusions. Hence we have preferred to stick to what can be demonstrated through a rigorous methodological approach rather than speculating about scenarios which cannot be confirmed at this stage.

Given that much research still remains to be done about the staybehind phenomenon, both in the countries covered in the following essays and in other countries: what, at the present juncture, can the history of stay-behind tell us about the Cold War? Our answer must be that it illustrates, better than anything else, the fear felt by the Western world of an impending Soviet domination of Europe, as well as the determination in the countries concerned that an occupation, should it occur, would be resisted in every possible way. Then, as the balance of forces changed and the West through the 1960s gained more

⁶ We are grateful to Cees Wiebes for providing us with a copy of this document.

confidence in the deterrent strength of its defenses, the urgency of a stay-behind preparedness waned.

Some of the structures and networks still remained, particularly in the front-line countries, whether on a kind of 'just in case' basis; on a calculation that their maintenance was a cheap price to pay compared to the difficulties of rebuilding them in a future emergency; or simply through the bureaucratic inertia that tends to keep institutions in existence long after their *raison d'être* has gone. Finally, although the eruption of the 'Gladio' scandal in Italy in 1990 became the immediate cause for the demise of the stay-behind phenomenon, its sudden death coincided in near-perfect timing with the end of the Cold War.

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