

Double Degree Program in **Politics: Philosophy and Economics**
Course of **Political Philosophy** and **International Relations**

**Shaping Fear:
The Impact of History and Media on Terrorism Perceptions in
Italy and France.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
Acknowledgments	5
Abstract – Keywords	6
Introduction	7
I. Purpose of Study and Research Questions	7
II. Significance: Importance of Understanding National History and Media Narratives in Shaping Public Perception	7
III. Methodology: Research Approach	8
Chapter 1: The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism.	9
Section 1: The First and Second Waves of Terrorism: Background and Context.	10
Section 2: The Third wave, the « New Left » wave.....	13
Section 3: The Fourth Wave, the « Religious » wave.....	15
Chapter 2: Defining Terrorism and Its Perception.	18
Section 1: Defining “Terrorism” in Political Philosophy.	18
Section 2: The Philosophy of Terrorism.....	20
Section 3: Legitimacy of Political Violence and the Conceptual Distinction Between War and Terrorism.....	21
Section 4: Can Religious Terrorism Ever Be Justified?	22
Section 5: Elements Constituting Terrorism: Technical Definitions.	25
Chapter 3: Historical Background.	26
Section 1: The Italian Experience, The Red Brigades and The Murder of Aldo Moro.	27
Section 2: The Red Brigades Era.....	29
Section 3: The French Experience, Paris and Nice Attacks, and Earlier Incidents.	30
Section 4: The Perceived Risk of Terrorism: Insights from Lennart Sjöberg’s Empirical Study.....	33
Chapter 4: Survey and Results.	34
Section 1: Data Cleaning and Pre-processing.	35
Section 2: Breakdown of Responses by Age Group and Nationality.	35
Section 3: Descriptive Analysis.....	36
Section 4: Considering the Omitted Variables in the Analysis.	37
Section 5: Positing the Influence of Media Narratives and Historical National Events on Public Perception of Terrorism.	38
Chapter 5: Contemporary National Security Policy.	40
Section 1: Evolution of Italy’s National Security Policies.	40
1. National Security Policies before Italian terrorist attacks.	40
2. National Security Policies after Red Brigades Era: How Did the Italian Government React?.....	41
Section 2: Evolution of France’s National Security Policies.	42
3. National Security Policies before terrorist attacks.	42
4. National Security Policies before terrorist attacks: How France Reacted to the Threat of Terrorism.	43

Section 3: Counter-Terrorism Strategies of the European Union: Frameworks and Evolution.....	46
<i>Conclusion</i>	50
Recap of Findings.	50
Final Reflections on How Society's Response to Terrorism Reflects Its Core Values and Resilience.....	51
<i>Bibliography</i>	52

*A mio padre, mia madre e mio fratello.
Siamo alberi: le radici unite, i rami diversi.
Ovunque mi porti il vento,
Voi sarete il terreno solido sotto i miei piedi.*

L'amore è veramente l'arma più potente che possediamo.

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ABSTRACT – KEYWORDS

Résumé:

Le terrorisme est largement considéré comme l'un des plus grands défis du monde moderne, une perspective que je partage sincèrement. Pour contribuer au débat en cours sur le terrorisme, j'ai mené une étude comparative explorant le rôle crucial que jouent l'histoire nationale et les récits médiatiques dans la formation de la perception publique du terrorisme en Italie et en France. Cette recherche a été réalisée dans le cadre de ma double licence en "Politics, Philosophy and Economics" à l'Université LUISS Guido Carli et à Sciences Po Bordeaux, couvrant la période d'octobre 2024 à avril 2025.

Mots clés:

Terrorisme; Perception Publique; Histoire Nationale; Récits Médiatiques; Politique de Sécurité; Relations Internationales; Italie et France; Étude Comparative; Impact Social; Philosophie Politique.

Abstract:

Terrorism is widely regarded as one of the greatest challenges of the modern world, a perspective I honestly share. To contribute to the ongoing debate on terrorism, I conducted a comparative study exploring the critical role national history and media narratives play in shaping public perception of terrorism in Italy and France. This research was carried out as part of my dual bachelor's degree in "Politics, Philosophy and Economics" at LUISS Guido Carli University and Sciences Po Bordeaux, spanning the period from October 2024 to April 2025.

Keywords:

Terrorism; Public Perception; National History; Media Narratives; Security Policy; International Relations; Italy and France; Comparative Study; Social Impact; Political Philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

I. Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Terrorism is a controversial issue that has become the subject of many analyses, particularly in recent years. Numerous debates have been made around this concept, not only regarding its definition and its understanding but also possible “justifications”.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse terrorism through the lens of public perception, specifically focusing on how national history and media narratives influence citizens’ views on terrorism in Italy and France. It is important to note that discussing terrorism without a clear and shared definition, can lead to confusion and hinder effective policymaking. However, it must be said that public perception of terrorism is shaped not only by the factual events surrounding terrorist acts, but also by the way these events are narrated in the media and interpreted in the context of national history. Therefore, understanding how these narratives shape public perception is critical for analysing the implications they have on national security policies and the public’s response to terrorism.

Thus, the central research question of this thesis is: *What role do national history and media narratives play in shaping public perception of terrorism in Italy and France?*

II. Significance: Importance of Understanding National History and Media Narratives in Shaping Public Perception

Understanding how national history and media narratives shape public perception of terrorism is a crucial aspect of analysing security policy in democracy. Public perception, influenced by historical context and media framing, plays a key role in shaping how citizens view terrorism, and consequently, how governments respond. As McCombs, Maxwell, and Sebastian Valenzuela discuss in “*Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and Public Opinion (2020)*”, mass media can significantly influence public opinion, which, in turn, can affect national security policies.

In fact, as governments react to citizens’ anxieties, expectations and demands for protection, popular perception of terrorism can effectively influence policy decisions. The subjects and empirical case studies of this thesis will be respectively Italy and France, two nations with different histories of dealing with terrorism and public opinion. By examining how citizens in these countries understand and respond to terrorism, this research will highlight the importance

of historical and media influences on public opinion and policymaking. Furthermore, by addressing the wider societal implications, this study attempts to address how misconceptions or fear of terrorism may result in legislative changes that occasionally put security above civil liberties.

III. Methodology: Research Approach

In order to obtain as much information as possible about the connection between national history, media narratives, and public perception in France and Italy, the study's methodology will utilise a mixed methods approach. To gather a variety of perspectives on terrorism, a survey will be distributed to a sample of Italian and French individuals in order to gather a range of perspectives on terrorism. I will analyse the data collected and try to identify patterns and correlations between public perception and attitudes toward national security measures. Also, statistical analysis can help us reveal all the significant differences between the Italian and French populations.

Furthermore, the analysis of specific events, such as the Italian *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) attacks and recent terror incidents in France (e.g., 2015 attacks), will be used as case studies, providing a qualitative component to the thesis. By investigating public response to these events, coupled with media portrayals, and subsequent policy changes, this study will explore whether these episodes have influenced public attitudes toward terrorism and national security in both countries.

CHAPTER 1: THE FOUR WAVES OF MODERN TERRORISM.

What is terrorism? When discussing this phenomenon, it is important to recognize that there are different types of terrorism, and the answers to the question can vary from person to person. This variation depends on factors such as cultural background, place of birth, education, and perhaps most significantly, age.

The idea for this thesis emerged from a personal experience I had in high school. I remember my professor discussing how, when he was our age, there was a general widespread fear of going out, taking trains, and going about everyday life due to the threat of terrorism in Italy. This story highlighted for me the significant difference in how terrorism is perceived across generations. While my generation has grown up in a time where terrorism, although present, does not carry the same immediate and personal fears as it did in the past, older generations experienced a very different reality. It is all about the reality in which you grew up.

Age, therefore, is a particularly important factor because it often determines the experiences, historical context, and media exposure individuals have had over the course of their lives. For instance, older generations may have experienced a more direct encounter with terrorism or political violence, such as the Italian Brigade Rosse or the waves of bombings and attacks in Europe during 1970s and 1980s. This could in turn shape their perceptions differently, if compared to younger generations who may not have experienced such events first-hand. Younger people, on the other hand, may be influenced more by the media coverage of contemporary terrorism, such as attacks related to ISIS or Islamist extremism.

Before delving into the concrete discussion of the thesis, the origin of terrorism and the different types of it must be analysed. The article “*The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*”¹ by David C. Rapoport, gives us an important base from which starting. In fact, the author explores the concept of modern terrorism through the analysis of four distinct waves. Will be shown how each wave is characterized by specific objectives, strategies, and key groups, reflecting unique historical and political context. Rapoport, examines the evolution of terrorist tactics over time, highlighting how technological innovation and social transformations have influenced their operational methods. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on understanding these waves to grasp how past experiences have shaped -and continue to shape- the current landscape of terrorism.

¹ David C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2004).

Section 1: The First and Second Waves of Terrorism: Background and Context.

The first two waves -known as the anarchist wave and the anticolonial wave- are explored in this section as part of the general background necessary for understanding the dynamics of the more recent waves of terrorism, which will serve as the focus of this thesis. It is not feasible to bypass the first two waves and then focus only on the last two, as the initial waves are essential for providing the historical and conceptual framework of terrorism as a global phenomenon; the last two, on the other hand, are directly relevant to the case studies that will be examined in this thesis.

The first wave, coinciding with the origin of terrorism, began in 1880 in Western Europe (Balkans and Russia) and is also known as “the anarchist wave”. The strategies used by the anarchist were mainly assassination campaigns against government officials, strategies that later were adopted by nearly all the other groups of the time, including those with nationalist goals in the Balkans². Among the significant examples of this wave, there were notable instances of rebel terror, but they were specific to particular times and nations.

The anarchists of the first wave, sought to dismantle all forms of government and create a new political order based on self-governance. Anarchists assassinated monarchs, presidents, and prime ministers, believing that eliminating key figures would spark revolutions. Rapoport suggests that the anarchist wave was the first experience of global or truly international terrorism in history³. *Revolution* was the overwhelming obsession, yet it was meaningless unless it led to a new source of political and moral legitimacy, for this reason revolutionaries aimed to create new foundations for politics. Also, the role of media should not be forgotten: the late 19th century saw advancements in telegraphy, daily communications and also railways, which flourished and played a role in the spread of anarchist ideas. Russian writers for instance, developed a strategy for terror that became a legacy for their successors to refine and expand. Sergei Nechaev made a significant contribution to this effort, his ideas were outlined in his work “*The Catechism of a Revolutionary*”⁴ (1869), which promoted the idea that revolutionaries should be completely devoted to their cause, using any means necessary, including violence and deception. Nachaev saw terrorism as a necessary tool for dismantling oppressive regimes⁵. His writings inspired the so called “propaganda by the deed”⁶, a concept in political and

² David C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2004), 47.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sergey Nechayev, *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* (1869), trans. from Russian.

⁵ David C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2004), 49.

⁶ Igor Primoratz, "Terrorism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified February 28, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/terrorism/#StatTerr>, sec. 1.1.2

revolutionary movements, that refers to the idea that direct, violent actions -such as assassinations, bombings, or other attacks- can inspire political change and encourage others to rise against oppression.

However, the peak of the first wave of international terrorist activity occurred in the 1890s, sometimes referred to as “the golden age of assassinations”⁷. As a matter of fact, during this period, monarchs, prime ministers, and presidents were frequently assassinated, often by individuals who could easily move across international borders.

The second wave⁸, known also as “the anticolonial wave”, began in the 1920s and lasted for approximately forty years. The particularity of this wave was that it was primarily fueled by anticolonial struggles following the World War I. At that time, many nations were seeking independence from colonial powers such as in India, French and other European empires. Unlike the anarchist wave that preceded it, which targeted government officials to incite political revolutions, this wave focused on gaining national independence and self-determination.

For this reason, the terrorist campaigns of the second wave took place in territories where long-standing colonial rule had become increasingly unsustainable, in regions where colonial powers struggled to maintain control, and where indigenous people sought independence through both political and violent means.

Regarding the historical origins of the anti-colonial wave, Rapaport identifies it in the period right after the *Treaty of Versailles*⁹ (1919), as a matter of fact, the treaty dismantled several empires (Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and German) and restructured colonial territories under the League of Nations’ mandate system. However, this system kept many non-European territories under European rule, fueling nationalist resistance movements that sought independence. A key and ongoing example was the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, which intensified during the British rule under the Mandate for Palestine. Jewish militant groups (Zionist paramilitary groups), such as Irgun and Lehi launched attacks against British authorities, arguing that such violence was necessary to establish a Jewish homeland.¹⁰

One of the defining characteristics of this second wave was the redefinition of the term “terrorism” by anti-colonial groups. Aware of the term’s strong negative connotations, these organizations sought to reshape their public image to gain both domestic and international support. For example, the previously mentioned group *Irgun* in Palestine strategically labelled

⁷ David C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2004), 52.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Treaty of Versailles*, 1919

¹⁰ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006)

its fighters as “freedom fighters”¹¹ rather than terrorists, framing their actions as resistance against oppression rather than mere violence. This tactic proved effective, as sympathetic audiences, including diaspora communities and international political movements, became more inclined to support their cause. This demonstrates how terrorist groups can disguise themselves under different narratives, making it essential to assess their actions rather than solely relying on labels. Later terrorist organizations, including the third and fourth waves, adopted similar strategies, using terms such as “revolutionaries” or “martyrs” to frame their actions in a more positive light.

In this second wave, terrorist organizations had the desire to be recognized by the international community. They wanted to gain legitimacy through the newly established United Nations (UN), seeking diplomatic recognition and legal justification for their struggles. As explained in an article published by the UN website¹², the UN played a pivotal role in facilitating the transition of colonies to independent states, thus, anti-colonial movements actively sought legitimacy and support from the United Nations during this period of decolonization. Some of these movements, like the FLN in Algeria, successfully presented their cause as a fight against colonial oppression, securing international support¹³ and diplomatic intervention in their favour.

However, there was a shift in the tactics used by anti-colonial terrorist groups from those of the anarchist wave. As a matter of fact, while the anarchists were primarily focused on assassinations, second-wave groups developed more complex strategies to challenge colonial rule. In this regard, *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*¹⁴ explains the evolution of terrorist tactics and the diverse methods employed by these groups. Guerrilla warfare, for instance, became a dominant method: some hit-and-run attacks were conducted against military and government targets. But also, sabotage and bombings were employed against symbols of colonial power such as government offices, military installations, and police stations. Some groups did not hesitate in conducting high-profile attacks, such as the King David Hotel bombing in 1946¹⁵, where the Irgun targeted British administrative headquarters in Jerusalem, killing 91 people.

Another important factor of this second wave, was that it marked a turning point in how global institutions and states responded to terrorism. In 1934, the League of Nations attempted to address terrorism on a global scale, recognizing it a serious international issue. Especially, the assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in

¹¹ David C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2004), 54.

¹² United Nations, *Decolonization*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/about>.

¹³ David C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 2004), 55.

¹⁴ *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, ed. Erica Chenoweth et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

¹⁵ Peter Chalk, *Encyclopedia of World Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 394.

Marseille, triggered discussions about how states should collaborate to combat terrorism. However, they failed to implement a cohesive counterterrorism strategy and to have a real global response to terrorism, we must wait until the post-World War II era. The last and important aspect to analyse about the second wave of terrorism is its legacy, or long-term impact we could say, on the next generations of terrorist movements. As a matter of fact, the success of the anti-colonial terrorists, demonstrated that violence could be an effective tool for achieving political objectives, encouraging later groups in the third and fourth waves to adopt similar methods.

Section 2: The Third wave, the « New Left » wave.

The Third Wave of terrorism, also referred to by Rapoport as “the New Left Wave”, emerged in the 1960s and lasted for approximately two decades, until the late 1980s. Several major global events influenced this period, contributing to the rise of various terrorist movements. Notably, a defining characteristic of this wave was the shared leftist ideology among these groups. For instance, the Vietnam War played a crucial role, specifically, the ability of the Viet Cong, a communist guerrilla force, to withstand the superior military power of the United States. This resilience inspired radical movements worldwide, as leftist groups viewed guerrilla warfare and terrorism as effective means of resisting Western imperialism.¹⁶

Moreover, as previously said, many nations had gained independence during the Second Wave of terrorism, but continued struggles against Western influence persisted. Not just the Palestinian cause, but also, the struggles in Latin America, and European leftist movements were all influenced by decolonization debates.

For instance, during the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara became symbols of successful revolutionary struggle, inspiring radical leftist movements worldwide. In this case too, the concept of guerrilla warfare as a means of resisting capitalist oppression gained traction.

“Instead, after 1960 and for nearly the next decade, Castro and his inner circle pursued revolution, largely but not exclusively in Latin America, through the support of rural guerrilla organizations.”¹⁷

¹⁶"Vietnam War," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>.

¹⁷ Roger W. Fontaine, *Terrorism: The Cuban Connection* (New York: Crane Russak, 1988).

Furthermore, student-led movements across Europe and the U.S demanded social change, opposing capitalism, colonialism, and authoritarianism. Some radicalized groups moved from protest to violent action, giving rise to groups like the Brigate Rosse in Italy, or Germany's Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF). During the third wave of modern terrorism, France played a crucial role in the broader anti-colonial and leftist revolutionary movements that shaped this wave. As a matter of fact, following the May 1968 protests, France saw the radicalization of the left, as well as the consequences of the Algerian War, but these cases will be analysed later in the thesis.

As previously said, the groups in this wave framed their struggle as part of a global resistance against capitalism, Western imperialism, and authoritarian regimes, many of which identified as Marxist-Leninist organizations, seeking to overthrow Western-backed governments. Another example besides those of Italy and Germany is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), founded in 1964, which became a major actor in international terrorism. Particularly, in 1967, Palestinian groups (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, PFLP), fought the so called "six-day war", during which used terrorism to draw global attention. Airplane hijackings became a signature tactic of Palestinian groups, as demonstrated in two major cases:

- 1.The Dawson's Field hijackings (1970): were a series of four plane hijackings orchestrated by PFLP. In September 1970, these four commercial airliners, were diverted to a remote desert airstrip at Dawson's Field in Jordan. In this case the hijackers were motivated by the desire to bring global attention to the Palestinian cause and to force the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.¹⁸

- 2.The Entebbe Hostage Crisis (1976): one of the most significant and high-profile terrorist incidents of the 1970s according to numerous scholarly works. On June 27, 1976, two members of the PFLP-General Command, hijacked Air France Flight 139, en route from Tel Aviv to Paris, and diverted it to Entebbe, Uganda, where it was held hostage. The hijackers demanded the release of 53 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, alongside other political prisoners. Among the hostages there were several French nationals, making the event especially significant for France. For this reason, France became directly involved in the diplomatic negotiations, along with Israel and other countries. Obviously, the event raised concerns about terrorism on French Soil and the safety of French citizens abroad. Although France wasn't directly involved in the rescue, its airline industry was threatened, and this made French officials reconsider their approach to handling terrorism.¹⁹

¹⁸ T. Baker, *Hijacking and Airline Security* (Carson-Dellosa Publishing, 2005).

¹⁹ Francis A. Boyle, "The Entebbe Hostages Crisis," *Netherlands International Law Review* 29, no. 1 (1982): 32–71.

It is important to analyse these events in order to highlight the growing global nature of terrorism, as well as the increasing involvement of international actors, during this third wave of modern terrorism.

As it has been demonstrated so far, hijackings became a defining feature, but not only that, kidnappings of political figures and business executives were also employed as tools for political leverage and ransom. One of the prominent examples that will be discussed in this thesis is the kidnapping and assassination of the Italian Prime Minister *Aldo Moro* (1978) by the *Brigate Rosse*.

Regarding the Soviet Union, the latter along with its allies provided ideological, financial, and logistical support to leftist terrorist groups²⁰. As terrorist groups increased their attacks on Western interests, governments intensified counterterrorism efforts; international cooperation expanded, with intelligence-sharing becoming a key tool and, the role of the UN changed significantly, with stronger anti-terrorism resolutions introduced during this wave.

Section 3: The Fourth Wave, the « Religious » wave.

While the previously analysed waves were mostly politically oriented, the fourth wave of modern terrorism marks a distinct and significant shift from the earlier waves, with a strong focus on religious and ethnic identity, particularly Islamic radicalism. This is probably the most interesting wave of modern terrorism, maybe, also because it began in the late 20th century and continues to shape global terrorism nowadays. The main feature of this wave is its emphasis on religious and ethnic identities, these identities often overlap, as religious ideology becomes closely tied with ethnic or nationalistic aspirations. This combination has proved to be a powerful tool in motivating violent action, as it appeals to both a sense of communal identity and a call for a defensive struggle. Rapaport (2004) explains how Islamic terrorism, became the central ideology of this wave, with groups framing their actions as a defence of their faith and culture against perceived foreign oppression, particularly the Western influence.

With the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Madrid bombings and Paris attacks, these groups, most notably al-Qaeda and ISIS, carried out some of the most deadly and high-profile assaults in

²⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviet System: A CIA Assessment*, CIA-RDP90T00155R000200050001-6 (1985), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90T00155R000200050001-6.pdf>.

history. But **why Islam at the core?** These groups not only focus on local or regional grievances but also frame their campaigns as a broader global conflict against the West, specifically targeting “infidels” or non-Muslim states. The ideological and strategic focus of these groups revolves around the notion of *Jihad* (holy war), which has been widely promoted through propaganda and recruitment strategies. Another defining feature is the use of suicide bombings²¹. This tactic became widespread especially after its use by Hezbollah in Lebanon in the 1980s²², and was considered both cost-effective and highly destructive. Through this tactic, terrorists are able to target not only civilians, but also military personnel and even political leaders through their suicide, making this form of terrorism particularly potent and fear-inducing. In this way, suicide bombings spread across the globe in countries such as Sri Lanka (by the Tamil tigers) and Palestine and were adopted by various Islamic groups in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa²³. These attacks have a psychological effect, that combined with the intense media coverage, has made them a powerful tool in the hands of terrorists. The 1980s marked a dramatic decline in “secular terrorism” as the main motivator for violent groups. While in the earlier waves we have seen a mix of nationalist and secular causes, for instance the Marxist-inspired groups like the Red Army Faction, the fourth wave saw a rise in religious extremism, consequently groups like PLO and Basque ETA began to lose influence compared to Islamic radical movements. This shift let us understand the cultural and ideological transformation that occurred in many conflict zones, with religion becoming more important than class or ideology in shaping the motivations of groups engaging in violence.

Furthermore, another important feature of this wave regards the size and the resilience of these new terrorist groups. As a matter of fact, they are generally larger and more durable than those in earlier waves. Unlike the often decentralized and smaller groups of previous waves, organizations like al-Qaeda and ISIS have hundreds, sometimes thousands, of members, and their operations span multiple countries. They are well organized, with established training camps, global networks, and access to substantial resources. For this reason, their longevity and persistence make them very difficult opponents in both military and ideological struggles, being able to withstand major counterterrorism efforts, regrouping in new territories as needed.

Al-Qaeda, founded by Osama Bin Laden, epitomized many of the characteristics of the fourth wave. The group called the United States the “Great Satan” and its primary goal was to drive

²¹ Singh, Rashmi. "Suicide Terrorism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, edited by Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas, and Stathis N. Kalyvas, 257–279. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

²² Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²³ Singh, Rashmi. "Suicide Terrorism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, edited by Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas, and Stathis N. Kalyvas, 257–279. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

U.S forces out of Muslim lands, especially in Saudi Arabia, which is home to the two holiest cities in Islam²⁴. Al-Qaeda's ideology basically framed the United States as an existential threat to Islamic civilization, which justified the use of violence and terrorism against American citizens, military personnel, and allies in the broader war against what they termed the "infidels". As everyone knows, the 9/11 attacks were the most visible manifestation of this ideology, with the aim not only to kill Americans, but to provoke a global war that would polarize the world and create a broader conflict between Islam and the West, fulfilling a prophetic narrative of a clash of civilizations. As the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington argues:

"The future wars would be fought not between countries, but between cultures".²⁵

In conclusion, it can be said that as these groups evolved and persisted, they changed the global landscape of terrorism, leading to new strategies of counterterrorism, military intervention, and cooperation. Lastly, after having analysed all four waves of modern terrorism, we can now shape the argument of this thesis by moving forward to the next topic. This analysis should provide us a strong foundation, allowing for a better understanding of the next sections, as we now have a solid contextual basis to build upon.

²⁴ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, "America's Great Satan," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 6 (2019): 56–66.

²⁵ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINING TERRORISM AND ITS PERCEPTION.

Section 1: Defining “Terrorism” in Political Philosophy.

When discussing terrorism within the field of Political Philosophy, scholars and authors typically focus on its moral legitimacy -whether terrorism can ever be justified- rather than on its practical effectiveness, root causes, or its impact on democratic institutions. It is a matter of exploring why, from an ethical standpoint, someone might choose to become a terrorist.

As outlined in an article of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy²⁶, discussions on the moral justification of terrorism are shaped by how we define the concept itself. Anyway, a narrow definition, which focuses on violence against innocent civilians for political or coercive purposes, is often considered more suitable for an ethical analysis. Within this framework, philosophers debate whether terrorism can ever be justified, either by challenging the innocence of its victims or by arguing that its consequences or moral imperatives outweigh its harm. Thus, this philosophical lens is crucial to understand terrorism beyond its strategic or legal implications. It is precisely this depth of analysis that motivated me to write my thesis at the intersection of Political Philosophy and International Relations, because without first engaging with these ethical and conceptual questions, we cannot fully grasp how media narratives and historical events influence public perception of terrorism.

An important source for the definition of terrorism in Philosophy is the article²⁷ by A. Fiala from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. The author delves into the topic of “terrorism”, giving the readers a comprehensive analysis of how terrorism is connected to the philosophy of history, and justice in war. Particularly, the article starts with the definition of terrorism, asserting that it involves criminal acts like kidnapping, hijacking, and murder. These acts violate the rules of armed conflict by deliberately targeting non-combatants or taking hostages. Basically, Fiala believes that the purpose of terrorism is to instill fear in the target population, using violence to destabilize social structures.

Moreover, it is also important to note how different philosophies of history (Realism, Christianity, Kantianism, and Hegelism) influence the understanding of terrorism and justice in war. *Realism* justifies terrorism in the struggle against a political power viewed as a threat. As

²⁶ Igor Primoratz, "Terrorism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified February 28, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/terrorism/>.

²⁷ Andrew Fiala, "Defining Terrorism," *Essays in Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2003)

a matter of fact, from a realist perspective, war is a necessary expedient for preserving power²⁸.

Thus, from this perspective, there are no limits in principles to the exercise of power.

On the other hand, *Christianity* does not justify terrorism, as it does not aim for peace.

According to the Christian philosophy, human history is a constant struggle between good and evil, and war is the escalation of this struggle between the two²⁹.

Kantianism, states that acts of “hostility” such as assassins or poisoners, should be prohibited because they undermine the mutual trust necessary for a future peace. In fact, Kant’s political philosophy points beyond war and condemns activities such as terrorism and genocide, because they make a livable peace impossible.³⁰

From a *Hegelianist* perspective, terrorism would be condemned for violating ideas of right and departing from legitimate institutional embodiments of spirit. Hegel would condemn terrorism because war is a political mechanism for settling disputes between states, that have proper entities to conduct war: armies. Terrorists instead, are not representatives of legitimate institutional bodies, thus they can be considered outlaws and they should be subject to punishment.³¹

John Rawls, similarly to Kant, is hopeful that peace will prevail. He envisioned a world where different societies could coexist under principles of justice, forming what he called a “Society of Peoples”, governed by fairness and mutual respect. This hope stems from an implicit philosophy where diverse people will come to an agreement about reasonable principles of justice. The concept of “supreme emergency” is fundamental to understand Rawls’s idea on terrorism. Rawls recognizes that, in rare and extreme cases, liberal principles may need to be compromised to ensure their survival³². But then, what is considered a “supreme emergency”? A “supreme emergency” is a situation where society faces total annihilation, meaning its people and liberal values are at existential risk. In such emergency, pragmatism may override strict moral rules, thus, liberal democracies might be justified in taking actions that would normally be impermissible (e.g., the UK bombing German cities during WWII to prevent Nazi domination). Although Rawls does not directly state whether the supreme emergency exemption would apply to terrorists, in the context of the War on Terror, the argument is: if terrorism poses an existential threat to liberal democracy, then

²⁸ Andrew Fiala, "Defining Terrorism," *Essays in Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2003)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kant, Immanuel. "Perpetual Peace." In *Kant: Political Writings*, edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet, 93–130. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

³¹ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

³² Andrew Fiala, "Defining Terrorism," *Essays in Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2003)

extreme measures -such as targeting civilians- could be justified under Rawls's logic. For instance, in "*The Law of Peoples*", Rawls categorizes societies into different types:

1. Liberal Peoples: just and democratic states.
2. Decent Peoples: non-liberal but peaceful societies.
3. Outlaws States: aggressive, rights-violating regimes.

If a state harbors terrorists or actively supports terrorism, Rawls might classify it as an outlaw state, and consequently, military action against them may be justified. At the same time, in "*The Law of Peoples*", Rawls condemns violating human rights and targeting non-combatants, but, in a dire enough situation, even this principle might be overridden, leaving space to a controversial question.

In any case, the definition of terrorism impacts the ethical response, and this is the reason why it is important to define the concept before delving into further discussion. If considered a *criminal act*, law enforcement to counter terrorism is the justified response. If defined as an *act of war*, ethical and political problems arise. Furthermore, if we go ahead with the analysis of Fiala's paper "Defining Terrorism." *Essays in Philosophy*" the author explains that the identity of the immediate victims is irrelevant; the pain and the deaths caused by terrorism are simply means for creating social anxiety. It is a calculus of terror, a rational decision procedure based on the idea that terror disrupts social structures. Thus, the terrorist's goal is not to inflict pain per se, but to use its threat to intimidate a population and destabilize the social order. Here comes why terrorism is considered evil: it aims at destabilization and disruption, creating an atmosphere of fear.

Section 2: The Philosophy of Terrorism.

Analysing terrorism through the lens of political philosophy involves exploring its ethical, political, and social dimensions. The central question of this section will be:

Can terrorism ever be justified, considering both the intentions behind acts of terrorism and their consequences?

In *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, Virginia Held discusses the moral dimensions of terrorism, focusing mainly on the ethical implications and moral reasoning surrounding the use of terrorism as a "strategy". Held explores how terrorism is often treated as a morally distinct form of violence, compared to other types of political violence. She emphasized that understanding terrorism from a moral standpoint requires careful ethical reflections and, moral judgments about terrorism can be highly context-dependent and shaped by broader political,

social, and historical factors. According to her, there is a moral responsibility of both perpetrators of terrorism and those who are complicit in or support such actions. Basically, she discusses how responsibility for terrorism might be shared across different actors, including states, non-state actors, and global actors.

Moreover, another compelling perspective considers modern terrorism as a “social disease”³³, a phenomenon rooted in social injustices and geopolitical manipulations. D. Mutagirov argues that modern terrorism is not a random or inexplicable act, but rather a response to social injustices, inter-state violence, and the inability of institutions to protect human rights. In this sense, terrorism can be understood as a symptom of a deeper social illness, an effect of the economic and political inequalities that characterize many contemporary societies. This view also aligns with some of Michel Foucault’s reflections, who critically explored power and oppression, highlighting how power structures can lead to social violence.³⁴

Anyway, another central point concerns terrorism as a response to human rights violations by states³⁵. However, not all acts of political violence are considered legitimate: terrorism, understood as indiscriminate violence aimed at creating fear among the population, differs from resistance against oppression or the struggle for independence. In this regard, we can engage with Hanna Arendt’s reflection on “political violence”, where the legitimacy of a violent act depends on its purpose and the context in which it occurs.³⁶

Section 3: Legitimacy of Political Violence and the Conceptual Distinction Between War and Terrorism.

In the context of terrorism, Mutagirov makes a distinction between acts of terrorism and acts of resistance, suggesting that the latter may be considered legitimate, as in struggles for independence or the removal of oppressive tyrants³⁷. In this sense, the legitimacy of the use of

³³ Dzhamal Mutagirov, "Philosophy of Modern Terrorism," *Revista Turismo Estudos e Práticas-RTEP/GEPLAT/UERN* 2 (2020): 1-12.

³⁴ Asli Daldal, "Power and Ideology in Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci: A Comparative Analysis," *Review of History and Political Science* 2, no. 2 (2014): 160–167.

³⁵ Dzhamal Mutagirov, "Philosophy of Modern Terrorism," *Revista Turismo Estudos e Práticas-RTEP/GEPLAT/UERN* 2 (2020): 1-12.

³⁶ Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," in *Democracy: A Reader* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 566–574.

³⁷ Dzhamal Mutagirov, "Philosophy of Modern Terrorism," *Revista Turismo Estudos e Práticas-RTEP/GEPLAT/UERN* 2 (2020): 1-12.

force can be seen as dependent on the context in which it is exercised and the goals it seeks to achieve.

At this point, it is necessary to provide a clarification. What differentiates terrorism from war? Terrorism usually occurs between non-state entities seeking political power or challenging the state order, whereas war traditionally involves sovereign states.³⁸ However, these categories are not always that clear, thus, the perception of an act considered as “terrorist” depends on who is making the judgment. In many cases, the victors in a war define the “terrorists” as those who oppose their power, while those fighting for independence or sovereignty may be seen as legitimate combatants. This distinction raises important moral questions about the legitimacy of those who wield violence. The distinction between terrorism and war is not only a matter of the entities involved, but also of the legitimacy and justice of the use of violence. A crucial criterion is the proportionality of the use of force: basically, while in war attacks on military targets are often “justified”, terrorism is mainly criticized for its indiscriminate nature, especially when it focuses on civilian targets.

According to “Just War Theory”, the use of force in war is only legitimate if it meets certain criteria, such as a “just cause”, the intention of restoring peace, and proportionality in the use of force. These principles can also apply to terrorism, in the context of civil wars, where some may justify the use of violence as a tool to overthrow an oppressive regime.³⁹

Section 4: Can Religious Terrorism Ever Be Justified?

However, if terrorism can be justified as a means to “free the oppressed”, then the question arises: can *religious* terrorism ever be justified? As usual, it depends on the point of view. Some religious interpretations or ideologies have been used to justify acts of violence, including terrorism, such as in the Muslim religion. This is often seen in contexts where groups believe they are defending their faith, fighting for religious freedom, or protecting their religious communities from perceived threats. In this view, violence is seen as an act of divine will or a necessary defense of religious values. For instance, some extremist groups have used a radical

³⁸ Jessica A. Stanton, “Terrorism, Civil War, and Insurgency,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, ed. Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas, and Stathis N. Kalyvas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 348.

³⁹ Brian Orend, “War,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified October 26, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/#JustCaus>, sec. 3.1

interpretation of religious texts (e.g., Jihad in Islam or holy wars in Christianity) to justify acts of violence. They may claim that such violence is sanctioned by God or necessary to protect religious purity or territories.

However, when it comes to interpreting Islam, I find it difficult to form a definitive opinion. This brings me to a personal reflection on religious terrorism, shaped by my own experience in Morocco. During the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to travel to Morocco, where I interviewed a local guy who was born and raised in a small village in the mountains near Marrakesh. My decision to interview him stemmed from a long-standing curiosity about cultures different from my own. I have always questioned, perhaps too much, the narratives we are accustomed to hearing from the media about the East and the Muslim world. At that moment, I wanted to go beyond those narratives and gain a deeper understanding. Thus, I had the chance to meet and talk with Mouad, a 22-year-old student who works in a Riad to earn extra money and support his studies. Our conversation was truly enriching; we discussed cultural differences, the values he was raised with, and the ancient traditions that, in today's world, our generation is gradually losing. We also reflected on the importance of keeping traditions alive as a way to preserve our identity and remember our roots. Our discussion touched on complex topics, ranging from religion to economic struggles. Most importantly, Mouad helped me see the true values of Islam, which are different from the distorted interpretations used to justify acts of terrorism. This conversation reinforced my belief that the problem is not religion itself, but rather the misinterpretation and misuse of it.

Mouad was very open with me, and he even spoke about the darker aspects of Islam. At one point, he asked me to turn off the camera before revealing something that had deeply impacted him: when he was in elementary school, his teachers explicitly taught them to hate those who were not Muslims, the so called "infidels". This conversation only reinforced my belief that religion is not the problem. Rather, it is how its values are taught and by whom that truly shapes interpretation and, ultimately, influences future actions. Hence, I believe that religious terrorism can never be justified from ethical, legal, and philosophical perspectives for several fundamental reasons. Every possible justification used by the extremists, falls apart when examined through moral principles, international law, and the true teaching of most religious traditions. For instance, whether viewed through utilitarianism -which seeks the greatest good for the greatest number- or deontological ethics -which upholds moral duties and principles-, harming civilians is inherently wrong. Most ethical theories reject the justification of terrorism because it deliberately targets innocent people.

Utilitarianism asserts that action should be judged based on their consequences, specifically whether they promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Terrorism, particularly religious terrorism, fails this test. Sounds obvious that the deliberate targeting of civilians to achieve political or religious goals results in significant harm, fear, and suffering, which far outweighs any potential benefit. The pain and the loss caused to innocent people, in an utilitarianist framework, would overshadow the supposed “greater good” that might be claimed by the terrorists. Therefore, terrorism, as an act that maximizes suffering, is inherently unjustifiable.⁴⁰

On the other hand, *Deontologists*, such as Immanuel Kant, focus on the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions, irrespective of their outcomes. Kantian ethics emphasizes treating people as ends in themselves, not as means to an objective. Religious terrorism, which exploits individuals as tools for a supposed divine cause, directly violates this principle. Religious terrorism treats individuals as expendable instruments in a broader ideological struggle, this violates Kant’s imperative to respect human dignity, making terrorism an unethical act, regardless of the terrorist’s motivations or goals.⁴¹ Moreover, most major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, emphasize peace, compassion, and the sanctity of human life. The misuses of religious texts to justify violence is a distortion of core religious values.

Finally, since religious texts are often open to interpretation, allowing terrorism based on religious justification would mean any violent act could be excused under the pretense of “faith”. However, International law, particularly the principles enshrined in conventions such as the Geneva Conventions, establishes that the use of force must be justified only in certain circumstances such as self-defense against aggression. Violence against civilians is prohibited⁴², where it comes from non-state groups (terrorism) or states (human rights violations during armed conflict). Therefore, any form of indiscriminate violence, such as that typical of terrorism, is generally considered illegitimate, regardless of the cause that motivates it. I firmly believe that no religious, ethical, or philosophical framework can provide a valid excuse for the killing of innocent people in the name of faith.

⁴⁰ David Brink, "Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified August 21, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill-moral-political/#UtiStaCon>.

⁴¹ Robert Johnson and Adam Cureton, "Kant's Moral Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified January 21, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/#MorFre>.

⁴² International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "Civilian Population," *How Does Law Protect in War?* <https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/civilian-population>.

Section 5: Elements Constituting Terrorism: Technical Definitions.

So far, we understood that defining terrorism is a complex task. Terrorism is notoriously difficult to define due to political, legal, and ideological differences among states and scholars⁴³. As a matter of fact, international organizations -like UN, EU, NATO-, and states, provide differing definitions, reflecting their strategic interests and security concerns.

Nevertheless, International law provides various definitions that attempt to establish a legal framework for prosecuting terrorist offenses. Notably, Art.2, Paragraph 1, Letter b) of the “1999 International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism”⁴⁴ defines terrorism as:

Any “act intended to kill or seriously injure a civilian or any other person not directly participating in hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when, by its nature or context, such an act is intended to intimidate a population or to compel a government or an international organization to carry out or refrain from carrying out any act.”

A remarkable source for this section is “*The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*” by Erica Chenoweth, which explores various definitions of terrorism, also going through the difficulties in reaching a universal agreement on its meaning, and theoretical frameworks used to study it. Moreover, it examines the evolution of terrorism from its early forms to contemporary manifestations, demonstrating that terrorism is not a modern phenomenon, but has evolved alongside political and social changes.

Despite ongoing definitional debates, most International Relations scholars and institutions agree on certain fundamental elements of terrorism. After an in-depth analysis of key works on the subject, such as “*Another Kind of War*” by Lynn Jhon A, and “*The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*” by Schmid, we can summarize these elements as follows:

1. The deliberate use of violence, such as bombings, assassinations or cyberattacks, as well as the psychological impact that these acts may cause, so I would say, the threat of violence.
2. The purpose: usually political, religious, or ideological. Seeking to influence government policies, challenge state authority or promote radical ideologies.
3. The rejection of established laws, legitimizing their actions through alternative ideological, religious, or political justifications.
4. The target of civilians or symbolic targets generally non-combatants.

⁴³ Ben Saul, "Defining Terrorism: A Conceptual Minefield," in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, ed. Erica Chenoweth et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 34–49.

⁴⁴ 1999 International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism," Art. 2, Para. 1, Letter b), United Nations, 1999, <https://www.congress.gov/treaty-document/106th-congress/49/document-text>

5. Non-state actors (e.g., Al-Qaeda, ISIS).
6. Last but not least, the performative aspect: terrorism often relies on spectacle, its success is partly measured by the level of public attention it garners (allowing the general spread of fear).

These are the main aspects characterizing the phenomenon of terrorism, or at least, these are the main features that we can find analyzing every terrorist attack. Nevertheless, in the article by Thomas J. by the name of “*Defining International Terrorism: A Pragmatic Approach*”, the author addresses the ongoing challenge of establishing a universally accepted definition of international terrorism. As a matter of fact, despite extensive scholarly discourse and over three decades of intergovernmental discussions, a consensus remains elusive. Badey critiques existing definitions, categorizing them in two primary groups: “academic definitions” and “governmental definitions”. The formers are usually detailed and complex, and their intricacy can render them impractical for common usage. On the other hand, the “governmental” ones, tend to be too ambiguous, allowing for politically convenient interpretations of events. What Badey tries to do through his article is to advocate for a more straightforward and functional definition of terrorism, focusing on its primary characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of violence. Such a pragmatic approach would effectively enhance both academic analyses and policy-making processes related to counterterrorism.

Finally, can be said that the real reasons behind the difficult explanation of the phenomenon of terrorism, must be attributed to its multifaced nature.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

In order to fully understand how past events continue to influence contemporary fears, political discourse, and state responses, it is essential to grasp the historical trajectory of terrorism, in both Italy and France. The purpose of this thesis is rooted around the presumption that the way societies react to terrorism is deeply rooted in their historical experiences, shaping not only legal frameworks but also broader narratives about security, freedom, and the role of the state. Italy and France have undoubtedly faced different waves of terrorism, and now that we have analyzed them, we can better understand their lasting impact on their respective societies. In Italy, the Brigade Rosse (Red Brigades) emerged during the “Years of Lead” (Anni di Piombo) in the 1970s, a period marked by political violence and left-wing extremism. As a matter of fact, the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro in 1978 remains one of the most defining moments in Italian history, symbolizing the intense struggle between the state and domestic

terrorist organizations. This event, of course, profoundly influenced Italy's approach to counterterrorism, leading to significant legislative and security reforms.

On the other hand, in France, terrorist threats have evolved differently. Islamist terrorism has become the dominant security concern, especially in recent decades. While France has experienced various forms of political violence, the 21st century has been marked by high-profile attacks, such as the 2015 Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan attacks, and the 2016 Nice attack. These incidents not only reinforced public anxiety about terrorism but also led to heightened security measures, stricter counterterrorism policies, and a broader societal debate on issues such as radicalization, immigration, and civil liberties.

The following sections will examine these events in Italy and France, highlighting the long-term effects on national security and public opinion.

Section 1: The Italian Experience, The Red Brigades and The Murder of Aldo Moro.

The murder of Aldo Moro, a very important Italian politician, was not just an act of terrorism. It was an event that profoundly shaped Italian politics, society, and historical consciousness. The so called "Anni di piombo" ("Years of Lead" as previously specified) were a decade of political instability, economic crisis, and widespread violence. It can be said that Italy was at the crossroads of the Cold War, with a deeply divided political landscape: The Christian Democracy (DC) which governed the country since 1946, ensuring that Italy remained within the Western bloc. The Italian Communist Party (PCI), which not only was the largest in Europe, but was also growing in influence and legitimacy, posing a challenge to the established order. And finally, the extremist groups from both the far-left (e.g., Brigate Rosse) and the far-right (e.g., Ordine Nuovo) engaged in bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings.⁴⁵

This era of the Italian history is also known as the one of the "strategy of tension", a theory suggesting that violent events were possibly manipulated by intelligence services, including allegations of involvement by the CIA⁴⁶, and other clandestine organizations, to keep Italy

⁴⁵ Kathryn Westcott, "Italy's history of terror," *BBC*, January 6, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3363555.stm>

⁴⁶ "The Bologna Massacre, the 'Strategy of Tension' and Operation Gladio," *CounterPunch*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/07/31/the-bologna-massacre-the-strategy-of-tension-and-operation-gladio/>.

politically unstable, thus preventing the rise of communism. The kidnapping of Aldo Moro cannot be separated from this broader context.⁴⁷

At the heart of this crisis was Aldo Moro's political project: the "Compromesso Storico" (Historic Compromise), an unprecedented attempt to bring the Communists into government through an alliance with the Christian Democracy. Moro was convinced that Italy could only achieve political stability through a coalition that included both center-right and left-wing forces. However, it must be specified that this initiative was seen as a problem by multiple actors, for instance, the U.S and NATO, that strongly opposed any Communist participation in government. The Soviet Union also viewed it with skepticism, fearing it would "tame" the Communist Party into a moderate force. And finally, the Italian deep state, such as the intelligence services, P2, and sections of the armed forces, which were convinced that Moro's plan was destabilizing. Hence, this means that Aldo Moro was isolated even before his kidnapping, but today the question still remains: did his enemies *let* the Red Brigades kill him?

On March 16, 1978, the same day the Parliament was set to approve the government supported by the PCI, the Red Brigades carried out their attack: Moro's five bodyguards were executed in a matter of seconds, and Moro was taken hostage and disappeared for 55 days. During his captivity Moro wrote dozens of letters to politicians, the Pope, and his family, but the Italian government refused to negotiate. Also, the Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti and Interior Minister Francesco Cossiga, decided to not negotiate with terrorists and even the Communist Party refused to intervene. Moro basically faced a wall of silence.⁴⁸

On May 9, 1978, he was executed with 11 gunshots and left in the trunk of a car in Via Caetani, between the headquarters of the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party. But why was the Aldo Moro case so shocking? Because it revealed the fragility of Italian democracy. It exposed the moral and political failure of the state with its refusal to negotiate.⁴⁹

Furthermore, this case left a permanent wound in Italy's national consciousness and confirmed the presence of invisible powers such as the intelligence services, clandestine organizations, and foreign governments.

⁴⁷ Francesco M. Biscione, "Strategia della tensione. Genesi e destino di un'espressione," *Bibliomanie. Letterature, storiografie, semiotiche* 50, no. 12 (2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.48276/issn.2280-8833.5267>.

⁴⁸ "Pourquoi a-t-on tué Aldo Moro?" *INA.fr*, <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/pourquoi-a-t-on-tue-aldo-moro>.

⁴⁹ Graziella Parati, "Esterno Notte: Marco Bellocchio's series grapples with ghost of assassinated Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro," *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/esterno-notte-marco-bellocchio-series-grapples-with-ghost-of-assassinated-italian-prime-minister-aldo-moro-204059>.

Section 2: The Red Brigades Era.

This section is dedicated to the explanation of who were the Red Brigades and what was their main goal. The Red Brigades emerged in 1960s, which was, as previously mentioned, a time of political and social tension in Italy. The country was deeply divided: the right-wing, the left-wing and several students protests and workers' strikes that were escalating into violent clashes with the police. Particularly, the Red Brigades were more than just a militant group, they were inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology which believed that Italy was a capitalist dictatorship protected by imperialist forces, such as the U.S. They were convinced that violence was the only way to create a "proletarian revolution", thus dismantling the state. The Red Brigades were founded by Renato Curcio, Margherita Cagol, and Alberto Franceschini in Milan in 1970. They started as a small radical faction within the worker's movement.⁵⁰

They believed that Italy was ensnared in a capitalist dictatorship safeguarded by imperialist powers, notably the United States. They argued that only through violent revolution could a true proletarian government be established. At the beginning, they were conducting small attacks, such as factory sabotage and the kidnapping of industrial managers for example to pressure companies for workers' rights. Anyway, by the 1972, the group evolved into a urban guerrilla movement, adopting more violent tactics, including bombings and assassinations. Their motto was:

"Colpire al cuore dello Stato" (Strike at the heart of the State)

Their targets became more strategic, and the group grew in size and ambition. They started attacking industrialist and business executives, as they were seen as symbols of capitalist oppression. But also, judges, journalists, academics and obviously politicians -especially those from the Christian Democracy, who dominated Italian politics-.

The activities of the Red Brigades had a profound impact on Italian society, instilling a climate of fear and insecurity. The Years of Lead, saw the Italian government struggle to maintain order and respond effectively to the growing threat of domestic terrorism. The state's response included both heightened security measures and controversial strategies, such as the employment of "negotiated management" of public order, which some criticized as a tacit acknowledgment of the brigades' power.⁵¹

Moreover, in contrast to the religiously motivated terrorism that would later emerge in France, the Red Brigades' terrorism was deeply political, rooted in ideological beliefs about class struggle and anti-imperialism. This difference helps us to highlights the diverse nature of

⁵⁰ Red Brigades," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, Stanford University, June 2018, archived from the original on August 13, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/profiles/red-brigades>

⁵¹ "Years of Lead" — Domestic Terrorism and Italy's Red Brigades, Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training, <https://www.adst.org>

terrorism and the need for tailored counter-terrorism strategies. While Italy grappled with ideologically driven groups, France would later face challenges related to religious extremism, which necessitated different approaches in policy and public communication.

Understanding the transition from politically motivated violence in Italy to the religiously inspired terrorism in France, is crucial for grasping the broader dynamics of European terrorism. This analysis not only sheds light on the specific historical and social contexts that gave rise to these movements but also enhances our understanding of the evolving nature of terrorism and counter-terrorism effort across Europe. In the subsequent section we will delve deeper into the French experience, drawing parallels and contrast with Italy's struggle against political extremism.

Section 3: The French Experience, Paris and Nice Attacks, and Earlier Incidents.

France has long been a land of revolutions and revolutionaries. In this section I will focus on the more recent history of terrorism in France -one that continues to shape its policies and national legislation-. This is not to suggest that these events encompass the entirety of France's experience with terrorism, but rather to provide an analysis of its most recent developments.

For this analysis, the book *“French Terror Wave, 2015-2016: Al-Qaeda and ISIS Attacks from Charlie Hebdo to the Bataclan Theatre”* by Marc E. Vargo⁵² will help us providing an in-depth examination of the series of terrorist attacks that struck France during this period.

As in other countries, terrorism in France has evolved through various phases, reflecting the nation's complex political, social, and international dynamics. Particularly, it must be said that the word “terrorism” originated during the so called “Reign of Terror”⁵³: *“a climactic period of state-sanctioned violence during the French Revolution (1789-99)”* (world history encyclopedia, 2022). This period was marked by mass executions and political purges led by revolutionary leaders to consolidate power and suppress dissent. Thus, this era set a precedent for state-sponsored terror as a political tool. During 19th and 20th centuries, France also faced anarchist movements employing bombings and assassination to challenge state structures, as in

⁵² Marc E. Vargo, *French Terror Wave, 2015-2016: Al-Qaeda and ISIS Attacks from Charlie Hebdo to the Bataclan Theatre*

⁵³ Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, "THE EMERGENCE OF TERRORISM," in *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire* (New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2018), 21 - 52, <https://doi.org/10.7312/erle18726-003>.

the notable case of the assassination of President Sadi Carnot in 1894⁵⁴. Then, the struggle for Algerian independence saw the National Liberation Front (FLN) conducting attacks in both Algeria and mainland France (1954–1962)⁵⁵. Moreover, France experienced attacks linked to Middle eastern conflicts, particularly during 1970s-1980s, including the 1983 Orly Airport bombing by the Armenian Secret Army for the liberation of Armenia⁵⁶.

France has had significant experience with terrorism. The policy that they adopted at the beginning was the one of “appeasement” toward international terrorist groups, allowing them to use French territory as a base on the condition that they did not carry out attacks in France. We can say that this policy led France to become a refuge for international terrorists. But then, in the 1980s, France was hit by a wave of attacks in Paris, targeting department stores and the metro. At first, French authorities struggled to identify the perpetrators and their motives, mistakenly suspecting local neo-Nazi militants before realizing that the attacks were carried out by terrorists from the Middle East. This school of thought adopted by French was also defined as the “sanctuary doctrine” by Jeremy Shapiro, a former RAND analyst graduated at Harvard. Shapiro has cultivated contacts among counter-terrorist experts at law enforcement agencies in both Paris and Washington.⁵⁷

Following the failure of the “sanctuary doctrine” and increasing public pressure, France’s counterterrorism policy evolved to focus on repression and prevention⁵⁸. A point in favour of France is that they provide of a system of magistrates with extensive investigative powers who have developed deep expertise in global Islamic terrorist networks. France’s response to 9/11 marked a definitive rejection of the sanctuary doctrine, reinforcing its solidarity with the United States and joined the campaign to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan. Another interesting point proposed by Shapiro regards France’s experience as an occupying power in Algeria, he suggests that its subsequent fight against the Islamic insurgency have profoundly shaped its perspective on terrorism.

But moving forward to later events, on November 13th, 2015, Paris experienced a series of coordinated terrorist attacks that resulted in the deaths of at least 128 people and left many others injured. The assaults targeted multiple locations across the city, including the Batcalan

⁵⁴ Milton Kerker, "Sadi Carnot," *The Scientific Monthly* 85, no. 3 (1957): 143-149.

⁵⁵ Phillip C. Naylor, "France and Algeria," in *A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 23-46.

⁵⁶ "Sympathy Won't Help," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1983.

⁵⁷ For an overview of France's position on the Iraq war, see Stanley Hoffmann, France, the United States & Iraq, *THE NATION*, Feb. 16, 2004, at 16; Paul Starobin, The French Were Right, *NAT'LJ.*, Nov. 8, 2003, at 3406.

⁵⁸ Jeremy Shapiro and Bénédicte Suzan, "The French Experience of Counter-terrorism," *Survival* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 67–98.

concert hall, where gunmen opened the fire during a performance, leading to a hostage situation. Other sites attacked included restaurants such as Le Carillon, La Belle Equipe, Le Petit Cambodge, and an area near the Stade De France, the national football stadium, where suicide bombers struck during a match between France and Germany⁵⁹. The reason behind these attacks has been explained by ISIS components themselves: they claimed the Paris attacks were a response to France's campaign against its fighters and insults against Islam's prophet⁶⁰. These events led the French President François Hollande to declare a state of emergency, closing the country's borders, and mobilizing 1,500 soldiers to assist police forces in securing Paris. Public events were cancelled, national monuments and tourist sites were closed, schools and universities were temporarily shut down. From an interview to a Bataclan attack survivor, Ms Le Guen, we can understand how deadly and horrific the event was:

Ms Le Guen saw the full horror of the atrocity.

"The first thing I saw was a body lying just in front of the door. Then we had to go through the Bataclan's main room to get out," she recalled. "There were dozens and dozens of bodies everywhere and the room had absorbed the smell of dry blood." ⁶¹

The attacks led to heightened security measures across the city, including increased patrols and the deployment of additional troops to maintain order; these tragic events marked the deadliest assault on French soil since World War II and had a profound impact on the nation's security policies and public life⁶².

Furthermore, on July 14, 2016, the city of Nice, in the south of France, was hit by an Islamist terrorist attack with a truck on French national day. In this attack 86 people were killed and 458 injured. The driver of the truck was a 31-year-old man, Tunisian resident in France: Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel. The Nice attack was the third mass killing in Western Europe in only eight months, causing not only fear but also anxiety in a continent that had to deal with the struggle of having security challenges. ⁶³

⁵⁹ "Euronews," description of attacks near Le Petit Cambodge, Stade De France, and other locations.

⁶⁰ D. Murro, Associate Researcher, CIBOD, 2015

⁶¹ "Paris Attacks: One Year On, Bataclan Survivor Says 'I Live with it Every Day'," *The Independent*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/paris-attacks-one-year-anniversary-bataclan-survivor-kelly-le-guen-isis-islamic-state-a7413901.html>.

⁶² Homeland Security Advisory Council, *The Attacks on Paris: Lessons Learned* (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University School of Public Policy, 2016), <https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/hsac/content/hsac-paris-lessons-learned-whitepaper.pdf>.

⁶³ "The Hindu," topic page on "Nice Terror Attack," https://www.thehindu.com/topic/Nice_Terror_Attack/.

Section 4: The Perceived Risk of Terrorism: Insights from Lennart Sjöberg's Empirical Study.

Numerous studies analysed citizens' perception of terrorism risk, highlighting key factors that influence this perception. In this section, I will focus on the study conducted in 2005 by Lennart Sjöberg, which represent a significant contribution to the analysis of this phenomenon.⁶⁴

In particular, Sjöberg's study examines the perception of terrorism risk among Swedish respondents following the events of September 11, 2001/ The results show that the overall level of perceived risk was relatively low, with a clear distinction between personal risk and the risk perceived for others. Participant tended to believe that the risk for society, as a whole, was higher than their individual risk. The author also explored various factors influencing risk perception, including demographic characteristics, the psychometric dimension of "dread", perceptions of terrorism's causes, attributes assigned to terrorists, and tendencies toward suspicious thinking.

The demographic trends in risk perception that the study identified are:

- Woman tended to assess the risk of terrorism higher than men.
- Older individuals provided higher risk assessments.
- Respondents with lower education levels perceived a greater risk of terrorism.
- Demographic factors explained only about 5% of the variance in risk perception.

The psychological factors had a more significant impact on individual perception of terrorism risk:

- Fear ("dread") correlated with perceived risk.
- Reasons attributed to terrorism, such as global crime, were considered important.
- The perception of selfishness and greed among terrorists influenced risk assessment.
- A tendency toward suspicious thinking, characterized by beliefs about subversion and secret control, increased risk perception.
- The perception of terrorists' competence influenced perceived risk: if they were seen as confused and uninformed, the perceived risk was higher.
- The generalization of risk across space and time strongly correlated with the perception of terrorism: people believed that the risk could spread and repeat in the future.
- Those who attributed terrorism to global injustice perceived a high risk, as did those who rejected this explanation, while those who were uncertain perceived a lower risk.

⁶⁴ L. Sjöberg, "The Perceived Risk of Terrorism," *Risk Management* 7, no. 1 (2005): 43–61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3867677>.

Another interesting point on which the study focuses is the comparison between personal and general terrorism risk. As a matter of fact, the author explains that the risk for society was perceived as higher than personal risk, and, the general risk of terrorism was however higher than the average for other risks. Furthermore, according to sources, fears of terrorism tend to vary significantly after major events. In particular, immediately after September 11, 2001, there was a notable increase in the perception of terrorism risk and public concern, both in Sweden and the United States. This pattern suggests a similar response in other countries, as in the case for France after the 2015 Paris attacks and for Italy following the Brigade Rosse attacks, or the assassination of Aldo Moro. For instance, in October 2001, 83% of Lennart Sjöberg's study respondents, of the in the United States, considered another attack very likely in the following weeks. The author moreover explains as a similar effect of an initial strong reaction followed by a decline was observed after other disasters too, such as the Chernobyl incident in 1986. Of course, this suggests that there may be a common pattern in psychological responses to catastrophic events. The reason for this "gradual decline" of risk perception, could be linked to the lack of new attacks on the same scale as the initial one. The expectation of imminent new attacks, which at the end did not materialize, led to a reassessment of risk perception. Sjöberg's study confirms that the perception of terrorism risk is influenced more by psychological factors than demographic ones; emotions such as fear, beliefs about terrorism's causes, and patterns of suspicious thinking seem to have a much more significant impact.

CHAPTER 4: SURVEY AND RESULTS.

In the light of the above literary analysis, in this chapter I will outline the data collection and analysis process for this thesis on the possible connection between media narratives, national historical events, and public perception of terrorism in Italy and France. The main aim of this chapter is to present the methodology used to collect the data, subsequently, to present the structure of the analysis and the tool employed to assess whether public opinion about terrorism is shaped by national history and media portrayals.

The survey I conducted on a sample of Italian and French population, consists of several sections, including questions about the frequency with which each individual think about terrorism, their views on media influence, and the impact of terrorism on their daily lives. I will discuss how the survey was distributed, the methods used to collect responses (e.g., online platforms). Moreover, I ensured the data was collected in an ethically way, guaranteeing anonymity and informed consent for participants. However, it must be specified that some

challenges in the data collection were addressed, such as an imbalance in the number of responses from Italy and France, which I decided to fix through a weighted analysis.

Section 1: Data Cleaning and Pre-processing.

The first step that I had to do in analyzing the survey, was ensuring that the dataset was “clean” and properly prepared for the analysis. As a matter of fact, the survey collected responses from 150 Italians and 27 French citizens. This imbalance could have skewed the analysis, making Italian perspectives disproportionately influential. To address this, I applied a weighted analysis to make sure that both nationalities were represented equally in the final dataset. The purpose of this process was, of course, to adjust the influence of each nationality on the results, ensuring that both the Italian and French responses had equal representation in the analysis, despite the disparity in the number of participants.

The weight for French respondents was calculated as the ratio of Italian responses to French responses ($150/27 \approx 5.56$). This means each French response was weighted 5.56 times, to balance out the difference in sample size. For Italian respondents the weight remained 1, as there was no need to adjust their influence. Then, I applied this weight to each individual response in the survey dataset. This ensured that when analyzing the data, in Chi-Square tests, the results would reflect both nationalities proportionally, with the French responses being weighted more heavily. By making these cleaning steps, I made the results more reliable and valid. The next step involved applying statistical tests to assess the relationship between nationality, age, and perception of terrorism.

Section 2: Breakdown of Responses by Age Group and Nationality.

In order to explore trends more deeply, I broke down the responses to the key questions by age group and nationality. This allowed me to observe if there are any significant generational differences in how terrorism is perceived.

I divided the respondents in age brackets (e.g., 18-24, 25-34, 45-54), to see if generational differences effectively play a role in shaping views on terrorism. As previously explained, I hypothesized that older generations may have a different level of concern or media exposure related to terrorism, given their life experiences. Furthermore, I compared Italian and French responses to see if there were significant differences in how each nationality views the media's

role in shaping terrorism perceptions. Finally, I made use of charts and graphs to visualize trends, particularly for key questions such as:

- Bar charts to show the distribution of responses for each question.
- Pie charts to visualize the proportions of responses.
- Cross-tabulation of responses by age group and nationality to reveal any significant pattern or differences.

Section 3: Descriptive Analysis.

Descriptive statistics allow us to summarize and interpret the key characteristics of the survey responses. This section is dedicated to providing an overview of how participants view terrorism, the media's role in shaping their opinion, and their concerns about national security.

“How frequently do respondents think about terrorism?”

This question was essential for understanding the level of concern about terrorism across both Italian and French populations. Thus, I broke down responses by age group to see if different generations perceive the frequency of terrorism differently. The analysis showed that, overall, respondents across both Italy and France are moderately concerned about terrorism, with younger people (18-24) showing slightly higher concern levels. However, there was no significant age-based difference in how often people think about terrorism, suggesting that the global media environment impact all generations similarly.

“What role do respondents think the media plays in shaping their views on terrorism?”

This was another key question, because it addressed how respondents perceive the role of the media in influencing their opinions about terrorism. The purpose was to identify if there were any significant generational or national differences in how people perceive media exaggeration of terrorism. Specifically, my curiosity was to examine if younger people (digital natives) have a more neutral or skeptical view of the media compared to older generations, who may have grown up with more traditional media outlets. The results showed that Italians, were more likely to have strong opinions on media exaggeration, with many agreeing that the media exaggerated the threat of terrorism. French respondents, on the other hand, were more neutral, possibly reflecting a greater desensitization to media portrayals of terrorism, due to their country's “recent” experiences.

“How concerned are respondents about terrorism and national security?”

The aim of this question was to grasp the overall level of concern about terrorism and national security among respondents, providing insights into how serious they perceive the threat of terrorism to be. This allowed me to understand whether people in Italy, with its historical terrorist events, are more concerned than those in France, or, if younger generations feel more vulnerable to terrorism than older generations who may have lived through the height of terrorism in the 1970s. Both Italians and French expressed similar levels of concern about national security, with a slight difference: Italians showed more extreme concern compared to the French which may be attributed to their country's historical experience with domestic terrorism.

Section 4: Considering the Omitted Variables in the Analysis.

When conducting an analysis, it is essential to consider the potential impact of “omitted variables” in addition to the core variables of interest (such as nationality, age, and media consumption). Omitted variables are those that were not originally included in the model, but still might influence both the independent and the dependent variables. Not accounting these omitted variables could lead to some biased results, or, an inaccurate understanding of the relationships between nationality, age, media influence, and perception of terrorism. Thus, to ensure that my analysis provided accurate and reliable results, I included several additional variables to account for any potential omitted factors that could possibly confound the relationship being examined.

I identified few key factors that could potentially influence perceptions of terrorism and the media's role in exaggerating its threat. These included: education level, political views, and media consumption habits. Then, I added these variables in my regression model and employed a multiple regression analysis to account for these omitted variables. This allowed me to assess the relationship between nationality, age, and perception of terrorism, while controlling for the effects of the omitted variables. The results of the regression provided several insights:

1. Education level: The analysis showed that higher education levels were associated with a lower perception of media exaggeration regarding terrorism. This suggests that respondents with higher levels of education may be more critical of sensationalized media portrayals of terrorism and may view the media with more skepticism.

2. Political views: As anticipated, conservative respondents were more likely to agree that media exaggerates the threat of terrorism. This aligns with the idea that those with a more security-focused political ideology might view terrorism as a more immediate threat, amplifying the perception of its media portrayal.
3. Media consumption: Respondents who primarily rely in social media for news were more likely to perceive the media as exaggerating the threat of terrorism. This suggests that social media, with its tendency to amplify sensational stories, contributes effectively to heightened perceptions of terrorism compared to traditional news outlets, which may provide more balanced coverage.

Section 5: Positing the Influence of Media Narratives and Historical National Events on Public Perception of Terrorism.

The descriptive statistics showed several important factors and patterns in how Italian and French respondents perceive terrorism. Compared to the French, Italians, in particular, showed a higher level of concern about terrorism. This was evident in questions such as “how often do you think about terrorism?” and their overall level of concern about national security. The responses from Italians consistently showed that a larger proportion of them are extremely concerned or moderately concerned about terrorism. This finding is particularly significant considering Italy’s historical context with terrorism. In fact, as previously motioned, Italy experienced significant domestic terrorism during 1970s and 1980s, with groups like the Red Brigades targeting both government institutions and civilians. Italian society was impacted for a long period by this time, and many older Italians may have developed increased fears of terrorist attacks, influencing their current perceptions.

However, the regression analysis reveals that education level and media consumption habits also play significant roles in shaping perceptions of terrorism. Educated respondents are less concerned about terrorism, likely due to their ability to critically engage with media narratives and their higher levels of media literacy. This finding suggests that Italians with higher education levels, despite the historical context of terrorism in Italy, may be less susceptible to sensationalized portrayals of terrorism by the media.

The French respondents, in contrast, demonstrated a much more neutral response when asked if they believed that the media exaggerates the threat of terrorism. On the one hand, Italians

tended to either agree or disagree strongly with the statements; on the other hand, French respondents were more likely to select neutral responses. This trend occurred for both younger and older age groups, and this may reflect a general desensitization to the media's portrayals of terrorism. As previously stated, France has experienced numerous high-profile terrorist attacks, most notably the 2015 Paris attacks, which had a profound effect on the national psyche. However, after several years of media coverage, contrary to what I thought, French citizens may have become somehow "desensitized" to the constant media portrayal of terrorism, leading to a more neutral perception. By the way, this contrast with Italy, where terrorism has not been as prominent in recent decades, making media portrayals seem more alarming to the public. Importantly, the regression model showed that political views play a role in shaping media perceptions. In particular, conservative respondents in both countries were more likely to view terrorism as an immediate threat and believed that the media's portrayal was often exaggerated. This suggests that political ideology might influence how individuals engage with media narratives, particularly when it comes to security and national threats.

However, despite differences in historical experiences and national contexts, the role of media exposure was confirmed as a key factor in shaping public perception of terrorism. French media in particular, after years of covering terrorist attacks and national security issues, might have contributed to a more normalized view of terrorism. Over time, people may become less reactive to media portrayals of terrorism, especially when the information is seen as "repetitive" or "sensationalized". Italians, however, have not experienced the same level of terrorism coverage in recent decades, making media portrayals seem more alarming or exaggerated when they occur. This finding is also influenced by the media consumption habits in both countries. Social media exposure, which is more prominent among younger generations, was shown to amplify perceptions of terrorism in both Italy and France, potentially due to the more sensationalized nature of online content.

Moreover, age differences in media perceptions and concern about terrorism were less pronounced than initially expected. This could suggest that global media coverage, particularly through digital platforms, has created a shared sense of vulnerability across age groups, mostly among younger generations. In this regard, we might think that while older generations can still be influenced by personal memories of past terrorism, younger generations are heavily influenced by the continuous stream of media content available online. Additionally, the education variable showed that younger generations with higher education levels are generally more critical of media portrayals, suggesting that media literacy may moderate the impact of media consumption in terrorism perceptions.

In conclusion, we can say that both national history and media exposure play critical roles in shaping how individuals perceive terrorism. The Italian experience with terrorism likely fuels a greater emotional response to media portrayals, while the French experience with repeated terrorist attacks may have resulted in greater media desensitization. Age, on the other hand, did not have a strong impact on perception of terrorism or media influence as initially expected. This may suggest that while generational differences, of course, exist, they are overshadowed by the global nature of media narratives surrounding terrorism. Education levels and media consumption habits were found to be significant factors in explaining the variation in perceptions across both nations, revealing the complex interplay of historical events, media narratives, and socioeconomic factors in shaping public opinion on terrorism.

CHAPTER 5: CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY.

Section 1: Evolution of Italy's National Security Policies.

1. National Security Policies before Italian terrorist attacks.

Even before the rise of the Red Brigades in 1970s, Italy had already experienced the issue of terrorism, particularly with the anarchist, neo-fascist, and separatist movements. National strategies to fight terrorism started to being developed in the early 20th century and later intensified in the post-World War II period. At the end of the 19th century and in the early decade of the 20th century, anarchist terrorism was one of the main threats, for instance, just think about the assassination of King Umberto I in 1900. In that case, the State's response was predominantly repressive, with mass arrests and special laws against anarchists⁶⁵. Particularly, in 1898, was held the Rome Anti-Anarchist Conference, which was an international diplomatic meeting convened in response to the rising threat of anarchist movements across Europe. The participants were 21 countries, including Italy and France. The main objectives were: the

⁶⁵ Pier Carlo Masini, "Storia degli anarchici italiani nell'epoca degli attentati," *Storicamente.org*, last modified September 11, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140911014744/http://storicamente.org/emigrazione-femminile-in-brasile_link7

extradition of the anarchist, the sharing of surveillance and information, press restrictions and stronger national laws⁶⁶.

Moreover, fascism adopted repressive legal measure, such as the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the state (1926), to counter political opponents, including anarchists and communist who were considered “terrorists”. But after World War II, Italy implemented a preventive control policy over extremist political groups, both left-wing and right-wing, through the implementation of intelligence services and the police. Furthermore, during the Tambroni government (1960), Italy adopted a zero tolerance strategy toward communist demonstrations and social protests, which were often considered potentially subversive⁶⁷.

Also, in 1966, the SID (Servizio Informazioni Difesa, Defense Intelligence Service) was reorganized to enhance countermeasures against internal threats. All these strategies paved the way for more complex approaches, in the 1970s, when terrorism became a concrete threat with the emergence of Red Brigades and other subversive organizations.

2. National Security Policies after Red Brigades Era: How Did the Italian Government React?.

The Italian government responded to the Red Brigades with an aggressive crackdown, this means a combination of repressive measures and legislative actions. More specifically, specialized units were created, for instance the Special Anti-Terrorism Unit of Carabinieri, which used infiltration techniques and targeted investigations. Moreover, the government implemented the so called “*strategia dei pentiti*”, basically using informants and repentants between former BR militants, to grasp more information about the organization. They were encouraged to collaborate with justice through the *pentitism* system. Furthermore, thanks to an increased surveillance, the Red Brigades were targeted through enhanced intelligence activities, wiretapping, and undercover operations⁶⁸.

Regarding law and anti-terrorism legislation, the Italian government implemented:

1. *Legge Reale* (1975): introducing measures such as allowing the police to use firearms against dangerous suspects and extending preventive detention periods.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Richard Bach Jensen, "The International Campaign Against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880–1930s," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 1 (2009): 89-109.

⁶⁷ Guido Panvini, "L'immagine di Aldo Moro nell'estrema destra, 1960-1978," in *Vita, un Paese: Aldo Moro e l'Italia del Novecento* (2013): 779-800.

⁶⁸ "Dentro Cosa Nostra – Storia del Pentitismo Mafioso," *ildocumento.it*, March 30, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150627043139/http://ildocumento.it/mafia/dentro-cosa-nostra-storia-del-pentitismo-mafioso.html>

⁶⁹ *Legge Reale* (1975): "Legge 22 maggio 1975, n. 152 - Disposizioni a tutela dell'ordine pubblico," Normattiva, <http://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:1975-05-22;152>.

2. *Legge Cossiga (1979)*: strengthened anti-terrorism measures by increasing penalties and providing legal recognition for those who dissociated from armed struggle. This legislation gave an important push to the fight against terrorism in Italy.
3. *Legge n. 304 (1982)*: a law that granted sentence reductions and legal benefits to former terrorists who cooperated with the authorities. It encouraged defections and obtained valuable intelligence. This also helped leading to the capture of many BR members.
4. *Decreto Legge del 1982*: targeted terrorist financing and logistical support, facilitating the suppression of terrorist activities.⁷⁰

In 1974 there was the first arrest of key BR members, including Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini. In 1981, instead, there was the arrest of Mario Moretti, one of the BR's top leaders, responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro. He was captured thanks to information provided by a "*pentito*" (repentant).

During the '80s and the '90s the Red Brigades were gradually dismantled through a series of targeted operations that led to the arrest or disengagement of its remaining members.

Section 2: Evolution of France's National Security Policies.

3. National Security Policies before terrorist attacks.

Concerning France, the situation is largely similar to that of Italy: before France faced large-scale terrorist attacks in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the country had already developed national security policies to counter various forms of internal and external threats, including anarchist violence, anti-colonial movements, and far-right and far-left extremism. As might be expected, these policies evolved throughout the 20th century in response to emerging threats. To be specific, following a series of anarchist bombings and assassinations in the 1890s, -as the previously mentioned assassination of President Carnot in 1894-, France implemented strict anti-anarchist laws, known as "*lois scélérates*", aimed at criminalizing anarchist propaganda and reinforcing police powers⁷¹. Moreover, the *Sûreté Générale*, the national security agency,

⁷⁰ (www.normattiva.it)

⁷¹ Francis de Pressensé and Émile Pouget, *Les lois scélérates de 1893-1894* (Éditions le Flibustier, 2008).

expanded its role in monitoring radical groups, laying the foundation for modern intelligence practices. From 1940 to 1944, during the Vichy regime, national security policies started to be dictated by the collaborationist government, which established authoritarian policing structures, including the *Milice*, to suppress resistance movements⁷². On top of that, in 1944 France created the “*Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire*” (DST), aimed to counter espionage and domestic subversion, with a special focus on communist activities during the Cold War⁷³. But it was in 1960s and 1970s that the French state officially began responding to political extremism, reorganizing security forces such as the *Gendarmerie Mobile* and the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*. Also, the *Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage* was restructured to combat emerging terrorist threats⁷⁴. Handling far-right and far-left groups, the government enacted emergency laws and strengthened police counterterrorism operations, such as the case of the *Organisation de l’Armée Secrète*⁷⁵, a far-right paramilitary group engaged in terrorist activities, and the *Gauche Prolétarienne* and *Action Directe*, two far-left groups closely monitored as well⁷⁶.

Regarding the foundations of modern counterterrorism in France, they emerged in the 1970s, with the creation of the *Brigade Anti-Commando* to address hostage situations and armed attacks, as well as the establishment of the *Groupe d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale*, a special forces unit specialized in counter terrorism⁷⁷.

As was anticipated, France began developing legal frameworks to combat terrorism as well, increasing coordination and reinforcing state power against threats. These policies laid the ground for France’s modern counterterrorism apparatus, which would later be tested by domestic and international terrorist attacks in the 1980s and beyond.

4. National Security Policies before terrorist attacks: How France Reacted to the Threat of Terrorism.

After September 11, 2001 attacks, France, as well as other countries, started strengthen its counter-terrorism measures. The government particularly focused on improving the

⁷² Stanley Hoffmann, "Collaborationism in France during World War II," *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 3 (1968): 375-395.

⁷³ Olivier Brun and Jérôme Poirot, "52. 16 novembre 1944. Création de la Direction de la surveillance du territoire, confiée à Roger Wybot," in *Hors collection* (2021): 180-182.

⁷⁴ Gildas Lepetit, "La réforme de la gendarmerie mobile après mai 1968," *Gendinfo*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.gendarmerie.interieur.gouv.fr/gendinfo/histoire/la-reforme-de-la-gendarmerie-mobile-apres-mai-1968>.

⁷⁵ "OAS (Organisation de l’Armée Secrète)," *Encyclopædia Universalis*, <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/oas-organisation-de-l-armee-secrete/>.

⁷⁶ A. Dubuisson, "Discours et influences de la société sur les pratiques d’Action Directe (1979-1982)," *Conflictualités, représentations et médiatisation de la violence et de la radicalisation* 95.

⁷⁷ *Encyclopédie de la Gendarmerie Nationale*, vol. III (Paris: Éditions SPE Barthelemy, 2006), 160.

coordination between its intelligence agencies and law enforcement bodies. However, in this section I will focus on the policy shifts that occurred after 2015 Paris attacks, which marked a significant turning point in France's approach to national security.

Firstly, France declared a state of emergency which lasted for two years in order to allow security forces to conduct searches, raids, and house arrests without judicial oversight. Successively, the French government passed several laws. It must be specified that already existed numerous laws in France on the fight against terrorism, by the way, the following ones are the most significant and widely discussed, that concern the period following the 2015 Paris attacks:

- The 2015 "*Loi de Programmation Militaire*"⁷⁸ (Military Programming Law) aimed at expanding counter-terrorism budgets. This law covered a period of 6 years and was updated following the 2015 attacks, in order to take into account the evolved context. It also allowed for the use of military forces for domestic security operations (*Operation Sentinelle*, launched on January 12, 2015), increasing visible military presence in areas considered at high risk, especially in Paris.
- The "*Loi du 3 juin 2016*"⁷⁹ that allowed the authorities to block access to websites that promote terrorism radicalization; expanded the surveillance powers of intelligence services monitoring internet and social media platforms; and gave authorities additional powers to place individuals under house arrest, controlling their movements.
- The "*Loi du 30 octobre 2017*"⁸⁰, that made permanent many of the emergency powers granted during the state of emergency that followed the attacks, basically giving the authorities the power to carry out administrative searches and seize weapons without judicial approval, expanding the use of electronic surveillance and reinforcing the ability to block online content related to terrorism. This law is particularly important because it also aims at preventing radicalization, through the closure of places of worship associated with extremist activity as well.
- The "*Loi confortant le respect des principes de la République*"⁸¹: introduced to combat radicalization through strengthening France's secular values, such as "laïcité", with stricter regulations on religious associations -reinforcing government oversight-, homeschooling, and online hate speeches.

⁷⁸ France, *Journal officiel de la République française*, "Loi n° 2015-912 du 24 juillet 2015 relative au renseignement," July 25, 2015, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000030943133/>.

⁷⁹ France, *Journal officiel de la République française*, "Loi n° 2021-1109 du 24 août 2021 sur la gestion de la crise sanitaire," August 25, 2021, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000032627231>.

⁸⁰ France, *Journal officiel de la République française*, "Loi n° 2017-1510 du 30 octobre 2017 renforçant la sécurité intérieure et la lutte contre le terrorisme," <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000035932811>.

⁸¹ Légifrance, "Loi n° 2021-1109 du 24 août 2021 confortant le respect des principes de la République," August 24, 2021, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000043964778>.

- Although France already had the *Fiche S* list⁸² in place, following the 2015 Paris attacks, the government began refining and reinforcing its use. The list identifies individuals suspected of involvement in radicalization or terrorist activities and includes those considered a national security threat, even if they have not been convicted of a crime.

Clearly, France continuously updates its approach to combat terrorism as threats evolve. Especially under President Emmanuel Macron, the government pushes for stronger regulations and international cooperation to combat radicalization. Macron's approach to terrorism is based on strong security measures, preventive strategies, international cooperation and a commitment to maintain the core values of French republicanism, including secularism and individual freedoms. Particularly, the France's international strategy to combat terrorism is comprehensively expressed on the webpage from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs⁸³. France's plan of action includes preventing radicalization and combating terrorist propaganda through high dialogues with international partners and participating in multilateral discussions. Giving the digital era we are living in, it is crucial to focus on online content. For this reason, a significant attention is placed on collaborating with digital companies to ensure the rapid removal of terrorist content online, the France Ministry assures that the contents related to terrorist organization and propaganda, are usually removed from any platform within one hour from their publication, as clearly expressed from the European Union rules to fight terrorism. Moreover, France actively participates in international efforts, with the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum, to mitigate any possible threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters. Another key area of focus for France is the issue of terrorist financing; recognizing that terrorist organizations require funding, France has taken significant steps to cut off these financial resources. In particular, in April 2018, France hosted the conference "No Money for Terror", bringing together representatives from nearly 80 countries, including Italy, and leaders from various international organizations. Also, thanks to the "Paris Agenda", they settled priorities and concrete actions to combat terrorist financing, strengthening their legal frameworks and enhancing their intelligence cooperation.

⁸² France, *Journal officiel de la République française*, "Loi n° 2010-1192 du 11 octobre 2010 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public," <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000022276189>.

⁸³ Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "Terrorism: France's International Action," *France Diplomacy*, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/terrorism-france-s-international-action/>.

Section 3: Counter-Terrorism Strategies of the European Union: Frameworks and Evolution.

After analysing France and Italy's responses to terrorist threats, it is essential to place our findings and policies within not only a national context, but also an international setting, such as that of the European Union. The European Council and the Council of the European Union set counterterrorism as a top priority for the European Union. As outlined on the website of the European Council, the measures adopted by European countries have been shaped by the 2015 Paris attacks. It is stated that:

“Although responsibility for combating crime and safeguarding security primarily lies with the member states, recent years’ terrorist attacks have shown that this is also a common responsibility which they must shoulder together. The EU contributes to the protection of its citizens by acting as the main forum for cooperation and coordination among member states.”

84

Nevertheless, before the pivotal 2015 Paris attacks, the European Union already had established a framework for counterterrorism that reflected a growing awareness of the international nature of terror threats. As previously stated, this framework evolved over the years through various legislative and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing cooperation and security across all over EU.

Established in 2002, the *European Arrest Warrant*⁸⁵ (EAW) revolutionized judicial cooperation within the EU by allowing for the swift extradition of individuals suspected of serious crimes, including terrorism. Moreover, it eliminated lengthy extradition procedures and facilitated real-time law enforcement across borders. The EAW was definitely effective in cases such as the rapid arrest and extradition of suspects involved in the 2004 Madrid train bombings, demonstrating its critical role in Europe's counterterrorism efforts.

⁸⁴ European Council, "Fight against Terrorism," *Council of the European Union*, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/>.

⁸⁵ European Commission, "European Arrest Warrant," last modified 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/law/cross-border-cases/judicial-cooperation/types-judicial-cooperation/european-arrest-warrant_en.

Furthermore, in 2005, following the Madrid and London attacks of 2004 and 2005, the European Union adopted a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy⁸⁶ that was its first major framework to address terrorism holistically and it laid the ground for coordinated action to stop, defend, find, and respond to terrorist attacks. In any way the strategy often faced implementation challenges due to varying national security policies among member states, which sometimes led fragmented efforts.

In 2006 a directive also known as “*Directive 2006/24/EC*”⁸⁷ was implemented to bolster law enforcement capabilities in tracing and preventing terrorist activities, requiring telecom operators to retain certain data. Soon this directive sparked significant debates over privacy and data protection, to be then annulled by the European Court of Justice in 2014 due to concerns over privacy rights and data security.

Spanning the period from 2010 to 2014, the Stockholm Programme⁸⁸ aimed at strengthening the security of the EU’s shared space by enhancing operational cooperation, managing external borders, and improving the common visa policy. It recognized the necessity of balancing security with respect for fundamental rights. In particular, a notable outcome was the enhancement of the Schengen Information System (SIS)⁸⁹ and the Visa Information System (VIS)⁹⁰, which improved both significantly the sharing of information for border and law enforcement agencies.

It must be said that these legislative tools helped standardize the approach to counterterrorism across the EU, although some differences in national implementation occasionally hindered their effectiveness. But still, these initiatives collectively contributed to a security architecture within the EU that, while not without flaws, significantly improved the capacity of the European Union countries, to counter terrorism.

⁸⁶ European Parliament, « Understanding EU counter-terrorism policy », European Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing, March 2023,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/739395/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)739395_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/739395/EPRS_BRI(2023)739395_EN.pdf).

⁸⁷ Council of the European Union, "Directive 2006/24/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 on the retention of data generated or processed in connection with the provision of publicly available electronic communications services or of public communications networks and amending Directive 2002/58/EC," Official Journal of the European Union, April 13, 2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2006/24/oj>.

⁸⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "UNHCR Protection Manual," last modified September 2009, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4a9d13ce9.pdf>.

⁸⁹ European Commission, "Schengen Information System," Home Affairs, last modified 2023, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-information-system_en.

⁹⁰ European Commission, "Visa Information System (VIS)," Home Affairs, last modified 2023, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/visa-information-system_en.

The 2015 Paris attacks, however, marked the turning point by underscoring the necessity for even stronger, integrated and quick responses, leading to a renewed emphasis on strengthening external borders, improving EU-wide intelligence sharing, and addressing radicalization more effectively.

Today, the European Union defines terrorism as follows:

“According to EU law, terrorist offences are acts committed with the aim of:

- *Seriously intimidating a population.*
- *Unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act.*
- *Seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic, or social structures of a country or an international organisation.”*⁹¹

Thus, responding to these defined threats, the European Union’s primary responses are the following:

1. Prevention of radicalization.
2. A comprehensive list of individuals, groups, and entities involved in terrorism. Since September 2016, the EU has been able to impose sanctions on ISIL/Da’esh, Al-Qaeda, and associated persons or entities. Additionally, the EU is developing four new tools to enhance the sharing and accessibility of information across member states.
3. an EU counter-terrorism coordinator: An official responsible for coordinating counter-terrorism efforts within the EU, monitoring the implementation of the EU’s counterterrorism strategy, and improving communication between EU and non-EU countries.
4. Cutting off terrorist financing: Since 2018, the EU has strengthened anti-money laundering regulations to prevent the financing of terrorism.
5. Firearms control: New regulations to control the acquisition and possession of firearms, as well as to restrict public access to explosive precursors.
6. The EU has implemented a directive aimed at criminalizing action such as training or traveling for terrorist purposes, organizing or facilitating such travel and providing or collecting funds to terrorist group or activities.

⁹¹ European Council, "Fight against Terrorism," *Council of the European Union*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/>.

7. Finally: cooperating with non-EU countries, in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa, the Gulf and the Sahel, to combat terrorism on a global scale.⁹²

These measures reflect the EU's commitment to proactively answer to terrorism, underscoring the need for collaboration both within and beyond its borders.

⁹² Council of the European Union, "Fight Against Terrorism," *European Union*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/#terrorist%20list>.

CONCLUSION

Recap of Findings.

In this thesis I tried to draw attention to several important findings about how national history and media narratives shape public perception of terrorism in Italy and France. Firstly, I underlined how historical context has a big impact on public attitudes in both nations. On the one hand, Italians with their collective memory of political violence in 1970s and 1980s, showed heightened sensitivity to terrorism. On the other hand, French respondents exhibited a form of normalization or resilience toward terrorism due to frequent recent incidents. Furthermore, the media plays a crucial role, often exaggerating the threat of terrorism, particularly through sensationalist portrayals prevalent on social media. Lastly, education levels emerged as a critical factor, with higher education correlating with more critical perceptions of media narratives.

My research confirms that media narratives and historical contexts profoundly influence national security perceptions and policies. Media amplification of terrorism threats can pressure governments into adopting stringent security measures that risk infringing upon civil liberties and exacerbating societal divisions. As a result, protecting national security and preserving democratic freedoms and human rights need to be carefully balanced. Possible unintended consequences, such as increased societal polarisation and anxiety, highlight the significance of thoughtful and nuanced media coverage. And finally, reactive initiatives sparked by public anxieties should be avoided by policymakers since they may unintentionally weaken democratic institutions.

Writing this thesis, I came to the conclusion that future studies on this subject should involve other European nations. This could enrich the understanding of how various historical and media contexts uniquely shape public perceptions. Moreover, exploring the impact of emerging technologies, such as AI-driven media platforms, on perceptions of terrorism and national security policies could further contribute to a contemporary understanding of this dynamic. Lastly, another interesting idea could be conducting longitudinal studies that track changes in public perceptions over time, in order to provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of societal responses to terrorism.

Final Reflections on How Society's Response to Terrorism Reflects Its Core Values and Resilience.

Ultimately, the way societies respond to terrorism is indicative of their core values, societal resilience, and commitment to democratic principles. Responses shaped by historical experiences and media narratives reveal collective attitudes towards security, liberty, and human rights. While fear and anxiety may provoke short-term restrictive measures, resilient societies demonstrate an ability to critically engage with threats without compromising democratic freedoms. This research emphasizes the importance of fostering informed public discourse and critical media literacy to reinforce societal resilience and ensure balanced, proportionate responses to the ongoing challenge of terrorism.

In our quest for security, the measures we embrace are a testament to our values and our collective will to preserve the fabric of society. France and Italy's multifaceted approaches to counterterrorism, not only reflects a commitment to safeguard their citizens, but also challenges us to consider the delicate balance between security and freedom, vigilance, and trust. As Benjamin Franklin said,

“ Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.”

This quote should remind us of the perennial tension that democratic societies face. As we advance our strategies to counter terrorism, we must also nurture the very ideals that these threats seek to undermine: liberty, justice, and the unyielding pursuit of peace. France and Italy's initiatives, from tightening border controls to enhancing intelligence sharing and addressing radicalization, must therefore be continuously scrutinized and guided by these higher principles. The challenge lies not only in the effectiveness of these measures but also in their ability to harmonize security with the inalienable rights and dignities of each human being.

In conclusion, the journey of combating terrorism is more than a narrative of laws and directives; it is more a reflection of a broader struggle for harmony between safety and freedom. As we look forward, it is imperative that we remain vigilant not just against the forces of terror but against the erosion of the very liberties that define us. Through a lens of compassion and justice, our response to terrorism can transcend mere reaction and become a signal of our resilience and our commitment to a just world.

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