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**Intelligence Failures in Countering Islamic Terrorism:**

**A Comparative Analysis on the Strategic Surprises**

**of the 9/11 and the Paris Attacks and**

**the Exceptionality of the Italian Case**

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*«No religion is responsible for terrorism. People are responsible for violence and terrorism.»*

Barack Obama

## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this thesis is to explain why intelligence systems sometimes fail. The attacks of September 11, 2001 against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington and the attacks in Paris on the evening of November 13, 2015 demonstrated the limitations and weaknesses of intelligence agencies and of both the United States and France. The intelligence process is not a perfect process and is very often subject to malfunctions that expose the systems within which they operate to risks, such as failures and strategic surprises. Faced with a new threat such as international Islamic terrorism, Western national security systems have found themselves unprepared to fight a new type of war against some non-state actors such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. This asymmetric war, which uses new strategies and tactics, also depends on the degree of involvement of the affected countries in conflicts in the Middle East and on internal social causes due to phenomena of radicalization. Italy proves to be an exception in the Western jihadist landscape, due to some internal and external characteristics, not being hit by any attack of Islamic origin so far.

## INTRODUCTION

The protection of national security is one of the most important prerogatives of a democratic state, which is committed to protecting the integrity of its territory, the safety of its population and the maintenance of its civil and political institutions. In this sense, the concept of national security also coincides with the concept of defense and is aimed at protecting the institutions and the founding principles of democracy, without which there could not even be freedom. Security and freedom are therefore the cornerstones on which the rule of law finds its foundation. National security is thus a precious asset for the State, which is concerned with preserving it through the intelligence activity carried out by its own security apparatuses and agencies. They deal with the collection, maintenance, analysis, processing of data and dissemination of news aimed at preventing internal and external threats to the State and destabilizing activities of any kind.

Intelligence agencies, better known as Secret Services, are organizations headed by a State whose work is covered by secrecy, and which operate to pursue the safeguarding of the national interest and the maintenance of national security. These are both civil and military entities that report directly to the government of a State to which they belong. These agencies operate secretly both abroad (*espionage* activities), and within the territory of the State to which they belong (in this case we are talking about *counter-espionage* activities). A peculiar role assumed by intelligence agencies in recent years is that of *counter-terrorism*, that is, the set of strategies, tactics and techniques aimed at fighting and preventing terrorism understood as subversive activities that make use of violence for political or religious purposes.<sup>1</sup> The counter-terrorism strategy is therefore a government plan that uses resources and instruments of national power to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, their networks in such a way as to make them unable to use violence to instill fear among the civilian population and force governments to act according to the demands and objectives of the terrorists.<sup>2</sup>

However, intelligence work and security services are not infallible systems: despite the high professionalism and competence of its agents and the resources that a country possesses, the information produced is not always useful or sufficient to predict and prevent an attack. The United States of America is an example of this vulnerability, despite the fact it is an economic, political and military superpower in the world, the winner of two World Wars and the only winning power of the Cold War, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union. Twice, in fact, the United States has suffered heavy attacks from an external enemy, which have deeply shocked public opinion due to their gravity, spectacularity, but above all due to the fact of having been

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia P. Fortna, *Do Terrorists Win? Rebels' Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 519-556.

<sup>2</sup> Dan E. Stigall, Chris Miller, Lauren Donnatucci, *The 2018 U.S. National Strategy for Counterterrorism: A Synoptic Overview*, American University National Security Law Brief, 2019.

conducted on US soil without being somehow intercepted by the own security agencies: the attack on Pearl Harbor, conducted by the Japanese Military Air Force on December 7, 1941, and the tragedy of September 11, 2001, of an Islamic origin, have shown that it is not entirely impossible to circumvent American intelligence and Security Services. In particular, these two events are known to be the greatest intelligence failures in history, destined to set a trend for state intelligence agencies around the world and for those who want to approach to the field of security studies in the context of international relations.

It should be noted that at the international level there is no universally valid definition of “terrorism”, since States and other actors of the international community are at odds in recognizing what terrorism is and what characteristics it has. In fact, the term could be used biased by States and non-state groups to accuse or denounce political opponents of subversive actions to public order or a threat to collective security.<sup>3</sup> A definition of “terrorism” officially recognized by the States of the international community would lead to legal repercussions that could be controversial from a formal and substantive point of view. However, in the academic field, several scholars have tried to give a definition of “terrorism” to facilitate the research methodology. The American professor Bruce Hoffman, lecturer at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. and one of the world’s leading experts in the studies of terrorism, argues that terrorism is distinguishable from other crimes when the actions perpetrated<sup>4</sup>:

- have mainly political aims and motives;
- are violent or threaten to use violence;
- are designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the victim or the immediate target;
- are led by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or by a conspiratorial cell (whose members do not wear uniforms or identifying insignia) and are perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity.

Given that there are different forms of terrorism, and that political violence is used to achieve the most disparate objectives, this thesis analyzes the failures of intelligence in countering Islamic terrorism, and therefore a religious type of terrorism.

After the end of the Cold War, a geopolitical scenario had emerged in which the United States remained the sole hegemonic power of the international order, and liberal democracy and the values of the West seemed to be the only ideological alternative left for the nations of the world that emerged

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, p.23.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2 ed., Columbia University Press, New York, 2006, p. 40.

from the yoke of the political and ideological bipolarity of the United States and the Soviet Union. Hence, from a bipolar geopolitical scenario, we moved to a unipolar scenario, led by the United States, from which an optimistic vision of history emerged.<sup>5</sup> In 1993, Samuel P. Huntington stated instead that the end of the Cold War would not lead to a more united and harmonious world guided by the values of the West, but to the re-emergence of dividing lines and conflicts of a cultural-religious nature, centered on national identity.<sup>6</sup> This theory can be summarized with the expression “*clash of civilizations*”, and affirms that the division of the world into States is reductive, and that instead it should be divided according to civilizations, and that to understand present and future conflicts one should first understand cultural differences, and that it is culture (and not the State) that must be considered a battleground. Huntington also predicted that as the modernization process progressed, the West would gradually lose its dominance over the world, as its civilization would not be able to recognize the irreconcilable nature of the tensions between different cultures.<sup>7</sup> This vision seems to be prophetic in relation to the global scenario that starting from September 11, 2001 has taken shape: globalization has shown its limits and its controversial aspects, and the world has appeared split into two new blocks (Western civilization and Islamic civilization) at war with each other.

The problem of Islamic terrorism in the West, which has had widespread resonance in recent years, seems to be the result of this “clash of different civilizations”, and poses problems not only at the security level but also at the social level in every country. This has given rise to a wide debate on the link between Islam and terrorism, but it has also led the West to question its own model of society and to question the values it advocates, such as individual freedom, freedom of worship, peace and equality. But Islam, with 1.8 billion followers worldwide (i.e., 24% of the world’s population)<sup>8</sup>, is indeed a violent religion as portrayed in the public debate of the Western media and in the populist rhetoric of right-wing leaders and politicians? Is it really the source of the terrorist attacks that have upset America and Western Europe in the last twenty years or has it been exploited by political motivations and issues? What is certain is that Islamic terrorism today is a fairly complex phenomenon, since in recent years there has been a total change in the style, strategies, techniques and subjects involved. We have gone from a local dimension to a global dimension, where the enemy is no longer external, but Westerners who communicate with each other in a European language, travel with European passports, communicate and campaign through social media, products of that

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, on *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, pp. 22-49.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, Pew Research Center, Washington D.C., 2011.



much hated Western society.<sup>9</sup> It is thus a modern phenomenon, in continuous transformation and full of contradictions, which can only be understood through the study of the actors involved and the context in which they operate.

My analysis is aimed at analyzing the two most striking cases of intelligence failures in the West: the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. in the United States and the Paris attacks on the evening of November 13, 2015 in France. A third case study is represented by Italy, which has so far proved to be an exception in the context of the increase in cases and the resurgence of jihadist attacks in Europe. For the sake of completeness and precision, I thought it was appropriate to divide my thesis into four chapters, each of which associated with a level of analysis.

In the first chapter I will analyze the intelligence work on a theoretical level, referring to the academic literature to explain what the intelligence cycle is and how it works, what are intelligence failures and strategic surprises, and what the theory of the Black Swan consists of. This theoretical framework will be useful for analyzing the case studies that I set out to analyze and to which I will refer during my discussion.

In the second chapter I will analyze the attacks of September 11, 2001 (which I will often refer to with the widely recognized abbreviation “9/11”) from a historical perspective, analyzing facts, causes and consequences, but after examining the main US intelligence agencies, and what is and how the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda operates; I will also talk about the implications that 9/11 had on the international scenario, and the involvement of the United States in two long-term wars in the Middle East: the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq.

In the third chapter I will talk about the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015, again analyzing facts, causes and consequences after explaining how the French intelligence system is structured and how it works, and explaining how ISIS, the terrorist organization that was responsible for the attacks, was born and operates; I will also make a brief reference to French involvement in the Middle East, referring to colonialism and the problems that arose from it and to the military reactions of France after the attack.

In the fourth and last chapter, I will examine the exceptional nature of the Italian case: in fact, Italy has not suffered any significant jihadist attacks to date. After having illustrated which agencies is divided into and how Italian intelligence operates, and analyzed the presence of the Islamic community in Italy and what are the main trends of radicalization within our country, I will try to explain why Italy has never suffered real jihadist attacks capable of causing a high number of victims,

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<sup>9</sup> Amer Al-Sabaileh, *Islam e terrorismo*, in Francesca Maria Corrao, Luciano Violante, *L'Islam non è terrorismo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2018.

as happened in the two previous cases and in other attacks that have bloodied Europe and other Western countries; a significant event that could change this trend could be a change in Italian foreign policy, and therefore the country's involvement in intervening in the MENA area. In this section, I will evaluate the hypothesis in which Italy decides to intervene in Libya.

In the conclusions of my thesis, I will try to answer many of the questions that I will raise during my discussion, but in particular to a question that may appear tainted by a cognitive bias: could the attacks of 9/11 and Paris have been avoided? I will try to answer this question by highlighting in the first two case studies what or at what level the intelligence systems have failed, what has worked in Italy, and what to do in such a way as to prevent other intelligence failures in the West in the fight against Islamic terrorism.

# CHAPTER 1

## Intelligence: A Theoretical Framework

«Security is a process, not a product.»

Bruce Schneier

### 1.1 – The Intelligence Cycle

Intelligence is a particular form of information that allows policy-makers or operational commanders to make more effective decisions.<sup>10</sup> Intelligence is therefore information that is calibrated to support decision-makers and is therefore only a support to the decision-making process. Consequently, what is relevant or necessary for a certain decision-making process or for a certain power may not be so for the other. This constitutes at the same time the strengths and weaknesses of intelligence because if on the one hand the production of particular information is targeted and constitutes a fundamental support in the decision-making process, on the other hand it cannot be understood and ignored or left aside. This instrumental idea of intelligence as a special type of information that constitutes the prelude to policies and lines of action and makes strategic decision-making more effective represents a classic Western conceptualization that has remained almost unchanged over time.<sup>11</sup>

Former CIA agent Mark Lowenthal argues that the word “intelligence” is commonly used in three different ways<sup>12</sup>:

- a) as a *process*, through which intelligence is requested by policy-makers or operational commanders, then collected, analyzed, and disseminated to consumers. This process is often called the “intelligence cycle”, although the nature of this cycle is now a matter of debate;
- b) as a *product*, once circulating as a document, but today distributed through multi-level electronic security databases;

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Warner, *Wanted: A Definition of “Intelligence”*, on *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2002, pp. 15-22.

<sup>11</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence*, in Paul D. Williams, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, 2 ed., Routledge, London, 2012, pp. 235-249.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 4 ed., SAGE Publications, 2008.

- c) as *institutions*, if we refer to intelligence services and communities. As their name implies, they offer various “services” to the government and this implies more and more active efforts on their part to shape the world, as well as just reporting what is happening there.

Hence, the intelligence cycle is the process of developing “raw” information into “finished products” of intelligence for policy-makers to use in decision-making and action. Intelligence is effective only if it is effective as a whole, that is, in the phases of the cycle that characterizes it, even though several times this cycle has been subject to criticism as it excessively schematizes a succession of actions that actually have many shades.<sup>13</sup> The intelligence cycle, however, constitutes an important analytical and theoretical tool for understanding the functioning of a work that is in reality very complex. There are five stages that make up the intelligence cycle<sup>14</sup>:

- 1. Planning and Direction:** Management of the entire intelligence work, from identifying the need for data to providing a finished product of intelligence to the consumer. This phase is the beginning and the end of the cycle: the beginning because it involves the design of specific data collection requirements, and the end because the final product of the process that supports the policies and the lines of action of the decisions generates new requirements. The whole process depends on the leadership of institutions and public officials. Policy-makers (the President and his collaborators, the National Security Council, and other major government departments and agencies) begin the process by requesting intelligence.
- 2. Collection:** Gathering of the “raw” information needed to produce finished intelligence products. There are many sources of information, including open sources, such as foreign radio and television services, newspapers, periodicals, and books. Open source reporting is an integral part of analytical skills. There are also secret sources of information, which are found through different means.
- 3. Processing and Exploitation:** Conversion of the large amount of information collected into a form that can be used by analysts through decoding, language translation, and data reduction.
- 4. Analysis and Production:** Converting basic information into finished intelligence products. This phase consists in integrating, evaluating, and analyzing all available data (which are often fragmented and even in contradiction with each other), and in preparing intelligence products for consumers. The intelligence analysts, who are the protagonists of this phase, consider the

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<sup>13</sup> Bruce D. Berkowitz, Allan E. Goodman, *Best Truth: Intelligence in the Age*, Yale University Press, Yale, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The Intelligence Cycle*, Central Intelligence Agency, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/kids-page/parents-teachers/docs/Briefing-intelligence-cycle.pdf>.

reliability, validity, and relevance of the information. They integrate the data into a coherent whole, put the evaluated information into context, and produce final intelligence products that include event assessments and judgments about the implications of the obtained information for the state.

- 5. Dissemination:** Distribution of the finished intelligence product to consumers, i.e., the same policy-makers who gave life to the process. Policy-makers are therefore the final recipients of the finished intelligence product, and make decisions based on information and these decisions can lead to a request for more intelligence, thus triggering a new intelligence cycle.



*Fig. 1: The Intelligence Cycle. Source: Intelligence 101.*

Hence, the intelligence cycle begins when a State's national security agents need to know something about another State or other non-state actors on the global scene whose actions could impact their State's security. This need for information becomes a national priority and is eventually assigned to one or more entities that form the State's intelligence community. The information requested may

relate to empirical and observable developments (such as, for example, weapons of mass destruction, types of weapons, international agreements, terrorism, etc.) or may relate to intentions (what a State or group plans to do with weapons in their possession). Above all, information is something that the State or group under attention does not want the other State to obtain.<sup>15</sup>

In the collection phase, the various intelligence agencies and sub-agencies begin to collect information through a combination of different disciplines, especially if the object of investigation is at a high level of priority. These disciplines are generally divided into two macro-categories: *human intelligence collection* (HUMINT), that is the use of operative agents or infiltrated spies, and *technical intelligence collection* (TECHINT), that is the information obtained through technical means. The use of TECHINT in the information gathering phase was possible thanks to technological and scientific progress, at first thanks to the development of wire-based electronic communications, then thanks to the development of wireless electronic communications, and finally, thanks to the development of airplanes and aeronautical technology.<sup>16</sup> It includes several sub-disciplines. Extensively, the intelligence collection disciplines can be summarized as follows<sup>17</sup>:

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
HUMINT	<i>Human Intelligence.</i> Information collected by intelligence agents who are usually stationed in foreign nations.
TECHINT	<i>Technical Intelligence.</i> Originally it indicated information reported about weapons, but now it is used to indicate information collected from the interception of a set of various electronic signals through sophisticated technological means.
SIGINT	<i>Signals Intelligence.</i> All types of information collected through electronic devices, including the following sub-disciplines.
IMINT	<i>Imagery Intelligence.</i> Any type of photographic or digital image collected via satellite in orbit or

<sup>15</sup> Stan A. Taylor, *The Role of Intelligence in National Security*, in Alan Collins, *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, pp. 299-317.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>17</sup> Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 2 ed., SAGE Publications, 2003.

	ground systems (airplanes or Unmanned Ariel Vehicles).
PHOTINT	<i>Photographic Intelligence</i> . An earlier term for IMINT. Widely used to describe both films and digital photographs taken from satellite.
COMINT	<i>Communication Intelligence</i> . The interception of communications between two or more parties.
TELINT	<i>Telemetry Intelligence</i> . The interception of data transmitted during the tests of various types of weapons systems.
ELINT	<i>Electronic Intelligence</i> . The interception of electronic emissions emanating from weapons and tracking systems.
MASINT	<i>Measures and Signatures Intelligence</i> . A newer form of SIGINT that uses more advanced devices that can sense materials used in various types of modern weapons.
RADINT	<i>Radar Intelligence</i> . Information derived from the use of radar signals emanating from overhead satellites, aircraft or ground-based sources.
OSINT	<i>Open Source Intelligence</i> . The collection of intelligence information from a variety of sources open to the public (media, government information, academic publications, etc.).

The collection phase is followed by the processing and exploitation phase, although the two phases often overlap. This phase consists in the translation of material in foreign languages, in the interpretation of photographs, and in the decryption or decoding of communication codes. Due to the large amount of collected material, the translation of intercepted communications can take several months, and the decryption of communication codes can even take many years.

The analysis phase is considered the most important and difficult phase of the intelligence process. All information collected and processed is finally provided to analysts, who contextualize it

historically and try to separate valid information from misleading information entered by the targeted State's intelligence to confuse the intelligence work of the State that collects information. The information that reaches analysts is called "raw" or "unfinished" intelligence, and is mostly contradictory or ambiguous information, but analysts try to turn it into what is called "finished" or "actionable" intelligence. For this reason, the analysis phase also coincides with the intelligence production phase. If critical and urgent information is transmitted immediately, most of the information is instead transformed into finished intelligence products before it can be presented to decision-makers. Intelligence production can be conducted in various forms, such as with daily or occasional briefings to decision-makers, or through intelligence estimates, i.e., periodic printed assessments of important developments.

In the dissemination phase, the last phase of the process, the information is delivered to those who had requested it in the first instance. Obviously, through the intelligence cycle, additional related information is added to the specific information collected in response to the original request. Therefore, it is precisely in the dissemination phase that intelligence adds value to the decision-making process. Senior government officials, in possession of the final intelligence product, will thus be able to pursue policies and practice statecraft in a more conscious manner, and will theoretically be able to improve the security of their own State or alliance they are part of.

If in this perspective the intelligence cycle seems a logical and effective process, in its phases it often shows some weaknesses that can create malfunctions. Specifically, we can talk about the problems of the Intelligence Cycle, which can be detected by analyzing each of its phases<sup>18</sup>:

- 1. Planning and Direction.** In this phase where the decision-maker requests information from a team of analysts, it often emerges that the directives are too broad, or on the contrary, not broad enough. This can lead the analyst to make decisions on their own initiative in order to adapt the directives to data collection. The risk is that the analyst could adapt the directives incorrectly and end up looking for wrong information.
- 2. Collection.** Collection in the intelligence cycle refers to the means used to collect "raw" information which is then used in the later stages of the cycle. At this stage, any of the disciplines used to gather information may be at risk of malfunction. Here are the main problems:

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<sup>18</sup> Emanuela Del Re, *Intelligence e disseminazione. Esame delle problematiche connesse con l'effettiva disseminazione dell'intelligence in materia di terrorismo, a livello nazionale e internazionale*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici (Ce.Mi.SS), 2008, p. 16.



- a) HUMINT.** The weaknesses are: the inability to recruit different people due to the distorted perception of risk factors; the inability to trust different people due to the lack of innovation of the techniques for OPSEC (Operation Security), i.e., the process that aims to give to a military operation the appropriate level of security, to deny knowledge to the potential adversary regarding the dispositions, capabilities, intentions and vulnerabilities of friendly forces; and the inability to share information with the community due to “operational technophobia”, that is, the inaccessibility of most networks and databases by the intelligence community.<sup>19</sup>
- b) TECHINT (SIGINT, COMINT, ELINT, TELINT, RADINT).** These systems are designed to intercept the lines of communication, however they have showed several technological weaknesses. As for COMINT, although modern interception techniques allow accurate communication intelligence, often the adversary does not disseminate the information so that it can be intercepted; another weakness is constituted by the decryption of both verbal and written codes, which become more and more complex to decipher.
- c) MASINT.** This is also part of TECHINT. It is the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data (metric, spatial, plasma, hydromagnetic, modulation, etc.) which have the purpose of identifying distinctive aspects of the source, the broadcaster or the sender, to facilitate subsequent identification and its evaluation. It is liable to error because it is a difficult area to understand and identify for both decision-makers and analysts; moreover, the discipline generally suffers from poor funding from governments due to the high cost of the technological materials needed to implement it; finally, specialist training is required to use technological tools, and this slows down the analysis process considerably.
- d) IMINT.** It is commonly thought that this discipline includes only photographs, which however it is not always possible to obtain, as in the case of infrared images; moreover, airplanes and satellites can produce inaccurate data due to adverse weather factors, or the satellite’s temporal diachrony, since if not placed correctly over time, the image loses its value; finally, the target could be camouflaged or sheltered from the lens.

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<sup>19</sup> Philip V. Fellman, Roxana Wright, *Modeling Terrorist Networks - Complex Systems at the Mid-Range*, on *The Intelligencer, Journal of U.S. Intelligence Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2004.

e) **OSINT.** Information deriving from open sources (newspapers, radio, television, newspapers, periodicals, Internet) can become less reliable if the degree of reliability of the sources is not taken into account, and if the information becomes excessive and misleading, thus preventing further investigation or the identification of a data hierarchy.

**3. Processing and Exploitation.** The problem is that there is often too much information available and not enough analysts to cover it. A substantial part of the information held by intelligence agencies ends up not being treated because it is not in line with the needs specified by the directives, and therefore is set aside.

**4. Analysis and Production.** In this stage, the work of the intelligence community emerges. Here are two areas where risks can emerge:

a) **Tactical-operational field:** discrepancy between short-term (current events) and long-term objectives; although the final goal should take both into consideration, so as to avoid giving more prominence to one of the two analysis options, the current trend seems to be to give more prominence to current events.

b) **Analysts:** the human component is very relevant in the analysis process, in fact one of the main weaknesses of the analysis is the cognitive bias of the analysts (prejudices caused by simplified information analysis strategies); the problem is that these biases can manifest themselves at the individual level, but also at the group level of the analysts, especially when there is a group conditioning based on competition with others to win for first the support of the decision-maker with their own analysis report.

**5. Dissemination.** The main mistake that can be made during the dissemination phase is to disseminate information to the wrong decision-maker; in addition, there may be a little ability to identify a hierarchy of the importance of information: if a data is deemed so important that it must be disseminated, this must take place within the appropriate time frame, which could not happen in the case of particularly sensitive data.

The intelligence cycle, therefore, is far from being a perfect and risk-free process. The problems, weaknesses and malfunctions that may arise and that can compromise the work of analysts and the action of decision-makers are called intelligence failures.

## 1.2 – Intelligence Failures

Despite the importance of national security and defense for the State and the great level of attention devoted to intelligence work, security scholars often disagree on the concept of “intelligence failure”, in fact there is no universally accepted definition in the literature. Generally, scholars are divided mainly between those who believe that an intelligence failure is to be considered such when the Secret Services fail, and those who believe that we can speak of intelligence failure when the error or serious inability to predict an event belongs to the decision-maker.<sup>20</sup> According to Mark Lowenthal, an intelligence failure is the inability of intelligence agencies to provide accurate or timely information and/or analysis on an event or matter of national concern.<sup>21</sup> Instead, according to Gary Schmitt and Abram Shulsky, an intelligence failure can be defined as a misunderstanding of a situation that leads a government or its armed forces to take inappropriate and counterproductive actions for their own interests.<sup>22</sup>

As we have seen, the intelligence cycle is not a perfect process, and it has many recurring risks and errors that are easy to run into. But there are a series of reasons that more specifically can cause intelligence failures. According to Mark Lowenthal, these can be<sup>23</sup>:

1. **Overestimation:** this is perhaps the most common reason for failure, which if not corrected, can lead to the perpetuation of the error for a long period of time. Examples include the Cold War period, when the United States had consistently overestimated the “missile gap” with the Soviet Union, and the Iraq War, of which critics argue that this was the main type of error that occurred in evaluating Saddam Hussein’s war potential.
2. **Underestimation:** occurs when the intelligence or political leadership seem not to be receptive to alarms or misinterpret the intentions of the enemy. This happened in 1941, when Stalin did not want to give credit to the possibility that Hitler would invade Russia, despite the British and American Secret Services trying to warn him. Underestimation is the main cause of distrust of foreign intelligence, and it can also be the reason why lower-ranking employees in intelligence agencies are not heard.

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<sup>20</sup> Sistema di Informazione per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, *Fallimenti strategici e azione preventiva*, Sistema di Informazione per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, 2014, <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/letture/fallimenti-strategici-e-teoria-dellazione-preventiva.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Lowenthal, *The Burdensome Concept of Failure*, in Alfred C. Maurer, Marion David Tunstall, James M. Keagle, *Intelligence and Policy Process*, Westview Press, 1985, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Abram Shulsky, Gary Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, Brassey’s Publisher, 2002, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Lowenthal, *From Secrets to Policy*, 1 ed., CQ Press, Washington D.C., 2000, pp. 42-43.

3. **Subordination of intelligence to politics:** this happens when reports are processed to meet the expectations of decision-makers instead of the basis on data analysis. It is the most discussed and analyzed type of failure, although some analyzes speak of related errors. An example of this cause can be precisely that of the 9/11, in which it is commonly thought that the policy of non-intervention towards Saudi Arabia could have interfered with intelligence regarding the hijackers, many of whom were Saudis and therefore less controlled. The activation of intelligence work towards foreign countries or their citizens could thus lead to political disputes or diplomatic incidents.
4. **Lack of communication:** the absence of a centralized office often creates this type of problem, but this frequently happens when there are at the same time different operators from different agencies with different roles, and who have different rules to whom and how to communicate. This also happens when there are too few analysts who only work part-time for multiple agencies, and as a result have no responsibility for full-time intelligence work.
5. **Unavailability of information:** regulations and bureaucratic jealousies can sometimes cause the unavailability of information, but the most common problem concerns the limitations on the circulation of sensitive information.
6. **Received Opinion:** this reason is also called “conventional judgment” and consists of statements and opinions that are generally viewed favorably but have never been sufficiently investigated. Sometimes, decision-makers find themselves in the situation of having to elaborate more complex assumptions based on limited information.
7. **Mirror-Imaging:** this is the technique defined as “judging unfamiliar situations on the basis of familiar ones”, but more often it involves estimating a threat of what one would do (the individual or his government, or a government similar to his own) in the same situation. This problem also occurs when there are too many specialists, such as criminologists.
8. **Over-confidence:** this happens when one party trusts too much in its own abilities that projects its reasons towards the other party, and believes that, as long as it does nothing, the other party will not act either. A classic example in this case is the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, but some analysts argue that the Cold War itself was characterized by it.
9. **Complacency:** it happens when, knowing that the enemy might do something, not being sure of what and when, nothing is done. The classic case is that of the United Kingdom which did nothing in the weeks leading up to the 1982 Falklands war with Argentina. A more recent

example can be the Rwanda genocide, and the non-reaction of the international community in the face of it.

**10. Failure or inability to connect the dots:** this happens when you fail to unite the fragments of intelligence and form a coherent whole. It is more easily observable in retrospect, as happened in the case of the 9/11 and other terrorist attacks.

These causes of intelligence failures are generic, but they are trends that have been found in multiple historical episodes, as illustrated, and identified within many state bureaucracies.

Erik J. Dahl, professor of National Security at the Naval Postgraduate School, argues that intelligence failures are a phenomenon that affects both sides of the intelligence cycle, that is, both analysts and decision-makers.<sup>24</sup> An intelligence failure, therefore, can be caused both by the agencies, when they are unable to produce the intelligence needed by decision-makers, and by the decision-makers themselves, when they are unable to act appropriately on the basis of the information received. Dahl identifies three different schools of thought that group the main theories that explain the intelligence failures<sup>25</sup>:

1. The **“traditional” school** includes theories that claim that intelligence failures are natural and, in part, inevitable. They occur either in the analysis phase, generally due to intrinsic cognitive limits and as such never completely eliminable, or in the dissemination phase, i.e., the stage of receiving or absorbing information by the decision-maker, who is not predisposed to transpose them or not act as it should. Some traditional scholars like Michael Handel argue that most failures occur because intelligence analysts or decision-makers refuse to adapt to new information<sup>26</sup>, while others like Richards Heuer argue that many of the failures are caused by resistance to change and cognitive bias typical of the human mind.<sup>27</sup> Thus, for traditionalists it is possible to improve intelligence performance, but not to the point of definitively eliminating failures, which are often inevitable, as Richard Betts also wrote.<sup>28</sup> Faced with the increase in terrorist attacks of Islamic origin in the last twenty years, various analysts of the traditionalist school have come to the conclusion that terrorist attacks cannot always be prevented, and that for this reason the best possible strategy is to prepare for

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<sup>24</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Handel, *Avoiding Political and Technological Surprise in the 1980's*, in R. Godson, *Analysis and Estimates*, National Strategy Information Center and Transaction Books, Washington D.C., Vol. 2, 1980.

<sup>27</sup> Richards Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Betts, *Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures are Inevitable*, on *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1978.

managing the consequences rather than trying to achieve absolute safety, often in vain. According to Dahl, the traditional school is characterized not only by a latent pessimism, but also by a total inattention of limits and errors in the information collection phase.

2. The “**reformist**” school is followed by a lower number of scholars than the “traditional” school, from which it differs for its relative optimism and above all for the confidence in the possibility of obtaining considerable improvements in intelligence performance. Compared to the “traditionalist” researchers, who believe that a margin of error is in any case physiological and irrepressible, the experts belonging to the “reformist” school argue that the failures of intelligence are caused by organizational limitations which, as such, they can be overcome with specific bureaucratic reforms. In fact, reformists argue that intelligence inefficiencies are caused by insufficient coordination between the various agencies and/or a failure to share information between the various offices. These problems are due to an incorrect institutional organization. Harold Wilensky, an organizational intelligence theorist, wrote: «*If anything is clear from this book, it is that intelligence failures are built into complex organizations*».<sup>29</sup> Glenn Hastedt argues, however, that it is the very nature of bureaucratic organizations (hierarchical, specialized and centralized) that limits the capacity to share information and causes intelligence failures.<sup>30</sup>
3. The “**contrary**” school is in contrast with both the “traditionalist” and the “reformist” approach. The most authoritative exponents of this school, including David Khan<sup>31</sup> and Ariel Levite<sup>32</sup>, believe that the causes of the main intelligence failures are to be identified in the information collection phase within the intelligence process. Therefore, where the “traditionalist” school identifies the weak point within the analysis phase and the “reformist” school identifies it in the organizational context, the “contrary” school instead focuses on the collection of information. Scholars who follow this current of thought argue that in cases of intelligence failures there was no information suitable for a general alarm, that is, an “*early warning*”. The problem, hence, is not the cognitive limit of the analysts or the inability of the decision maker, nor is it an inefficient bureaucratic system. The problem is insufficient information, and on that account a strategic failure is generated by a failure in the field of information collection.

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<sup>29</sup> Harold Wilensky, *Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry*, Basic Books, 1967, p. 179.

<sup>30</sup> Glenn Hastedt, *Organizational Foundations of Intelligence Failures*, in Alfred C. Maurer, Marion D. Tunstall, James M. Keagle, *Intelligence and Policy Process*, Westview Press, 1985, pp. 140-156.

<sup>31</sup> David Kahn, *The Intelligence Failure at Pearl Harbor*, on *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 138, 1991, p.52.

<sup>32</sup> Ariel Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprise*, Columbia University Press, 1987.

Dahl believes that all three schools of thought suffer from some important limitations.<sup>33</sup> Firstly, success cases are not analyzed in most intelligence failures studies. This represents an evident and rather consistent limitation as it does not allow to test the theories by analyzing the opposite cases in which the surprise attacks fail and instead the intelligence is successful. Dahl calls this shortcoming of the methodology “selection bias” which risks invalidating the overall analysis. Secondly, the limit can be constituted by a hindsight bias, that is the tendency to re-evaluate with “hindsight” the information available at the moment of the surprise attack. Those signals and data that appeared weak and unimportant before the attack turned out, after the event, clear and strongly indicative of what would happen. Therefore, the information, with “hindsight”, is significant where previously it appeared at least neutral. Finally, there is a third limitation, and it is due to the fact that the intelligence failures literature takes into account episodes of strategic failures that mainly, though not exclusively, occurred during the Cold War period.

Dahl concludes that the only way to objectively study failures is to compare them with successful cases.<sup>34</sup> However, this is not always easy as the intelligence successes tend not to be declared by the Secret Services and intelligence agencies to protect the secrecy of operations, sources and methods, but also because of the “alarm paradox” as a result of which many effective alarms appear false precisely because they succeed in thwarting and preventing the attack. It is thus not easy to have data on intelligence successes, but it is still possible, and in his study Dahl tests the theories of the three schools by comparing cases of intelligence failure with successful cases, and including in his analysis both episodes of conventional military attacks and episodes of terrorist attacks, which are unconventional.<sup>35</sup>

Intelligence is of no value unless it is produced for some decision-maker, whether a president, a senior military official, or some other customer<sup>36</sup> In fact, if intelligence provided an alarm to the decision-maker, but he did not act, it would still be considered a failure and not a success, even if the final and disseminated information, that is, the “finished” or “actionable” intelligence was correct. To be successful, therefore, it is necessary for the intelligence community to provide information and for decision-makers to act appropriately on the base of “actionable” intelligence. This explains why intelligence successes are more difficult to achieve than failures, which can still result from

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<sup>33</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Dennis C. Wilder, *An Educated Consumer Is Our Best Consumer*, in *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2011, pp. 23-31.

malfunctions at any stage of the process, while successes need the efficiency of both analysts and decision-makers.

Although the casuistry of intelligence failures in relation to Islamic terrorism seems to us very broad due to the media coverage they receive after every time an attack occurs, it is fair to point out that there are as many cases of intelligence successes in which potential new attacks are foiled, even if the details of these operations are not disclosed to the general public. Terrorist attacks constitute a special case among intelligence failures. They are “surprise attacks”, or more specifically “strategic surprises”.

### **1.3 – Strategic Surprises and Surprise Attacks**

The concept of strategic surprise comes from military jargon, although in the light of today’s challenges it covers a much broader set of meanings than the original one. If originally defined as “a military action that does not respond to the expectations and assumptions of the victim and is the failure of the early warning that reflects the victim’s inability to prepare for the risk”<sup>37</sup>, today it has passed to understand it as “an unexpected development that has had a decisive, fundamental, transformative, and sometimes revolutionary effect”.<sup>38</sup> Strategic surprises can arise from random events, historical discontinuities, trend reversals, systemic transitions or from people’s actions; they can occur in various shapes and sizes, and the impact can be both negative and positive, although the focus is mostly on negative events.

Sometimes sudden events or “shocks” strike decision-makers and leaders because their lines of action have allowed the development of gray areas vulnerable to surprises. These gray areas, before developing at the level of the decision-making process, first developed at the stage of the intelligence process. It is useful in this regard to distinguish between *strategic intelligence* and *tactical intelligence*<sup>39</sup>:

- *strategic intelligence* tends to be long-term, broader in focus and of interest to high-level policy-makers who make decisions on the most important national and international issues;

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<sup>37</sup> Ephraim Kam, *Surprise Attack. The Victim’s Perspective*, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Jaiko, *Strategic Surprise*, The Institute of World Politics, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 22.



- *tactical intelligence* is short-term, more focused (often on specific events), and is used much more often by junior-level officials engaged in planning or directing individual operations.

Following this distinction, strategic surprises could be defined as a failure of strategic intelligence, since it is expected to provide the policy-maker with information that anticipates what the adversary is planning and thus allows him to take appropriate preventive actions to deny the opponent a decisive strategic advantage. Indeed, according to Milo Jones and Philippe Silberzahn, strategic surprises represent the sudden awareness of having operated on the base of an incorrect assessment of the threat that results in a failure to foresee a serious threat to the “vital” national interest.<sup>40</sup>

For an event to be a strategic surprise, there must be two conditions: it must be *strategic* (that is, if it is successful, it has the potential to compromise the essential interests of the victim), and it must be a *surprise* (that is, the victim is unprepared for the event). The unpreparedness to handle a sudden attack is divided into three levels<sup>41</sup>:

1. **Cognitive level:** surprise is a psychological phenomenon, and its occurrence demonstrates organizational-cognitive failure in the design of the organization’s threat map. The intelligence personnel and the leaders of the organization act according to a “wrong assessment of the threat”. They had not foreseen the threat, which did not appear in full force on their threat map, so they were not prepared for the event.
2. **Infrastructure level and organizational capacity:** the organization has not built the infrastructure and operational capabilities necessary to manage the threat.
3. **Operational preparedness level:** the organization has not prepared and has not assimilated emergency procedures and operational plans (“organizational routines”) for the management of an event or a threat (or other similar). In the absence of an adequate “combat doctrine” (or “operations doctrine”), the organization’s ability to cope with the event will be seriously compromised.

Little research has been conducted on what people learn from surprises. One of the few studies, conducted by Baruch Fischhoff, provides evidence that humans have a strong hindsight bias in judging unexpected events as less surprising than they actually were.<sup>42</sup> The knowledge they acquire after the unexpected occurrence of an event leads them to underestimate what they have to learn from surprise

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<sup>40</sup> Milo Jones, Philippe Silberzahn, *Constructing Cassandra: Reframing Intelligence Failure at the CIA, 1947-2001*, Stanford University Press, 2014, pp. 3-6.

<sup>41</sup> Avner Barnea, Avi Meshulach, *Forecasting for Intelligence Analysis: Scenario to Abort Strategic Surprise*, on *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 2020, Vol. 0, No. 0, pp. 1-28.

<sup>42</sup> Baruch Fischhoff, *Hindsight ≠ Foresight: The Effect of Outcome Knowledge on Judgement under Uncertainty*, on *Oregon Research Institute Research Bulletin*, Vol. 14, No. 13, 1974, pp. 1-34.

and their own source. We can talk about strategic surprises in various fields (historical, military, economic, financial, technological, etc.), however, security studies have focused more on surprise attacks used in military strategies and on the threats deriving from the phenomenon of terrorism.

A surprise strategy is a strategy in which force is used in an unexpected way, at an unexpected moment against an unexpected target, with the prediction of trying to achieve what the most conventional methods of warfare cannot.<sup>43</sup> The nature of such surprises is that force must be applied asymmetrically: the attacker's strengths must be arrayed against the enemy's weaknesses. The surprise effect ensures that vulnerabilities are not corrected. Terrorism has always relied on surprise. Being the weapon of the weak against the strong, it blurs the boundaries between combatants and non-combatants, thus complicating the task of those who would like to defend themselves from this threat. In such situations there are an almost infinite number of targets, many more than on any battlefield. Furthermore, it is impossible to use enough methods to prevent surprise attacks, other than to attack those responsible in a targeted manner. It can be said, therefore, that strategic surprise is a cornerstone of non-symmetrical warfare.

While conventional wars between nations declined after the end of World War II, democratic countries are increasingly involved in conflicts with non-state actors. Asymmetric warfare is the use of innovative strategies, tactics and technologies by a weaker State or sub-state adversary that are intended to avoid strengths and exploit the potential vulnerabilities of a larger and technologically adversary higher.<sup>44</sup> The aim is not to claim territory or even to threaten the sovereignty of the opponent: more often than not, the main objective is to weaken the enemy and his ability to use his conventional military superiority effectively. Asymmetric warfare not only satisfies military challenges, but it also threatens to erode the core values of a liberal democracy. In any case, whether it is symmetrical warfare or asymmetrical warfare, strategic surprises offer golden opportunities for the "attacker" and lethal dangers for the "victim", and the likelihood of attacks being successful has increased thanks to the progress of technology.

Surprise attacks (tactically important) and strategic surprises (strategically relevant) are the most serious categories of intelligence failures. They arise from the failure of risk management, the failure of the imagination, and the failure or inability to know how to connect the dots. The misunderstanding of the information available before the attack, rather than the lack of information relating to it, is the main cause of this type of intelligence failure. This explanation can be traced back to the "*signals-versus-noises dilemma*", formulated by the communication theorist Claude Shannon,

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<sup>43</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *On Strategic Surprise*, on *Hoover Digest*, Hoover Institution, Vol. 2, 2002. <https://www.hoover.org/research/strategic-surprise>.

<sup>44</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Asymmetric Warfare Threats to US Interests: Expert Panel Support.*, CIA Publication, Washington D.C., May 26, 1998.

who in its original form argues that if a large amount of signals are collected in a given system, the probability of picking up noises will also be higher.<sup>45</sup> Applied to intelligence studies, it could be affirmed that information collected through intelligence search systems is often contradictory, and it is often difficult to distinguish truthful information (i.e., “signals”) from false information (i.e., “noises”). The contradictory nature of the information collected goes beyond simple quantitative analysis, and often the result that analysts and intelligence agencies arrive at is a combination of both elements, so the “finished” intelligence product, that is, “actionable” intelligence, cannot be said to be completely reliable or totally unreliable.

According to Roberta Wohlstetter, the United States failed to prevent the Japanese attack on the Pearl Harbor naval air base in the archipelago of Hawaii not because there was not enough information about the intentions of the Japanese, but because there was too much.<sup>46</sup> The decryption of the codes used by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service overwhelmed American intelligence analysts with more information than they could process, and to solve the problem, they relied, even subconsciously, on their expectations of what could or could not have happened. The information possessed was therefore misinterpreted, and since it seemed unlikely that the Japanese could at such a great distance attack the Pearl Harbor naval air base, the Americans interpreted as “noises” what were actually “signals” suggesting that they could do so. Wohlstetter argues that the presumption of the enemy’s incapability led to a probability discount of the event in the analysis, also demonstrated by the fact that immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor the Americans did little to defend their bases from the Japanese bombing that occurred in the Philippines and other parts of the Pacific. Strategic surprises, hence, occur when noises are interpreted as signals and vice versa.

By analyzing the Pearl Harbor surprise attack, Wohlstetter sought to extend the meaning of “noise” to identify the causes of misunderstanding of “early warning signals”.<sup>47</sup> These include:

1. **Deception.** The Japanese managed to deceive the American Intelligence Services by diverting the attention of Americans to other possible threats and by maintaining a regular volume of radio traffic by communicating innocent information, such as exercise maneuvers.
2. **Communication failure.** Information, analysis, and alarms did not circulate through the intelligence agencies’ chains of command due to information overload, time pressure, and the difficulty of allocating attention.

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<sup>45</sup> Claude E. Shannon, Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, University of Illinois Press, 1949.

<sup>46</sup> Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decisions*, Stanford University Press, 1962.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

3. **Bureaucratic organizational deficiencies.** Information failed to circulate through the chain of command and through organizational links between Washington and Honolulu Headquarters, and between the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy.
4. **Misconceptions of the enemy.** They are the errors caused by the excess of self-confidence, illusions, lack of experience, and ethnocentrism. Americans misinterpreted the signals due to the underestimation of the Japanese people, their military capabilities and their technological achievements.
5. **Misperceptions of the intelligence and/or decision-makers.** The early warning signals that reached decision-makers were rejected because they were not presented to them in a persuasive manner, because of previous “false alarms” denied in their messages, or because the same information also suggested other threats.

These factors have been used by intelligence scholars to try to explain other case studies of strategic surprises, such as the Norwegian campaign in 1940, Operation Barbarossa in 1941, the Korean War in 1950, the Cuban missiles in 1963, the Six Day War in 1967, the Têt offensive in 1968, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, etc. In all these cases of surprise attacks, and in others, the lack of information was not considered a cause of the intelligence failure. The intelligence scholars therefore agreed that<sup>48</sup>:

- a) the gradual transition from tactical early warning to national evaluation by decision-makers moves with difficulty in proportion to the organization’s hierarchy and its complexity;
- b) at all levels, the information provides the basis for the early warning;
- c) subjectivity must and can be overcome at all levels of the information estimation;
- d) complexity can be dominated by the decomposition and the division of labor.

According to Colin Gray, there is no “silver bullet” to avoid and prevent strategic surprises, since the prevention of surprises, although an important goal, is an impossible mission, or at least it is if we have utopian ambitions to inhabit a safe and risk-free environment.<sup>49</sup> Strategic surprise researchers have, however, tried to propose new techniques whose goal is to help analysts to overcome the difficulties in achieving the full sensitivity of information. Many of these proposals involve statistical data processing, and focus on the information collection phase, with the aim of collecting more information, on the processing and exploitation phase, with the aim of improving the capacity of

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<sup>48</sup> Zvi Lanir, *Fundamental Surprises*, Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, 1983, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Transformation and Strategic Surprise*, Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War Co., 2005.

research units to “digest” the information collected, and on the dissemination phase, with the aim of spreading the “finished” intelligence product as quickly as possible.<sup>50</sup>

Regarding the dissemination phase, Erik J. Dahl argues that there are two key factors for the prevention of surprise attacks: the *specificity of the alarm* and the *receptivity of the decision-maker*.<sup>51</sup> According to the dominant theory, especially in the United States, it is strategic intelligence that is indispensable in order to prevent surprise attacks. Comparing the intelligence failures cases with the intelligence successes cases, however, Dahl comes to the conclusion that in most cases of failure, strategic alerts prior to the attacks correctly identified the threat picture, but they were little or no not at all useful in the effective prevention of attacks due to their generic nature. In fact, lacking information on who, how, when and where, the alarm did not create that sense of urgency such as to push the decision-maker to act accordingly, nor did it provide the detailed information necessary for an effective prevention activity. Instead, the intelligence case study shows that when the alarms were specific and the decision-makers receptive, the attacks were averted. Thus, the integrated analysis of failures and successes helps to re-evaluate tactical intelligence.

Decision-makers appear to be reluctant to listen to opinions and forecasts, and more sensitive to data and facts. This fact constitutes the “paradox of strategic warning”, on the base of which decision-makers, although they declare they need strategic analysis, are more attentive to the specificity of tactical alarms.<sup>52</sup> Tactical intelligence is most useful when leaders are receptive. According to Dahl, receptivity is a complex phenomenon and basically consists in the confidence that the decision-maker has towards intelligence agencies and in the seriousness with which a threat is assessed. A decision-maker who has confidence in their intelligence agencies and does not underestimate the threat will tend to be highly receptive and sensitive to the alarms launched by the Secret Services to which they report and will implement the appropriate countermeasures and thus increasing the chances of preventing the surprise attack.

The comparative analysis of the successes and failures of intelligence demonstrates, therefore, that strategic analyzes are not sufficient to convince leaders to acknowledge the alarms of their intelligence agencies. Obviously, the role of strategic intelligence must not and cannot be underestimated. Indeed, as Jack Davis argues, strategic alerts ensure that the right resources are made available to prevent threats and it is fair to say that a good level of strategic intelligence helps to produce a good level of tactical intelligence.<sup>53</sup> But the latter is the indispensable tool for preventing

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<sup>50</sup> Zvi Lanir, *Fundamental Surprises*, Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, 1983, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 22-23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Davis, *Strategic Warning: If Surprise is Inevitable, What Role for Analysis?*, on *The Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2003, <https://www.cia.gov/library/kent-center-occasional-papers/vol2no1.htm>.

surprise attacks. In the absence of tactical alarms, threats to the system could be perceived or imagined by analysts, even correctly, but leaders are unlikely to give credit to strategic alarms only. Decision-makers therefore prefer to make their own decisions based on certain facts. The more hypothetical and theoretical the analysis is formulated, the less the decision-maker will be inclined to follow it up.

More specifically, Dahl's study indicates that the importance of the specificity of the alarm and the receptivity of the decision-maker necessary for preventive action changes according to the type of attack.<sup>54</sup> In the case of conventional attacks, used in symmetrical wars and where intelligence is generally able to collect a great variety of specific information, the most important factor is the receptivity of the decision-maker. On the other hand, in the case of unconventional attacks, typical of asymmetric wars, such as terrorist attacks, the decision-maker tends to be already sensitive to the threat, and the most important factor is the availability of highly specific tactical alerts.

In conclusion, it can be said that it is certainly a good idea to prepare to handle the unexpected, and that both intelligence agencies and decision-makers must develop contingency plans to respond to intelligence failures, strategic surprises and surprise attacks, but the primary task of intelligence agencies and national security systems is to predict and prevent such surprises. The comparative study of intelligence failures and successes conducted by Dahl suggests that the theory of preventive action, i.e., the availability of tactical intelligence and the need to have the specificity of the alarm and a good level of receptivity of the decision-maker, is useful both for the forecast and for the prevention of strategic surprises.

## **1.4 – The Black Swan Theory**

If the theory of preventive action suggests that it is possible to predict and prevent strategic surprises and surprise attacks by improving some functional aspects of the intelligence system and the decision-making system, another theory born in the socio-economic field but adopted by the Security Studies argues that it is impossible to prevent certain events from occurring. This theory was developed by Lebanese-American mathematician, philosopher and ex-Wall Street trader Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his 2007 book *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, and tries to explain how it is impossible to predict and evaluate the probability of some such singular events using the scientific

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<sup>54</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 24-25.

methods normally used to estimate the risks.<sup>55</sup> The Black Swan Theory (or the Theory of Black Swan Events) is a metaphor that encompasses the concept that the event is a surprise (to the observer) and has a major impact. After having happened, the event is rationalized in hindsight. This theory explains:

- a) the disproportionate role of high-impact, difficult to predict and rare events that are beyond the realm of normal expectations in history, science, finance and technology;
- b) the non-calculability of the probability of consequential rare events using scientific methods (due to the very nature of small probabilities);
- c) the psychological biases that make people individually and collectively blind to uncertainty and unaware of the massive role of the rare event in historical affairs.

The Black Swan theory refers only to unexpected events of great magnitude and with important consequences, and to their dominant role in history. Such events, considered extremely anomalous, play much larger roles than normal ones. Examples of Black Swans in history may be the outbreak of World War I, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Black Monday of the October 19, 1987, the rapid spread of the Internet, the 2008 World Economic Crisis, etc. In all these cases, the occurrence of unexpected and unforeseen events has diverted on a large scale the normal flow of events of a nation, a continent or the whole world.

The expression “black swan” derives from the Latin poet Juvenal, who already in the II century AD he referred to the fragility of systems, sensitive to rare and improbable events, writing: «*Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno*»<sup>56</sup>, that is “a rare bird in the land and very likely like a black swan”. At the time, in fact, it was assumed that black swans did not exist, and the expression soon became a way of saying to indicate something impossible. Only in 1967, the Dutch navigator Willem de Vlamingh, during a voyage of exploration along Western Australia, discovered the existence of black swans in a river that will later be called “Swan River”. From this moment on, the ancient saying, used to indicate something impossible, has totally changed its meaning, being used to indicate something that can be destroyed by empirical evidence.

Taleb argues that most of the scientific and technological discoveries and art works are the result of Black Swans.<sup>57</sup> They are not necessarily planned, but they happen by chance or as result of a Black Swan event. Hence, most discoveries are made through a “trial and error” process rather than

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<sup>55</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Random House, 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Juvenal, *Satires*, VI, 165, 127 AD.

<sup>57</sup> Joshua Warner, *Black Swan Theory Explained: What is a Black Swan Event?*, on *ig.com*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.ig.com/en/news-and-trade-ideas/black-swan-theory-explained--what-is-a-black-swan-event--200703#:~:text=Black%20Swan%20investing%20is%20about,of%20a%20Black%20Swan%20event.>

through extensive design and planning, which is why the results are usually so surprising and unexpected.

Taleb argues that for an event to be considered a Black Swan it must have three essential characteristics<sup>58</sup>:

1. **Rarity:** it is an anomalous and isolated event, which does not fall within the range of normal expectations since nothing in the past can plausibly indicate its possibility.
2. **Extreme impact:** the event has serious and extreme consequences in society or in the world.
3. **Retrospective predictability:** despite its anomalous status, human nature makes us rationalize the event after it has happened, by virtue of a hindsight bias, making it explainable and predictable.

A small number of Black Swans explain almost everything in our world, from the success of ideas and religions, to the dynamics of historical events, to the elements of our personal life. Black Swan events can also be used to describe highly unlikely events that do not happen in reality.

Black Swan events are rare in nature, but it is still very likely that something very similar has happened in the past. For example, it can be said that a natural catastrophe is always a shocking event, but history is full of it. A financial crash very often arises suddenly out of nowhere and takes most people by surprise, besides the fact that there have already been economic crises in the past. Similarly, terrorist attacks have occurred several times over time, but they always happen as sudden and shocking events both for the chosen objectives in which to conduct the attack, and for the modalities of the action carried out: every time this happens the world wonders because he was caught unprepared. Because history is linear and not cyclical, Black Swan events are considered very unlikely based on historical evidence, but not impossible.

It is also worth pointing out the role of perspective in Black Swan events. Taleb argues that the surprise of the Black Swan event is perceived by the observer, but not by the actor: what is a Black Swan surprise for a turkey, is not a surprise for his butcher.<sup>59</sup> A terrorist attack is regarded as a Black Swan event by most people, but not by its perpetrators. This also means that Black Swan events are not always perceived as negative by everyone. The goal should be to “avoid being the turkey” by identifying areas of vulnerability to “transform Black Swans into White Swans”.

One problem that the Black Swan theory poses stems from the belief that the unstructured randomness found in life resembles the structural randomness found in the game theory. This derives

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<sup>58</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Random House, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Allen Webb, *Taking improbable events seriously: An interview with the author of The Black Swan (Corporate Finance)*, McKinsey Quarterly, 2008, p. 3.



from the assumption that the unexpected can be predicted by extrapolating it from statistical variations based on past observations, especially when it is assumed that these statistics represent samples from a bell-shaped curve, typical of the Gaussian distribution. These concerns are most often relevant in financial markets, where major players use value at risk models, which involve normal distributions, although market returns typically have fat tail distributions. More generally, decision theory, based on a fixed universe or model of possible outcomes, ignores and minimizes the effect of events that are “out of the model”. For example, a simple model of daily stock market returns may include extreme movements such as Black Monday (1987) but may not model the collapse of markets after the attacks of September 11, 2001. A fixed model considers the “known unknowns” but ignores the “unknown unknowns”. Thus, the Black Swan theory suggests that what is not known is much more important than what is known: we could also use all our knowledge to prepare for what we believe to be every possible eventuality, but then we could totally be proved wrong from a single Black Swan event.

The main idea of the Taleb’s book is not to try to predict Black Swan events, which by their intrinsic nature are inevitable and unpredictable, but to try to build robustness against negative events and be able to exploit positive ones. Taleb argues that banks and commercial companies are particularly vulnerable to dangerous Black Swan events and are exposed to losses greater than those predicted by their flawed models, and for this reason it would be optimal to build financial resources reserved for the unexpected. In the second edition of the book, Taleb also provides “Ten Principles for a Strong Black Swan Society”.<sup>60</sup> In other words, to be able to manage future events and their own unforeseeable consequences, one must “expect the unexpected”.

Although it is not possible to predict and prevent Black Swans, some authors have tried to provide solutions to mitigate the consequences of shock events within a society. For example, Peter Ho and Adrian Kuah argue that when unpredictable shocks occur, the state must recognize the complexity of the environment in which its institutions must function and the implementation of new non-linear tools for managing difficulties and strategic risks.<sup>61</sup> Instead, according to David Wildman, scenario analysis used in combination with more formal methodologies and approaches in managing geopolitical risks and combinations of risks is the most appropriate strategy for taking into account the arrival of the Black Swans.<sup>62</sup> Traditional risk management and risk decrease methods have proven to be ineffective in decreasing the risks related to Black Swans events, since although they focus on events that can occur suddenly, they do not have a global perspective to track or expect all subsequent

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<sup>60</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: Second Edition: The Impact of the Highly Improbable: With a new section: “On Robustness and Fragility”*, Random House, 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Ho, Adrian Kuah, *Governing for the Future What Government Can Do*, on *Prism*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2015, pp. 9-21.

<sup>62</sup> David Wildman, *Geopolitical Risk: The Butterfly Effect and Black Swans*, on *FTI Journal*, 2015, pp. 2-5.

consequences that occur one after the other after the occurrence of the shock or, for example, to expect reactions and countermeasures from a wide range of subjects who together form the so-called “Butterfly Effect”.<sup>63</sup>

It is debatable whether the terrorist attacks are to be considered Black Swans or not, at least from the observer’s point of view. However, two events have particularly marked the history of the West and redesigned world geopolitics, and which will be the subject of study of this thesis, are to be considered Black Swans in all respects: the attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington and the attacks of November 13, 2015 in Paris. Because of the visual shock produced, the methods of execution, and the security dilemmas they have put in place after their event are to be considered something that goes beyond simple intelligence failures or strategic surprises, also by virtue of the discontinuities they have produced in history.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem.*

## CHAPTER 2

### The Case of USA: The Attacks of the 9/11

*«What we learned on September 11 is that the unthinkable is now thinkable in the world.»*

John Ashcroft

#### 2.1 – The US Intelligence Community

In the United States, the intelligence community is represented by the United States Intelligence Community (IC), a federative entity that brings together seventeen federal government agencies and organizations.<sup>64</sup> Agencies and organizations subordinate to the Intelligence Community work separately or jointly to conduct intelligence activities in support of US foreign policy and national security, and include intelligence agencies, military and civil intelligence, and analysis offices belonging to the Departments of the Federal Executive of the United States of America. The IC is overseen by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which in turn is headed by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), who is subordinate to the President of the United States. Among their various responsibilities, IC members collect information and produce foreign and domestic intelligence, contribute to military planning and carry out espionage and counter-espionage operations.

The IC was established by *Executive Order 12333*, signed on December 4, 1981 by then US President Ronald Reagan.<sup>65</sup> This executive order aimed to extend the powers and responsibilities of US intelligence agencies and direct the leaders of federal government agencies to fully cooperate with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) inquiries. This executive order was later called “United States Intelligence Activities”. *Executive Order 12333* attributed six main objectives to the IC:

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<sup>64</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Members of the IC*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2004, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/what-we-do/members-of-the-ic>.

<sup>65</sup> Ronald Reagan, *Executive Order 12333 – United States Intelligence Activities*, US Federal Register, December 4, 1981, <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12333.html>.

1. Collection of information necessary for the President, the National Security Council, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense and other executive officials to carry out their duties and responsibilities;
2. Production and dissemination of intelligence;
3. Collection of information regarding and against the conduct of security activities, intelligence activities directed against the United States, international terrorist activities and/or narcotics and other hostile activities directed against the United States from foreign powers, organizations, persons and their agents;
4. Special activities (defined as activities conducted in support of US foreign policy objectives abroad that are planned and executed in a manner that the “role of the US government is not evident or publicly acknowledged” and functions in support of such activities, but which are not intended to influence US political processes, public opinion, policies or media and do not include diplomatic activities or the gathering and production of intelligence or related support functions);
5. Administrative and support activities in the United States and abroad necessary for carrying out the authorized activities;
6. Other intelligence activities that the President may direct from time to time.

In addition to *Executive Order 12333*, the IC is also governed by the *National Security Act* of 1947, which reorganized the US government’s military and intelligence agencies after World War II. Although it presents itself as a federation of its member agencies and organizations, its overall structure is actually a confederation due to the lack of a well-defined structure, unified leadership and common governance. Until 2004, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was also the director of Central Intelligence (DCI), and thus was also head of the Intelligence Community. As a result, he had little or no effective authority over the budgetary authorities of the other agencies and therefore had limited influence over their operations.

In 2004, the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA)* was approved, which amended the *National Security Act* of 1947 and proposed substantial changes to the statutory organization of the IC.<sup>66</sup> The IRTPA, in fact, established the office of the Director of National

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<sup>66</sup> United States Congress, *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA)*, 2004, <https://www.congress.gov/108/plaws/publ458/PLAW-108publ458.pdf>.

Intelligence (DNI), who is directly subject to the authority, direction and control of the President of the United States. On the base of the same rule, the Director of National Intelligence:

- is the principal advisor to the President of the United States, the National Security Council and the Homeland Security Council on national security-related intelligence matters;
- directs the United States Intelligence Community made up of sixteen other entities and agencies and establishes its objectives, priorities and guidelines;
- oversees and directs the National Intelligence Program and its budget.

The Director of National Intelligence is appointed by the President, but his appointment must be ratified by the Senate. He must be a current officer in the United States Armed Forces or have a proven experience in the field of military intelligence. Once he takes office, he also joins the United States Cabinet. Despite its responsibilities, the DNI does not have the authority to direct and control any entity of the IC other than its own personnel (i.e., the Office of the Director of National Intelligence), nor does the DNI have the authority to hire or fire personnel in the IC except the one inside your office. The member bodies of the Executive are directed and controlled by the respective heads of department and by all the Cabinet officials who report to the President. With the 2004 reform it was also established that only the director of the CIA should report to the DNI. On July 30, 2008, *Executive Order 13470* was also promulgated by then President George W. Bush, which amended the previous *Executive Order 12333* of 1981.<sup>67</sup> This executive order substantially strengthened the role of the Director of National Intelligence.

Thus, in addition to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which is the primary organ of the IC and coordinates its intelligence work, the IC is composed of sixteen other agencies and offices, briefly listing here<sup>68</sup>:

### **Independent Federal Agencies:**

- 1. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):** undoubtedly, it is the best-known intelligence agency, known for spying on foreign governments and conducting covert operations, including financing opposition groups in other countries to influence elections or depose some foreign leaders.

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<sup>67</sup> George W. Bush, *Executive Order 13470 – Further Amendments to Executive Order 12333*, United States Intelligence Activities, US Federal Register, July 30, 2008, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2008-08-04/pdf/E8-17940.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Nina Agrawal, *There's more than CIA and FBI: The 17 agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community*, on *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 2017.

## United States Department of Defense

2. **National Security Agency (NSA):** once so secretive that it was called “No Such Agency”, the NSA is the largest and perhaps the most technologically sophisticated of all intelligence agencies. It focuses on signal intelligence (SIGINT), i.e., the monitoring, collection and processing of communications and other electronic information, as well as the decryption of secret codes. It is also involved in protecting US information systems from external penetration. The NSA oversees PRISM and other mass surveillance programs. It is believed to employ more mathematicians than any other organization in the country.
3. **Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA):** it is the Pentagon’s main spy agency, and the main body for the collection and analysis of information on foreign armies, with the support of the intelligence offices of all military orders. The DIA shares this information with military leaders, combatants, and defense policy-makers in order to “prevent and decisively win wars”, according to its mission statement.
4. **National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA):** this agency is the main provider of geospatial intelligence: it provides, in fact, analysis and information on the natural and artificial characteristics of the earth and its activities. This type of intelligence discipline (which may be called “GEOINT”) is used for combat, humanitarian and disaster relief, border and transport security, and security planning for special events, such as the identification of Osama bin Laden’s hiding place in the mountains of Abbottabad, Pakistan. The technology used by the NGA also created the reference system for GPS.
5. **National Reconnaissance Office (NRO):** was a secret agency for 31 years, until its existence was declassified in 1992. The office designs, builds and operates the nation’s reconnaissance satellites, providing the Pentagon, CIA, and other agencies with accurate navigation, early warning of missile launches and near real-time images to support counter-terrorism activities. On the civilian side, satellites help detect damage caused by natural disasters and support environmental research.
6. **Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Agency (AF ISR):** it is the intelligence branch of the Military Air Force, in turn divided into two other Armed Forces, the United States Space Force (USSF) and the Air Force Space Command (AFSPC). Since 2014 it has been reorganized into the current **Twenty-Fifth Air Force (25 AF)**. It uses airplanes, drones and satellites to identify hiding places, bunkers, mobile launchers, and weapons depots. He is also responsible for decryption activities within the Air Force

7. **Army Military Intelligence:** it is the intelligence branch of the Army, intercepts electronic communications and provides maps, terrain images and information on foreign forces to assist combatants on the battlefield.
8. **Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI):** it is the intelligence branch of the Army, intercepts electronic communications and provides maps, terrain images and information on foreign forces to assist combatants on the battlefield.
9. **Marine Corps Intelligence:** it is the intelligence office of the Marine Corps. The officers of this office create military maps, intercept and translate radio and electronic signals, analyze the images collected by the sensors and carry out counter-espionage activities.

#### **United States Department of Justice**

10. **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI):** it has both police and intelligence functions, operating through the Directorate of Intelligence. From an intelligence perspective, it aims to protect the United States from terrorism, cyber attacks and foreign intelligence operations and espionage. He maintains the government's watch list of terrorists, and has been involved in interrogating detainees believed to be of "high value", sometimes clashing with CIA work.
11. **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) – Office of National Security Intelligence:** the DEA is the United States government's guardhouse for controlling drugs that are illegally manufactured, distributed, or dispensed. It is also responsible for the seizure and confiscation of assets related to illicit drug trafficking. The Office of National Security Intelligence assists law enforcement with investigations and prosecutions. More recently, he has focused on the threat posed by a wave of heroin and counterfeit pills containing fentanyl.

#### **United States Department of State**

12. **Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR):** this office collects and analyzes intelligence on global affairs and advises the Secretary of State and other diplomats. In addition, it conducts foreign opinion polls and tracks and analyzes issues that can undermine US foreign policy goals, such as arms proliferation, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. Although it is one of the smallest intelligence agencies, its assessment of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has not been as inaccurate as that of other IC agencies.

**13. Office of Intelligence and Analysis:** the collection of information at the Treasury dates back to the beginning of the foundation of the Department, when Secretary Alexander Hamilton sent an undercover tax officer to investigate the ongoing “whiskey rebellion” in Western Pennsylvania. Today the Office of Intelligence and Analysis operates within the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, which works to prevent sanctioned countries, money launderers, terrorists, drug bosses and weapons of mass destruction suppliers from depositing or moving their money through the US financial system.

**United States Department of Energy:**

**14. Office of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence:** the origin of this office dates back to the Manhattan Project, when the Atomic Energy Commission was charged with analyzing the Soviet Union’s atomic weapons program. Today, the office’s role is to provide technical information on foreign nuclear weapons, energy security, science and technology, nuclear energy, security and waste.

**United States Department of Homeland Security:**

**15. Office of Intelligence and Analysis:** the object of “internal security” includes emergency preparedness, border control, transport security and biological defense (from Ebola and SARS, for example), among other issues mainly related to terrorist activities in the US territory. The Office of Intelligence and Analysis has the task of collecting information in these areas and sharing it with state, local, tribal, territorial and private sector partners through a network of “fusion centers”.

**16. Coast Guard Intelligence:** The Coast Guard protects and defends more than 100,000 miles of coastline and inland waterways. It is involved in search and rescue operations, drug seizure, interdiction of migrants, and assistance in the smuggling of goods. Its intelligence office contributes to some criminal investigations and provides intelligence information to other national agencies from domestic and foreign ports, coastal and international waters.

It is worth noting that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was officially established on November 25, 2002 with the *Homeland Security Act* in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 at the behest of President George W. Bush who intended to establish an internal security office to coordinate security efforts. In fact, with its institution, it was intended to unite in a single



ministry all those governmental organizations and federal agencies that referred to internal security, that is, those bodies whose task was the protection of the civil sphere of American citizens, inside and outside the borders of United States. The DHS performs functions similar to those of the Ministry of the Interior in other countries, in particular it deals with counter-terrorism, border security, immigration and customs, IT security and the prevention and management of natural disasters. Currently, it is the third largest department in the Government Cabinet, after the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran Affairs.

The DHS has incorporated a total of twenty-two agencies previously belonging to other Departments. According to American professor Peter Andreas, the creation of the DHS was the most significant reorganization of the United States government since the Cold War and the most substantial reorganization of federal agencies since the enactment of the *National Security Act* of 1947.<sup>69</sup> For Raphael Perl, the DHS, with the incorporation of twenty-two government agencies into a single organization, constitutes the most diverse amalgamation of federal functions and responsibilities.<sup>70</sup> Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen argues that the introduction of the term “homeland” focuses attention on a population that needs to be protected not only from emergencies such as natural disasters, but also from widespread threats by individuals not native to the United States.<sup>71</sup>

The IC works by following two separate programs:

- The **National Intelligence Program (NIP)**, formerly known as the National Foreign Intelligence Program, refers to all programs, projects and activities of the intelligence community, as well as any other intelligence community program jointly designated by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) and the head of a United States department or agency or the President. This program does not include programs, projects or activities that are competing for military departments to acquire intelligence information solely for the planning and conduct of tactical military operations by the United States Armed Forces. The DNI is responsible for the direction and supervision of the NIP, although the ability to do so is limited.
- The **Military Intelligence Program (MIP)** refers to military departments’ programs, projects or activities to acquire intelligence solely for the planning and conduct of tactical military

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Andreas, *Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-First Century*, on *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2003, pp. 78-111.

<sup>70</sup> Raphael Perl, *The Department of Homeland Security: Background and Challenges*, in U.S.-Russian Workshop Proceedings, National Research Council of the National Academies, *Terrorism. Reducing Vulnerabilities and Improving Responses*, 2004, pp. 176-184.

<sup>71</sup> Masha Gessen, *Homeland Security was destined to become a Secret Police Force*, on *The New Yorker*, July 25, 2020.

operations by the United States Armed Forces. The MIP is directed and controlled by the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence. To form MIP, in 2005 the Department of Defense combined the **Joint Military Intelligence Program** and the **Tactical Intelligence and Related Activities**.

Sometimes the definitions of the NIP and the MIP overlap when it comes to military intelligence, so the assignment of intelligence activities between the two programs proves problematic.

In light of the major intelligence failures in recent years that have questioned how well the IC guarantees US national security, particularly those identified by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, also known as the “9/11 Commission” and the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, also known as the “Iraq Intelligence Commission” or “WMD Commission”, the general organizational structure of the IC and the authorities and powers of the DNI have become the subject of intense debate in the United States.

Previously, inter-agency cooperation and the flow of information between the agencies that were part of the IC were hampered by policies that sought to limit the sharing of information related to privacy protection and security issues. Attempts to modernize and facilitate inter-agency cooperation within the IC include technological, structural, procedural and cultural dimensions. Examples of this cooperation are the creation of security-related encyclopedias, the establishment of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the National Intelligence Centers, the Program Manager Information Sharing Environment, and the Information Sharing Council; in addition, legal and political frameworks established by the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act* of 2004, by *Executive Order 13354* for information sharing of 2004<sup>72</sup>, by *Executive Order 13388* of 2005<sup>73</sup>, and by *National Intelligence Strategy* of 2005 have been approved.

Taking into account the general organizational structure of the IC in the United States, the intelligence failure of September 11, 2001 can be explained according to a large study by Amy Zegart, a lecturer at Stanford University and a researcher at the Hoover Institution, according to the theories of the reformist school.<sup>74</sup> In fact, she highlighted how bureaucratic reorganizations were the preferred solutions and recommended by all the government and expert commissions created to examine the strategic failures of the IC of Washington. In fact, from 1991 to 2001, the twelve study commissions set up proposed no less than 340 reform interventions, mostly of an organizational nature. Zegart still

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<sup>72</sup> George W. Bush, *Executive Order 13354 – National Counterterrorism Center*, US Federal Register, August 27, 2004, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/eo/eo-13354.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> George W. Bush, *Executive Order 13388 – Further Strengthening the Sharing of Terrorism Information to Protect Americans*, US Federal Register, October 25, 2005, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/eo/eo-13388.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> Amy Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the origins of 9/11*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

believes that the main problem of the US Intelligence Community is disorganization (or rather, inefficient organization).

Therefore, unlike scholars of the traditionalist school who believe that the US Secret Services did a good job at the strategic intelligence level and that the failure of September 11, 2001 is attributable to the inevitability and unpredictability of the event beyond all expectations and imagination, as well as the cognitive limits of analysts and decision-makers, Amy Zegart argues that the US Intelligence Community is severely deficient in several respects, mainly due to an erroneous “organizational design”.<sup>75</sup>

## 2.2 - Analysis of a Terrorist Organization: Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda (literally “the Base” in Arabic) is a multinational militant Islamist organization of Sunni current recognized as a terrorist organization by many countries, as well as the European Union, the United Nations Security Council and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Operating through a network of Islamic extremists and Salafist jihadists globally, Al-Qaeda applies the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism to hostile acts and violent actions both against various Islamic regimes considered too pro-Western, and therefore considered *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), and towards the Western world, summarily defined as *kāfir* (infidel), very often accused of interfering in the affairs of the Middle East and of oppressing and corrupting the Islamic people.

Al-Qaeda members believe that Islam is threatened by a Christian-Jewish alliance and that it is conspiring to destroy it and destroy those Muslim-majority countries.<sup>76</sup> Because the organization promotes a Sunni-like fundamentalist ideology, it considers *takfir* (heretics) other groups of Muslims, such as liberal Muslims, Shiites, Sufis, and other sects, and for this reason has been responsible for inciting sectarian violence among Muslims.<sup>77</sup> Al-Qaeda opposes laws it considers man-made and would like to impose a strict form of *Shari'ah* (sacred law) in Muslim-majority countries.

Some authors have argued that the creation and organization of Al-Qaeda were inspired by the Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), an ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood movement and one of the greatest theorists of Sunni political Islam. In *Milestones*, the movement’s manifesto,

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<sup>75</sup> Amy Zegart, “CNN with Secret’s”: 9/11, the CIA, and the Organizational Roots of Failure, on *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Rickenbacher, *The “War Against Islam”: How a Conspiracy Theory Drove and Shaped the Islamist Movement*, on *European Eye on Radicalization*, December 6, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> Barbara A. Weightman, *Dragons and Tigers: A Geography of South, East, and Southeast Asia*, 3 ed., Wiley, New Jersey, 2011.

Qutb argued that due to the lack of Shari'ah law, the Muslim world was no longer Muslim and had returned to *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance).<sup>78</sup> Many Muslims were not true Muslims, but they were apostates. Among these were also leaders of Muslim countries who promoted a secularized lifestyle influenced by the West or had not fully succeeded in enforcing the law of the Shari'ah. Therefore, the Muslim community had to be restored to its original form, and to do so a revolution of loyal and virtuous Muslims was needed to establish "true Islamic states", implement the Shari'ah and free the Muslim world from any non-Muslim influence. For Qutb, the "Jewish world" was the enemy of Islam and plotted to destroy it. It can thus be said that Sayyid Qutb's intellectual work directly or indirectly influenced the leaders and minds of Al-Qaeda, including especially Abdullah Azzam, mentor of Osama Bin Laden, and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, leader of the organization since 2011 after the death of Bin Laden, who in his youth had played in the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

According to French orientalist Gilles Kepel, the resistance of the *mujahideen* against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (December 1979 - February 1989) has further developed the Salafi jihadist movement that inspired Al-Qaeda.<sup>79</sup> The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is in fact remembered as the moment in which the *jihad* from being a local phenomenon becomes a global phenomenon, as a number of Muslim volunteers from all over the world estimated between 25,000 and 35,000 units joined the Afghan fighters to the liberation of one's country against the invasion of a Western government, which at the time was one of the two great world superpowers.<sup>80</sup> The figure of the Palestinian theologian Abdullah Azzam (1941-1989), who in 1984 founded the *Maktab al-Khidamat* organization (Office of the Services) in Peshawar, Pakistan, is placed in this scenario, dedicated to recruiting, welcoming and to the military training of thousands of foreign volunteers ready to fight alongside their Afghan brothers. In his view, the struggle of the mujahideen must become the universal emblem for all Muslims, especially if the war effort aims at the goal of creating an Islamic State in Afghanistan. Most scholars identify in this recruitment the prototype of the modern call to arms of foreign fighters.<sup>81</sup>

The figure of Azzam and his teachings will have a significant influence in the formation of Osama Bin Laden, who came into contact with Azzam in the early 1980s, when he was a student of economics and business management at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah and had attended some theology courses held by Azzam. Belonging to a very wealthy family and close to the Saudi Royal House of the Sa'ūd, Osama Bin Laden was born in 1957 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. His father,

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<sup>78</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones (Ma'alim fi Al-Tariq)*, Kazi Publications, 1964.

<sup>79</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> Angelino Alfano, *Chi ha paura non è libero. La nostra guerra contro il terrore*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015, p. 77.

Muhammad Bin 'Awad Bin Laden was the founder of one of the country's leading financial groups, the Saudi Binladin Group, with important branches in the construction sector. After studying at the University of Jeddah, the young Bin Laden settled in Peshawar in 1982 where he financed the anti-Soviet struggle of the Afghan mujahideen using family assets. Here he quickly acquired notoriety due to his charisma and generosity and was distinguished by his commitment to building the infrastructure necessary for the war of liberation, such as roads, warehouses, and training camps for the military training of combatants.

The help provided by Muslims from all over the world, including Azzam and the young Bin Laden, proves to be instrumental in liberating Afghanistan from Soviet occupation. The training camps offer basic programs for the study of Shari'ah, insights into the techniques of guerrilla and assassination, advanced courses on the use of explosives and heavy weapons. In these "virtual universities of Islamic radicalism", each individual acquires awareness of his own potential, establishing links with his comrades that would be resumed and renewed in the future.<sup>82</sup> Bin Laden, while supporting Azzam's doctrine of globalization of jihad, soon enters into conflict with him from a tactical point of view, since Azzam intends to integrate the Arab fighters among the Afghan groups, and in this way immediately export the jihad to the world level. Instead, Bin Laden insisted on the creation of a separate and better-organized fighting force, whose goal was to revive the word of God to make Islam a victorious religion.<sup>83</sup> Then, in 1988 he founded Al-Qaeda, an operational and military structure that immediately had to act as an aggregative network of non-Afghan Islamic adepts, but which in perspective should represent the tool for the promotion of jihad even outside the so-called "Arab nation". Upon Azzam's death in 1989, Bin Laden will reap his moral and ideological legacy.

It is important to emphasize that the Soviet-Afghan war is placed within the context of the Cold War. The Soviet Union decided to invade Afghanistan in 1979 for a number of reasons, including expanding its influence in Asia, preserving the Communist government established in 1978 which was in crisis due to a lack of military support, wanting to protect their interests in Afghanistan from the influence of Iran (after the Islamic Revolution) and the West, and wanting to prevent Islamic radicalization in Muslim-majority Republics in the Soviet Union, especially in the South of the country. The United States, backed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, decided to finance the resistance of the mujahideen through a CIA program called Operation Cyclone, which channeled funds through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency. It is estimated that the United States has donated an amount of approximately 600 million dollars to Afghan Islamic militants to defeat Soviet rule in the

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<sup>82</sup> Angelino Alfano, *Chi ha paura non è libero. La nostra guerra contro il terrore*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015, p. 79.

<sup>83</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader*, Simon & Schuster, 2006, pp. 74-88.

country.<sup>84</sup> The mujahideen managed to inflict heavy defeats on foreign troops, and the Soviet Union decided to withdraw from Afghanistan in February 1989.

After the end of the conflict, and especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States stopped financing the mujahideen. This, together with the outbreak of the First Gulf War following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, leads to a definitive break in relations between Al-Qaeda and the United States, and between Bin Laden and the Saudi Royal Family, guilty in his eyes. to have disregarded the principle of defense of the Muslim *umma* (community of faithful) by privileging the contribution of the Americans, whom are allowed access and the establishment of military bases in Saudi Arabia, the sacred land of Islam, to stop the advance of Saddam Hussein's soldiers. After speaking publicly against King Fahd for hosting American troops, Bin Laden was banished from Saudi Arabia where he had recently returned and was forced into exile in Sudan in 1992. Here he was welcomed by the Islamist theorist Hassan Al-Turabi and he was able to continue the activity of recalling and military training of new followers, carefully planning the strategy of Al-Qaeda. During his Sudanese residence, Bin Laden assisted the Sudanese government, bought and started various commercial enterprises, and set up training camps. The growing international pressure on the government of Khartoum to proceed with his expulsion from the country, however, prompted him to return permanently to Afghanistan in 1996.

In the mid-1990s, Afghanistan was controlled by the Taliban and provided a perfect base for Al-Qaeda. The Taliban regime was hostile to adapting their homeland to the most modern societies in the world, rejecting any attempt at interpretation that was not framed in the more conservative spiritual and cultural tradition of Islamic thought, and was recognized as a legitimate government of Afghanistan by only three countries, namely Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Although not officially working together, Al-Qaeda enjoyed the protection of the Taliban and supported the regime in such a strong symbiotic relationship that many Western observers described the Taliban Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as “the world's first terrorist-sponsored state”.<sup>85</sup> In 1996, the organization announced its jihad to expel foreign troops and interests from the lands of Islam. Two years later, after the declaration of war against the United States and its allies, Bin Laden is internationally consecrated as “sheikh of terror”, and initiates and redirects Al-Qaeda's resources towards global propaganda attacks.

Since 1992, Bin Laden has used *fatwas*, that is, opinions on the interpretation of Quranic law, as a tool to provide legitimacy for his criminal actions and encourage the mujahideen to fight. In fact,

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<sup>84</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *Holy war, Inc.: Inside the secret world of Osama bin Laden*, Free Press, New York, 2001, pp. 68–69.

<sup>85</sup> William Rosenau, Alexander Powell, Pamela G. Faber, *Al-Qaeda Core: A Case Study*, Center for Naval Analyses, 2017.

neither Bin Laden nor his successor Ayman Al-Zawahiri possessed the traditional Islamic academic qualifications to issue a fatwa, not being professional theologians. However, they rejected the authority of the contemporary *ulama* (Muslim scholars), whom they regarded as paid servants by the rulers of the jahiliyya and decided to replace their religious power. The appeals launched by Bin Laden take the form of an invitation to “global religious war”, and for this reason they are addressed to every Muslim regardless of his territorial location. One of the most important of these “spiritual communiques” was the one issued on February 23, 1998, in which Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri announced the formation of an International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders and called on Muslims to kill Americans and their allies wherever they are, considering them all targets without distinguishing between civilians and military. They declared<sup>86</sup>:

*«The sentence to kill Americans and their allies, civilians and military, is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do so in any country where it is possible to do so, in order to liberate the Al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [in Mecca] from their grasp, and for their armies to move from all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, “and fight the pagans all together while they fight you all together” and “fight them until there is no more turmoil or oppression, and justice and faith in Allah prevail”.»*

The occupation of the holy land of Islam, the crimes committed by the troops of “American Satan” and the “devil worshipers aligned with them” represent a clear declaration of war against God and Muslims, and if the enemy destroys the Islamic countries, then it is necessary to defend themselves using the same systems.<sup>87</sup> The project was aimed at bringing together the fundamentalist groups active all over the world under a single banner.

The first Al-Qaeda attack against the United States therefore occurs on August 7, 1998 with the attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Some suicide bombers blew themselves up outside the facilities, killing 224 people, 12 of whom were American citizens. The attacks, which took place simultaneously, brought to light for the first time ever the threat of Al-Qaeda in the eyes of the American public. The FBI put the name of Bin Laden on its list of “ten most wanted criminals” (*FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives*). In retaliation, the United States responded with Operation Infinite Reach, launching a barrage of cruise missiles at the Al-Qaeda base in Khost, Afghanistan and the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical industry in Khartoum, Sudan, believed to be a chemical weapons factory. The operation, however, did not have any results from a strategic point of view, and

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<sup>86</sup> Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Abu Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Mir Hamzah, Fazlul Rahman, *Text of Fatwah Urging Jihad Against Americans*, Al-Quds Al-'Arabi, February 23, 1998.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*.

the network remained intact. Another Al-Qaeda-branded attack was the one on the USS Cole, which took place on October 12, 2000 in the port of Aden, Yemen, when a boat full of explosives seriously damaged the missile destroyer while it was offshore, killing 17 American soldiers. These attacks, together with the one that already occurred at the World Trade Center in New York on February 26, 1993, always of Islamic origin and carried out by individuals not directly attributable to Al-Qaeda, will prepare the ground for what will be the attacks of September 11, 2001.

British historian Mark Sedgwick, an expert on Islam and terrorism and president of the Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies, describes Al-Qaeda's strategy as immediate policy but with ultimate religious goals.<sup>88</sup> In 2005, the Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper published excerpts from the document *Al Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020*, written by Saif Al-Adel, one of the highest-ranking military members of Al-Qaeda.<sup>89</sup> The former editor of the magazine Abdel Bari Atwan summarizes this strategy by listing five steps to free the umma from all forms of oppression<sup>90</sup>:

1. Convince the United States and the West to invade a Muslim country by organizing a massive attack or series of attacks on US soil that results in massive civilian casualties.
2. Incite local resistance against the occupation forces.
3. Expand the conflict in neighboring countries and engage the United States and its allies in a long war of attrition.
4. Convert Al-Qaeda into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be freely franchised in other countries without directly requiring command and control, and through these franchises incite attacks against the United States and countries allied with the United States until they withdraw from the conflict.
5. The US economy will eventually collapse by 2020, under the pressure of multiple commitments in numerous places. This will lead to a collapse of the world economic system and global political instability. Al-Qaeda will succeed in promoting global jihad and establishing a Wahhabi caliphate all over the world.

Atwan notes that while the plan is unrealistic, it is worrying as it virtually describes the dynamics that led to the implosion of the Soviet Union.<sup>91</sup> Instead, according to Jordanian journalist and writer Fouad

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<sup>88</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Al-Qaeda and the Nature of Religious Terrorism*, on *Terrorism & Political Violence*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2010, pp. 795–814.

<sup>89</sup> Bassam Al-Baddarin, *Al-Qaeda's has drawn up working strategy lasting until 2020*, Al-Quds Al-Arabi, March 11, 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of Al-Qaeda*, University of California Press, 2005, p. 221.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*.



Hussein, the Al-Qaeda strategy consists of seven phases, and is similar to the plan described in the *Al-Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020*.<sup>92</sup> These seven phases include:

1. "The Awakening". This phase was to last from 2001 to 2003. The goal was to provoke the United States to attack a Muslim country by carrying out an attack on US soil that killed many civilians.
2. "Opening Eyes". This phase was to last from 2003 to 2006. The goal of this phase was to recruit young men for the cause and turn the Al-Qaeda group into a movement. Iraq was to become the center of all operations with financial and military support from bases in other States.
3. "Arising and Standing Up". It was supposed to last from 2003 to 2006. At this stage, Al-Qaeda wanted to carry out further attacks and focus its attention on Syria. Other countries of the Arabian Peninsula, besides Iraq, were in danger of US interference.
4. Declaration of an Islamic Caliphate, expected between 2013 and 2016. At this stage, Al-Qaeda foresaw a sharp reduction in resistance in Israel.
5. Declaration of an "Islamic Army" and of a "struggle between believers and non-believers", also called "total confrontation".
6. "Definitive victory" planned to be completed by 2020.

According to this view, the war of "total confrontation" should have lasted less than two years.

Charles Lister of the Middle East Institute and Katherine Zimmerman of the American Enterprise Institute argue that the new model of Al-Qaeda is the "socialization of the community" and the construction of a large territorial base of operations with the support of local communities, also obtaining an independent income with the private financing of the sheikhs.<sup>93</sup>

In the 1990s, Al-Qaeda was financed in part by Osama Bin Laden's personal wealth and resources. Other sources of income came from the heroin trade (Afghanistan and Pakistan were and still are the world's leading producers of opium poppies) and from private donations from supporters in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and other Islamic Gulf States. Evidence regarding Saudi Arabia's support for Al-Qaeda was found in a list called the "Golden Chain", found during a Bosnian police raid in Sarajevo in 2002, which listed some names among Al-Qaeda's donors and beneficiaries.<sup>94</sup> The

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<sup>92</sup> Von Yassin Musharbash, *The Future of Terrorism: What al-Qaida Really Wants*, on *Der Spiegel International*, August 12, 2005.

<sup>93</sup> BBC, *What has happened to Al-Qaeda?*, on *BBC News World*, April 5, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Glenn R. Simpson, *List of Early Al-Qaeda Donors Points to Saudi Elite, Charities*, on *The Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2003.

list included twenty names of Saudi politicians and businessmen among the donors of the organization, and there was evidence that Al-Qaeda has extensively exploited some charities to channel financial and material support to its agents around the world.<sup>95</sup>

In particular, the link between Al-Qaeda and the following charities was demonstrated: the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), the Muslim World League (MWL), the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), and the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation (AHIF). The IIRO had ties to Al-Qaeda associates around the world, including Ayman Al-Zawahiri and one of his brothers, who worked for the IIRO in Albania and was recruiting on behalf of the IIRO.<sup>96</sup> The MWL was openly identified by the Al-Qaeda leader as one of the three charities that Al-Qaeda relied primarily on for funding sources.<sup>97</sup>

Several Qatari citizens have also been accused of funding Al-Qaeda. In addition, Qatar Charity, one of the largest NGOs in the country, channeled funds for Al-Qaeda agents abroad, and it was claimed by some of its former members that Abdullah Mohammed Yusef, former director of the organization, was affiliated with Al-Qaeda and at the same time the National Islamic Front, a political group that gave refuge in Sudan to Bin Laden in 1992.<sup>98</sup> According to the Consortium Against Terrorism Finance (CATF), since 2013 Qatar has financed Al-Qaeda enterprises through the Jabhat Al-Nusra group, its former affiliate in Syria.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Qatar has launched fundraising campaigns to finance Al-Nusra and has financed the group's activities through kidnapping for ransom.

Al-Qaeda follows centralization in decision-making, while allowing for decentralization from an executive point of view<sup>100</sup>. Over time, the leadership has isolated itself and has undergone a progressive decentralization, regionalizing itself into various groups. Hence, Al-Qaeda has various ramifications and several affiliated groups in the world, among which it is worth mentioning Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in Syria (formerly known as Jabhat Al-Nusra). This decentralization marks a radical paradigm change that refers to new struggle procedures, allowing single individuals or small groups, endowed with ample decision-making and operational autonomy, to carry out actions inspired by the jihadist logic of the organization, which, according to its once, it acts almost exclusively as a "claiming umbrella".<sup>101</sup> This *modus operandi* increases the rate of unpredictability of hostile action, and obviously, it is reflected

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>96</sup> Steve Emerson, *Jihad Incorporated: A Guide to Militant Islam in the US*, Prometheus Books, 2006, p. 382.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>98</sup> Gian Micalessin, *Quella ricca fondazione vicina ad Al-Qaida*, on *Il Giornale*, August 11, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Consortium Against Terrorism Finance (CATF), *Funding Al-Nusra Through Ransom: Qatar and the Myth of "Humanitarian Principle"*, CATF Reports, 2015.

<sup>100</sup> Khalid Al-Hammadi, *The Inside Story of Al-Qaeda*, on *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, March 22, 2005.

<sup>101</sup> Angelino Alfano, *Chi ha paura non è libero. La nostra guerra contro il terrore*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015, p. 80.

in the exponential increase in the risks associated with security, given that the degree of autonomy enjoyed by individuals, once they have “camouflaged” themselves in the social fabric of a particular country, reveals the vulnerability of objectives that were previously considered unapproachable.

Over the past twenty years, the information gathered above all on the Afghan-Pakistani front, the investigative investigations carried out on the European front of the organization and the relative dismantling of some active cells connected to Islamic fundamentalism in Europe have offered a more articulated and in-depth vision of the operational structure originated by Al-Qaeda. In fact, evidence has been found of three levels of terrorist cells, defined on the basis of hierarchical dependence, functional capabilities, and the very nature of their objectives<sup>102</sup>:

1. **Associated and affiliated groups:** groups directly connected to the top of the organization, from which the instructions and planning of operational details with reference to the actions to be taken come from.
2. **Adherent groups:** groups dependent on Islamic terrorist organizations that have entered into collaboration agreements with Al-Qaeda, based on a principle of “mutual assistance” through the International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders.
3. **“Inspired” groups:** “Constellation” of autonomous terrorist cells, not directly connected to Al-Qaeda or to any of the formations adhering to the Islamic Front, but in various ways aggregated to the fundamentalist galaxy from which they draw the common denominator of aversion to West and the will to subjugate it.

The particular conformation of Al-Qaeda, capable of acting as a subject in its own right or acting as a “claiming umbrella” for other fundamentalist groups, makes in some cases particularly complex to distinguish between the criminal actions directly attributable to it and those attributable to the cartel of Islamic organizations that identify with the International Islamic Front for Jihad. In fact, many organizations, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, have ended up losing their planning and organizational specificity, becoming an integral part of Al-Qaeda itself.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001 and in response to their condemnation by many Islamic ulama, Al-Qaeda provided its own justification for the killing of non-combatants and civilians, entitled *A Statement from Qaidat Al-Jihad Regarding the Mandates of the Heroes and the Legality of the Operations in New York and Washington*.<sup>103</sup> In this document it is stated that the United States is

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<sup>102</sup> Carla E. Humud, Alexis Arieff, Lauren P. Blanchard, Christopher M. Blanchard, Jeremy M. Sharp, Kenneth Katzman, *Al-Qaeda-Affiliated Groups: Middle East and Africa*, Congressional Research Center, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Al-Qaeda, *A Statement from Qaidat Al-Jihad Regarding the Mandates of the Heroes and the Legality of the Operations in New York and Washington*, Middle East Policy Council, 2004.

leading the West in waging a war against Islam so that the attacks on the United States are a defense of Islam and any treaties and agreements between Muslim majority countries and Western countries that would be violated by the attacks is void. Several conditions allow the killing of civilians, including:

- retaliation against the US war on Islam, which Al-Qaeda claims targeted “Muslim women, children, and elderly”;
- when it is too difficult to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants when attacking an enemy stronghold and/or non-combatants remain in enemy territory;
- those who assist the enemy with “deed, speech, mind” can kill, and this includes the population living in democratic countries because civilians can vote in elections that bring the enemies of Islam to power;
- the necessity to kill in war to protect Islam and Muslims;
- the prophet Muhammad, when asked whether Muslim fighters could use the catapult against the village of Taif, replied affirmatively, even if the enemy fighters were mixed with a civilian population;
- whether women, children and other protected groups act as human shields for the enemy;
- if the enemy has broken a treaty, the killing of civilians is allowed.

According to some scholars, such as Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, this statement provides ample theological justification for the killing of civilians in almost every conceivable situation.<sup>104</sup>

### **2.3 – The 9/11 Attacks: Facts, Causes and Consequences**

The attacks of September 11, 2001 (often referred to as “9/11”) were a series of four coordinated suicide attacks by some members of the international terrorist organization Al-Qaeda against civilian and military targets of the United States of America. Due to their gravity, the high number of victims, and the spectacularity and visual effect of the actions carried out, the attacks of September 11, 2001

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<sup>104</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, John Kaltner, *Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda’s Justification for September 11*, Middle East Policy, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2003, pp. 76-92.

are considered by world public opinion as the most serious terrorist attacks of the contemporary age, in addition to be known as the most serious failure of US intelligence. Indeed, the events of September 11, 2001 were the first armed attack on US territory by a foreign force in times of peace, sixty years after the attack on the Pearl Harbor naval air base.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, four commercial airplanes belonging to two of the major US airlines (United Airlines and American Airlines) were hijacked by 19 terrorists belonging to Al-Qaeda and crashed with all their human cargo into civil and military buildings. American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, both departing from Logan International Airport, in Boston, and headed to Los Angeles International Airport, were respectively crashed into the North Tower and South Tower of the World Trade Center in New York, in the Lower Manhattan neighborhood. Within 1 hour and 42 minutes, both towers collapsed, and the debris and fires caused by the collapse later damaged other buildings in the World Trade Center complex, causing them to collapse in whole or in part. American Airlines Flight 77, departing from Washington Dulles International Airport (Virginia) and headed to Los Angeles International Airport, was crashed into the Pentagon in Arlington (Virginia), the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense, causing the collapse of the West facade of the building. A fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, departed from Newark International Airport (New Jersey) and headed to San Francisco International Airport, crashed in a field near Shanksville (Pennsylvania) following an uprising of passengers, who had understood the intentions of the hijackers and had tried to regain control of the plane. It is assumed that this last plane was headed to Washington, targeting the White House or the Capitol Building. The attacks resulted in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people, while more than 6,000 are estimated to have been injured.<sup>105</sup> In the following years, more people died from cancers or respiratory diseases caused by the debris and dust from the collapsed buildings.<sup>106</sup> During the attacks on the World Trade Center, there was widespread media coverage, and images circulated intensively even after the attacks in media around the world.

Immediately after the attacks, US security agencies identified Al-Qaeda as responsible for the attacks and Osama Bin Laden as the mandator. Proof of this was, according to the United States government, the 1998 fatwa signed by Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri calling on Muslims to global jihad, and to the duty to kill Americans and their allies without distinction between civilians and military, in addition to the attacks already occurred on the US embassies in East Africa and the attack on the USS Cole in the Gulf of Aden for which the same organization was responsible. Bin Laden, having

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<sup>105</sup> Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, *How much did the September 11 terrorist attack cost America?*, IAGS, 2004, <http://www.iags.org/costof911.html>.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*.

previously denied his involvement for a long time, only admitted his responsibility for the attacks in 2004 with a video recording.<sup>107</sup> In addition to Bin Laden, four other people linked to Al-Qaeda were identified as having detailed knowledge of the operations: Ramzi Bin Al-Shibh, Abu Turab Al-Urdunni, Mohammed Atef, and Khalid Shaykh Muhammad.<sup>108</sup> The latter was believed to be the “main architect” of the 9/11 attacks, as well as having been the adviser and financier of the 1993 World Trade Center attack and uncle of Rami Yusuf, leader of the group of attackers of that attack.

In addition to the 1998 fatwa, and the 1996 fatwa in which Bin Laden ordered the immediate abandonment of US forces from Saudi Arabia as the Prophet Mohammed had banned the constant presence of infidels in the holy land of Islam, in *Letter to America* of 2002, Bin Laden explained that the attacks had the following motives<sup>109</sup>:

- US support for Israel;
- support for “attacks on Muslims” in Somalia;
- support for the Philippines against Muslims in the Islamic uprising in the Philippines (Moro conflict);
- support for Israeli “aggressions” against Muslims in Lebanon;
- support for Russia in the “atrocities against Muslims” in Chechnya;
- presence of pro-American governments in the Middle East that operate as “agents of the United States” and are against the interests of Muslims;
- support for India in “oppression against Muslims” in Kashmir;
- presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia;
- sanctions against Iraq after the Gulf War.

The support of the United States (the “Great Satan”) for Israel (the “Little Satan”) is believed to be the main motive for the attack, since hatred of Israel and American interference in the region was the

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<sup>107</sup> Maggie Michael, *Bin Laden, in statement to US people, says he ordered Sept. 11 attacks*, on *SignOnSanDiego.com*, October 29, 2004.

<sup>108</sup> District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, *Substitution for Testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed*, United States Department of Justice, 2006, p. 24.

<sup>109</sup> Osama Bin Laden, *Full text: Bin Laden’s “Letter to America”*, on *The Guardian*, November 24, 2002.

element that united the main minds of the attack.<sup>110</sup> In addition to the reasons stated by Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, some analysts have suggested others, and they include<sup>111</sup>:

- Western support for Islamic authoritarian and democratic regimes in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan and North Africa;
- the presence of Western troops in some of these nations;
- the crisis of Islamic values due to globalization;
- the desire to involve the United States in a vast conflict against the Islamic world in the hope of motivating other allies to support Al-Qaeda.

According to American analyst Michael Scott Doran, an expert in Middle East international politics and a member of the Hudson Institute, the 9/11 attacks were a strategic move aimed at provoking the United States and involving them in a war against some countries in the Middle East that would have incited a pan-Islamic revolution, a goal already declared by Al-Qaeda in the *Al Qaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020* by Saif Al-Adel.<sup>112</sup>

On September 28, 2001, the FBI published the personal details and photos of the nineteen hijackers who took part in the attack.<sup>113</sup> Of these, fifteen came from Saudi Arabia, two from the United Arab Emirates, one from Egypt and one from Lebanon. In contrast to the usual profile of suicide bombers, the 9/11 hijackers were all mature, well-educated adults from wealthy and largely secularized families. Furthermore, many of them already lived in the West where they had work or study experiences. Some of them were part of the so-called Hamburg Cell, in Germany, a city where they had moved in their youth to study at the local University and where they had developed radical ideas and anti-Western sentiments, and where they came into contact with the network of Al-Qaeda in the local Al-Quds mosque.<sup>114</sup> Among the most prominent members of the cell were: Mohammed Atta, Egyptian, leader of the terrorist command of the operation and hijacker pilot of American Airlines Flight 11 which struck the North Tower; Marwan Al-Shehhi, Emirati, hijacker pilot of United Airlines Flight 175 which hit the South Tower; Ziad Jarrah, Lebanese, pilot of United Airlines Flight 93 which was to go to Washington and which instead crashed in the countryside of Pennsylvania; Ramzi Bin Al-Shibh, a Yemeni, already described as one of the masterminds of the entire operation,

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<sup>110</sup> Rahimullah Yusufzai, *Face to face with Osama*, on *The Guardian*, September 26, 2001.

<sup>111</sup> Tom Rockmore, *Before and After 9/11: A Philosophical Examination of Globalization, Terror, and History*, Bloomsbury, 2011.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Scott Doran, *Somebody Else's Civil War*, on *Foreign Affairs*, 2002.

<sup>113</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The FBI Releases 19 Photographs of Individuals Believed to be the Hijackers of the Four Airliners that Crashed on September 11, 2001*, United States Department of Justice, 2001.

<sup>114</sup> Terry McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers: The 9/11 Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It*, HarperCollins, 2005, pp. 2-3.

but did not participate in the attacks as he was refused entry visas to the United States. These, together with Hani Hanjour, who was the pilot who hijacked American Airlines Flight 77 against the Pentagon, after a period of training in the al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, moved shortly before the attacks in the United States, where they took flight lessons at the Huffman Aviation school in Venice, Florida, and where they obtained the license of commercial aircraft pilots.

The 9/11 attacks are known to be the greatest intelligence failure of the contemporary age, both for their spectacularity and for the visual shock they produced in the eyes of American and international public opinion, and for both short-term and long-term consequences that caused. Firstly, there were economic consequences: the destruction of the World Trade Center damaged the New York economy and had a significant impact on global markets, causing the closure of Wall Street until September 17. In that week, US stocks lost 14 trillion dollars in value.<sup>115</sup> More than 430,000 jobs were lost in New York, with exports being the sector most affected by the crisis. Some 18,000 small businesses located in Lower Manhattan were destroyed or relocated after the attacks and received state funds to help the resumption of their activities.<sup>116</sup> North American airspace was closed several days after the attacks and airliners experienced a decline after its reopening. The attacks caused an approximately 20% cut in air travel capacity, exacerbating the problems of US airline companies.<sup>117</sup> New travel rules and new security protocols were introduced, and baggage and passenger checks were stepped up at airports around the world. Secondly, there were also political consequences: following the attacks, many governments around the world passed legislation to combat terrorism and allocated more resources to their intelligence compartments to develop counter-terrorism programs. In the United States, the Department of Homeland Security was created with the aforementioned *Homeland Security Act* (2002) to coordinate national counter-terrorism efforts. On October 26, 2001, the controversial *USA PATRIOT Act* (acronym for *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001*) was passed which gave the federal government greater powers, including the authority to detain suspected foreign terrorists for one week free of charge, to monitor telephone communications, e-mails and Internet use by suspected terrorists and prosecute them without time limits.<sup>118</sup> The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) established that the cockpits of aircraft should be reinforced to prevent future hijackings and that terrorists take control of the aircraft, established the figure of “sky

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<sup>115</sup> Gail Makinen, *The Economic Effects of 9/11: A Retrospective Assessment*, on *Congressional Research Service*, The Library of Congress, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>117</sup> Dipasis Bhadra, Pamela Texter, *Airline Networks: An Economic Framework to Analyze Domestic US Air Travel*, on *Journal of Transportation and Statistics*, Bureau of Transport Statistics, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2004.

<sup>118</sup> 107<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, *H. R. 3162 USA PATRIOT Act*, Electronic Privacy Information Center, October 24, 2001, <https://epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.pdf>.



marshals”, that is plainclothes police officers to ensure safety in flight. On November 19, 2001, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) was passed which made the federal government, not airports, responsible for airport security.<sup>119</sup> The law also created the Transportation Security Administration to better inspect passengers and baggage, causing long delays and passenger privacy concerns.

Despite several previous attacks on US targets abroad attributed to Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden, most Americans did not know these names before that day and had no idea what kind of threat their country was facing. Everyone wondered how it was possible that a small group of individuals could have accomplished something so great, amazed that three simultaneously hijacked airplanes could be crashed, almost simultaneously, into three separate buildings. To shed light on the events, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (also known as “9/11 Commission”) was established by Congress on November 27, 2002 through a law signed by President George W. Bush. The Commission, chaired by former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean and made up of five members of the Democratic Party and five members of the Republican Party, aimed to prepare a comprehensive account of the circumstances in which the attacks occurred, including their preparations and the first response to them. It also had a mandate to make recommendations to prevent future attacks. The final report of the Commission, consisting of about 600 pages, was published on July 22, 2004 after having examined a huge amount of documents and conducted a thousand interrogations in ten different countries.

In this report, the Commission, while acknowledging the difficulty of formulating *a posteriori* evaluations and judgments on the work of the numerous IC agencies involved, highlights a general and widespread underestimation of the danger represented by Al-Qaeda, attributable to all US political, diplomatic, military, investigative, and intelligence levels and sectors.<sup>120</sup> For instance, on the political front, the lack of attention on the part of the United States Congress to issues related to terrorism is underlined, which was not granted relevance even during the debates that animated the campaign for the presidential elections in 2000. Regarding the diplomatic sector, it refers to the vain pressure to induce the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to expel Osama Bin Laden and the members of Al-Qaeda, to whom instead it has continued to guarantee hospitality over the years. In the report there are also references to the complex relations with other actors in the Middle East, primarily Pakistan, which allegedly maintained good relations with Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban and founder of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, despite the different expectations of the United States. Always

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<sup>119</sup> 107<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, *S.1447 Aviation and Transportation Security Act*, Congress.gov, November 19, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ71/PLAW-107publ71.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, W. W. Norton & Company, July 22, 2004, <https://www.amazon.com/11-Commission-Report-Terrorist-Authorized/dp/0393326713>.

with reference to Pakistan, the Commission then blames the US military sector for an inability to draw up plans to block the expansion in the country of the group led by Bin Laden. Again, as regards the intelligence sector, it should be noted that although the birth of Al-Qaeda can be traced back to the end of the 1980s, no in-depth analyzes of the organization had been carried out before 1999. The same information held by some intelligence structures has not been channeled into a path of sharing with other federal agencies and this has impeded the development of a broader investigation perspective. In conclusion, it can be said that the terrorist threat was not a priority during the Clinton administration, much less during the first year of Bush's presidency.<sup>121</sup>

Before 9/11 there was a plenty of reasons to believe that the United States was vulnerable to attacks on its own territory. The US Commission on National Security/21st Century, also known as the "Hart-Rudman Commission", set up in 1998 by then Secretary of Defense William Cohen, analyzed the emerging international security context straddling the two millennia with the aim of developing an adequate national security strategy. The Commission's final report, published on January 31, 2001, had repeatedly signaled the possibility of attacks on national soil, arguing that "national security" no longer meant simply discouraging aggression in other parts of the world, but that at that moment it also required the preparation for possible attacks at home: "national security" meant homeland security.<sup>122</sup> The growing threat of Al-Qaeda was evident with the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the US Cole in 2000, in addition to the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 with minor consequences. On July 10, 2001, FBI Special Agent Kenneth Williams, in a letter sent to FBI Headquarters, renamed the *Phoenix Memo*, recommended the creation of a list of students enrolled in universities and civil aviation schools in the United States due to suspicious associates with individuals who may have connections with Osama Bin Laden.<sup>123</sup> This memorandum was viewed by a dozen FBI officials, but not by those of higher rank, due to a deficit in the Office's analytical skills.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the existence of the memo was not disclosed to President George W. Bush and senior personnel to national security until May 2002. On August 6, 2001, the CIA delivered a President's Daily Brief (PDB) to Bush titled *Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US* which warned him of terrorist threats from Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, and of «*patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for a hijacking of US aircraft*».<sup>125</sup> In response to accusations that the Bush administration did not act on the contents of the

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<sup>121</sup> Angelino Alfano, *Chi ha paura non è libero. La nostra guerra contro il terrore*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015, p. 85.

<sup>122</sup> The United States Commission on National Security/21<sup>st</sup> Century, *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change*, Center for Homeland Defense and Security, January 31, 2001, <file:///C:/Users/utente/Downloads/2079.pdf>.

<sup>123</sup> Richard Behar, *FBI's "Phoenix" memo unmasked*, on *Fortune*, May 22, 2002.

<sup>124</sup> David Johnston, Don van Natta, Jr., *Traces of Terror: The FBI Memo: Ashcroft Learned on Agency's Alert Just after 9/11*, on *The New York Times*, May 21, 2002.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas S. Blanton, *The President's Daily Brief*, The National Security Archive, April 12, 2004.

briefing, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and General Richard Myers stressed that the CIA PDB had not warned the President of a new specific threat, but that it contained historical information based on old reports from previous briefings.<sup>126</sup> The flight instructor of Zakariyya Musawi, who was arrested on August 16, 2001 for violating immigration regulations and then accused of being part of the plot, phoned FBI agents several times, distrustful of his student's behavior, expressing the suspicions that some airplanes could be used as bombs.<sup>127</sup>

All these signals about what was to happen soon are clear only in retrospect. They were not evident at the time, for the same reason that the Japanese intentions to attack Pearl Harbor were not: the future is not as knowable as the past. No one had ever combined a multiple hijacking with a kamikaze attack before, nor had such a combination ever occurred on the territory of the United States, a country with the highest spending in the world for the defense sector. Therefore, a hypothesis of incapability had again produced a discount of probability: no one had found any particular signal in the midst of the "noises" generated by all the other possible threats to all the other possible targets.<sup>128</sup>

According to political scientist Daniel Byman, professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, failures in preventing the 9/11 terrorist attacks can be examined from four perspectives<sup>129</sup>:

- 1. Cognitive bias** by intelligence analysts and policy-makers regarding the threat of terrorism. At the time, in fact, terrorism was not on the list of "top priorities" for threats to national interests and security, and few resources and men were destined for the counter-terrorism department. Analysts and policy-makers have suffered from a kind of "failure of imagination" as they failed to recognize that Al-Qaeda, unlike other terrorist groups of the past, had both the intentions and the abilities to inflict on the United States heavy attacks. Based on the information collected, the CIA and FBI focused their attention on possible attacks outside the United States, but not within the national borders, as they were conditioned by this bias.
- 2. Organizational pathologies** typical of bureaucracy, especially concerning the work of the CIA and the FBI. The lack of tactical warning related to the attacks was partly due to the fact that the IC and other institutions had not responded to the strategic alarm and had not

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<sup>126</sup> Richard Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon: Serving on the Front Lines of National Security*, Simon & Schuster, 2009, p. 186.

<sup>127</sup> Neil A. Lewis, *Flight Instructor Recalls Suspicious About Moussaoui*, on *The New York Times*, March 9, 2006.

<sup>128</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *On Strategic Surprise*, on *Hoover Digest*, Hoover Institution, Vol. 2, 2002. <https://www.hoover.org/research/strategic-surprise>.

<sup>129</sup> Daniel Byman, *Strategic Surprise and the September 11 Attacks*, on *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 8, 2005, pp. 145-170.

sufficiently strengthened their ability to collect, analyze and disseminate information or act on what they knew. Furthermore, some institutions, including the US military, did not have counter-terrorism among their main missions, despite the high level of strategic alarm.

3. **Political and strategic mistakes** by senior government officials. Some of the problems associated with focusing attention on Al-Qaeda as a growing terrorist threat stemmed from legitimate political limits and trade-offs in foreign policy. As counter-terrorism was not a US priority at the time, their foreign policy efforts mostly focused on monitoring the development of the nuclear program in Pakistan and consolidating relations with Saudi Arabia for issues related to oil price stability, the Middle East peace process and sanctions in Iraq. Political or economic pressures on these regimes motivated by domestic security reasons would have been difficult to implement in the absence of real danger and could potentially harm vital US interests in those countries.
4. **Nature of the adversary.** Terrorist organizations are generally viewed by intelligence communities as “hard targets”, as they are difficult to infiltrate, their members are difficult to identify and their actions are difficult to anticipate. Being non-state actors, they make war asymmetrical and are inclined to use unconventional methods of warfare. Al-Qaeda, in particular, stood out for its excellent organization and transnational nature: the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has long provided a safe haven for the organization, and once it was overthrown by the US intervention, and many of its cells dismantled, operations continued elsewhere. Al-Qaeda uses the professionalism of its agents, and this has allowed them to make few mistakes. The US government and intelligence community did not have a coherent approach at the time to cope with the capabilities of these terrorists.

Thus, we can say that the causes related to the intelligence failure which led to the occurrence of the 9/11 attacks are related to the underestimation of the risk, the lack of communication between the different intelligence agencies and between the security departments, the failure to connect the dots, and marginally the subordination of intelligence to politics. The inability of the various US security agencies to know how to communicate with each other and not having made the warning strong enough on policy-makers is to be placed within the theories of the reformist school. With hindsight, it can be said that numerous mistakes were made at all levels of the US government and more generally by the US intelligence community, which made the strategic surprise of the 9/11 attacks more likely to happen.

Contrary to the dominant thesis that states the 9/11 attacks occurred because there was a lot of information at the tactical level but not enough information at the strategic level, Erik J. Dahl instead

argues that the strategic information produced by the IC was good but that was not enough to prevent the attacks.<sup>130</sup> Referring to the theory of preventive action, Dahl argues that strategic intelligence, which consists of general long-term assessments, is not suitable for preventing intelligence failures and surprises. Terrorist attacks such as those of 9/11 may have long-term and strategic consequences, but they are in fact “tactical” events. So, to prevent this type of attack, policy-makers need tactical intelligence, that is, knowing when and where a plot is planned and who is involved. Pre-9/11 US intelligence has failed to acquire tactical intelligence on the conspiracy and to issue specific warnings on the attacks. Prior to 9/11, intelligence was not focused enough on collecting information and analyzing specific tactical-level intelligence on Al-Qaeda and the growing threat of international terrorism. Furthermore, according to Dahl, to be effective intelligence must be received and understood by decision-makers who have the possibility to act, but this did not happen in the case of 9/11 in which, as we have seen, decision-makers at the national level they were poorly receptive to the warnings received about the Al-Qaeda threat.<sup>131</sup> Again, the specificity of the warning and the receptivity of the decision-maker are necessary to predict and prevent intelligence failures and surprises, but due to errors made at the analysis and production level and at the dissemination level in the intelligence process it was not possible to avert the 9/11 attacks.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 also had long-term effects on the international scene. In fact, shortly after the attacks, the United States decided to resort to war and invaded Afghanistan, while in 2003 they declared war on Iraq. The two wars in the Middle East caused a domino effect in world geopolitics, and in turn, led to some intelligence failures.

## **2.4 – The US Involvement in the Middle East: The War on Terror**

The shock of the September 11, 2001 attacks forced the West to interface with a new type of threat, this time a non-state enemy, and a new front to the security dilemma, ten years after the end of the Cold War. The United States decided a few days later to respond militarily against the organizations and states it held responsible for the attacks. On September 20, 2001, United States President George W. Bush, in a formal speech to Congress, used the term “war on terror” to refer to the government’s

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<sup>130</sup> Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 129.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibidem*.

intention to take military action against states that hosted, supported and financed terrorist organizations. On this occasion, Bush declared<sup>132</sup>:

*«Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them. Our war on terror begins with Al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.»*

From this point on, the Bush administration and the Western media have used the term “War on Terror”, or “Global War on Terrorism”, to identify a global struggle of a military, political, legal and ideological nature both against some organizations classified as “terrorist” (in particular, in reference to the Islamist terrorists of Al-Qaeda), and towards some States accused of supporting them or perceived as a threat to the security of the United States and its allies (in particular, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Baathist regime in Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein). Subsequently, on the occasion of the State of the Union Address before the Congress on January 29, 2002, Bush will coin the expression “Axis of Evil” to refer to the plot of those nations pro-international terrorism and engaged in the development of weapons of mass destruction<sup>133</sup>; this list included nations such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea, but looked with greater interest those States considered fertile ground for the threat of Islamic terrorism.

On September 12, 2001, for the first time ever, NATO invoked Art. 5 of the *North Atlantic Treaty*, which commits each member State to consider an armed attack against one member State as an armed attack against all of them.<sup>134</sup> The invocation of Art. 5 led to the activation of Operation Eagle Assist, in which a patrol operation of the United States airspace was carried out, and of Operation Active Endeavor, which provided for the surveillance of the Mediterranean Sea to prevent the movement of terrorists or weapons of mass destruction.

On September 14, the United States Congress passed the law called *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists* (AUMFT), which was then signed by President Bush on September 18. Still in effect, the authorization grants the President authority to use all “necessary and appropriate force” against those who are deemed to have “planned, authorized, committed or assisted” the 9/11 attacks, or who had such persons or groups to prevent future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or individuals.<sup>135</sup> It has been used several times to

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<sup>132</sup> George W. Bush, *Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, September 20, 2001.*, on CCN, September 21, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

<sup>133</sup> George W. Bush, *President Delivers State of the Union Address*, The White House, January 29, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

<sup>134</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, Art. 5, 1949.

<sup>135</sup> 107<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, *Public Law 107-40*, Congress.gov, September 18, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ40/PLAW-107publ40.pdf>.

justify numerous military actions. The Congress stated that this law was intended to constitute specific legal authorization under Section 5 (b) of the 1973 *War Powers Resolution*.<sup>136</sup>

In the 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, the Bush administration defined the following objectives in the War on Terror<sup>137</sup>:

1. Defeat terrorists such as Osama Bin Laden, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and destroy their organizations.
2. Identify, locate and demolish terrorists along with their organizations.
3. Reject sponsorship, support and sanctuary to terrorists.
  - a) End the state sponsorship of terrorism.
  - b) Establish and maintain an international standard of responsibility concerning combating terrorism.
  - c) Strengthen and maintain the international effort to combat terrorism.
  - d) Function with willing and able States.
  - e) Enable weak States.
  - f) Persuade reluctant States.
  - g) Compel unwilling States.
  - h) Intervene and dismantle material support for terrorists.
  - i) Abolish terrorist sanctuaries and havens.
4. Reduce the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit.
  - a) Establish partnerships with the international community to strengthen weak States and prevent the (re)emergence of terrorism.
  - b) Win the war of ideals.
5. Protect US citizens and interests at home and abroad.
  - a) Integrate the National Strategy for Homeland Security.
  - b) Attain domain awareness.
  - c) Enhance measures to ensure the integrity, reliability and availability of critical, physical and information-based infrastructures at home and abroad.

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<sup>136</sup> 93<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, *H.J. Resolution 542 War Powers Resolution*, Art.5, US Government Publishing Office, November 3, 1973, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-87/pdf/STATUTE-87-Pg555.pdf>.

<sup>137</sup> George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, The White House, February 14, 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030214-7.html>.

- d) Implement measures to protect US citizens abroad.
- e) Ensure an integrated incident management capacity.

In his speech before the Congress on September 20, Bush repeatedly referred to the link between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, issuing an ultimatum to the latter in which he made the following requests<sup>138</sup>:

- hand over all Al-Qaeda leaders present in Afghanistan to the United States;
- free all prisoners of foreign nations, including US citizens;
- protect foreign journalists, diplomats and volunteers in Afghanistan;
- close Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and hand over each terrorist to the appropriate authorities;
- guarantee free access to the United States in order to verify their closure.

The Taliban did not respond directly to Bush, as they believed that initiating a dialogue with a political leader from a non-Muslim country would be an insult to Islam. So, through the mediation of their embassy in Pakistan, they declared that they rejected the ultimatum as there was no evidence linking Bin Laden to the 9/11 attacks. On September 22, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates withdrew their recognition of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which continued to be recognized only by Pakistan. On 7 October, just before the war began, the Taliban publicly declared their willingness to prosecute Bin Laden in Afghanistan, but only through an “Islamic” court, that is, subject to the laws of the Shari’ah; the United States refused this offer, considering it insufficient in relation to their requests. On October 14, a week after the invasion began, the Taliban expressed their willingness to hand over Bin Laden to a third country for trial, but only if evidence that he was involved in the attacks was provided. On the same days, moderate members of the Taliban regime met with US ambassadors in Afghanistan to find a way to persuade Mullah Omar to hand over Bin Laden to the United States. Bush turned down this offer, citing the US policy of “not negotiating with terrorists”.

Then, on October 7, 2001, military operations in Afghanistan began. The US and British Armed Forces began an aerial bombardment with the aim of targeting the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. The first bombings mainly focused on the capital Kabul, where electricity supplies were interrupted, in Kandahar, where the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, resided, and in Jalalabad, where Al-Qaeda training camps were present. Through Operation Enduring Freedom, the United States and NATO

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<sup>138</sup> George W. Bush, *Transcript of President Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, September 20, 2001*, on CCN, September 21, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.



have provided air, tactical and logistical support to Afghan groups hostile to the Taliban regime, called the “Northern Alliance” or “United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan”. After the initial objectives were completed, a coalition of over 40 countries (including all NATO members) formed a security mission in the country called the “International Security Assistance Force” (ISAF) to combat insurgent allies of the Taliban government, which in 2014 was succeeded by the Resolute Support Mission (RS), with the aim of supporting the Afghan government of the new Islamic Republic of Afghanistan even with fewer foreign troops involved.

The legitimacy of military intervention in Afghanistan is a matter of debate for scholars of international law.<sup>139</sup> According to some jurists, this is an act of self-defense in compliance with Art. 51 of the *United Nations Charter*.<sup>140</sup> According to others, however, it is not an act of legitimate defense since it is possible only as result of an attack from a sovereign State. Since Al-Qaeda is not a State, then it seems difficult to be able to invoke self-defense as a legitimate reason for resorting to war. Another part of the doctrine maintains that the United Nations Security Council, with *Resolution no. 1368/2001* in which he qualified terrorism as a “threat to international peace and security” (pursuant to Art. 39 of the *United Nations Charter*) implicitly authorized the attack.<sup>141</sup> The legal legitimacy of the intervention could be deduced from the fact that on several occasions the United Nations has endorsed the presence of the NATO coalition in Afghanistan by establishing the ISAF and no foreign State has ever condemned the military attack in Afghanistan. It can therefore be assumed that there has been a rather broad international consensus on the intervention.

After the initial defeats inflicted by the coalition forces that had invaded the country, in 2003 the Taliban united in an insurrection led by Mullah Omar against the new Afghan government established in Kabul and recognized as legitimate by foreign forces. Tactically, they have used guerrilla actions and ambushes in rural areas of the country against foreign forces, suicide attacks on civilian targets in urban areas, and targeted killings against members of the newborn Afghan regime. Throughout the insurgency, the Taliban used the weaknesses of the Afghan government to reassert influence in rural areas of Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. Due to an escalation of violence among the fighting forces, in 2006 Afghanistan was ranked tenth among the Failed States in the annual ranking compiled by *Foreign Policy*.<sup>142</sup> On May 2, 2011, after a manhunt that lasted almost ten years, the Navy SEALs of the United States Navy managed to identify and kill in a firefight Osama Bin Laden, hidden in a building complex near Abbottabad, in Pakistan, as part of Operation Neptune

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<sup>139</sup> Rabia Khan, *Was the NATO Invasion of Afghanistan Legal?*, on *E-International Relations*, 2013, <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/06/was-the-nato-invasion-of-afghanistan-legal/>.

<sup>140</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, Art. 51, Chap. VII, United Nations Digital Library, 1945.

<sup>141</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 1368 (2001)*, United Nations Digital Library, 2001.

<sup>142</sup> Foreign Policy & The Fund for Peace, *The Failed States Index*, on *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 2006.

Spear. Upon Bin Laden's death, his right-hand man Ayman Al-Zawahiri assumed leadership of Al-Qaeda. The organization confirmed the death of its founder in a statement on May 6, 2011, promising revenge.<sup>143</sup>

In a research conducted by Neta Crawford, a professor at Boston University, it is estimated that since the conflict began in mid-2001, more than 100,000 people have been killed in the war in Afghanistan, including 62,000 Afghan National Security Forces, 31,000 civilians, 4,000 ISAF soldiers and civilian contractors, and an indefinite number of fighting forces among the Taliban.<sup>144</sup> After almost twenty years, the war seems to have reached a turning point with the signing of an agreement between the United States and the Taliban, signed on February 29, 2020 in Doha, Qatar, in which the United States undertakes to withdraw from Afghan territory within 14 months provided that the Taliban break their ties with Al-Qaeda, do not allow Afghanistan to host terrorist organizations determined to plan attacks abroad, and cooperate in the reconstruction of the country. Despite the peace agreement, some authoritative sources argue that the ties between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are still strong, and that Al-Qaeda played a "prompter" role in the negotiations with the United States.<sup>145</sup>

In the 2002 document *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, updated in 2006, some principles in US foreign policy in that particular historical period are outlined. These principles have been called the "Bush Doctrine" and involve unilateralism and the use of preventive warfare. In the document one can read the following<sup>146</sup>:

*«The security environment confronting the United States today is radically different from what we have faced before. Yet the first duty of the United States Government remains what it always has been: to protect the American people and American interests. It is an enduring American principle that this duty obligates the Government to anticipate and counter threats, using all elements of national power, before the threats can do grave damage. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction, and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. There are few greater threats than a terrorist attack with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). To forestall or prevent such*

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<sup>143</sup> Rachel Quigley, *Your happiness will turn to sadness: Al-Qaeda admits Bin Laden is dead – but vows bloody revenge*, on *Daily Mail*, May 6, 2011.

<sup>144</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *Update on the Human Costs of War for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001 to mid-2016*, Watson Institute International & Public Affairs, Brown University, 2016.

<sup>145</sup> Susannah George, *Behind the Taliban's ties to Al-Qaeda: A Shared Ideology and Decades of Battlefield Support*, on *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2020.

<sup>146</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, 2002, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.

*hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defense. The United States will not resort to force in all cases to preempt emerging threats. Our preference is that non-military actions succeed. And no country should ever use preemption as a pretext for aggression.»*

The two main pillars of the Bush Doctrine are the use of preemptive attacks on potential enemies and the promotion of regime changes in some countries in favor of democracies. Years after the end of his presidency, Bush will explain the concept of the Bush Doctrine in four “poles”, three of which are practical and one idealistic<sup>147</sup>:

1. Make no distinction between terrorists and host nations and take both into account.
2. Confront the enemy abroad before they can attack us again here at home.
3. Confront threats before they fully materialize.
4. Promote liberty and hope as alternatives to the ideology of repression and fear of the enemy.

Based on this doctrine, suspecting that Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction and supported the al-Qaeda network that was responsible for the 9/11 attacks, in 2003 the United States, on in the wake of the War on Terror which had already begun in Afghanistan, decided to resort to the preventive war against Iraq, which is also part of the so-called “Axis of Evil”. Several reasons were in favor of this type of intervention:

1. The probable construction of an Iraqi arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. In 2002, a *National Intelligence Estimate* by the CIA submitted to the President stated that Iraq had continued its WMD programs, disobeying UN resolutions, and that Saddam Hussein’s regime possessed chemical and biological weapons and also missiles with a range exceeding that allowed by the restrictions imposed by the United Nations<sup>148</sup>; in the absence of further restrictions, Iraq was likely to possess nuclear weapons by the end of the decade, even with the absence of inspections and the relaxation of sanctions. Thus, it was believed that Iraq’s ability to produce weapons of mass destruction could endanger the security of the entire West.

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<sup>147</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, Crown Publishing Group, 2010.

<sup>148</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *National Intelligence Estimate: Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Federation of American Scientists, 2002.

2. The alleged contacts between Iraq and various terrorist groups indicate a possible collaboration. The fear was that Iraq could provide atomic weapons for use in an attack. US Vice President Dick Cheney argued that links existed between Al-Qaeda and Iraq, while Bush was never so explicit but made several implicit references to this possibility.<sup>149</sup>
3. The reputation of the United States would have been strengthened by the war, and this would have prompted the governments of many countries to align themselves with Washington, improving the international political situation.
4. The regime change in Iraq in favor of a democratic regime would have improved the image of the United States in the Middle East, providing a model to be imitated by other countries in the region, generally ruled by autocratic regimes.
5. The systematic human rights violations against the Iraqi population and the atrocities committed against the Kurdish population, as well as the numerous crimes for which Saddam Hussein's regime was responsible, such as causing the Iran-Iraq War and the First Gulf War.
6. The refusal and lack of cooperation with the inspections of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection or "UNMOVIC" created in 1999 precisely to monitor the disarmament program of Iraq by the Security Council.<sup>150</sup>
7. Violations of the no-fly zones until shortly before the intervention, established to protect the Shiite and Kurdish populations in Iraq oppressed by the regime of Saddam Hussein.
8. Once a pro-American regime was established in Iraq, the country could be used as a base to attack and overthrow the regimes in Iran and Syria, opposed to the Washington government.

On October 11, 2002, the Congress authorized Bush to use force to defend US national security against the continuing threat posed by Iraq, and to implement all United Nations Security Council resolutions in this regard. Once the authorization by the Congress was obtained, Bush should have convinced the Security Council to take action against non-compliance with the previous sixteen resolutions concerning Iraq. The use of force would only be permissible after it was certain that further diplomatic efforts would not have served to protect the United States or implement the resolutions. After a few weeks of negotiations, the Security Council passed *Resolution no. 1441/2002*

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<sup>149</sup> David E. Sanger, Robin Toner, *Bush and Cheney Talk Strongly of Al-Qaeda Links with Hussein*, on *The New York Times*, June 18, 2004.

<sup>150</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 1284 (1999)*, United Nations Digital Library, 1999.

which offered Iraq a last chance to fulfill its disarmament obligations and threatened “serious consequences” if it did not, setting a series of deadlines within which disarmament should proceed.<sup>151</sup> Iraq accepted the resolution, allowing the inspectors to return and granting them prerogatives it had always denied, such as unrestricted access to presidential sites. According to reports from chief inspectors, although Iraq had not fully accepted its obligations, there was no evidence of the development of a noteworthy atomic program. In regard to chemical weapons, several months were necessary to carry out inspections.

After the umpteenth refusal by Saddam Hussein to give up power and go into exile, the war in Iraq began on March 20, 2003 without an official declaration of war, under the codename Operation Iraqi Freedom. The United States invaded the country along with a “coalition of the willing”, i.e., a list of 49 US allied countries whose level of involvement ranged from military participation (as in the case of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland) to logistical support, up to simple political support. On April 9, three weeks after the invasion began, the Americans managed to enter the capital Baghdad, ending Saddam Hussein’s regime after 24 years of government. Many political and military members of the Baathist regime were arrested or killed in battle, and Saddam was captured on December 13, and then executed on December 30, 2006, following a death sentence by an Iraqi special court for crimes against the humanity. Already on April 15, 2003, all major Iraqi cities were in the hands of the coalition forces, and on May 1<sup>st</sup>, President Bush declared military operations concluded on large scale. On May 22, the Security Council approved *Resolution no. 1483/2003* with which he urged the international community to contribute to the stability and security of Iraq.<sup>152</sup> On October 16, *Resolution no. 1511/2003* which laid the foundations for international and United Nations participation in the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq and the maintenance of security.<sup>153</sup>

However, the conflict soon turned into resistance and a war of liberation by foreign troops, considered invaders by many Arab armed groups, both Sunni and Shiite, to eventually lead to a civil war between the various factions, caused by an imbalance in the power management (which facilitated the Shiite majority components). After the overthrow of Saddam and the establishment of a formal democracy in 2005, there has been a sharp increase in sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites in the country, and in general a decline in the security of citizens. From 2008 onwards, many of the coalition forces begin withdrawing their troops from Iraq, and the United States signs an agreement with which it intends to withdraw all its troops by the end of 2011. The conflict between the various Iraqi factions continued even after the withdrawal of foreign troops. According to another

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<sup>151</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 1441 (2002)*, United Nations Digital Library, 2002.

<sup>152</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 1483 (2003)*, United Nations Digital Library, 2003.

<sup>153</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 1511 (2003)*, United Nations Digital Library, 2003.

study conducted by Neta Crawford in the context of Brown University's *Costs of War Project*, 4,550 US soldiers, 323 foreign soldiers belonging to coalition forces, 41,726 Iraqi soldiers and policemen belonging to both Saddam Hussein's Army and the security forces of the new Iraqi government, and 3,793 US contractors have died since the beginning of the conflict to 2018, while it is estimated that Iraqi civilian casualties would amount to between 182,272 and 204,575 deaths.<sup>154</sup> In total, casualties in Iraq are estimated to have reached between 268,000 and 295,000 deaths.<sup>155</sup>

The cost of the war in Iraq to the United States amounts to 1,922 trillion dollars in total.<sup>156</sup> Several years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, it is possible to trace a post-war analysis: the sustained advantages by those in favor of intervention in Iraq have not been achieved, while many of the arguments of those who opposed the conflict have been revealed realistic and grounded. In particular:

- Foreign occupation forces and US research teams have not found relevant and significant quantities of WMD. Some members of the US inspection teams argued that the Iraqi government certainly intended to resume its nuclear, chemical and biological rearmament program as soon as UN sanctions were lifted but admitted that at the time of the invasion Iraq's supply of WMD was almost non-existent, so the threat presented by US intelligence agencies was exaggerated compared to reality.<sup>157</sup>
- No evidence was found in the archives of Iraqi ministries of alleged links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda, or links to Iraq and other international terrorist networks, even in the years following the US intervention.
- The overthrow of Saddam Hussein's autocratic regime is undoubtedly the most positive element in the balance of the war.
- The prolongation of the civil war and the growing number of victims following attacks by various paramilitary groups have disappointed expectations of a quick and "clean" war.
- The Iraqi elections did not lead to a pro-Western democracy or to the birth of a strong government capable of managing internal conflicts. The Republic of Iraq still appears to be a fragile State also due to the intensification of conflicts between the various ethnic and

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<sup>154</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency*, Watson Institute International & Public Affairs, Brown University, 2018.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>156</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *The Iraq War has cost the US nearly \$2 trillion*, on *Military Times*, February 6, 2020.

<sup>157</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, Progressive Management, 2004.

religious groups, which led to the rise of a new civil war in 2014 and the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS).<sup>158</sup> The government is currently supported by Shia religious parties, financed and militarily supported by the United States.

- The popularity of the United States in Islamic countries and towards international public opinion has suffered a drastic decline immediately after the invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, a broad consensus has developed among intelligence experts that the war in Iraq has become one of the main factors favoring the growth of Islamic terrorism. In 2004, the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London concluded that the occupation of Iraq had become a powerful global recruiting pretext for the mujahideen and that the invasion “galvanized” Al-Qaeda and inspired rebels to violence.<sup>159</sup> A 2005 report from the US National Intelligence Council argued that the war in Iraq had become fertile ground for a new generation of terrorists, and provided them with training camps, recruiting opportunities and opportunities to improve technical skills.<sup>160</sup>
- The war in Iraq is one of the reasons for the rise of crude oil price. If in 2003 a barrel price was around 30 dollars, in the summer of 2006 it underwent a sharp rise, exceeding 75 dollars, and after a short pause, it started to rise again, exceeding 100 dollars in January 2008, and then it returned to previous levels.<sup>161</sup> The expected growth of Iraqi oil exports did not happen, also due to the continuous sabotage of oil wells by terrorists.
- While some countries such as Libya and Syria respectively proceeded with disarmament and withdrawal from Lebanon between 2004 and 2006 for fear of a military intervention by the United States in their national territory, other countries such as Iran and North Korea continue to have anti-American positions, so much so that North Korea has come to possess nuclear weapons.

On the basis of this evidence, we can say that the war in Iraq represents the greatest failure of US intelligence since the failure of 9/11. As for the absence of obvious traces of the proliferation of WMD in Iraq, some Western governments intervened in the conflict have been accused of having deliberately exaggerated the Iraqi threat to obtain authorization for intervention from their respective parliaments. In the United States, the controversy arose over the low reliability of the information

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<sup>158</sup> Dexter Filkins, *Did George W. Bush create ISIS?*, on *The New Yorker*, May 15, 2015.

<sup>159</sup> Kim Sengupta, *Occupation Made World Less Safe, Pro-War Institute Says*, on *The Independent*, May 26, 2004.

<sup>160</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Mapping the Global Future*, Federation of American Scientists, 2005.

<sup>161</sup> N. Sönnichsen, *OPEC oil prices annually 1960-2020*, on *Statista*, January 7, 2021.

provided by the CIA, so much so that it led to the creation of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (also called “Iraq Intelligence Commission” or “WMD Commission”) to investigate the responsibility of the IC for providing misinformation regarding alleged WMD in Iraq. The doubt was that the information provided by the IC could have been manipulated by the Bush administration as a pretext for invading Iraq, and that the reality had therefore been “adjusted” to serve policy. The Commission’s report concluded that in reference to the IC failure in the pre-war assessments that there had been systemic flaws in the collection, analysis and dissemination process.<sup>162</sup> The main flaws had been an analytical process driven by assumptions and interference rather than data, errors by some agencies in collecting all relevant information and fully analyzing the alleged information, insufficient control of key sources, and a rather fiery presentation of “finished” intelligence to policy-makers.

In conclusion, we can say that the War on Terror, twenty years after its inception, did not give the desired results and was counterproductive in the long term. Since “terrorism” is not a well-defined category recognized unanimously by the States, it is difficult to establish who or what is being fought against. The costs of the now twenty-year US interference in the Middle East have been much higher than the expected results, and the same is true for the States that have offered them military and logistical support. The War on Terror has provided a way to maintain a state of perpetual warfare as the announcement of vague objectives by the United States has resulted in an endless conflict situation as the so-called “terrorist groups” continue to arise indefinitely. The two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq destabilized the Middle East, an area already conflictive and problematic itself, and consolidated the opposition of the countries of the region to the United States. Furthermore, they have provided the pretext for further attacks on the United States and its allies and have functioned as recruiting bases for new generations of extremists and radicalized throughout the Islamic world. These conflicts have given them the will, the intent, the purpose and the ideology to act. This phenomenon has been evident with the increase in terrorist attacks over the past decade across Europe.

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<sup>162</sup> Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Federation of American Scientists, 2005, [https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/wmd\\_report.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/wmd_report.pdf).



## CHAPTER 3

### The Case of France: The Paris Attacks of November 13

«Terrorism has become the systematic weapon of a war that knows no borders or seldom has a face.»

Jacques Chirac

#### 3.1 – The French Intelligence Community

In France, the intelligence system is represented by the *Communauté française de renseignement* (French Intelligence Community), which over time has undergone various reforms and extensive reorganizations thanks to the strong convergence of the country's political forces towards a project to transform the entire structure institution dedicated to defense and national security.

The reform process of the French Secret Services began with *Law no. 2006-64* of January 23, 2006<sup>163</sup> and with the *Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme* (*White Paper of the Government on internal security in the face of terrorism*)<sup>164</sup>, with which the French Government, in wanting to develop a new strategy to combat terrorism, it strengthened the powers of the Information Services, especially those concerning telephone and computer wiretapping and access to databases. In this way, a profound reorganization of the Intelligence Services placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior was launched, and cooperation between Information Services and Police Forces was strengthened. On 9 October 2007, with the *Law no. 2007-1443*, the *Délégation parlementaire au renseignement* (Parliamentary Intelligence Delegation - “DPR”) was established, a permanent bicameral body aimed at parliamentary control over the Information Services<sup>165</sup>. It is made up of four deputies and four senators, including the Presidents of the Permanent Commissions of the Assembly and the Senate that deal with internal security and defense matters, and remains distinct from the pre-existing *Commission de vérification des fonds spéciaux*

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<sup>163</sup> Assemblée Nationale, *Loi no. 2006-64 relative à la lutte contre le terrorisme et portant dispositions diverses relatives à la sécurité et aux contrôles frontaliers*, Journal Officiel de la République Française, January 23, 2006.

<sup>164</sup> Secrétariat général de la défense nationale, *La France face au terrorisme. Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme*, La Documentation française, 2006.

<sup>165</sup> Assemblée Nationale, *Loi no. 2007-1443 portant création d'une délégation parlementaire au renseignement*, Journal Officiel de la République Française, October 9, 2007.

(Commission for the Verification of Special Funds), which has exclusively the functions of budgetary control and the management of intelligence funds.

Subsequently, in June 2008, the then President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy adopted the *Livre blanc sur la Défense et Sécurité nationale* (*White Paper on Defense and National Security*), a programmatic document with which a restructuring project of the whole national security apparatus, establishing the introduction of new institutional actors in the legal system.<sup>166</sup> This document, taking into account the now labile separation between internal and external security, outlined a strategy that included both defense and national security, providing for the combined use of civil and military means.<sup>167</sup> From this moment on, the French Intelligence officially became part of the “strategic functions” of defense and national security. In addition to the four functions traditionally connected to French national security (dissuasion, prevention, protection, and intervention), there is also the capacity for “knowledge and anticipation”.<sup>168</sup> The recognition of the importance of the intelligence function has led to a profound review of the decision-making sector in the field of defense and national security, and it has resulted in the reorganization of operational structures. In fact, following the adoption of the 2008 *White Paper*, six Information Services were created, collocated under the control of three different Ministries and placed under the governance of the *Coordonnateur national du renseignement* (National Intelligence Coordinator – “CN”). They are divided as follows:

#### **Ministry of the Armed Forces (until 2017, Ministry of Defense):**

- 1. Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure (Directorate-General for External Security – “DGSE”):** is the agency responsible for coordinating espionage and counter-espionage activities outside the national territory. It depends directly on the Ministry.
- 2. Direction de la Protection et de la Sécurité de la Defense (Directorate for Defense Protection and Security – “DPSD”):** deals with developing, together with the heads of the military sectors, the measures necessary for the protection of personnel, information and sensitive structures that depend on the Ministry; in addition, it is responsible for managing the application of these measures.

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<sup>166</sup> Jean-Claude Mallet, Présidence de la République, Ministère de la Défense, *Le Livre Blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité Nationale*, La Documentation française, 2008.

<sup>167</sup> Riccardo Alcaro, Filippo Chiesa, Stefano Silvestri, *Strategie di sicurezza e modelli di difesa a confronto: i casi di Gran Bretagna, Francia e Germania*, Servizio studi del Senato della Repubblica Italiana, Servizio affari internazionali, No. 99, 2008.

<sup>168</sup> Alfonso Montagnese, *Intelligence francese. Evoluzione e confronto*, on *Informazioni della Difesa*, No. 2, 2015.

- 3. Direction du Renseignement militaire (Military Intelligence Directorate - “DRM”):** deals with providing tactical and strategic information on the present and future operational theaters of the Armed Forces. It depends on the Chief-of-Staff of the Armed Forces.

#### **Ministry of the Interior:**

- 4. Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur (Central Directorate of Internal Intelligence – “DCRI”):** has the task of preventing and countering the activities promoted by national or foreign organizations aimed at threatening the security of the country on the national territory. Therefore, it mainly deals with counter-espionage and the fight against internal terrorism.

#### **Ministry of the Economy and Finance:**

- 5. Direction nationale du renseignement et des enquêtes douanières (National Directorate of Intelligence and Customs Investigations – “DNRED”):** is the agency responsible for collecting information on the movement of goods entering and leaving the French territory and for disseminating information to customs services; in particular, the Directorate has the task of following the investigations to combat customs fraud and investigating the movements of suspicious goods.
- 6. Traitement du renseignement et de l'action contre les circuits financiers clandestins (Treatment of intelligence and action against clandestine financial circuits – “TRACFIN”):** it is the national financial information cell that has the task of collecting information on suspicious or clandestine financial circuits, money laundering and terrorist financing.

Of these agencies, the *Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure* (DGSE) and the *Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur* (DCRI) are the only Services with general competence with territorial division of tasks. The reform was intended to encourage a reorganization of the Secret Services,

greater cooperation between them, and the establishment of a unitary control mechanism for their activities.

In implementation of the content of the 2008 *White Paper*, on 24 December 2009 the French Government issued *Decree no. 2009-1657*, with which significant changes were made to the national intelligence system.<sup>169</sup> In particular, the Executive formalized the establishment of the *Conseil de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale* (Defense and National Security Council – “CDSN”). It is an inter-ministerial committee, chaired by the President of the Republic and composed of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Economy, and the Minister of the Budget (officially called “Minister of Action and Public Accounts”). The composition of the collegiate body can be integrated, following the specific request of the President of the Republic, with the participation in the meetings of other Ministers. The Council represents the highest strategic planning body in matters of defense and national security. It can also be assembled in a “restricted” formation, in the event of a crisis and with a composition established by the President of the Republic on the basis of the issues to be discussed, and in two different “specialized formations”:

- 1. Conseil de défense sur les armements nucléaires (Defense Council on Nuclear Weapons - “CAN”)**
- 2. Conseil National du Renseignement (National Intelligence Council - “CNR”)**

The *Conseil National du Renseignement* has the task of defining the strategic orientations and priorities in the field of intelligence, as well as the planning of human and instrumental resources of the information organizations. It is chaired by the President of the Republic and composed of the Prime Minister and the Ministers and Directors of the Information Services identified according to the topic on the subcommittee’s agenda.

The *Decree n. 2009-1657* also established the figure of the *Coordonnateur national du renseignement* (National Intelligence Coordinator – “CN”), already provided in the 2008 *White Paper*, placing him under the authority of the President of the Republic. In addition to being the advisor to the Head of State in matters of intelligence, it performs functions of liaison between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, and coordination between the information bodies. The *Coordonnateur national du renseignement* sits in the *Conseil National du Renseignement*, in which it performs secretarial functions, and is appointed by the Council of Ministers (which is chaired

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<sup>169</sup> François Fillon (Premier Ministre), *Décret no. 2009-1657 relatif au conseil de défense et de sécurité nationale et au secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale*, Journal Officiel de la République Française, December 24, 2009.

by the President of the Republic, and consequently the appointment of the Coordinator is strongly influenced by the Head of State).<sup>170</sup>

The same government provision also created the *Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale* (General Secretariat of Defense and National Security – “SGDSN”), a structure also introduced by the 2008 *White Paper*, which replaces the pre-existing *Secrétariat général de la défense nationale* (General Secretariat of the National Defense - “SGDN”). The Secretariat, headed by a Secretary-General, is structured in two Departments and is supported by a specific General Administration Service competent in sectors related to logistics, management of financial and human resources. Within the *Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale* there is the *Agence nationale de la sécurité des systèmes d'information* (National Agency for the Security of the Information Systems – “ANSSI”), a body created in 2009 with tasks of cybernetic security, which refers to the Prime Minister via the Secretariat.

To promote the development of a shared culture within the intelligence community and to foster greater cooperation between them, the French government established with *Decree no. 2010-800* of 13 July 2010 the *Académie du renseignement* (Academy of Intelligence), centralizing in a single national structure, placed under the Prime Minister’s office, the skills in training the personnel of the Information Services placed under the authority of the competent Ministers.<sup>171</sup>

In April 2013, the President of the Republic François Hollande published the latest *Livre blanc sur la Défense et Sécurité nationale* (*White Paper on Defense and National Security*).<sup>172</sup> In addition to confirming the centrality of the intelligence function and the importance of analysis and forecasting skills, it reiterates the need to have effective mechanisms for coordination between information systems. This strategic document does not differ much from the 2008 White Paper, of which in principle it retains the structure and the fundamental concepts, but has a long-term perspective, that is until 2028. In the field of intelligence, the most important innovations concern:

- the strengthening of the ability to make forecasts, also through the permanent involvement of universities, think tanks and research centers;
- the strengthening of inter-ministerial coordination (especially in the context of analyzes and forecasts) and between the “military” Services and those subject to other Ministries;

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<sup>170</sup> Alfonso Montagnese, *Intelligence francese. Evoluzione e confronto*, on *Informazioni della Difesa*, No. 2, 2015.

<sup>171</sup> François Fillon (Premier Ministre), *Décret no. 2010-800 portant création de l'Académie du renseignement*, Journal Officiel de la République Française, July 13, 2010.

<sup>172</sup> Jean-Marie Guehenno, Présidence de la République, Commission du Livre blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité nationale, *Livre blanc sur la Défense et Sécurité nationale*, La Documentation française, 2013.

- the rationalization of resources and means (through the principle of sharing, both at the national level and at the NATO and the European Union level)<sup>173</sup>;
- the expansion of parliamentary control powers entrusted to the specific bicameral body;
- the strengthening of the *Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur*.

In May 2013, almost at the same time as the publication of the last *White Paper, Mission d'information sur l'évaluation du cadre juridique applicable aux services de renseignement* was published, a report resulting from a fact-finding investigation by a parliamentary commission on the world of French intelligence that started at the end of 2012.<sup>174</sup> This report highlights the regulatory fragmentation that characterizes the French intelligence system and highlights the need to overcome it. In fact, the French Intelligence Community is regulated by measures of different rank and not very harmonious with each other. The report proposes the adoption of a framework law to regulate the sector in an organic way.

The inhomogeneity and low level of integration between the measures that make up the regulatory framework of the intelligence community lead to some negative effects that are immediately identifiable in the different legal-administrative framework of the Information Services: a Directorate-General (the DGSE), a Central Directorate (the DCRI), two Directorates (the DRM and the DPSD) and two Services with national competence (TRACFIN and DNRED). The complex configuration of the organisms in ordering takes the concrete form, in essence, in placing them on different hierarchical levels, and consequently in an uneven endowment of human and financial resources, commensurate with the ordering level of each structure. The 2013 parliamentary report suggests numerous reform proposals aimed at improving the entire intelligence system. Some of these are:

- the further strengthening of parliamentary control, with the establishment of a new bicameral committee that will absorb the competences currently distributed among the various parliamentary bodies;
- the creation of a new agency which, acquiring all the skills and means provided to the other Services, exercises the functions of SIGINT and IMINT with exclusive competence;

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<sup>173</sup> Claudio Catalano, *Un nuovo capitolo: il Libro Bianco della difesa francese*, on *Osservatorio Strategico*, CeMiSS, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2013.

<sup>174</sup> Jean-Jacques Urvoas, Patrice Verchère, *Rapport d'information n. 1022 - Mission d'information sur l'évaluation du cadre juridique applicable aux services de renseignement*, *Assemblée Nationale*, Commission des lois constitutionnelles, de la législation et de l'administration générale de la République, 2013, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/pdf/rap-info/i1022.pdf>.

- the exclusion of the two Services belonging to the Ministry of Economy and Finance (TRACFIN and DNRED) from the intelligence system properly understood;
- the rationalization and simplification of relations between the three Services of the Ministry of the Armed Forces;
- the strengthening of intelligence and counter-espionage capabilities on the national territory, with the increase of the resources assigned to the DCRI.

This reform project was implemented, in relation to the expansion of internal intelligence resources and capabilities, with *Decree no. 2014-445* of 30 April 2014, in the reconfiguration of the DCRI in the *Direction générale de la sécurité intérieure* (Directorate General for Internal Security - “DGSI”).<sup>175</sup> This provision strengthened the Intelligence Service operating on the national territory in terms of autonomy (previously, in fact, it was a central direction of the *Direction générale de la Police nationale* “DGPN” which was always under the Ministry of the Interior) and resources assigned to it (following the elevation of the order to autonomous management of the Ministry).

Currently, at the end of the reform process started in 2006, the French intelligence system appears to be polycentric, at both political-strategic and operational level. This constitutes an element of weakness for the French Intelligence Community, as the centralization of some functions is not contemplated and there is no coordination authority with the Executive that can conduct daily intelligence activities.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, its operational structure is very complex, with six Services headed by three different Ministries (Armed Forces, Interior, Economy and Finance), and it is characterized by a fragmented hierarchical line. Therefore, even the two Services with a generalist vocation (DGSI and DGSE) do not respond to a single top of the Executive, but to two different Ministries (Interior and Armed Forces). Despite the introduction of the DPR in 2007 with the aim of exercising parliamentary control of the Intelligence Services, the strengthening of the executive power in the field of national security has not been accompanied by a balanced counterweight in favor of the legislative power. Based on this it is easy to understand how often the work of the two agencies is not well coordinated, and the exchange of information is not always optimal.

The weakness of the French Intelligence Community can be framed within the theories of the reformist school. The numerous intelligence reforms that have taken place in recent years may have had the side effect of “shattering” the system, depriving it of a central “brain” capable of processing the information collected by this or that structure. A bureaucratic reform aimed at harmonizing the

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<sup>175</sup> Bernard Cazeneuve (Ministère de l’Intérieur), *Décret no. 2014-445 relatif aux missions et à l’organisation de la direction générale de la sécurité intérieure*, Journal Officiel de la République Française, April 30, 2014.

<sup>176</sup> Marco Franchini, *Il sistema nazionale delle informazioni per la sicurezza e l’autorità delegata*, on *Giornale di diritto amministrativo*, No. 4, 2008.

system and aimed at the unity and hierarchization of the Services under the branch of the Executive could be the solution to overcome an often fragmented information and operating system. Probably, it is precisely because of this fragmented system and the poor coordination of the two Services of general competence that several Islamist attacks have hit French territory in the last decade. Or, the causes of the increase of terrorism in France could be other. According to the Italian political scientist Aldo Giannuli, the French Secret Services have an excellent theoretical tradition, a good capacity for collecting information, and notable successes to boast in sectors such as espionage and military counter-espionage, economic warfare, the fight against organized crime, the penetration of markets where France is not traditionally present, etc., but in the sphere of terrorism they show that they have not exceeded the limits they already had at the time of the war in Algeria: there is a real cultural gap, a series of prejudices which prevent us from understanding the phenomenon of terrorism.<sup>177</sup> And this is a serious shortcoming when one refers to one of the best Secret Services in the Western world.

### **3.2 - Analysis of a Terrorist Organization: The Islamic State**

The Islamic State (abbreviated IS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also indicated by the Arabic acronym *Daesh* (which stands for *Al-Dawla Al-Islāmiyya fī Al-‘Irāq wa Al-Shām*, where *Shām* stands for Levant), is a militant Islamist organization that until 2017 controlled a large territory between Western Iraq and North-Eastern Syria. Following a fundamentalist Salafist doctrine of Sunni Islam, it proclaimed itself as Islamic Caliphate on June 29, 2014 despite many leaders and scholars of the Islamic world claimed the illegitimacy of this proclamation and the contrast of the organization’s ideology with the religious doctrine. The Islamic State is officially recognized as a terrorist organization by many countries such as the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey and Israel, and by the European Union and the United Nations. The latter have repeatedly drawn attention to the humanitarian emergency posed by the territorial conquests of the IS.

The Islamic State is an Islamic extremist organization that collects elements of Salafism (a doctrine that supports the return to the origins of Islam, considered as an example of purity) and Wahhabism (which supports a literal interpretation of the Koran and condemns all forms of

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<sup>177</sup> Aldo Giannuli, *I limiti dell'Intelligence francese*, on *Osservatorio Globalizzazione*, November 28, 2015.



secularism), and thus supports a strict and puritanical form of Sunni Islam.<sup>178</sup> It promotes global *jihad* as a duty for every Muslim. Like Al-Qaeda and many other modern jihadist groups, IS is inspired by the ideology of Sayyid Qutb and adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which support political Islam and the rejection of the secularization (and therefore the westernization) of Islamic nations. Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, who choose the electoral instrument and consequently opt for a legal strategy to rise to power, IS supports the mandatory nature of jihad, and thus the conquest of power through armed struggle and religious violence. Its leaders view the entire West and its models of life as enemies of Islam, and advocate a radical interpretation of Islam, judging Muslims who disagree with it as *tākfīr* (infidels) or *murtadd* (apostates). IS aims to restore the original model of Islam and rejects all the innovations of the religion, which it believes are responsible for the corruption of its original spirit. It condemns the more recent caliphates and the Ottoman Empire for having deviated from what it calls “pure Islam”, seeking instead to establish a Wahhabi caliphate in which the *Shari’ah* and the rigid Salafist doctrine are applied. The symbolism used by the group also evokes the Islam of the origins: the flag of IS is a variant of the Black Standard, the legendary battle flag of the Prophet, with the Seal of Mohammed inside a white circle and a sentence above it which states «*There is no God but Allah*». <sup>179</sup>

IS differs from other Islamist and jihadist movements, including Al-Qaeda, in the emphasis it places on eschatology and apocalypticism, that is, the belief that Judgment Day will occur. According to William McCants, a well-known scholar of militant Islam, IS’s propaganda relies precisely on references to the End of Times.<sup>180</sup> The foreign fighters who join the ranks of the group want to travel and fight in the lands where it is said that the final battles of the Apocalypse will take place. In fact, according to Islamic eschatology, in *Malahim* (comparable to Armageddon for Christianity) the Army of Rome (the Christians) will confront the Army of Muslims in a battle in the city of Dabiq, in Northern Syria (together with the city of Amaq, in southern Turkey), from which the Muslims will emerge victorious and this will mark the End of Times.<sup>181</sup> The civil wars raging in Iraq and Syria today lend credibility to the prophecies. The apocalyptic tone of recruiting today makes more sense than before, when the Middle East region was more stable and Bin Laden’s recruiting propaganda leveraged on fighting corruption and tyranny rather than the Antichrist.

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<sup>178</sup> Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Center for Middle East Policy, Washington D.C., Vol. 19, 2015, pp. 1-48.

<sup>179</sup> Ilene Prusher, *What the ISIS Flag Says About the Militant Group*, on *Time*, September 9, 2014.

<sup>180</sup> William F. McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2015, p. 14.

<sup>181</sup> Abu Huraira, *Sahih Muslim Hadith*, translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, *The Book Pertaining to the Turmoil and Portents of the Last Hour (Kitab Al-Fitan wa Ashrat As-Sa’ah)*, Vol. 41, Chap. 9, Hadith 6924, Quran/Hadith, 2014, <http://www.theonlyquran.com/hadith/Sahih-Muslim/?volume=41&chapter=9>.

Since its inception, the stated goal of IS has been the founding of a Sunni Islamic Caliphate which was none other than the restoration of the old Abbasid Caliphate, the dynasty that ruled the Islamic world from 750 to 1258 and which covered an area of approximately 11.1 million km<sup>2</sup>. In mid-2014, the group released a video titled *The End of Sykes-Picot* announcing the group's intentions to eliminate the current borders between Islamic countries in the Middle East, established under the homonymous treaty by the powers of French and the United Kingdom after the end of the World War I.<sup>182</sup> On July 1, 2014, the map of the territories that the IS set out to conquer by 2020 was published, which traced the map of the territories once under the rule of the Islamic caliphates: North Africa, a large part of Western Asia, Balkans and Iberian Peninsula.<sup>183</sup> On November 4, 2014, the guidelines for conquering Rome were published: the plan was to move in two directions, namely that towards Libya which passes through Egypt, and that towards Israel which passes through Jordan.<sup>184</sup> In June 2014, ISIS published a document stating the lineage of its supreme leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi from the Prophet Muhammad, both being members of the Quraysh tribe.<sup>185</sup> As a Caliph, Al-Baghdadi demanded the loyalty of Muslims around the world according to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).

The origins of the group date back to the period of the US invasion of Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. At this stage, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi was the head of the group *Jamā'at Al-Tawhīd wa-Al-Jihād* (Organization of Monotheism and Jihad), founded in 1999, which gained notoriety during the early stages of the Iraqi guerrilla due to attacks against coalition forces, but also against civilian targets, such as Shia mosques and Iraqi government institutions, and for practicing the beheading of hostages. Growing more and more in strength and number, in 2004 Al-Zarqawi's group officially allied with Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network, changing its name to *Tanzim Qā'idat Al-Jihāf fi Bilād Al-Rāfidayn* (Organization of the Base of Jihad in Mesopotamia), also known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). It mainly pledged in fighting the US occupation of Iraq and the new Shiite-led and US-backed Iraqi government born in 2005. In a letter to Al-Zarqawi in July 2005, then Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri outlined a four-step plan to expand the war in Iraq<sup>186</sup>:

1. Expel US forces from Iraq.
2. Establish an Islamic authority (a caliphate or an emirate).

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<sup>182</sup> Al-Hayat Media Center, *Video: Islamic state media branch releases "The end of Sykes-Picot"*, on *Belfast Telegraph*, July 1, 2014.

<sup>183</sup> John Hall, *The ISIS map of the world: Militants outline chilling five-year plan for global domination as they declare formation of caliphate - and change their name to the Islamic State*, on *The Daily Mail*, July 1, 2014.

<sup>184</sup> RR Staff, *ISIS: parte il piano per conquistare Roma con l'aiuto della Turchia*, on *Rights Reporter*, November 4, 2014.

<sup>185</sup> Alex M. Johnson, *"Deviant and Pathological": What Do ISIS Extremists Really Want?*, on *NBC News*, September 3, 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Brian Whitaker, *Revealed: Al-Qaeda plan to seize control of Iraq*, on *The Guardian*, October 13, 2005.

3. Expanding the conflict to Iraq's neighboring secular countries.
4. Engaging in an Arab-Israeli conflict.

In January 2006, AQI united several small Iraqi Sunni groups in an organization called the "Mujāhideen of the Shura Council" (MSC). This was above all a propaganda act and an attempt to give the group an Iraqi identity, and perhaps to remove Al-Zarqawi from Al-Qaeda, guilty of having committed some tactical errors, such as the attacks of November 9, 2005 in Amman, where three hotels were hit by three coordinated suicide attacks.<sup>187</sup> On June 7, 2006, Al-Zarqawi was killed in a US air bombing, and Egyptian militant Abu Ayyub Al-Masri took his place as head of the organization.

On October 12, 2006, the Mujāhidīn of the Shura Council joined three other smaller fighting groups and six Iraqi Sunni tribes, forming an alliance with an oath that symbolically recalled the historian *Hilf Al-Mutayyabin* (Pact of the Scented), the pact of alliance between the various clans that were part of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In the oath, they solemnly pledged to free the Sunnis from Shia oppression, to rid Iraq of the Crusader occupiers, to promote Allah's message to the world, and to restore Islam to its former glory, even at the cost of giving his life for the cause.<sup>188</sup> Thus, *Dawlat Al-'Irāq Al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic State of Iraq, "ISI") was born, which included six governorates of Iraq with a Sunni majority, headed by Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi as Emir, and Abu Ayyub Al-Masri as Minister of War. According to some CIA sources, at the beginning of 2007 the ISI had plans to seize power in Central and Western Iraq and establish a Sunni caliphate.<sup>189</sup> The group strengthened its operational capabilities and had a significant presence in the Iraqi governorates of Al-Anbar, Diyala, and Baghdad, claiming Buqubah as its capital.

In the last months of 2007, the ISI launched violent and indiscriminate attacks on Iraqi civilians that gave to the group a negative image, and they led to the loss of support from the local population, causing them to become more isolated. Many ex-ISI guerrillas began to collaborate with the US military, and many high-level members of the group were captured or killed. Between July and October 2007, Al-Qaeda seemed to have lost its operational bases in Iraq, losing its control in the province of Al-Anbar and Baghdad, while in 2008, following a series of joint offensives between the US and Iraqis, it lost the governorate of Diyala up to the area of the city of Mosul, in the North of the

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<sup>187</sup> Brian Fishman, *Using the Mistakes of Al-Qaeda's Franchises to Undermine Its Strategies*, on *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 618, No. 1, 2008, pp. 46-54.

<sup>188</sup> MEMRI, *Jihad Groups in Iraq Take an Oath of Allegiance*, The Middle East Media Research Institute, 2006.

<sup>189</sup> Uzi Mahnaimi, *Al-Qaeda planning militant Islamic state within Iraq*, on *The Sunday Times*, May 13, 2007.

country. The loss of controlled territories, together with the rise of new rebel groups such as the Sons of Iraq, meant that the ISI was experiencing an “extraordinary crisis”.<sup>190</sup>

On April 18, 2010, Abu Ayyub Al-Masri and Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi were killed in a joint US-Iraqi raid near Tikrit. Then, on May 16, 2010, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was appointed as the new commander of the ISI. He reconstituted the group’s high command, decimated by attacks and arrests by US and Iraqi forces, by appointing former Iraqi military and intelligence officers from the Ba’th party who had served during Saddam Hussein’s government. In July 2012, Al-Baghdadi posted an audio recording online claiming that the ISI was returning to its former strongholds from which it had been driven out between 2007 and 2008 by US troops and the Children of Iraq. He also announced the start of a new offensive in Iraq called “Breaking the Walls” with the aim of freeing the group’s members captured and held in Iraqi prisons. This campaign culminated in July 2013, in a climate of increasing violence in Iraq, with the group carrying out simultaneous raids on Taji and the infamous Abu Grahیب prison, freeing more than 500 prisoners, many of them veterans of the Iraqi guerilla.<sup>191</sup>

In August 2011, following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, Al-Baghdadi began sending Iraqi and Syrian ISI members experts in guerrilla tactics to the country in order to create some bases of terrorist organizations. The new recruits were camped by the Syrian Abu Muhammad Al-Jawlani and renamed themselves in 2012 with the name of *Jabhat Al-Nusra li-Ahl Al-Shām* (Partisans of Relief to the People of Great Syria), or more simply *Jabhat Al-Nusra*. The group quickly grew to become a fighting force supported by other forces opposing to Bashar Al-Assad’s regime and to impose their presence in the Sunni-majority provinces of Raqqa, Idlib, Deir Ez-Zor, and Aleppo.

The breakdown and subsequent antagonism between IS and Al-Qaeda began in mid-2013. On April 8, Al-Baghdadi posted an audio recording online announcing that Jabhat Al-Nusra had been established, funded and supported by the ISI and that the two groups were merging in the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>192</sup> However, Al-Jawlani responded to this announcement by denying the merger of the groups and complained that neither he nor any other leader of Jabhat Al-Nusra had been consulted about it.<sup>193</sup> Subsequently, in June, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, in a letter addressed to the commanders of both movements, spoke out against the merger of the two groups and charged one of his representative to supervise relations between the two groups to put an end to tensions.<sup>194</sup> That same month, in another audio message, Al-Baghdadi stated that he rejected

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<sup>190</sup> Andrew Phillips, *How al Qaeda lost Iraq*, on *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2009, pp. 64-84.

<sup>191</sup> Jessica D. Lewis, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent. The Breaking Walls Campaign, Part I*, Middle East Security Report 14, Institute for the Study of War, 2013.

<sup>192</sup> MEMRI, *ISI Confirms That Jabhat Al-Nusra Is Its Extension In Syria, Declares “Islamic State Of Iraq And Al-Sham” As New Name Of Merged Group*, The Middle East Media Research Institute, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Naharnet Newsdesk, *Al-Nusra Commits to al-Qaida, Deny Iraq Branch “Merger”*, on *Naharet*, April 10, 2013.

<sup>194</sup> Basma Atassi, *Qaeda chief annuls Syrian-Iraqi jihad merger*, on *Al Jazeera*, June 9, 2013.

Al-Zawahiri's decision and that the merger between the two groups was continuing.<sup>195</sup> In October, Al-Zawahiri ordered the dissolution of ISIL, entrusting Jabhat Al-Nusra with the exclusive task of continuing the jihad in Syria. Al-Baghdadi, again rejecting this decision on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence, continued to operate in Syria.<sup>196</sup> In February 2014, after eight months of struggle for power, Al-Zawahiri publicly denied any relationship with ISIS in a statement released on the Internet.<sup>197</sup> Later, Al-Qaeda also distanced itself from the operations conducted by ISIS, judging them "too extreme".<sup>198</sup> However, in June 2014, an Al-Nusra cell in the Syrian city of Al-Bukamal along the Euphrates River allied itself with ISIS.

According to journalist Sarah Birke, there are some "significant differences" between Jabhat Al-Nusra (branch of Al-Qaeda in Syria) and ISIS.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, while Al-Nusra actively acts to overthrow the Assad regime, ISIS tends to be more focused on establishing its own government in the territories it conquers. ISIS is much more ruthless in wanting to create an Islamic State and is willing to do so by conducting sectarian attacks on other Muslims and imposing by force the Shari'ah. While Al-Nusra has developed locally and also has numerous contingents of foreign fighters in its ranks, ISIS fighters are perceived as "foreign invaders" by many Syrians. Syria soon became a terrain of ideological and methodological confrontation between ISIS and Al-Qaeda, with the former fighting for a more "global" purpose and with a more centralized structure, and the second having a more "national orientation" and organized as a perfect franchise, in which each of its regional affiliates is concerned with fighting the infidels in its area.<sup>200</sup> According to the sociologist and jihadist terrorist expert Alessandro Orsini, there are eight fundamental differences between Al-Qaeda and ISIS<sup>201</sup>:

1. Al-Qaeda prefers to urge the jihadists to attack Western cities, while ISIS prefers to urge them to build the Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, and to carry out the massacres against other Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, which are part of the anti-ISIS coalition led by the United States, both hit by terrorist attacks in the months of May and June 2015. The attacks carried out by ISIS against European cities, such as the Paris massacre of November 13, are nothing but the results of retaliations for the intensification of air raids against its stations.

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<sup>195</sup> Basma Atassi, *Iraqi Al-Qaeda chief rejects Zawahiri orders*, on *Al Jazeera*, June 15, 2013.

<sup>196</sup> The Daily Star, *Zawahiri disbands main Qaeda faction in Syria*, on *The Daily Star Lebanon*, November 8, 2013.

<sup>197</sup> Liz Sly, *Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq*, on *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2013.

<sup>198</sup> Kevin Barrett, *ISIS "too extreme for Al-Qaeda"*, on *Press TV*, February 7, 2014.

<sup>199</sup> Sarah Birke, *How Al-Qaeda Changed the Syrian War*, on *The New York Review*, December 27, 2013.

<sup>200</sup> Cecilia Tosi, *Isis versus Al-Qaeda*, on *eastwest.eu*, Eastwest European Institute, February 2, 2016.

<sup>201</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *ISIS. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2016, pp. 94-97.

2. According to Al-Qaeda, the Caliphate must not be established by force, but by consensus. According to Al-Zawahiri, in fact, the Caliphate is built «*by winning the hearts and minds of Muslims*». <sup>202</sup> On the contrary, ISIS claims that violence is the only possible way to build the Caliphate.
3. ISIS was officially born in 2014, twenty-six years after the birth of Al-Qaeda in 1988 and can therefore exploit the work already done by its previous rival, which has spread and reinvigorated jihadist ideology all over the world, and it can avoid making his own mistakes.
4. Having captured some oil fields, ISIS has the economic resources that Al-Qaeda has never had.
5. ISIS is luckier than Al-Qaeda in the confrontation with the United States. Osama Bin Laden, immediately after reaching the peak of his international visibility with the 9/11 attacks, had to face President George W. Bush, who had a political culture particularly prone to war and was soon ready to send US troops abroad. On the contrary, Barack Obama has a political culture that is anti-war, and as long as possible, he prefers to avoid resorting to military force. Being subjected to aerial bombardments, which are often inaccurate and ineffective, is much better than being subjected to aerial bombardments and at the same time also the invasion of 100,000 American soldiers, equipped with tanks and warships. In addition, the political culture of both Presidents also counts and has repercussions in the field of counter-terrorism.
6. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi is twenty years younger than Ayman Al-Zawahiri and is much more charismatic as a leader.
7. ISIS has made important progress in the field of jihadist communication. The videos released by the group attract much more attention than those of Bin Laden. In fact, when violence erupts, images are far more powerful than words. If Bin Laden liked to explain his point of view through a line of reasoning based on a chain of causes and effects, where the United States was the cause and Al-Qaeda was the effect, Al-Baghdadi prefers to release images of people who die burnt alive because he knows that even those who have no interest in international politics run to see that sadistic spectacle. The result is that the ISIS's "cinema" is increasingly crowded than the Al-Qaeda's "theater".
8. ISIS controls a vast territory and aims to establish a social system where the State assumes primary responsibility for the well-being of its citizens in matters of health, education, work

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<sup>202</sup> William Wallis, *Zawahiri leads Al-Qaeda into battle for Muslim hearts and minds*, on *Financial Times*, November 4, 2005.

and social security. Al-Qaeda portrays itself as a specialized vanguard of fighters and high-level operational minds.

On June 29, 2014, ISIS proclaimed the birth of the Islamic Caliphate with Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as the Caliph. As a “Caliphate”, it claimed religious, political and military authority over all Muslims in the world. However, the proclamation of the Islamic State has not been recognized by any government, leader or religious figure in the Islamic world. Many fighting rebel forces in Syria and Iraq joined the newly formed Islamic State, including 6,300 fighters from the Free Syrian Army, an armed group that was fighting against Assad’s government forces in Syria.<sup>203</sup> Between June and July 2014, after the Iraqi government of Nouri Al-Maliki had lost control of the strategic points of its borders, which had fallen into the hands of ISIS, Jordan and Saudi Arabia deployed their troops to their borders with Iraq. IS established its capital and headquarters in Raqqa, a city in the homonymous governorate in Northern Syria, which had once briefly been the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate (796-809).

The ISIS guerrilla strategy was to take as much territory in Syria as possible, exploiting the chaos of the civil war, and use it as a base to invade Iraq.<sup>204</sup> As ISIS advanced and conquered land, a widespread espionage system was established in order to monitor the local population, eliminate any possible opponents, and penetrate the local territory. According to security and intelligence expert Martin Reardon, the ISIS strategy is to use fear and intimidation as “tools” to psychologically bend the populations that fall under their control, thus generating hatred and revenge among its enemies.<sup>205</sup> Journalist Jason Burke argues that ISIS intimidates civilian populations in such a way as to force enemy governments to make rash decisions that they would not otherwise choose.<sup>206</sup> His goal is to terrorize his opponents and polarize and motivate his supporters by motivating them with spectacular scenes of deadly attacks. The Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 seem to confirm this trend, as well as underlining the global dimension of the jihad advocated by ISIS, just as it happened fourteen years earlier with 9/11 for Al-Qaeda. Regarding the strategy pursued in the West, also in light of the various attacks committed by single individuals (the so-called “lone wolves”) but inspired by ISIS, the journalist Rukmini Maria Callimachi argues that the organization has an interest in polarizing or eliminating the “gray zone” between non-Muslims and fundamentalists who support the ideology of ISIS, that is, moderate Muslims who live and are integrated in the West.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> The Daily Star, *Syrians adjust to life under ISIS rule*, on *The Daily Star Beirut*, August 29, 2014.

<sup>204</sup> Christoph Reuter, *Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State*, on *Der Spiegel International*, April 18, 2015.

<sup>205</sup> Martin Reardon, *ISIL and the management of savagery*, on *Al Jazeera English*, July 6, 2015.

<sup>206</sup> Jason Burke, *Islamic State “goes global” with Paris attacks*, on *The Guardian*, November 14, 2015.

<sup>207</sup> Isaac Chotiner, *The ISIS Correspondent*, on *Slate*, July 12, 2016.

On June 12, 2014, the Camp Speicher massacre took place, one of the largest sectarian massacres carried out by ISIS, in which about 1,700 Iraqi Air Force recruits, mostly Shiites, were killed.<sup>208</sup> This massacre will be followed by others against ethnic and religious minorities, such as the one against the Yazidis, Turkmen, Assyrians, Kurds, Druze, Armenians and even against some Sunni tribes who have opposed the authority of IS. ISIS in fact obliges people in the areas under its control to attest to their Islamic faith, to live according to their own interpretation of Sunni Islam and under the Shari'ah through the death penalty, torture, rape of women and genital mutilation. For these reasons, the United Nations holds ISIS responsible for committing massive violations of human rights, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the territories they conquered and annexed.<sup>209</sup> ISIS has been found to have committed large-scale ethnic cleansing especially in the territories in the North of Iraq.<sup>210</sup> Contextually, the group also began kidnapping Westerners for ransom. It also made itself known for the executions of hostages, accompanied by accurate media propaganda through videos accompanied on the web and threats to Western countries, nations of hostages: to remember are the executions of American journalists James Foley, Steven Sotloff, the British aid workers David Cawthorne Haines and Alan Henning, and the US soldier Peter Kassig.

ISIS has become famous for its effective use of propaganda through traditional media and social media. In November 2006, shortly after the birth of the Islamic State of Iraq, the Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production was founded, which produces audiovisual materials, pamphlets, and propaganda for the Internet. In 2014, the Al-Hayat Media Center was founded, aimed at the Western public, which publishes material in English, French, German and Russian. It is the body that since July 2014 periodically published the digital magazine *Dabiq* (as the name of the city where the final battle between Muslims and Crusaders in the Apocalypse will take place), mainly in English but also in other languages. Starting from September 2016, when ISIS began to lose territory, *Dabiq* was replaced by the other online magazine *Rumiyah* (like the prophecy concerning the fall of Rome). There is also a radio called *Al-Bayan* which broadcasts in Arabic, English and Russian mainly in Iraq, Syria and Libya. ISIS also uses social media such as Instagram, Twitter and Telegram as a propaganda tool to spread messages, organize hashtag campaigns, and disseminate videos and images of executions and praising jihad, even though these are regularly censored.

ISIS is the richest terrorist organization in the world. According to Iraqi national intelligence sources, it is estimated that in mid-2014 the group had accumulated a patrimony of about 2 billion

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<sup>208</sup> MEE Staff, *Photos show "mass execution" of Shia soldiers by ISIL in Iraq*, on *Middle East Eye*, February 12, 2015.

<sup>209</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, *Grave crimes committed on "unimaginable scale" in Iraq*, *UN Human Rights Council told*, on *UN News*, September 1, 2014.

<sup>210</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethnic cleansing on a historic scale: The Islamic State's systematic targeting of minorities in Northern Iraq*, Amnesty International, 2014.



dollars.<sup>211</sup> According to a study carried out by the International Financial Action Task Force, the income of ISIS come from<sup>212</sup>:

- proceeds from the occupation of the territories (including the occupation of oil wells and oil smuggling, the control and looting of banks, taxation imposed on subject populations, “protection taxes” imposed on religious minorities in order to live, the theft and sale of archaeological finds and art works, drug trafficking, especially heroin, trafficking in human beings and refugees, etc.);
- kidnappings for the purpose of extortion;
- donations from private investors from some Gulf countries (in particular Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar) through charities, which support the fight against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad;
- material support provided by foreign fighters;
- fundraising through modern communication networks.

For a certain period, ISIS also minted its own currency based on the one traded during the Umayyad Caliphate, and then reverted to the dollar.<sup>213</sup> In addition, within the territories it organized the education system through a special *Diwan* (Ministry) with the aim of training the next generation of jihadists: the schools, in fact, had only Shari’ah and Jihad courses scheduled.<sup>214</sup>

ISIS, in addition to controlling much of the territory of Iraq and Syria, has aimed to extend geographically and politically to other Muslim-majority territories. In doing so, it also made use of alliances with other terrorist groups. On March 7, 2015, the group allied with Boko Haram, a jihadist fundamentalist movement operating in Nigeria and also has networks in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. On March 13, a group of militants from the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement swore allegiance to Al-Baghdadi. Today, IS has official provinces in Libya, Egypt (in the Sinai Peninsula), Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and the North Caucasus. It has also received loyalty pledges from some groups in Somalia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines without establishing “official” networks, but identifying the new affiliates simply as “soldiers of the Caliphate”. In addition, groups and cells “adhering” or “inspired” by IS are scattered all over the world, and some of them have been

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<sup>211</sup> Martin Chulov, *How an arrest in Iraq revealed Isis's \$2bn jihadist network*, on *The Guardian*, June 15, 2014.

<sup>212</sup>FATF, *Financing of the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, Financial Action Task Force, 2015, <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf>.

<sup>213</sup> Lizzie Dearden, *Isis' attempt to topple US economy with own currency "failing" as reliance on American dollars increases*, on *Independent*, March 25, 2016.

<sup>214</sup> Iraqi Institution for Development, *Education in Mosul under the Islamic State (ISIS) 2015-2016*, Global Campaign for Education, 2016.

responsible for the attacks of Islamic origin that have struck Europe and other Western countries since 2015.

### **3.3 - The Paris Attacks of November 13: Facts, Causes and Consequences**

The escalation of jihadist violence in France occurs precisely in concomitance with the proclamation of the Islamic State, exactly a decade after the threat triggered across Europe by Al-Qaeda. Since 2015, ISIS-affiliated or adhered terrorist cells, or ISIS-inspired lone wolves (i.e., single individuals), have launched a series of attacks on European cities, taking national Secret Service and EU police agencies by surprise. France was the European country most affected by this phenomenon, also by virtue of its demography and its colonial past. In fact, it hosts one of the largest Islamic communities in the West due to the migrations from North African, West African and the Middle Eastern countries, which occurred immediately after the decolonization period. Islam is in fact the second most practiced religion in the country, after Christianity, and the number of Muslims residing in France amounts to 5,760,000 people, that is 8.8% of the French population.<sup>215</sup> The French model of multiculturalism has led to some problems, such as the radicalization of young Muslims, and the rise of the phenomenon of “homegrown terrorism”. The perpetrators of the jihadist massacres that took place in France were mostly French or Belgian citizens of the first or second generation, who spoke the national language and enjoyed European passports and freedom of movement.

Starting from January 2015, France was repeatedly hit by Islamic terrorist attacks. On January 7, the brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, both affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), opened fire at the headquarters of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris, guilty of having published some satirical cartoons with Muhammad and deemed offensive to Islam. 12 people died in the shooting, including 11 belonging to the editorial office and a policeman outside the newspaper’s headquarters while the attackers escaped only to be killed two days later in a firefight with the police after barricading themselves in a printing house. On January 9, Amedy Coulibaly, an accomplice of the two brothers but who had sworn allegiance to the Islamic State, after shooting and killing a policewoman, barricaded himself inside the kosher supermarket HyperCacher in Porte de Vincennes, in Eastern Paris, taking hostage 17 people and stating that it was an anti-Semitic attack. Four people died in the attack, all of them French citizens of Jewish religion, and the terrorist himself

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<sup>215</sup> Conrad Hackett, *5 facts about the Muslim population in Europe*, Pew Research Center, 2017.

was killed during the raid on the supermarket by the French Special Forces. These two attacks at the beginning of the year were also followed by other minor attacks nationwide throughout 2015, but the events of November 13 took Security Forces, Intelligence Services, and the political class by surprise due to the severity of the actions and the high number of victims. French and European public opinion, which was still trying to recover from the shock of the beginning of the year, was also hit hard.

The Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 were the bloodiest aggression in France after the end of World War II and the most serious terrorist attack in the European Union after the Madrid train attacks on March 11, 2004. A 9-people commando affiliated with an ISIS cell in Europe launched a series of coordinated attacks on three different civilian targets in Paris on Friday evening, an occasion for leisure for many young people and residents of the French capital. The terrorists were linked to the Verviers cell (in the province of Liège, Belgium) and led by the Belgian of Moroccan origin Abdelhamid Abaaoud, believed to be the planning mastermind and ringleader of the attacks. Most of them were young people born and raised between France and Belgium, and only two were Iraqi nationals.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, many of the attackers already had experience as fighters in Syria among the ranks of ISIS and had returned to Europe incognito thanks to the migration wave that began in 2014.<sup>217</sup> Organized into three platoons, they struck almost simultaneously:

- 1. The Stade de France in Saint-Denis**, in the North of Paris, while the friendly match between the national football teams of France and Germany was being discussed. To attend the game there were 80,000 fans, including the President of the French Republic François Hollande, the President of the National Assembly Claude Bertolone and the Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier. At 9.20 p.m., twenty minutes after the start of the match, one of the terrorists wearing an explosive belt detonated himself near Gate D, after being denied entry into the stadium. The explosion killed the terrorist himself and a spectator. At 9.30 p.m., a second terrorist detonated himself outside Gate H. To avoid panic, the public was not notified of what was happening outside the facility, and the match continued. At 9.53 p.m., a third suicide bomber blew himself up in a McDonald's located about 400 meters from the stadium. This latest explosion caused no deaths other than the suicide bomber, but only 11 seriously injured.
- 2. Some bars and restaurants between the 10th and 11th arrondissements**, a very lively area of Paris in the evening. At 9.25 p.m., four terrorists in a black SEAT León opened fire in Rue Bichat, in the restaurants Le Petit Cambodge and Le Carillon. 13 people died in the attack,

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<sup>216</sup> BBC, *Paris attacks: Who were the attackers?*, on BBC News, April 27, 2016.

<sup>217</sup> Jon Henley, Ian Traynor, Warren Murray, *Paris attacks: EU in emergency talks on border crackdown*, on *The Guardian*, November 20, 2015.

while 10 were seriously injured. The terrorists continued on Rue de la Fontaine au Roi, and at 9.32 p.m. the second shooting took place near the Café Bonne Bière and the pizzeria La Casa Nostra, causing 5 deaths and 8 injuries. At 9.36 p.m., the black car approached the La Belle Équipe restaurant, in Rue de Charonne, firing on customers: 21 people were killed, while the seriously injured were 9. At 9.40 p.m., one of the terrorists, subsequently identified as Brahim Abdeslam, got out of the car and blew himself up in the café Comptoir Voltaire, on Boulevard Voltaire, not far from the Bataclan theater. Besides the terrorist, the explosion did not cause deaths, but wounded 15 people.

**3. The Bataclan theater in the 11th arrondissement**, during a concert by the American rock group Eagles of Death Metal that started at 8.45 p.m. and with about 1,500 spectators (the concert was sold-out). It was the attack with the highest number of victims of all. At 9.40 p.m., three terrorists dressed in black (identified as Ismaël Omar Mostefai, Samy Amimour and Foued Mohamed-Aggad), equipped with shotguns, some hand grenades, explosive belts and charger backpacks, entered the hall, first killing the security guard and then starting to shoot the crowd. Within twenty minutes, the attack caused 90 deaths. While some members of the public manage to escape or take refuge on the roof, others are held hostage. The siege lasted more than two hours. At 10.30 p.m., the *Brigade de recherche et d'intervention*, a special body of the French police, broke into the theater and killed the terrorists, triggering the explosion of the explosive belts they were wearing. More than 99 injured, many of them serious, were rescued and taken to hospital.

In total, the victims of the attacks were 130 people of 26 different nationalities, while the wounded were 368, of which 80 were taken to hospital in serious condition.<sup>218</sup> The next day, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks via their official Twitter account and celebrated the success of the terrorists through online publications of their Al-Hayat Media Center on the dark web. The stated motives of the attacks were:

- reprisals for airstrikes by France on Islamic State targets in Syria and Iraq;
- ideological opposition to Paris as the capital of abomination and perversion;
- protest against Hollande's foreign policy, deemed deleterious towards Muslims all over the world.

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<sup>218</sup> BBC, *Paris attacks: Search goes on for missing*, on *BBC News*, November 17, 2015.

On November 14, President François Hollande declared a state of emergency in the whole country for three months. Following this order, France temporarily suspended the Schengen Agreement, closed its borders, public demonstrations were banned, and 1,500 soldiers were deployed to Paris. A white plan (*plan blanc* or *Plan Orsan*) was laid out for the Île de France and a red plan (*plan rouge* or *Plan Orsec-Novis*) for all of France. The state of emergency allowed the Police Forces to carry out investigations, searches without warrant, to place any suspected terrorist under house arrest without judicial approval, and to block websites that encouraged acts of terrorism. The state of emergency was renewed two more times, until the end of July 2016. However, after the Nice attack on July 14, 2016, the state of emergency was extended further.

After 48 hours of the attacks, 168 houses were searched and 104 people suspected of being terrorists or complicity with the perpetrators of the attacks were placed under house arrest.<sup>219</sup> On November 17, four days after the attacks, the French Police carried out a raid inside the Saint-Denis neighborhood, attacking some apartments occupied by terrorists who were planning a new attack at La Défense, near Paris. The next day, the Police found Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who was hiding in one of the neighborhood blocks with his cousin Hasna Aitboulahcen and Chakib Akrouh, one of the perpetrators of the restaurant shootings. After a siege that lasted several hours, Abaaoud was killed in a fire fight with the Police, while Akrouh died by detonating the explosive vest he was wearing. Eight other suspected militants were arrested during the raid on the apartment or in the immediate vicinity. At this point, Salah Abdeslam, Brahim's younger brother who blew himself up inside the Comptoir Voltaire cafeteria, was the only surviving terrorist of the massacre. On November 15, the French and Belgian authorities released his photographs and his name. In mid-December, the Belgian Police raided an apartment in Molenbeek, Brussels, where explosives and fingerprints compatible with those of Abdeslam were found. On March 18, 2016, after a four-month manhunt, Abdeslam was wounded in the leg and arrested in a counter-terrorism operation conducted by the Belgian police inside an apartment in Molenbeek, where he was hiding with other terrorists and some members of his family. Accused of planning and providing logistical support to the attacks, Salah Abdeslam was arrested and extradited to France on April 27, where he is still in the maximum-security prison in Fleury-Mérogis, Île de France. The arrest of Abdeslam is believed to have hastened the implementation of the attacks in Brussels which took place on March 22, 2016, four days after his arrest. The Brussels attacks were carried out by the same terrorist cell to which Abdeslam and the other terrorists of the Paris attacks belonged.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Angelique Chrisafis, *France under first state of emergency since 1961*, on *The Guardian*, November 16, 2015.

<sup>220</sup> Benjamin Siegel, Alexander Mallin, *Terror Arrested in Belgium Likely Accelerated Timetable for Brussels Bombings*, *US Lawmakers Say*, on *ABC News*, March 22, 2016.

The Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 are not an isolated case within the galaxy of Islamic attacks, as are the 9/11 attacks, because they are the most striking result of a series of intelligence failures of the French and European Secret Services that push analysts to rethink the intelligence model in the light of the new threat they face. The attacks are in fact part of an escalation of violence both before and after their occurrence: not only do they occur after the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters and the HyperCacher of Porte de Vincennes, but also before the Nice massacre of July 14, 2016, the shooting on the Champs Elysé on April 20, 2017, the multiple stabbing in the 2nd arrondissement on May 12, 2018, and the massacre at the Strasbourg Christmas markets on December 11, 2018. In the light of all these attacks, one wonders: what are the French Secret Services wrong? According to the Italian scholar Edoardo Camilli, it is possible to analyze the Paris attacks in a *post-mortem analysis*.<sup>221</sup> They constitute an intelligence failure for three reasons:

- 1. Failure in the detection and prioritization of threats.** The most common mistake in the intelligence cycle is not recognizing a threat as such or not placing it on the priority scale of the highest-risk threats. This can happen for two reasons. First, when the intelligence system is focusing on specific threats, already known, which tend to reduce their “field of view” on new ones; this means that the new threats may not be under the radar of intelligence officers and remain undetected. Second, when a threat is recognized as potential but is not assessed as imminent or capable of causing a high impact. In the case of the Paris attacks, both dynamics materialized as some of the attackers were already known to the authorities, while others had not been identified as a threat.
- 2. Failure in surveillance.** Once the threat is identified, constant and effective monitoring must be in place. France has around 11.00 radicalized individuals, of whom around 1.200 are foreign fighters. Considering that for 24/7 surveillance of a suspected terrorist, a security system must deploy at least 15-20 men. This would mean that France would need around 22,000 officers to monitor these terror suspects, and certainly not a viable option given the limited resources. However, in the case of the Paris attacks, surveillance of individuals identified as potential threats failed despite existing knowledge and new clues. Two of the Bataclan suicide terrorists, Ismaël Omar Mostefai and Samy Amimour, were both under the monitoring of the French Intelligence Services from 2010 to 2012, and both were also known to have traveled to Syria to fight alongside ISIS. The same was true of the alleged mastermind of the attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud. All three foreign fighters, despite being known to the authorities, managed to escape the Secret Services’ surveillance and travel unnoticed back

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<sup>221</sup> Edoardo Camilli, *The Paris attacks. A case of intelligence failure?*, NATO Review Magazine, 2015.

and forth between Europe and Syria. For this reason, although they had been identified as a threat, the Services were unable to identify them either on Belgian or French territory. If this had happened, it would have allowed the Security Services to raise their alert level and possibly prevent attacks. According to some sources, Turkey has reported twice the presence on its territory of the terrorist Mostefai in December 2014 and June 2015 but received no feedback from Paris.<sup>222</sup>

**3. Failure in information-sharing.** The Paris attacks highlighted the problem of information-sharing among the various countries of the European Union and NATO. If the French and Belgian Security Services can be blamed for losing track of their suspected terrorists, other European countries that saw these suspects crossing their territory should also take their share of the responsibility. Sharing information is of fundamental importance, considering that once within the Schengen zone an individual can travel freely across the continent. In practice, this means that known suspects should have been monitored in Syria and placed under close surveillance once they returned to Europe. This implies that EU countries should share a list of suspected extremists, thus allowing partner countries to “reset their radars”, track and report important information regarding suspects. The intelligence failure between France and Turkey on Mostefai is even more surprising as the two NATO allies have shared intelligence for decades in military cooperation.

According to other sources, in addition to the information passed on by the Turkish intelligence agencies, the Iraqi Secret Services would also have transmitted information to the French Intelligence Community about an imminent attack, but it is not known how detailed this information was and whether it was verifiable.<sup>223</sup> The French Intelligence Services probably receive many of these reports that require thorough evaluation and investigation, but in the end there may simply not be enough details to allow their exploitation. In fact, for the intelligence cycle to work, the information provided to an intelligence system must be detailed, specific and related to a specific threat that is the object of attention, but this very often runs into the legal constraints of the Police Forces: the absence of evidence therefore leads to the interruption of the surveillance of the suspected individuals, and to the reassignment of resources to other individuals assessed as priorities.<sup>224</sup> Certainly, the multinational nature of the execution plan (the attacks were in fact planned in Syria, organized in Belgium and carried out in France) added a further level of complication to the intelligence work. The attacks

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<sup>222</sup> Lee Moran, *Turkey Says It Warned France Twice About Paris Attacker*, on *The Huffington Post*, November 16, 2015.

<sup>223</sup> The Irish Times, *Iraqi intelligence says it warned France of imminent attacks*, on *The Irish Times*, November 15, 2015.

<sup>224</sup> Timothy Holman, *Paris: An Intelligence Failure or a Failure to Understand the Limits of Intelligence?*, Royal United Services Institute, 2015.

highlighted the difficulties in cooperation between countries and in collecting information once the terrorists had reached Syria as foreign militants. As Richard Betts points out, terrorist networks are not easy targets because they actively avoid investigation.<sup>225</sup> Intelligence has limits and sometimes the enemy is able to limit the effectiveness of even the most competent agencies. In these cases, agencies do not know what to do until they do, and then it is too late.

According to the British professor Peter Gill, intelligence researcher at the University of Liverpool, the failure of the terrorist attacks in Europe can be traced back to the issue of “targeting”, that is to focus attention on some selected individuals or objectives, and this happens both for the advent of the “new terrorism”, both for the exponential growth of “raw” information (collected through telephones, Internet and social media).<sup>226</sup> The attacks carried out in Europe were almost entirely organized by people who were “known” by the Police Forces and the Security Services, even if not for reasons related to terrorism. Hence, the causes of these failures may be inaccurate targeting, or rather, problems in correctly assessing which of the many potential targets to prioritize given the limited number of resources. The French internal intelligence agency DGSI has around 3,300 officers who are tasked with monitoring 20,000 people on national security checklists, of which 11,000 are identified as Islamic extremists.<sup>227</sup> Simply put, the French Intelligence System is extremely overloaded and unable to cope with a constant threat. Security and defense agencies in most European countries and NATO have suffered major budget cuts in recent years, following the 2008 global economic crisis and the subsequent implementation of austerity measures.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, the 9/11 attacks in the United States were already too distant in the memory of decision makers and public opinion, which led to national security being threatened more by economic factors than by terrorism or other serious forms of threat to security. Now, however, this trend seems to be reversing. With European economies on a slow path to recovery, and with the threat of domestic terrorism increasing, new resources are being made available for intelligence agencies. In fact, following the Paris attacks, President Hollande announced that 8,500 new staff members have been added to the Security Services.

From a purely theoretical point of view, it could be said that if the difficulties in collecting information and evidence on individuals given the international and cross-border extent of the operations are due to the contrary school, the Paris attacks can also be explained through the limits of the traditional school and of the reformist school. As for the traditional theories, it is important to

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<sup>225</sup> Richard K. Betts, in Report of the National Commission on Terrorism, *Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism*, Pursuant to Public Law 277, 105<sup>th</sup> Congress, Federation of American Scientists, 2002.

<sup>226</sup> Peter Gill, *Explaining the Intelligence Failure: Rethinking the Recent Terrorist Attacks in Europe*, on *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2020, pp. 43-67.

<sup>227</sup> Edoardo Camilli, *The Paris attacks. A case of intelligence failure?*, NATO Review Magazine, 2015.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibidem*.



underline how individual mistakes were made by the security apparatuses, as happened in the case of the Police checks on people traveling from Paris immediately after the attacks: although the car in which Salah Abdeslam was traveling along with Hamza Attou and Mohammed Amri had been stopped three times on the way to Belgium, the people traveling on board were not arrested because their profiles were not present in the Police's information collection systems on people suspected of terrorism, nor it was still known that Abdeslam was involved in the attacks. People make mistakes very often in carrying out their work. Perhaps a more zealous police officer would have had more scruple in conducting more thorough investigations of the three passengers in the car. Instead, as regards organizational theories, the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the Paris attacks concluded that the communication failures between the six French intelligence agencies and the lack of coordination between them were the cause of the failure that led to the attacks.<sup>229</sup> As Naval Postgraduate School historian Douglas Porch argues, the rivalries between these Services for resources and influence are intense. This encourages further fragmentation, duplication of efforts, distrust of rival services, fear of any leaks, secretiveness and compartmentalization.<sup>230</sup>

More conventionally, the intelligence failure of November 13 can be explained by the factors of the lack of communication between the various European and NATO intelligence agencies, the unavailability of information in possession of the French Secret Services, the received opinions due to an insufficient investigation of clues and suspects, and complacency, as the Security Services failed to act with no information about where and when the next attacks would occur. Furthermore, even assuming that the French Intelligence Services were in possession of all the information necessary to prevent the attacks, it is not certain that the plot would actually have been thwarted, due to the inability to know how to connect the dots. In fact, we know that to prevent an attack it is necessary to know how to connect the dots, and connect them in a certain order, but this unfortunately does not always happen.

According to some analysts, such as Emmanuel Karagiannis, a professor at King's College London, the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 closely resemble the 2008 Mumbai attacks from a strategic point of view: small teams of heavily armed jihadists simultaneously attacking many people to maximize losses.<sup>231</sup> While there are some tactical differences (the use of suicide vests, the massacre consummated in a few hours and culminating mostly in the suicide of the terrorists as soon as capture

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<sup>229</sup> Georges Fenech, Sébastien Pietrasanta, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission d'Enquête relative aux moyens mis en œuvre par l'État pour lutter contre le terrorisme depuis le 7 janvier 2015*, Assemblée Nationale, July 5, 2016, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-enq/r3922-t1.asp>.

<sup>230</sup> Douglas Porch, *Cultural Legacies of French Intelligence*, in Thomas C. Bruneau, Steven C. Boraz, *Reforming Intelligence: Obstacles to Democratic Control and Effectiveness*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2007, pp. 121–146.

<sup>231</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Were the Attacks in Paris and Brussels an Intelligence Failure?*, Defence-in-Depth, Defence Studies Department, King's College London, 2017.

seemed imminent), the multiple attacks against weak but high profile targets, in Paris they indicate a level of organization and sophistication that clearly took the French authorities by surprise. The country's intelligence community operates on the base of a Cold War model that is largely outdated. For many decades, intelligence agencies have focused almost exclusively on foreign governments. Consequently, the classic intelligence cycle cannot cope with the complexities of transnational Islamic networks. Human intelligence (HUMINT) is generally scarce and terrorists are increasingly using encrypted technology to communicate. Geo-spatial intelligence (RADINT) is also not very useful. Most of the attackers had European passports and were members of local Muslim communities. Therefore, they were able to benefit from open borders and family networks to organize the attacks.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 were caused by multiple intelligence failures. Although further terrorist attacks in the country were foreseeable due to a resurgence of Islamic attacks since the beginning of the year, what happened on the evening of November 13 was beyond all imagination, both for the type of target chosen and for the own complexity and the perfect organization and coordination of attacks. They have hit the mark in wanting to strike the Western lifestyle in its essence and the young European generations, but they also offered an opportunity to national and European Intelligence Services to rethink their organization and functions. The most visible consequences, immediately after the attacks, were the increase in the alert against other Islamist attacks on their territory by other European countries and a greater involvement of France in the international coalition at war against the Islamic State.

### **3.4 – The French Involvement in the Middle East: Opération Chammal**

In response to the advance of the Islamic State in the Middle East in the first half of 2014, in connection with the raging civil war in Iraq and Syria, many States decided to intervene to contain the expansion of the group in the region, not only because ISIS was carrying out massacres, atrocities and massive violations of human rights against civilian populations and ethnic-religious minorities in the conquered territories, but also because the spread of the Salafi jihadist ideology could lead to a further destabilization of the regimes of the area supported by the great world powers.

The United States decided to intervene against IS by leading a coalition of numerous Western and Arab countries that included France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, and Morocco. Other

countries such as Germany, Italy, and Spain have limited their commitment to logistical support. Independently from the Arab-Western coalition, Russia also decided to intervene militarily against IS, leading a coalition with Iran and the governments of Iraq and Syria themselves. Although the common goal of both coalitions was to block the advance of the IS, even in response to the acts of war it proclaimed against the two superpowers, the two coalitions supported two different factions in the civil war in Syria: Russia supported the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, while the United States supported the rebel forces that wanted to overthrow it, mainly represented by the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The confrontation in Syria between the two coalitions has therefore led to a worsening of relations between the United States and Russia and to a growing international tension.<sup>232</sup>

The United States began aerial bombardments of IS on August 8, 2014 to halt the group's advance into Iraqi Kurdistan, exactly three years after their withdrawal from the country. On September 4 and 5, in Newport, Wales, the NATO Summit between the allied countries was held. US Secretary of State John Kerry invited the Prime Ministers of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Australia (which is not a NATO member but has collaborated with it for a long time also through the 2012 *Political Declaration* and the 2013 *Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme*) in a separate meeting in which he urged them to support militarily and financially the fight against ISIS. The nine countries accepted the invitation by signing a declaration in which they pledged to provide air and logistical support to the forces fighting against ISIS.<sup>233</sup> Subsequently, these countries participated in the International Conference on Peace and Security in Iraq, hosted by France in Paris on September 15, 2014. In addition to the countries present at the Wales Summit (with exception of Australia), there were also diplomatic delegations from: Bahrain, Belgium, China, Czech Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the Arab League, European Union and United Nations.<sup>234</sup> They affirmed their commitment to support the Iraqi government of Haidar Al-Abadi and that it was important to protect unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq. To do this, they concluded, it was necessary to help the Iraqi government in the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups, legitimized by *Resolution no. 2170/2014* of the United Nations Security Council of August 15, 2014, in which any form of trade with ISIS was condemned and financial donations and ransom payments aimed at the group were disincentivized.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Eugenio Dacrema, *Russia e Usa scaricano sulla Siria tutta la loro debolezza*, on *eastwest.eu*, Eastwest European Institute, November 14, 2017.

<sup>233</sup> Denver Nicks, *U.S. Forms Anti-ISIS Coalition at NATO Summit*, on *Time*, September 5, 2014.

<sup>234</sup> Manuel Valls, *International Conference on Peace and Security in Iraq*, Gouvernement de la République Française, 2014, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/international-conference-on-peace-and-security-in-iraq>.

<sup>235</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2170 (2014)*, United Nations Digital Library, 2014.

Then, on October 17, 2014, the US Department of Defense formally established the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) and Operation Inherent Resolve with the aim of formalizing ongoing military actions against the growing threat posed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Operation Inherent Resolve not only included an active role of the coalition in military interventions, but also supported the training and equipping of Iraqi soldiers and brigades, in order to make Iraq's institutions and security forces more resilient and capable of dealing with evil foreign actors engaged in coercion and exploitation.<sup>236</sup> On December 3, 2014, at NATO headquarters in Brussels, diplomats and foreign ministers from 59 countries met to agree on a common line of action against the ISIS threat. In addition to the aforementioned countries, 33 other new States joined the coalition: Albania, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Portugal, South Korea, Romania, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Sweden, Taiwan and Ukraine.<sup>237</sup> They renamed themselves "Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant". US Secretary of State John Kerry stated at the meeting that the primary goal of countries' cooperation should be to defeat ISIS's ideology, funding and recruitment, rather than engaging in airstrikes or other military operations.<sup>238</sup> The joint strategy developed by the coalition involved a multi-faceted and long-term commitment that included<sup>239</sup>:

- supporting military operations, capacity building, and training;
- stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters;
- cutting off ISIS's access to financing and funding;
- addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises;
- exposing ISIS's true nature (ideological delegitimization).

Among all the member countries of both the coalition and NATO, France was the first European country to become more involved in the fight against IS. The reason for this effort lies mainly in two reasons. Firstly, France has been a former mandatory power in Syria since the signing of the *Sykes-Picot Agreement* with the United Kingdom. The French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon was commissioned by the League of Nations to France following the fall of the Ottoman Empire with the

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<sup>236</sup> Jim Garamone, *Building Capabilities, Nurturing Alliances at Heart of U.S. Strategy*, United States Department of Defense, 2019.

<sup>237</sup> John Kerry, *Joint Statement Issued by Partners at the Counter-ISIL Coalition Ministerial Meeting*, United States Department of State, 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/12/234627.htm>.

<sup>238</sup> France 24, *US-led coalition to battle IS group for "as long as it takes"*, on France 24, December 3, 2014.

<sup>239</sup> John Kerry, *Joint Statement Issued by Partners at the Counter-ISIL Coalition Ministerial Meeting*, United States Department of State, 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/12/234627.htm>.

aim of administering the country until the inhabitants were considered eligible for self-government. The mandate lasted from 1920 to 1946, and during this period revolts, collaboration and negotiations alternated for the full independence of the nation. France, therefore, has a strategic interest in remaining present in Syria's affairs, just as it looks with interest to all those countries that were once part of its colonial empire. Secondly, the French government is concerned about containing Islamic fundamentalist ideologies that could spread on a global scale. Indeed, in France the phenomenon of radicalization is not only a security threat, but also a quite widespread social problem, and then aims to defeat ISIS *in loco* as a terrorist organization that instigates terrorist attacks against the West and attracts young fanatics from all over the world to fight their own battles in the Middle East.

After nearly forty years of supporting the Alawite regime of Al-Assad, France has revised its positions following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in March 2011 and the use of chemical weapons against the rebels in 2013, hoping for a regime change in favor of a democracy and deciding to intervene militarily to protect the civilian population on the base of the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P).<sup>240</sup> According to researcher Samuel Ramani of the University of Oxford's St. Antony's College, France's hard line against Al-Assad and the extent of his intervention in Syria can be explained by three different factors<sup>241</sup>: first, France is using its interventionist foreign policy in Syria and the Middle East more broadly, to reinforce its self-perception as a great power; second, France is playing its historic role of presenting itself as an alternative foreign policy model to that offered by the United States; third, France sees its resolute opposition to the Al-Assad regime as an opportunity to strengthen security cooperation with the anti-Assad Sunni countries in the Middle East which also share with France a profound distrust of the country for Iran (historical ally of the Alawite regime of Assad dynasty). For these and for the aforementioned reasons, France decided to intervene towards the end of 2014 in the civil war in Syria and Iraq within the coalition led by the United States, considering that *Resolution no. 2170/2014* of the United Nations Security Council gave it the international legitimacy to take part in military operations.<sup>242</sup>

Thus, France intervened in the war against IS with *Opération Chammal* (Operation Chammal, named after Shamal, the hot and dusty wind blowing from the North-West over Iraq and the Persian Gulf States) for the first time on September 19, 2014, when the *Armée de l'air et de l'Espace* (French Air Force - "ALA") used two of its Dassault Rafale to conduct airstrikes against ISIS targets in Mosul, destroying a depot and killing 75 militiamen.<sup>243</sup> French President François Hollande had announced

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<sup>240</sup> Denver Journal of International Law & Policy, *Responsibility to Protect in the Wake of the Paris Attacks*, on *Denver Journal of International Law & Policy*, November 19, 2015.

<sup>241</sup> Samuel Ramani, *Why France is so deeply entangled in Syria*, on *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2015.

<sup>242</sup> Jean Guisnel, *Frappes contre l'État islamique: pourquoi la France peut peu*, on *Le Point*, September 11, 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Doug Stanglin, *First French airstrikes in Iraq hit ISIL depot*, on *USA Today News*, September 19, 2014.

just the day before the start of operations against ISIS at the request of assistance from the Iraqi authorities, declaring however that French support would only be airborne and that no ground troops would be employed in the conflict.<sup>244</sup> Between September 21 and 24, the French conducted some reconnaissance and air support actions to *Al-Quwwat Al-Barriyya Al-'Irāqiyya* (the Iraqi Army) in Mosul and Baghdad. On September 25, during a reconnaissance mission, two Dassault Rafales conducted a second air strike at nearby target air coordination operations center, destroying four ISIS depots near Fallujah and Kirkuk, killing 15 ISIS militiamen and wounding 30 of them.<sup>245</sup> On September 26, two Dassault Rafale and an Atlantique 2 carried out two reconnaissance missions over the Nineveh Governorate. In November 2014, French military strength was increased with six Jordan-based Dassault Mirage 2000Ds. It is estimated that between December 18, 2014 and January 7, 2015 the French Air Force carried out a total of 45 missions.<sup>246</sup> The Dassault Rafale and Mirage performed 30 of these missions, neutralizing 10 targets. On January 6, 2015, François Hollande declared that the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle (R91) would be deployed in the Persian Gulf with its strike group and that it was capable of supporting airstrikes against ISIS.<sup>247</sup> The ship was deployed in November and France launched its first airstrikes from the carrier on November 23.

Starting from the end of September 2015, France began airstrikes against ISIS positions also in Syria, initially on a small scale to avoid strengthening the Bashar Al-Assad regime by hitting its enemies. Towards October, the airstrikes by the ALA intensified. Meanwhile, the escalation of jihadist violence in France increased. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared that it was mandatory for France to strike Daesh in the name of self-defense and that it would continue with the attacks even if among the targets there were French citizens, because terrorists have no passport.<sup>248</sup> ISIS decided to attack Paris precisely out of revenge against France which in the last months of 2015 had intensified the bombing of its positions in Iraq and Syria. Certainly, the organization's leader Al-Baghdadi with the Paris attacks of November 13 did not expect to provoke the withdrawal of France from the American coalition, but rather to discourage other Western countries from intervening in the bombings against ISIS by focusing on terror.<sup>249</sup> According to Alessandro Orsini, in fact, if ISIS had been left free to build its jihadist society in Iraq and Syria, it would never have organized the attacks against Paris since from the operational point of view ISIS, unlike Al-Qaeda has a more local

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<sup>244</sup> Marion Dautry, *Irak: la France n'enverra pas de troupes au sol, annonce François Hollande*, on *RTL*, September 18, 2014.

<sup>245</sup> Ministère de la Défense, *Opération Chammal: deuxième frappe française en Irak*, Ministère des Armées, September 26, 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Helen Chachaty, *Opération Chammal: Les frappes continuent*, on *Le Journal d'Aviation*, January 8, 2015.

<sup>247</sup> Agence France-Presse, *Report: France To Deploy Aircraft Carrier To Gulf in IS Fight*, on *DefenseNews*, January 6, 2015.

<sup>248</sup> France 24, *"Terrorists have no passports", French PM says of Syria air strikes*, on *France 24*, October 12, 2015.

<sup>249</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *ISIS. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2016, p. 95.

dimension and prefers to focus its efforts on building the Caliphate and attacking other Middle Eastern countries to expand rather than targeting Western cities.<sup>250</sup> Russia also suffered a similar fate, which began its air campaign in Syria on September 30, 2015, and the next day suffered a serious attack by ISIS that shot down the Russian airliner Metrojet 9268 while flying over the Sinai Peninsula, causing 224 deaths.

On November 14, 2015, Hollande declared that the Paris attacks were an act of war by the Islamic State and that France would be ruthless in responding to ISIS militants using all possible means within the law, on every battlefield both at home and abroad, together with its allies.<sup>251</sup> Then, on November 15, the ALA launched Operation Chammal's largest airstrike against ISIS strongholds, sending 12 aircraft, including 10 fighters, to drop 20 bombs on Raqqa, the *de-facto* capital of ISIS. On November 16, the ALA carried out other airstrikes on strategic ISIS targets in Raqqa, including a command center, training camp and ammunition depot. On November 18, the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier actually left the port of Toulon to head to the Eastern Mediterranean to support the US-led international coalition bombings. As mentioned, this decision was made long before the November 13 attacks, but was accelerated following the events. In these operations, support was provided to France from the United Kingdom through in-flight refueling and the use of its air base in Cyprus at RAF Akrotiri, and from Germany, which sent a brigade and the reconnaissance aircraft Panavia Tornado to Turkey. The French authorities regularly provided detailed information to the US authorities where the main members of the ISIS's chain of command were in the areas between Iraq and Syria so that they were tracked down and killed through "target killings". This cooperation led US air raids to kill those believed to be the planners of the November 13 attacks. The United States decided to collaborate more closely with France in the fight against ISIS because they believed that the attacks of November 13, if they had not occurred in France, would have occurred in the United States, posing the threat of a new 9/11.<sup>252</sup>

Towards the end of 2016, France joined the US-led international coalition of 60 countries for the liberation of Mosul, which fell into the hands of ISIS in June 2014.<sup>253</sup> The *Armée de terre* (French Army) provided four CESAR howitzers and 150-200 French soldiers in Qayyarah, and then sent a second contingent of 600 French soldiers by the end of September. In Erbil, in the East of Mosul, 150 French soldiers were employed to train the *Peshmerga*, i.e., the Kurdish fighting forces. The aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle was relocated near the coast of Syria to support operations against ISIS

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<sup>250</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>251</sup> BBC, *Paris attacks: Hollande blames Islamic State for "act of war"*, on *BBC News*, December 14, 2015.

<sup>252</sup> Priscille Lafitte, *How the planners of the 2015 Paris attacks were systematically eliminated (interview with Matthieu Suc)*, on *France 24*, November 9, 2018.

<sup>253</sup> Fred Pleitgen, *On board the French nuclear carrier battling ISIS*, on *CNN World*, October 17, 2016.

through airstrikes and reconnaissance missions, together with a squadron of 24 Dassault Rafales. Another 12 Dassault Rafales operated from air force bases in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

Following the penetration of ISIS in the context of the second Libyan civil war since the end of 2014, France, which supports the government of Tobruk, has extended Operation Chammal to Libya since 2015, mostly providing logistical support to the United States and carrying out reconnaissance flights, surveillance operations and contact with local militias. However, in June 2016, following a shooting down of a French helicopter claimed by an Islamist group called the “Benghazi Defense Brigades” (BDB) in which three French soldiers were killed, the ALA bombed some Islamist positions near Benghazi.<sup>254</sup>

In 2017, IS began to gradually lose territory in Iraq and Syria and also lost control of the main settlements and conquered cities, including Raqqa. In 2018, many powers, including the United States and Russia, officially declared the war against ISIS won. However, following its own territorial retreat, ISIS began to increasingly resort to terrorist attacks and insurgency operations, using its underground networks and sleeper cells scattered throughout the Middle East. The battle of Baghuz Fawqani against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) between February and March 2019 marked the loss of the last territories controlled by ISIS, which sought to lead an insurrection in the territories it once controlled through the influence of its own propaganda.<sup>255</sup> Although the Trump administration had declared that it wanted to withdraw its troops from Syria considering the war against ISIS now over, French President Emmanuel Macron declared that ISIS was not yet completely defeated, and that France was determined to keep its soldiers in Syria throughout the year, despite the withdrawal of its main ally in the coalition.<sup>256</sup> The awareness that the victory against ISIS has not yet been definitively won was also expressed in some statements by the United Kingdom’s Minister of Defense Tobias Ellwood, who strongly disagreed with Trump in proclaiming victory too soon<sup>257</sup>, and by the Germany’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas who recognized the retreat of ISIS despite its still persistent threat.<sup>258</sup> The organization’s leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was killed during a US raid near Idlib, in the North-West of Syria, by blowing himself up with an explosive belt on October 27, 2019. ISIS confirmed the death of its leader and at the same time communicated the succession of Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurayshi as the new “Caliph” through its press organ *Amaq* on October 31, 2019.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Rami Musa, *French warplane bombed Libya militias after French deaths*, on *Associated Press (AP)*, July 21, 2016.

<sup>255</sup> Jamie Dettmer, *US-Led Allies Finishing Off “Caliphate”*, on *Voice of America (VOA News)*, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

<sup>256</sup> Arab News, *French military to continue fight against Daesh in Levant: Macron*, on *Arab News*, January 17, 2019.

<sup>257</sup> France 24, *US allies in Syria say IS group not yet defeated*, on *France 24*, December 20, 2018.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>259</sup> Martin Chulov, *Islamic state names new leader after death of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi*, on *The Guardian*, October 31, 2019.



Although the birth of ISIS can be traced back to the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003, an intervention to which France strongly opposed, the armed intervention against the IS in Iraq and Syria and the Operation Chammal offered France the opportunity to consolidate its position in the business and geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, to establish itself as a major military player on the international stage, and to strengthen its alliance with the United States both in the context of NATO and in a bilateral perspective. Nonetheless, the armed intervention in two Muslim countries, after the one led in Libya in 2011, could be the determining cause that led fundamentalist Islamic groups, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda, to declare war on France and inaugurate a new season of terrorist attacks on Western targets.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Case of Italy: An Exception in the Western Jihadist Panorama

«The security of power is based on the insecurity of citizens.»

Leonardo Sciascia

#### 4.1 - The Information System for the Security of the Republic

The current Italian intelligence system is organized in the *Sistema di informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica* (Information System for the Security of the Republic) and brings together all the bodies and authorities that have the task of ensuring information activities in order to safeguard the Italian Republic from threats coming from both internal and external.<sup>260</sup> It was established following a reform process that took place by means of *Law no. 124/2007* of August 3, 2007, which drastically changed the previous structure of the Information and Security Services established in 1977.<sup>261</sup> The reform of the national intelligence sector aimed at making the system able to fully respond to the modernization challenges imposed by continuous change and evolution of old and new threats in the supreme interest of the defense of the Italian Republic and its institutions. The articulation of the System thus makes it possible to “face change with change” by adapting its structures to the changing context, according to the directives given by the President of the Council of Ministers assisted by the *Comitato interministeriale per la sicurezza della Repubblica* (Interministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic) to safeguard the fundamental rights of citizens.

The first reorganization of the Italian Secret Services took place on March 30, 1949 after the birth of the Italian Republic and in the international political climate of the Cold War.<sup>262</sup> The Ministry of Defense was established (which merged the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Aeronautics and the Ministry of Merchant Marine) and the reorganization of the Military Information Services was established with the institutionalization of a single *Servizio Informazioni Forze Armate* (Armed

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<sup>260</sup> Sistema di informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica, *Chi siamo*, sicurezzanazionale.gov, 2007.

<sup>261</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Legge 3 Agosto 2007, n. 124 e nuove norme in favore delle vittime del terrorismo*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2007, [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2007-08-13&atto.codiceRedazionale=007G0139&elenco30giorni=false](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2007-08-13&atto.codiceRedazionale=007G0139&elenco30giorni=false).

<sup>262</sup> Sistema di informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica, *La nostra storia*, sicurezzanazionale.gov, 2007.

Forces Information Service – “SIFAR”) at direct dependencies of the Chief of Defense Staff and under the direction of General Carlo Re, whom was succeeded until 1965 by generals Umberto Broccoli, Ettore Musco, Giovanni De Lorenzo, Egidio Viggiani and Giovanni Allavena. Although SIFAR also dealt with internal security, since 1948 the Ministry of the Interior established the *Ufficio Affari Riservati* (Reserved Affairs Office) with information and political police duties, then dissolved in 1974. Subsequently, the then Minister of the Interior Francesco Cossiga constituted the *Ispettorato generale per l'azione contro il terrorismo* (Inspectorate General for Action Against Terrorism – “IGAT”), redefined in 1976 *Servizio di Sicurezza* (Security Service – “SDS”), with a predominantly operational role with Prefect Emilio Santillo at the top. Before him, Gesualdo Barletta, Domenico De Nozza, Ulderico Caputo, Efisio Ortona, Savino Figurati, Giuseppe Lutri, Elvio Catenacci, Eriberto Vigevano, and Federico Umberto D’Amato succeeded each other in 1949 at the helm of the so-called “civil service”. To support and link the Services, the *Sezione informazioni operative e situazione* (Operational Information and Situation Section – “SIOS”) was set up at each Armed Force, which was placed directly under the respective Chiefs of Staff and with specific tasks of technical-military information and military police. The creation of a real Secret Service such as SIFAR, even if at the beginning it had limited sovereignty and was in direct contact with the US Secret Services, was one of the first consequences of the stabilization of the Italian political situation and the entry of Italy in NATO, which took place in 1949.<sup>263</sup>

In 1965, the Decree of the President of the Republic transformed SIFAR into the *Servizio Informazioni Difesa* (Defense Information Service – “SID”), which is entrusted with the tasks of information, prevention and protection of military secrecy and any other activity of national interest aimed at the security and defense of the country.<sup>264</sup> This constitutes a further reform of the order of the Defense Staff and the Armed Forces. The SID officially began its activity on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966 under the direction of Admiral Eugenio Henke, who was succeeded, until 1977 (year of the new reform), by General Vito Miceli and Admiral Mario Casardi.

Italian intelligence has undergone a profound and radical transformation with *Law no. 801/1977* of October 24, 1977, which doubled the SID by establishing the *Servizio per le informazioni e la sicurezza militare* (Service for Military Information and Security – “SISMI”) and the *Servizio per le informazioni e la sicurezza democratica* (Service for Information and Democratic Security –

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<sup>263</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>264</sup> Giuseppe Saragat (Presidente della Repubblica Italiana), *Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica 18 novembre 1965, n. 1478, Riorganizzazione degli uffici centrali del Ministero della difesa*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 1965, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1966/01/15/065U1478/sg>.

“SISDE”).<sup>265</sup> The two new structures were respectively placed under the control of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior, but the new law assigned top-management, general political responsibility and coordination of information and security policy to the President of the Council of Ministers who coordinated the two intelligence bodies through the *Comitato esecutivo per i servizi di informazione e sicurezza* (Executive Committee for Information and Security Services – “CESIS”). Both Services remained in operation until the regulatory reform of 2007. The tasks of the SISMI were mainly aimed at defending national security from any threat in Italy and abroad, including with counter-espionage actions for this purpose. By law, it had to carry out all information and security tasks for the defense of the independence and integrity of the State from any danger, threat or aggression on a military level. From 1978 to 2007, General Giuseppe Santovito, General Nino Lugaresi, Admiral Fulvio Martini, General Sergio Luccarini, General Luigi Ramponi, General Cesare Pucci, General Sergio Siracusa, Admiral Gianfranco Battelli and General Nicolò Pollari succeeded one another. The tasks of SISDE were, on the other hand, aimed at defending the security of the Italian Republic and its institutions from any threat, operating mainly in Italy, taking care of the espionage activity. From 1977 to 2007, Giulio Grassini, Emanuele De Francesco, Vincenzo Parisi, Riccardo Malpica, Alessandro Voci, Angelo Finocchiaro, Domenico Salazar, Gaetano Marino, Vittorio Stelo, Mario Mori and Franco Gabrielli succeeded each other at the helm.

In 2007, the entire national intelligence apparatus underwent a profound change with the aforementioned *Law no. 124/2007* which establishes the current Information System for the Security of the Republic, also to respond to the changed social-national and political-international context and the new economic, cyber and energy challenges that always require new operational tools and new professional skills. Under the new legislation, the structure of the Italian national intelligence community is structured as follows<sup>266</sup>:

- 1. President of the Council of Ministers:** the Head of Government has the task of choosing the appointment of directors and vice-directors of each agency. He coordinates the information security policies, issues the directives and issues all provisions necessary for the organization and operation of the Information System for the well-being of the Italian Republic after having consulted with the Interministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic. The President of the Council of Ministers usually acts within the intelligence and Secret Services structures through the **Autorità delegata per la sicurezza della Repubblica** (Delegated Authority for

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<sup>265</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Legge 24 Ottobre 1977, n. 801, Istituzione e ordinamento dei servizi per le informazioni e la sicurezza e disciplina del segreto di Stato*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 1977, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1977/11/07/077U0801/sg>.

<sup>266</sup> Sistema di informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica, *La nostra organizzazione*, sicurezzanazionale.gov, 2007.

the Security of the Republic – “ADSR”), which cannot exercise further government functions other than those specifically provided for regulatory and operational area for which he is in charge. In 2007, the then Prime Minister Romano Prodi delegated the Undersecretary of State at the Presidency Enrico Micheli. In 2011, then Prime Minister Mario Monti did not delegate, maintaining his prerogatives on Italian intelligence. In 2018, President Giuseppe Conte initially did not appoint a delegated authority, maintaining the responsibility of the Italian intelligence community until January 2021, choosing Ambassador and Diplomatic Advisor to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers Piero Benassi as the Delegated Authority for the Security of the Republic.<sup>267</sup>

- 2. Comitato interministeriale per la sicurezza della Repubblica (Interministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic – “CISR”):** it is the body responsible for appointing the heads of intelligence agencies, supporting the President of the Council of Ministers for this purpose through consultancy and decision-making activities regarding the policy of the Services. It replaces the functions of the previous Interministerial Committee for Information and Security (CIIS) envisaged by the 1977 reform. The CISR is chaired by the President of the Council of Ministers, who orders the convocation, and is composed of the Delegated Authority for the Security of the Republic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Economy and Finance, and the Minister of Economic Development. The Director General of the Information Department for the Security (DIS) performs the function of Secretary.
- 3. Agenzia informazioni e sicurezza esterna (External Information and Security Agency – “AISE”):** has intelligence tasks and activities outside the national territory. It replaces the previous SISMI. In particular, it deals with:
  - researching and processing all information useful for the defense of the independence, integrity and security of the Italian Republic, from threats from abroad, also in implementation of international agreements;
  - promptly and continuously informing the respective holders of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the Ministry of the Interior for the profiles of their respective competence. The Director

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<sup>267</sup> Il Sole 24 Ore, *Consiglio dei Ministri, Benassi sottosegretario con delega ai Servizi*, on *Il Sole 24 Ore*, January 21, 2021.

constantly reports on the activity carried out to the President of the Council of Ministers or to the ADSR, if this is established, through the Director General of the Security Information Department (DIS); reporting directly to the President of the Council of Ministers in case of urgency or when other particular circumstances so require, informing the Director General of DIS without delay; submitting to the CISR, through the Director General of the DIS, an annual report on the operation and organization of the agency;

- carrying out activities relating to the counter-proliferation of nuclear materials, or in any case considered strategic materials, as well as information activities for security outside the national territory, to protect Italian political, military, economic, scientific and industrial interests; identifying and contrasting spying activities directed against Italy and activities aimed at damaging national interests outside the national territory; it also deals with the protection of high technology and “*dual use*” (i.e., products for both civil and military use).
- operating in close collaboration with the *II Reparto informazioni e sicurezza* (2<sup>nd</sup> Information and Security Department: it is a military intelligence department that depends on the Defense Staff but is not integrated into the Information System for the Security of the Republic) for various aspects deriving from the directives related to Art. 8 of *Law no. 124/2007*, for example counter-espionage, undercover actions, intelligence activities, security in diplomatic offices, information and security in operational theaters where the Italian Armed Forces are employed, collection of information and protection of security on all personnel acquired or to be acquired at the Information System for the Security.

The AISE reports to the President of the Council of Ministers or to the ADSR. Its management is appointed by a Director appointed (and revocable) by the President of the Council of Ministers with his own decree, chosen from among the top-managers or equivalent to the administration of the State, following consultation with the CISR. The assignment has a maximum duration of eight years and is renewable only once. The Director of AISE is supported by three Vice-Directors, appointed and revocable by the President of the Council of Ministers, after consultation with the Director. The other positions within the Agency are appointed by the Director of AISE. Since 2007, Admiral Bruno Branciforte, General Adriano Santini, Doctor Alberto Manenti, General Luciano Carta, and General Giovanni Caravelli, still in office, have succeeded one each other as Directors.

- 4. Agenzia informazioni e sicurezza interna (Internal Information and Security Agency – “AISI”):** is the internal investigation organization of Italy. It replaces the previous SISDE. It carries out information activities for the defense of the internal security of the Republic and of democratic institutions, as well as those for the protection of national interests and counter-espionage in Italian territory. By law, it cannot carry out operations abroad, which are however allowed only if AISE is involved and only in cases of close connection with its activity. In this case, the intervention coordinated by the Director General of the Information Department for the Security (DIS) is envisaged with the aim of avoiding the overlapping of territorial functions and competences with AISE and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Information and Security Department. The Director of the AISI reports to the President of the Council of Ministers or to the ADSR. It is assisted by two Vice-Directors, appointed (and revocable) by the President of the Council of Ministers, on the advice of the Director. The other positions within the Agency are appointed by the Director of the AISI. The position of Director of the AISI has a maximum duration of four years and is renewable only once. From 2007 to today, Prefect Giorgio Piccirillo, General Arturo Esposito and Prefect Mario Parente, still in office, have succeeded each other at the helm.
- 5. Dipartimento delle informazioni per la sicurezza (Information Department for the Security – “DIS”):** is the body for coordinating and planning operational activities. It has the task of supervising the activities of AISE and AISI on the correct application of the provisions issued by the President of the Council of Ministers, as well as on the administrative protection of State secrets. Furthermore, it collects information, analyzes and reports deriving from the Information Services for the Security, the Armed and Police Forces, the Public Administration of the State and research bodies, including private ones. In particular, the DIS deals with:
- promoting and ensuring the exchange of information between the AISE, the AISI, and the Police Forces, including through periodic meetings; communicating the data collected from the exchange of information and the results of periodic meetings to the President of the Council of Ministers. This information is transmitted, at the disposal of the President of the Council of Ministers and in consultation with the CISR, to public administrations or entities (including autonomous systems), interested in acquiring information for security; developing, together with the AISE and the AISI, the plan for the acquisition of human and material resources and any other resource instrumental to the activities of the Security Information Services to be submitted for approval by the President of the Council of Ministers;

- developing strategic analyzes or analyzes relating to particular situations, while leaving the exclusive competence of the AISE and the AISI for the elaboration of the respective research plans of the operations; formulating assessments and forecasts taking into account the analytical contributions provided by the AISE and the AISI on the various sectors; elaborating global analyzes to be submitted to the CISR on the basis of information and reports from other Services or entities; developing information research projects, on which the President of the Council of Ministers decides after having heard the opinion of the CISR.
- coordinating information research activities aimed at strengthening cyber protection and IT security at a national level.

Compared to AISE and AISI, the DIS therefore has general functions and acts through the following offices:

- a. **Ufficio centrale per la segretezza (Central Office for Secrecy – “UCSE”):** deals specifically with the administrative protection of State secret, including the release or revocation of the security clearance, i.e., the authorization to process documents, or materials classified from the degree of “*riservatissimo*” (top-confidential) to “*segretissimo*” (top-secret) for natural persons, organizations, companies and information companies.<sup>268</sup>
- b. **Ufficio centrale degli archivi (Central Archives Office – “UCA”):** has the function of coordinating, regulating and controlling the data management by the Italian Secret Services.
- c. **Ufficio centrale ispettivo (Central Inspection Office – “UCI”):** is responsible for exercising control over the AISE and AISI, verifying the compliance of security information activities with laws and regulations, as well as with the directives and provisions of the President of the Council of Ministers.
- d. **Scuola di Formazione (Training School):** deals with the training of Agencies’ operators, also through civilian teaching staff.

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<sup>268</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Art.42 (Disciplina del Segreto), Legge 3 Agosto 2007, n. 124 e nuove norme in favore delle vittime del terrorismo*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2007. The security clearance (NOS) provides for four types of secrecy attributable to the documents, in descending order: *top-secret*, *secret*, *top-confidential*, *confidential*. The rankings are assigned on the base of the criteria ordinarily followed in international relations.



The DIS depends directly on the President of the Council of Ministers or the ADSR. These use the DIS for the exercise of their skills in order to ensure full unity in the programming of the information search of the Information System for the Security, as well as in the analysis and operational activities of the Information Services for the Security. The general management of the DIS is entrusted to a senior or equivalent manager of the State administration, whose appointment and dismissal are the exclusive responsibility of the President of the Council of Ministers, following the opinion of the CISR. The office of the Director has a maximum duration of four years and is renewable for one time only. As provided by the law in force, the Director of the DIS is the direct contact for the President of the Council of Ministers and the ADSR. The Director is hierarchically and functionally superordinate to the DIS and the Offices set up within the same Department. The President of the Council of Ministers, on the advice of the Director General of the DIS, appoints one or more Deputy Directors General. The Director General entrusts other tasks within the Department, with the exception of the assignments whose conferment is up to the President of the Council of Ministers. The Director General of the DIS also acts as Secretary of the CISR. From 2007 to today, General Giuseppe Cucchi, Prefect Giovanni De Gennaro, Ambassador Giampiero Massolo, Prefect Alessandro Pansa and the current Director General, Prefect Gennaro Vecchione have succeeded each other as Directors of the DIS.

*Law no. 124/2007* also established the *Comitato parlamentare per la sicurezza della Repubblica* (Parliamentary Committee for the Security of the Republic – “COPASIR”), an organ of the Parliament that exercises parliamentary control over the work of the Italian Secret Services.<sup>269</sup> It replaces the previous *Comitato parlamentare di controllo sui servizi segreti* (Parliamentary Control Committee on Secret Services – “COPACO”) established by *Law no. 801/1977* and having the same functions. In particular, COPASIR deals with:

- systematically and continuously verifying that the activity of the Information System for the Security of the Republic is carried out in compliance with the Constitution and the laws;
- acquiring documents and information both from the Information System for the Security of the Republic or other bodies of the Public Administration, and from the judicial authorities or other investigators in derogation from the secret of the investigation;

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<sup>269</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Art.31 (Funzioni di controllo del Comitato parlamentare per la sicurezza della Repubblica) e 32 (Funzioni consultive del Comitato parlamentare per la sicurezza della Repubblica), Legge 3 Agosto 2007, n. 124 e nuove norme in favore delle vittime del terrorismo*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2007.

- expressing a non-binding preventive opinion on the draft regulations implementing the Security Services reform law;
- receiving from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers the six-monthly report on the activities of AISE and AISI, which contains an analysis of the situation and the dangers to security, as well as other relevant information including an indication of the essential reasons underlying the measures of the State secret.

The President of the Committee is elected from among the members belonging to the opposition parliamentary groups, by specific provision of the law, thus fulfilling the “*checks and balances functions*” typical of Italian parliamentary democracy. Since its establishment, the Presidents of the Committee have been: Claudio Scajola (Forza Italia), Francesco Rutelli (Democratic Party), Massimo D'Alema (Democratic Party), Giacomo Stucchi (Northern League), Lorenzo Guerini (Democratic Party), and Raffaele Volpi (Northern League), still in office. The Committee is made up of five Deputies and five Senators, appointed respectively by the President of the Chamber and the President of the Senate, in order to proportionally represent the main political forces that make up each Chamber of the Italian Parliament.

*Law no. 124/2007* was also born following the need to align the Italian intelligence apparatus to the new security context that in the first decade of the 2000s saw the United States, United Kingdom and Spain hit by jihadist terrorism. In just over a decade, while Italy has gone through difficult tests, its intelligence sector has shown an enviable elasticity and resilience, envied by its counterparts in other countries.<sup>270</sup> The Italian effort was aimed at centralizing the intelligence system, placing all the agencies under a single department, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, with the aim of ensuring perfect alignment between intelligence policies and practical activities. Despite the typical Italian political instability that produces frequent changes of the Executive, there is a tendency to promote a major continuity for this position due to its important character.<sup>271</sup> In this sense, the DIS emerges with a preponderant role, since it is responsible for coordinating the activities of AISE and AISI, once placed under the control of two different Ministries.

The organizational aspect and the approach to intelligence are closely interconnected: the first is fundamental and is the prerequisite for the functioning of any *modus operandi* employed by intelligence in counter-terrorism.<sup>272</sup> If we consider, for example, the French case, where six intelligence agencies are currently active, the efforts to coordinate such a complex system inevitably affect the effectiveness of their security activities, with particular reference to the internal perspective.

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<sup>270</sup> Alberto Castelvechi, *Intelligence, i nostri servizi segreti? Un'eccellenza nascosta*, on *Il Dubbio*, September 19, 2019.

<sup>271</sup> Stefano Polimeni, *Ten years later, the success of the Italian intelligence reform*, Aleph – Analisi strategiche, 2017.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidem*.

Also as regards the method, it is commonly argued that substantial differences exist across Europe. Italy differs greatly from other countries such as France, Belgium or the United Kingdom, where intelligence agencies are used to continue examining potential terrorists, filling many archives with numerous reports, documents and information before intervening. On the contrary, the Italian Secret Services have a more practical and direct approach and tend to clarify this “doubt” at the first sign of a probable threat. In doing so, they also meet the challenge of keeping the number of potential terrorists within a manageable range and, consequently, with the ability to monitor them as effectively as possible. However, again, this would not be possible without the simple, delineated and highly coordinated form of organization like the one chosen in 2007.

For the purposes of counter-terrorism, it is important to remember a renowned institutional body: the *Comitato di Analisi Strategica Antiterrorismo* (Counter-Terrorism Strategic Analysis Committee – “CASA”). It was established by the Ministry of the Interior at the end of 2003 in response to the suicide terrorist attack against the Italian Carabinieri station in Nassiriya, Iraq, on November 12, 2003, in which 18 Italian soldiers and 10 civilians died. Subsequently, it was officially formalized by the *Law Decree* of May 6, 2004.<sup>273</sup> With this regulatory intervention, the Committee goes to support the Crisis Unit of the Ministry of the Interior, i.e., its management department created for the management of terrorist emergencies on the national territory. It operates as a common platform in which the Italian Security Forces (Police, Prison Services, and Secret Services) share information about internal and external terrorist threats. The goal is to centralize information and intelligence from different sources and Security Forces to improve terrorism prevention activities, coordinate operations against groups or people suspected of being linked to jihadist movements and share “actionable” intelligence in relation to terrorist threats. Among its activities, CASA is responsible for updating the lists of Italian foreign terrorist fighters, defines the expulsion criteria for those deemed at risk, and suggests to the Government the level of counter-terrorism alert to be set. The CASA is chaired by the *Direttore Centrale della Polizia di Prevenzione della Polizia di Stato* (Central Director of the Prevention Police of the State Police), and brings together a Superior Officer of the Carabinieri, an Officer from the Information Department for the Security, an AISI officer and an AISE officer. The current President of the CASA is Lamberto Giannini. Sometimes, representatives of the Guardia di Finanza are also summoned to fight the financing of terrorist organizations and from the Department of Prison Administration, to monitor prisons, avoiding phenomena such as radicalization and proselytism. All its members cooperate with each other, both

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<sup>273</sup> Giuseppe Pisanu (Ministero dell’Interno), *Decreto Legge 6 Maggio 2004, Piano Nazionale per la gestione di eventi di natura terroristica*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2004, <http://leg15.camera.it/dati/leg15/lavori/documentiparlamentari/indiceetesti/033/001/00000001.pdf>.

at the state level and at the national level. CASA also collaborates with counterparts in allied foreign countries.

Overall, almost fifteen years later, the success of the entire Italian intelligence system is recognized both at home and abroad: coordination between agencies works, the organization-approach combination seems to be successful and the past memories of the inefficiencies of Italian Secret Services are far away. These positive results allow policy-makers to base future adaptations to the evolution of the international security scenario on a well-functioning system, as has happened in recent years with respect to counter-terrorism legislation. This condition is different in other countries where, however, they are still working to correct structural deficiencies.

## 4.2 – Islam in Italy and the Trends of Radicalization

Islam is the second most widespread religion in Italy after Christianity, mainly as a result of immigration from countries with a Muslim majority. In 2020, according to the annual report of the *Fondazione ISMU - Iniziative e Studi sulla Multiethnicità* (ISMU Foundation - Initiatives and Studies on Multi-Ethnicity), the number of Muslims residing in Italy amounted to almost 1.6 million, corresponding to 29.2% of the total foreign residents.<sup>274</sup> Religion is often the only common denominator of the Islamic communities in Italy, which differ internally for their ethnic and national diversity, unlike other European countries such as France and the United Kingdom. This is partly a consequence of the fact that Italy did not have such strong colonial “roots” as to be able to represent the geographical origin of migrants, as is the case in other countries. In fact, it is estimated that the majority of foreign Muslims residing in Italy come from Morocco (449,900 units), followed by Albania (205,300), Bangladesh (138,800), Pakistan (119,700), and Senegal (108,500).<sup>275</sup> According to an estimate made by the same institute, in 2016 among the Muslims residing in Italy there were also 900,000 native Italians, that is, people born abroad who acquired Italian citizenship, or Italian citizens converted to Islam.<sup>276</sup> From these estimates it is easy to understand how, in per capita terms, the Muslim population in Italy is significantly lower by about 2 million than in France, Germany and the United Kingdom.<sup>277</sup> In fact, Muslims in Italy are less than 3% of the Italian population.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Fondazione ISMU – Iniziative Studi sulla Multiethnicità, *Immigrati e religioni in Italia - Comunicato stampa 16.09.2020*, ISMU, 2020.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>276</sup> Alessio Menonna, *La presenza musulmana in Italia*, ISMU, 2016.

<sup>277</sup> Conrad Hackett, *5 Facts About the Muslim Population In Europe*, Pew Research Center, 2016.

<sup>278</sup> Alessio Menonna, *La presenza musulmana in Italia*, ISMU, 2016.

Furthermore, among the Muslim immigrants present in Italy, the Sunni component clearly prevails over the Shiite component: it is estimated that the total number of Shiites in Italy amounts to 15,450 units, that is 1.48% of the total number of resident Muslims.<sup>279</sup>

From the point of view of regional distribution, most of the Muslim population (64%) resides in Northern Italy, especially in Lombardy (379.189), Emilia-Romagna (219.794), and Veneto (186.677), where the possibility of finding work and of employment are higher than in the rest of the country.<sup>280</sup> The rest of the Muslim population is distributed in the Center (21%) especially in Tuscany (104,400) and Lazio (112,800), and to the South (15%), with Sicily in first place (61,400).<sup>281</sup> Since the beginning of the migratory phenomena in Italy in the 1980s, the problem has arisen of giving Muslims their own places of worship. Today in Italy there are ten official mosques (*masjid*), i.e., architectural structures equipped with spaces for the ablution process (*wudu*), large prayer rooms suitable for hosting groups of faithful during Friday prayers and other major celebrations of the calendar Islamic, and a tall minaret (*sawma'a*) which is meant to call the faithful for prayers (*adhan*):

- Omar Mosque in Catania (founded in 1980): it is the first mosque built in Italy after the end of the Arab domination in the Peninsula;
- Mosque of Segrate, near Milan (founded in 1988): it is historically the first mosque in Italy to be complete with dome and minaret;
- Palermo Mosque (founded in 1990);
- Rome Mosque (founded in 1995): it is the largest mosque in the West and the largest in Europe;
- Mercy Mosque in Catania (founded in 2012): it is the largest mosque in Southern Italy;
- Albenga Mosque (founded in 2013): it is the largest mosque in Liguria;
- Mohammed VI Mosque in Turin (founded in 2013): it is the largest mosque in Piedmont;
- Ravenna Mosque (founded in 2013): it is the second-largest mosque in Italy, after that of Rome;
- Colle Val d'Elsa Mosque, in the province of Siena (founded in 2013): it is the largest mosque in Tuscany;

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<sup>279</sup> Andrea Spreafico, *La presenza islamica in Italia*, on *Instrumenta*, Scuola Superiore dell'Amministrazione dell'Interno (SSAI), Vol. 9, No. 25, 2005, pp. 173-243.

<sup>280</sup> Fabrizio Ciocca, *Musulmani in Italia. Impatti urbani e sociali delle comunità islamiche*, Meltemi, Roma, 2018.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibidem*.

- Forlì Mosque (founded in 2017): it is the second largest mosque in Emilia-Romagna.

The presence of mosques in the regions where they are present indicates the concentration of the Muslim population within their territory. In addition to these official mosques, there are also a multitude of private spaces, rooms, garages, and abandoned warehouses, used as places of worship, which are generally called *muşalla*. The DIS estimates that there are about 774 of these places of worship on the national territory, including places not strictly aimed at religious functions, such as all spaces designed for cultural events, recreational meetings, and the sale of halal products.<sup>282</sup> Consequently, mosques and *muşalla*, located mainly in the main cities and urban areas, provide the opportunity to meet other people with common ethnic-religious roots, and to create moments of social aggregation.

Islam in Italy does not have a unitary institution of representation towards the State. Numerous associations claim the representation of the interests of Muslims residing in Italy. Among these, the *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia* (Union of Islamic Communities of Italy – “UCOII”) and the *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (Italian Islamic Religious Community – “Co.Re.Is”) stand out for their visibility. The UCOII, since its foundation in Ancona (in the Marche) in 1990, has been active in the Italian political scene, claiming to be the first representative association of the Islamic community. About 200 *muşalla* refer to it. Despite its ideological proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood, as it supported the ex-President of Egypt Mohamed Morsi and the Ennahdha Movement (Renaissance Party) in Tunisia, the association cannot simply be considered as the Italian branch of the Islamist movement.<sup>283</sup> Like the followers of Hasan Al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) and Sayyid Qutb (ideologue of the movement), the UCOII shares the purpose of a bottom-up approach to achieve the Islamization of society. At the same time, its members consider respect for Islamic morality as a duty that does not conflict with integration into the host society. On the contrary, Co.Re.Is, founded in Milan in 1993, acts on a different level since it places more emphasis on the spiritual and religious life of its adherents rather than addressing issues of public morality.<sup>284</sup> This is in line with the diverse nature of its membership, made up mainly of Italian converts, who could potentially play a mediating role between Muslim communities and the Italian government. Co.Re.Is adopts a top-down approach with regard to the legitimation of Islamic communities, following a more “institutional” path of representation of the national *umma*.

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<sup>282</sup> Ugo Gaudino, *Radicalization and De-Radicalization of Italian Muslims*, Mediterranean Insecurity, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>283</sup> Maria Bombardieri, *Mappatura dell'associazionismo islamico in Italia*, in Antonio Angelucci, Maria Bombardieri, Davide Tacchini, *Islam e integrazione in Italia*, Marsilio, Venezia, 2014.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibidem*.

One of the major consequences of the lack of a unitary association form of representation of Muslim communities in Italy is the absence of official recognition of Islam by the Italian State. Art. 8 of the Italian Constitution, in fact, states that<sup>285</sup>: «All religious confessions are equally free before the law. Religious denominations other than Catholic have the right to organize themselves according to their own statutes, as they do not conflict with the Italian legal system. Their relations with the State are regulated by law on the base of agreements with the relevant representatives». The official recognition of a religion by the Italian State must therefore be approved by the President of the Republic, at the request of the Minister of the Interior, through a special agreement signed by both the requesting religious community and the Government. A first attempt to stipulate an agreement took place in 2000, with the establishment of the Islamic Council of Italy, with the aim of obtaining recognition by the Italian State of Sunni Islam in the nation. The UCOII, the World Muslim League, and the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy (CICI, based in the Mosque of Rome) took part in this association, despite the opposition of its Moroccan component. The association did not last long, due to the conflicts between the pro-Saudi component and the component close to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, at present, it exists only formally.<sup>286</sup> In 2005, the then Minister of the Interior Giuseppe Pisanu, appointed a Consulta for Italian Islam (the so-called Islamic Consulta), composed of 16 members, of which 8 Italian citizens, including exponents of culture and secular Muslim associations, and the leaders of religious associations. It includes the UCOII, the Co.Re.Is, the Muslim World League, and the Islamic Union in the West (UIO), supported by Libya, while the Shiite component is represented by the Italian Ishmaelite Community. The goal of the Italian Islamic community is to have a harmonious and frequent dialogue with the Italian government. The Consulta has no real power to make any binding decisions but exists exclusively as a consultative platform for Islamic communities. It was further reformed under the Ministry of the Interior chaired by Roberto Maroni in 2010 (in the Berlusconi III Government) with the name of *Comitato per l'Islam italiano* (Committee for Italian Islam), and under the Ministry of the Interior chaired by Angelino Alfano in 2016 (in the Renzi Government) with the name *Consiglio per le relazioni con l'Islam* (Council for Relations with Islam). The way for the official recognition of Islam by the Italian State therefore seems to be hindered by internal dissent from the Italian Islamic communities.

In Italy, the radicalization of young Muslims and the tendency to manifest more extremist forms of religious faith is not as significant a problem as it is in other European countries. In fact, there are fewer Islamist extremists dangerous for public safety on Italian soil in absolute terms compared to

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<sup>285</sup> Assemblea Costituente della Repubblica Italiana, Art. 8 (*Principi fondamentali*), *Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 1948.

<sup>286</sup> Massimo Introvigne, Pierluigi Zoccatelli, CESNUR (Centro studi sulle nuove religioni), *Le religioni in Italia*, Elledici, 2006.

France, Germany or Belgium, as well as a smaller number of Islamic extremists as a percentage of the Italian Muslim population compared to these countries.<sup>287</sup> Italy seems to be the only exception in the Western European panorama to date because it has not suffered any Islamic attacks of significant proportions compared to attacks suffered in other European countries and in North America, and it appears to be relatively immune from overt manifestations of Islamic extremism. According to some experts, this is due to a number of factors.

First of all, even if it is difficult to quantify and compare the levels of a subjective concept such as “integration”, the factors that have contributed to a sense of alienation of the Muslim population in other European countries seem to be much less present in Italy. In other European countries, the second and third generation Muslim population is much larger, and the children and grandchildren of immigrants tend to have higher expectations than those who arrived first in the host country, but the lack of economic opportunities and perceived discrimination in the various sectors of social life has meant that these expectations have often remained unfulfilled and have created a widespread feeling of frustration and alienation from the national community. On the contrary, the Italian Muslim population is still largely of the first generation, and still has the capacity to assert their social position and living conditions, and therefore be less vulnerable to dynamics such as alienation, crisis of identity, and lack of a life purpose, which can make individuals susceptible to the phenomenon of radicalization.<sup>288</sup>

Secondly, in Italy, especially outside the major urban centers, there is an important micro-culture of inclusion.<sup>289</sup> This is linked to the economic structure of Italy, which emerged following the collapse of large industry, which ensured that social relations were strongly centered on personal contacts and community activities. In fact, 99% of the Italian business panorama is represented by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), spread throughout Italy and not only near large urban centers, of which 95% employs less than ten workers for productive activity.<sup>290</sup> Furthermore, in the postwar years, and in the context of rapid industrial expansion and economic boom, Italy did not rely on foreign workers (a policy adopted by other countries such as Germany and Belgium), but witnessed a massive wave migration from the more agricultural South of the country to the more industrialized North. As a result, when immigration from Muslim-majority countries to Italy began in the mid-1970s, these factors meant that immigrant workers largely ended up settling in small urban neighborhoods or provincial towns, avoiding the ghettoization of the larger urban centers. Although

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<sup>287</sup> Michele Groppi, *The Terror Threat to Italy: How Italian Exceptionalism is Rapidly Diminishing*, on *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 10, No. 5, 2017.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>289</sup> Dario Cristiani, *How Long Will Italy Weather Europe's Rising Terror Threat?*, on *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 20, 2017.

<sup>290</sup> Ufficio Studi Confcommercio, *Le piccole e medie imprese in Italia*, Confcommercio, 2009.



in Italy there are some dangerous suburban areas in the outskirts of cities (such as Tor Bella Monaca and Tor Sapienza in Rome, Lambrate and Quarto Oggiaro in Milan, Secondigliano and Scampia in Naples, etc.), we have not witnessed the development of urban centers of radicalization such as the suburbs of Paris such as Saint-Denis, Molenbeek in Brussels, or the boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets in London, although there are worrying signs that Italy is also moving in this direction.

Most researchers agree that in most cases the phenomenon of radicalization occurs as a consequence of the intersection of “a favorable environment and a personal trajectory”, although they continue to search for a definitive model that can explain the process of radicalization.<sup>291</sup> Cultural and social narratives focusing on divisions, conflicts and fears are likely to create an environment conducive to radicalization, fostering division and alienation. Although in some cases Italian cities are administered by local right-wing parties or tend to be xenophobic in their politics, local relations are based on a less conflictual and more nuanced micro-culture. Residents often know each other, sometimes work together and often interact with neighbors. Generally, they have greater mutual exposure, which is in stark contrast to the segregation that has developed in some European cities over the past thirty years. According to some statistics, most Muslims in Italy say they look favorably on the country. According to a survey carried out by researcher Michele Groppi, a PhD student of the Defense Studies program at King’s College in London and an expert on Islamic radicalization, 81% of Italian Muslims say they love Italy and its culture.<sup>292</sup> In the representative sample of Italian Muslims interviewed, the unemployment rate amounts to 8%, which is lower than the country’s overall unemployment rate, which instead amounts to 12%. In contrast, British Muslims have the highest levels of unemployment among all religious and ethnic groups in the United Kingdom (12.8% versus 5.4% of the general population).<sup>293</sup> These numbers are just some of the indicators that show how Italian Muslims are more integrated into the Italian social tissue than their European counterparts. Yet, there is no lack of countertendency situations, and Italy is not entirely exempt from the radar and networks of global jihadism.

First of all, it must be borne in mind that the evolution of the jihadist threat in Italy has been moving hand in hand with the migratory phenomenon since the early 1990s, when various Salafist groups managed to establish their networks within the suburbs of the main Italian cities, exploiting the geostrategic position of Italy, *de-facto* crossroads within the Mediterranean basin. In the 1990s,

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<sup>291</sup> Rogelio Alonso Pascual, Tore Bjørgo, Donatella Della Porta, Rik Coolsaet, *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism. A concise Report prepared by the European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2008.

<sup>292</sup> Michele Groppi, *Islamist Radicalization in Italy: Myth or Nightmare? An empirical analysis of the Italian case study*, on *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2020, pp. 117-135.

<sup>293</sup> The Women and Equalities Committee, *Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK*, The United Kingdom Parliament, 2016.

Milan became the main hotbed of clandestine cell activities composed of individuals from North Africa, which were constantly monitored and eventually dismantled in the early 2000s.<sup>294</sup> These cells were mainly affiliated with Al-Jamaat Al-Islamiya, an Egyptian Islamist militant movement, whose members moved to Italy after the repression by the Hosni Mubarak regime in the 1980s and 1990s. They established their headquarters in the mosque (actually, muşalla) on Viale Jenner and in the Islamic cultural center on Via Quaranta in Milan, soon establishing links with key figures of Al-Qaeda, such as Ayman Al-Zawahiri. The US Treasury Department described Milan as the “main station of Al-Qaeda’s operations in Europe”.<sup>295</sup> Thus, the Lombard capital soon became an important center of radicalization and recruitment for the mujahideen leaving for the theaters of Islamic jihad, such as Bosnia during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the network of muşalla spread throughout Lombardy (Como, Gallarate, Varese, and Cremona) acquired a strategic centrality for the logistical support of international jihadist networks (acquisition of counterfeit and high-quality identity cards, passports, and visas, and purchase of weapons and explosive materials) and for the preparation of terrorist attacks. Soon, Italy also became a base of operations for other terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda itself, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Ansar Al-Islam, and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA).<sup>296</sup> In addition to Milan, other cities (such as Turin, Bologna and Naples) were then gradually used as strategic bases for the recruitment of volunteers and for the organization of terrorist attacks all over the world.<sup>297</sup> The Italian bases have mostly served as centers of fundraising activities, counterfeiting of documents, arms and drug trafficking, and the facilitation of illegal immigration.

While the jihadist networks present in Italy before 9/11 were mainly composed of individuals who had radicalized themselves before moving to Italy, the jihadist networks established between the 2000s and 2010s were filled with individuals radicalized inside Italy.<sup>298</sup> As elsewhere in Europe, even in Italy individuals and groups of extremists gathered around figures of charismatic radical preachers who played an active role in recruiting individuals willing to travel to the theaters of global jihad, to join the ranks of the Islamic State, and to carry out terrorist activities in its name. However, the Italian clusters are smaller and more localized than their peers in the rest of Europe. In July 2007, a jihadist cell affiliated with Al-Qaeda headed by the muşalla of Ponte Felcino, near Perugia (Umbria) was

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<sup>294</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia: nascita, sviluppo e dinamiche di radicalizzazione*, ISPI - Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milano, 2014.

<sup>295</sup> David S. Hilzenrath, John Mintz, *More Assets on Hold in Anti-Terror Effort; 39 Parties Added to List of Al-Qaeda Supporters*, on *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2001.

<sup>296</sup> Michele Groppi, *The Terror Threat to Italy: How Italian Exceptionalism is Rapidly Diminishing*, on *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 10, No. 5, 2017.

<sup>297</sup> Ugo Gaudino, *Radicalization and De-Radicalization of Italian Muslims*, Mediterranean Insecurity, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>298</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, *The Evolution of Jihadism in Italy: Rise in Homegrown Radicals*, on *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 6, No. 11, 2013.

dismantled, and the imam of the mosque, the Moroccan Mostapha El Korchi was arrested together with some of his closest collaborators.<sup>299</sup> Investigations ascertained that the abusive mosque was a place of proselytism and training, and chemical substances were confiscated that were likely to be used in a future attack, in Italy or abroad. After six years of imprisonment for international recruitment aimed at terrorism, in 2012, El Korchi was expelled from Italy and repatriated to Morocco. Subsequently, other small groups of extremists were detected especially between Lombardy and Veneto, making this area probably the epicenter of jihadist activity in Italy. In July 2014, the Australian imam of Italian origin Robert “Musa” Cerantonio, an influential preacher in the places of worship between Brescia and Bergamo, in Lombardy, and promoter of a radical Islam, was arrested in the Philippines on charges of terrorism and later extradited to Australia. He had previously posted online a photo of himself waving the ISIS flag in front of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, stating: «*If Allah wills, we will destroy the Vatican*».<sup>300</sup> In Veneto, however, the radical Bosnian preacher Bilal “Cheb” Bosnić managed to create a small cluster in support of the IS. He had previously carried out recruiting activities also in Pordenone (Friuli-Venezia Giulia), and in Cremona and Bergamo (Lombardy). In an interview granted to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* in August 2014, Bosnić confirmed the presence of Italian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq and declared that the Caliphate had a strategic and ideological interest in wanting to recruit fighters in Italy.<sup>301</sup> Subsequently, Bosnić was arrested in Bosnia and Herzegovina in September 2014 in the so-called “Operation Damascus” on charges of inciting, recruiting and organizing terrorist activities on behalf of IS.<sup>302</sup>

Lombardy has been indicated by the Italian authorities as the first region of origin of Italian foreign fighters, which more than any other region serves as a recruiting center for IS. Despite the dismantling in the 2000s of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated cells, and particularly those gravitating around the mosque in Viale Jenner and the Islamic Community Fajr in Via Quaranta in Milan, it is believed that Lombardy has provided more than one third of ISIS foreign fighters from Italy.<sup>303</sup> In addition to Milan, four other clusters have been identified in the region, although they are not believed to be still active<sup>304</sup>:

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<sup>299</sup> *La Repubblica*, *Al-Qaeda, a Perugia una “scuola del terrore”*. Amato: “Polizia ha sventato rischi concreti”, on *La Repubblica*, July 21, 2007.

<sup>300</sup> Armando Di Landro, *L’imam jihadista italo-australiano. Sermoni anche a Bergamo e Brescia*, on *Corriere della Sera – Bergamo*, January 20, 2015.

<sup>301</sup> Giuliano Foschini, Giuliano Balestreri, *Bilal Bosnić: “Ci sono italiani nell’IS, conquisteremo il Vaticano”*, on *La Repubblica*, August 28, 2014.

<sup>302</sup> Giuliano Foschini, Fabio Tonacci, *Bosnia, arrestato Bosnić: “Reclutava in Italia per conto dell’IS”*, on *La Repubblica*, September 5, 2014.

<sup>303</sup> Alessandro Bartolini, *Reclutatori Isis, combattenti e aspiranti kamikaze: il grande romanzo nero del jihad è in Lombardia*, on *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, January 4, 2017.

<sup>304</sup> Michele Groppi, *The Terror Threat to Italy: How Italian Exceptionalism is Rapidly Diminishing*, on *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 10, No. 5, 2017.

1. **Cologno Monzese cluster:** it was made up of about a dozen Syrian citizens who had become radicalized following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. The group was active in perpetrating acts of intimidation against Syrian Christians in Italy and organizing the departure of its members to Syria to join the Free Syrian Army in 2012 and then to Jabhat Al-Nusra in 2013, thus forming the so-called “Battalion of Suleiman”. The leader of the group was filmed executing prisoners in Syria, while those who remained in Italy were charged with recruiting fighters.
2. **Inzago cluster (province of Milan):** gravitated around the figure of an Italian woman converted to radical Islam, Maria Giulia “Fatima” Sergio, her husband of Albanian origin Aldo Kobuzi, and their families. After converting to Islam in 2008 and having prompted her family to convert, Fatima left for Syria with her husband in 2014. During her time in the Caliphate, she was allegedly trained to use firearms, and put heavy pressure on members of her family to move to Syria. The Sergio and Kobuzi families, respectively from Milan and Grosseto (Tuscany), were preparing for the departure to reach Syria when they were arrested in July 2015.
3. **Varese-Lecco cluster:** it was made up of five Moroccan citizens and a converted Italian woman, Alice “Aisha” Brignoli. After her radicalization, Brignoli and her husband, Mohamed Koraichi, left for Syria with their three children. The couple’s relatives and friends were arrested before they also could flee. In April 2016, one of its members, Abderahhim Moutaharrik, was instructed by a WhatsApp audio message sent by an IS “sheikh” on how to strike Italy. According to the Italian authorities, the chosen target was the Vatican. In the same month, Moutaharrik was arrested and sentenced to six years in prison in February 2017. This appears to be the first case known to the Italian authorities in which ISIS has attempted to direct an attack in Italy on a cryptography application.
4. **Brescia cluster:** it was made up of four Kosovar citizens led by Samet Ishmiti, a worker from Brescia who radicalized online in 2011. Although it is not known that the group had any real intentions to attack Italy, some photos showed its members with arms in their hands while they stated: «*Francis will be the last Pope*». What worried the Italian authorities most were the personal and proven relationships of the members of the group with Lavdrim Muhaxheri, nicknamed “the Balkans’ Butcher”, one of the cruelest commanders of the IS and leader of the Balkan brigade in Syria.

With reference to foreign fighters, a significant fact is that the total number of people who left Italy to join the Islamic State amounts to 130 people, while the number of fighters who left France is

recorded at around 3,000.<sup>305</sup> Of these, only 24 individuals were Italian citizens, and 11 were born in Italy. These data are indicative of how radicalization is a marginal phenomenon in Italy, and Italian Muslims are better integrated into Italian society than their peers in France and the rest of European countries. Before the proclamation of the Islamic Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, the few dozen foreign fighters left Italy to go to fight in the theaters of global jihad such as the Balkans in the 1990s and in Iraq after the US invasion of 2003, and they had radicalized in mosques and Islamic cultural centers (mainly in Milan) and had links with international actors. On the contrary, the Italian foreign fighters who left to join the IS are not necessarily mosque-goers, but their radicalization has mainly occurred online and their links with international actors have been established through virtual communities.<sup>306</sup> In addition to the aforementioned cases connected to the Lombard clusters, we mention the cases of Giuliano “Ibrahim” Delnevo, 24-year-old Genoese and the first Italian foreign fighter who died in Syria in 2013, Anas El-Abboubi, born and raised near Brescia, creator of the Italian branch of “Sharia4”, arrested and then released, and fled to Syria in 2013, and Lara “Khadija” Bombonati, from Piedmont, belonging to a cell with ties in Italy and Europe, left for Syria with her husband Giovanni “Muhammad” Cascio to join an Islamic militia, to then return to Italy and be arrested for activities aimed at terrorism in June 2017.

Therefore, it can be said that even if the Muslim communities in Italy are better integrated than the Muslim communities in other European countries due to some structural endogenous factors of Italian society, the jihadist networks do not exclude Italy from their operational bases, and the phenomena of radicalization, so far manifested by few individuals, could increase as the second and third generation Muslim population grows in Italy.

### **4.3 – Why no Jihadist Attacks occurred in Italy?**

Italy is the only country not to have been hit by Islamic terrorism, at least until today. In the face of the escalation of jihadist violence across Europe, especially after the 2015 Paris attacks, the media, the politicians and the civilian population were immediately concerned about the possibility of an imminent attack in Italy, object of threats from ISIS for several times. This, however, has not yet

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<sup>305</sup> Francesco Marone, Lorenzo Vidino, *Destination Jihad: Italy's Foreign Fighters*, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 2019.

<sup>306</sup> Michele Groppi, *The Terror Threat to Italy: How Italian Exceptionalism is Rapidly Diminishing*, on *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 10, No. 5, 2017.

happened. In this sense, Italy represents a happy exception in the jihadist landscape in the West, since it is the only Western country that has not really suffered a successful large-scale attack.

It is known that the alert of jihadist terrorism is still high throughout Europe. The threat appears to be very serious and real, as evidenced by several terrorist attacks that occurred between 2015 and 2019 in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK. As for Italy, two elements must be taken into consideration. In the first place, it is true that Italy has managed to appear immune from successful attacks of Islamic origin, but the security agencies and the law enforcement have detected a strong presence on the Italian territory of terrorist activities of various kinds, from mere logistical support to actual attack attempts. Secondly, Italy remains a country at risk of violent radicalization, a risk that is constantly evolving. However, to date its success in the field of counter-terrorism is probably due to the combination of a long and considerable experience in this field, its legislation on the subject, the crucial role of the CASA, and some social factors different from other European countries.

While Al-Qaeda and its affiliated cells viewed Italy primarily as a logistic platform and used it as a base to collect information and resources for terrorist operations to be perpetrated abroad, terrorist threats to Italy have become explicit and real with the birth of the IS.<sup>307</sup> ISIS has directly threatened Italy more frequently than other jihadist terrorist organizations today or in the past. While it is true that Osama Bin Laden also threatened retaliation against US allies in the War on Terror between 2002 and 2003, with Italy included in the list of countries mentioned, Italian public opinion has proved more sensitive to the threats launched to their country by ISIS, both for the use of the organization's rhetoric and effective media campaign, and in the wake of the deadly ISIS-branded attacks in Europe where compatriots have also died. One explanation of the reason why Italy is cited so many times as the target of ISIS propaganda is that the term "Rumiyah" (i.e., "Rome") was used by the group as a generic term to indicate Western Christianity by which is at war. It is also the name, as already mentioned, of his first online magazine. Although not all threats directed towards Rome have been used to explicitly indicate Italy, they are sufficient to increase the perceived threat level of the country. "Rumiyah" is the term that refers to the prophecy of the Prophet Mohammed and that in Islamic eschatology indicates the conquest of Rome by the Islamic Army at the End of times.

In this context, threats against the Homeland of Christianity serve as a motivating and reinforcing slogan for IS followers and sympathizers throughout the world. The growing number of ISIS attacks on Christians in conquered territories and around the world and some past plans directed against the Vatican suggest that Rome will continue to be a target in the group's sight. The Italian

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<sup>307</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, *Il jihadismo autoctono in Italia: nascita, sviluppo e dinamiche di radicalizzazione*, ISPI - Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milan, 2014.

capital has been cited several times by the figures at the top of the IS. In July 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released an audio message saying to his followers: «*You will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills*». <sup>308</sup> In September of the same year, after the United States launched airstrikes in Syria, the then spokesman for Al-Baghdadi, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani declared in an audio recording: «*With the Allah's permission, we will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is His promise to us*». <sup>309</sup> Similarly, in February 2015, ISIS released a video of the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts on a beach in Libya. One of the fighters immediately shouted to the camera: «*We are here, South of Rome. Soon we will conquer Rome with God's will*». <sup>310</sup> These intimations were undoubtedly also aimed at putting pressure on Italy not to deepen its involvement in Libya too much. Italy has so far only been involved in logistical support to the anti-IS forces. Also in 2015, a video with executions and beheadings by some ISIS militiamen was specially subtitled in Italian and declared: «*You have declared war on me with the misbelieving alliance... the more you will fight, the more you will suffer!*». <sup>311</sup> One of the most explicit threats was made in April 2016 when a fighter, in an Islamic State video showing some executions that took place shortly before, declares in English: «*If it was Paris yesterday, and today Brussels, only Allah knows where it will be tomorrow. Maybe it will be in London or Berlin or Rome*». <sup>312</sup>

In addition to the constant and repeated threats, the exceptionality of the Italian case seems to be even more amazing if we consider that the country is considered the cradle of Western civilization, hosts the Vatican State (world capital of Christianity), is a powerful member country of the European Union and NATO, is a close ally of the United States, and has participated (at least from a logistical point of view) in global coalitions against both the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and against IS. All these factors should have made Italy an appetizing target for global jihad, and at the top of Al-Qaeda's and ISIS's list of targets to hit. According to the Italian researcher Nicolò Scremin there are six reasons that explain the exceptional nature of Italy, which in part summarize what has already been said <sup>313</sup>:

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<sup>308</sup> SITE Intelligence Group, *Islamic State Leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Encourages Emigration, Worldwide Action*, on *SITE Intelligence Group*, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014.

<sup>309</sup> SITE Intelligence Group, *IS Spokesman Rallies Fighters Against US-Led Coalition, Threatens Enemy and Calls Individual Muslims to Launch Attacks*, on *SITE Intelligence Group*, September 21, 2014.

<sup>310</sup> Adam Taylor, *The Islamic State threatens to come to Rome; Italians respond with travel advice*, on *The Washington Post*, February 20, 2015.

<sup>311</sup> Giordano Stabile, *Nuove minacce all'Italia in un video dell'ISIS*, on *La Stampa*, April 14, 2015.

<sup>312</sup> Reuters Staff, *Islamic State hints at attacks in London, Berlin and Rome*, on *Reuters*, April 5, 2016.

<sup>313</sup> Nicolò Scremin, *Assessing Assumed Italian Exceptionalism Vis-à-Vis Jihadi Terrorism*, on *Small Wars Journal*, March 28, 2018.

1. **Demography.** Large-scale Muslim immigration to Italy only began in the late 1980s, decades later than in other European realities. Therefore, not only does Italy host fewer Muslims in absolute or per capita terms, but it also explains why Italian foreign fighters (130) are fewer than those of France (1,900), Germany and the United Kingdom (few less than 1,000 each) and Belgium (over 500).<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, while the latter countries have larger numbers of second and third generation immigrants who are potentially more at risk of radicalization, Italy mainly hosts first generation immigrants who, for the moment, have not carried out attacks *in loco*.
2. **Italy is not on the top-list of global jihad targets.** While it is true that Italy has played a significant role in ISIS propaganda and has received threats several times from various terrorist groups, Rome does not seem to be an attractive target more than London, Paris and Brussels are. Apart from some controversial theories that claim that Italian Mafias collaborate with jihadist groups and act as a deterrent to terrorist attacks<sup>315</sup>, Italian exceptionalism could be the result of a specific will by Al-Qaeda and ISIS, who choose to exploit Italy as an operational-logistic base to recruit fighters and gather information, rather than making it the target of attacks. Italy has also served as a landing place for some terrorists disguised as refugees.
3. **Efficiency of the counter-terrorism apparatus.** At the internal operational level, the response from the security agencies was generally efficient in countering terrorism. It is believed that the Italian experience in the years of struggle against left and right-wing terrorism (the so-called “Years of Lead”) and against organized crime (especially during the 1992-1993 massacre season in the fight against the Sicilian Mafia “Cosa Nostra”) have guaranteed to the police a “wealth” in terms of experience in knowing how to monitor and supervise potential terrorists. Over time, the Italian authorities have gradually developed a capillary structure also in the territory, which allows greater control and favors the collection of information.

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<sup>314</sup> Francesco Marone, Lorenzo Vidino, *Destination Jihad: Italy's Foreign Fighters*, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 2019.

<sup>315</sup> Catherine Edwards, *Could Mafia keep Isis out of Italy? Maybe, but...*, on *The Local Italy*, November 19, 2015.



- 4. Solid counter-terrorism legislation.** Art. 270-quinquies of the *Italian Penal Code*<sup>316</sup>, expanding the sphere of action of Art. 270-bis of the same code<sup>317</sup>, allows to prosecute the people who actively and/or marginally participate (training and various forms of support, even in the virtual space) in any activity related to terrorism. The 2005 reform of Art. 270 allows the Italian authorities to intervene at the very early stages of the manifestation of activities aimed at terrorism or in the radicalization process, thus preemptively punishing the behaviors that precede and are functional to carry out terrorist attacks. As a result, Italian Police officers can conduct lengthy surveillance operations, preemptive raids, and even preemptive expulsions of suspected foreign terrorists.
- 5. Absence of urban ghettos.** In Italy, large poor suburbs outside the big cities are almost completely absent. Unlike France, Belgium and the United Kingdom, where a large part of the Muslim population often lives in disadvantaged neighborhoods plagued by petty crime, poverty, and jihadist influences that are easy to fall victim to, the “slums” ghettoized by Italian Muslims must still emerge. The Italian suburbs are less populous and ethnically more heterogeneous, where Muslim citizens are equal to only 7% of the local population.<sup>318</sup> Although Italian Muslims have mostly low-income jobs, the average unemployment rate in Italian Muslim neighborhoods is less than 10%, while in the European peripheries it is around 40%. Considering these data, it can therefore be argued that, at present, the best urban and social conditions in which Italian Muslims live manage for the moment to contain potential feelings of frustration that lead to radicalization and terrorism.
- 6. Marginal involvement of Italy in the Middle East.** Although Italy has provided training and logistical assistance to several local forces in Iraq and Libya, it has never actively participated in airstrikes as did the United States, France and the United Kingdom. This could have

<sup>316</sup> Codice penale italiano, Art. 270-quinquies (*Addestramento ad attività con finalità di terrorismo anche internazionale*), introduced by the Artt. 10 e 15 della Legge 31 Luglio 2005, no. 155, Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 27 Luglio 2005, no. 144, recante misure urgenti per il contrasto del terrorismo internazionale, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2005, [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=3&art.idGruppo=21&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=030U1398&art.idArticolo=270&art.idSottoArticolo=2&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1930-10-26&art.progressivo=0](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=3&art.idGruppo=21&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=030U1398&art.idArticolo=270&art.idSottoArticolo=2&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1930-10-26&art.progressivo=0).

<sup>317</sup> Codice penale italiano, Art. 270-bis (*Associazioni con finalità di terrorismo anche internazionale o di evasione dell'ordine democratico*), introduced by the Legge 15 Dicembre 2001, no. 438, Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 18 Ottobre 2001, no. 374, recante disposizioni urgenti per contrastare il terrorismo internazionale, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2005, [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=1&art.idGruppo=21&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=030U1398&art.idArticolo=270&art.idSottoArticolo=5&art.idSottoArticolo1=20&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1930-10-26&art.progressivo=0](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=1&art.idGruppo=21&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=030U1398&art.idArticolo=270&art.idSottoArticolo=5&art.idSottoArticolo1=20&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1930-10-26&art.progressivo=0).

<sup>318</sup> Michele Groppi, *Da noi nessuna Moleenbeek ma il futuro non è garantito*, on *Limes: Indagine sulle periferie*, No. 4, 2016, p. 2.

positively influenced the attitude of most Muslim communities in the world towards Italy, as well as having contributed to making the nation an unattractive target from a strategic point of view, and therefore, less desirable than others. According to Michele Groppi, “indignation for the Western foreign policy” is not a determining factor that pushes the Italian Muslim community to justify religiously motivated violence.<sup>319</sup>

In a recent study conducted by Italian researchers Andrea Beccaro and Stefano Bonino on the exceptional nature of the Italian case, the reasons that led to the success of Italian intelligence in the fight against Islamic terrorism are also explored<sup>320</sup>:

- 1. The expulsions proved effective.** The administrative expulsions of foreign citizens suspected of being involved in terrorist activities have become a milestone in Italy’s counter-terrorism strategy, and probably offer a partial explanation of why the jihadists have been unsuccessful in hitting Italy. *Law no. 144/2005*, in fact, provides that the Ministry of the Interior has the power to expel anyone deemed a threat to Italian national security.<sup>321</sup> Consequently, not only the Italian Security Forces can conduct long surveillance operations, preventive raids and expulsions of suspected foreign terrorists thanks to *Law no. 155/2005*, but they can also repatriate those they consider a terrorist by intervening from the very early stages of the radicalization process, punishing potentially dangerous behavior in advance.<sup>322</sup> The same law allows preventive wiretapping in the context of counter-terrorism investigations. Since 2015, Italy has expelled and repatriated about 400 people to their country of origin. Unlike what happens in France, Belgium and Great Britain, where there are a large number of homegrown terrorists, in Italy this procedure is particularly effective because most of the individuals that the Security Forces identify as possible threats are not Italian citizens (not yet!). This approach appeared controversial right from the start because it allows the immediate implementation of the measure avoiding right process to the person to be repatriated, but it seems to have been effective in preventing radicalized individuals from proselytizing and hitting Italy.

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<sup>319</sup> Michele Groppi, *An Empirical Analysis of Causes of Islamist Radicalisation: Italian Case Study*, on *Perspective On Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2017, p. 68-76.

<sup>320</sup> Andrea Beccaro, Stefano Bonino, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Italian Exceptionalism and Its Limits*, on *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2018, pp. 1-18.

<sup>321</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Legge 27 Luglio 2005, no. 144, Misure urgenti per il contrasto del terrorismo internazionale*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2005, [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2005-08-01&atto.codiceRedazionale=05A07885&elenco30giorni=false](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2005-08-01&atto.codiceRedazionale=05A07885&elenco30giorni=false).

<sup>322</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Legge 31 Luglio 2005, no. 155, Misure urgenti per il contrasto del terrorismo internazionale*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2005, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2005/08/01/005G0179/sg>.

- 2. Italy has established a highly centralized collaboration.** In order to centralize information and intelligence from different sources and Security Forces, improve activities to prevent and counter terrorism, and coordinate operations against groups or persons suspected of being connected to terrorist organizations, the Ministry of the Interior has founded the aforementioned *Comitato di Analisi Strategica Antiterrorismo* (Counter-Terrorism Strategic Analysis Committee - “CASA”), aiming precisely at countering international terrorism. Since the CASA is a platform on which it is possible to share information from different sources, it is not only able to coordinate different operations conducted by different Security Forces, but it can also prevent overlaps, making the counter-terrorism effort more efficient and effective. Furthermore, CASA deals with individuals suspected of being members of terrorist organizations, even when such people travel abroad. Since modern terrorism is a complex phenomenon, it very often overlaps with organized crime (especially when it comes to ISIS or AQIM, because both use illegal trafficking to finance themselves). For this reason, CASA works closely with the *Comitato di Sicurezza Finanziaria* (Financial Security Committee – “CFS”), an agency that has the task of monitoring the functioning of the prevention system and the sanctions for the financing of terrorism and money laundering. The CASA is the real flagship of Italian counter-terrorism, so much so that the Italian Government aims to promote the model abroad, and in May 2019 it presented it to 30 different Security Services in other countries.<sup>323</sup>
- 3. The Italian Security Forces have decades of experience.** Italy has a long history in the fight against both national and international terrorism. During the so-called “Years of Lead”, a period of social and political turbulence that lasted from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, many terrorist organizations, both right- and left-wing, were responsible for various attacks. The *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades – “BR”), the most infamous of the leftist organizations, were responsible for numerous violent attacks, including murders, kidnappings and robberies. Although the group was dismembered by the Italian Security Forces in the 1980s, new cells appeared in the late 1990s and launched new attacks. With regard to international terrorism, Italy suffered bloody attacks in the 1970s and 1980s, by organizations such as the Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims (ROSM), which claimed responsibility for the attack at the Café de Paris in Via Veneto in Rome, and the Japanese Red Army (JRA), which attacked the United Service Organizations, a recreational club for US military in the center of Naples. As the former State Police officer and Undersecretary of the Ministry of the

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<sup>323</sup> Andrea Beccaro, Stefano Bonino, *Why has Italy avoided jihadist terrorist attacks? Our research helps explain.*, on *The Washington Post*, December 24, 2019.

Interior for the Monti Government Carlo De Stefano argues, although it is difficult to compare different phenomena (i.e., terrorism in the Years of Lead with contemporary terrorism), the Italian experience differs from that of other European countries. While both France (with *Action Directe*) and Germany (with the *Rote Armee Fraktion*) suffered left-wing terrorist attacks in the 1970s, those terrorist campaigns were much shorter than those of the Red Brigades in Italy.<sup>324</sup> This temporal dimension can explain the readiness of the Italian Security Forces to adapt to terrorism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, according to Franco Gabrielli, current head of the State Police, the Italian legislation is very effective due to its long experience in the fight against terrorism, consequently, also for their considerable experience in the fight and monitoring of organized crime, the Italian authorities have progressively developed a sprawling structure also on the territory, which allows greater control and favors the collection of information.<sup>325</sup> Therefore, it can be said that this many years of experience has allowed Italy to promptly adapt its legislation to the “new” threat and environment. Furthermore, it is possible that the long, difficult and often dangerous investigative activity against right- and left-wing terrorism, together with that often prevalent against criminality, has contributed to developing the habit of the Italian investigators, the law enforcement and the judiciary of dealing with complex and difficult situations.

**4. There are jihadist terrorist activities, but there has been no successful terrorist attack.**

It would be inexact to depict Italy as a country where Islamic terrorism does not exist. In fact, as we will see in Italy there have been small-scale jihadist terrorist attacks, even if less successful, bloody or well organized like those of other Western countries. Since some of the perpetrators of the attacks in Europe had family or criminal ties with Italy, the country has also indirectly suffered the phenomenon of terrorism on its territory. It should be emphasized that the jihadist attacks in Italy are mostly rudimentary and isolated episodes. Furthermore, subsequent investigations showed that the perpetrators of these attacks also suffered from various types of mental disorders. However, we must keep in mind that, even if in Italy the internal jihadist threat is relatively low, it is still constantly increasing.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Italy adopted a series of counter-terrorism measures that managed to crack down most of the networks of jihadist groups on the national territory. International events and repeated attacks on Western targets have led Italian policy-makers to be more aware of the jihadist threat, and greater concern has also been raised by national security agencies. In fact, since 2001,

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<sup>324</sup> Carlo De Stefano, Elettra Santori, Italo Saverio Trento, *Terrorismo, criminalità e contrabbando. Gli affari dei jihadisti tra Medio Oriente, Africa ed Europa*, Rubbettino, 2019.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibidem*.

more than 20 Islamist plots have been discovered aimed at Italian targets. Some of these plans were at an advanced stage of preparation at the time of discovery, but none of them, even if successful, caused any casualties. It is important to underline how some episodes highlighted a change in the jihadist *modus operandi*. If in the 1990s, Italy was at the center of networks and logistical settlements of Islamist militant movements, in the 2000s the jihadist threat soon began to be embodied by the so-called “lone wolves”, that is, individuals marked by experiences of social marginality and psychological fragility, suspected of planning attacks on national targets, albeit without contact with international movements.<sup>326</sup> In particular, among the partially successful or not completed attacks in Italy, it is worth noting those against the following objectives:

- 1. Embassy of the United States of America in Rome (January 2001).** An Italian cell associated with Al-Qaeda was planning a chemical attack on the US embassy in Via Veneto, in the center of Rome, planning to spread cyanide in the ventilation systems of the building, and in this way kill within a few minutes whoever was inside. The Carabinieri Corps was able to foil the attack before it was carried out. In April, Essid Sami Ben Khemais, Tunisian, believed to be the head of the Al-Qaeda cell in Italy, was arrested, while Ben Heni Mohamed Lased, Libyan, was arrested in October in Germany. Both had been intercepted in previous months while exchanging information and advice on the attack to be carried out, awaiting more detailed instructions from Osama Bin Laden.
- 2. Temple of Concordia in Agrigento, Sicily (November 5, 2001).** An improvised explosive device, made with a camping gas stove, was detonated on the stairs of the Temple.
- 3. Milan Cathedral metro station (May 11, 2002).** The same type of bomb used in the attack on the Temple of Concordia was used, causing great chaos inside the station. The State Police managed to identify the Italian convert Domenico Quaranta as the person responsible for the two episodes. The Sicilian man was suffering from psychological problems and it is believed that he embraced radical Islam while being held in the prison of Trapani.
- 4. Synagogue of Modena, in Emilia-Romagna (December 11, 2003).** Al Khatib Muhammad Shafiq Ahma, a Jordanian citizen of Palestinian origin, born in Kuwait, suffering from a severe form of depression and psychiatric problems, committed suicide by blowing up his car parked in front of the synagogue using a lighter to blow up a LPG cylinder on board of his car. The explosion did not cause any injuries and damaged the windows of the synagogue and surrounding houses.

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<sup>326</sup> Ugo Gaudino, *Radicalization and De-Radicalization of Italian Muslims*, Mediterranean Insecurity, 2018, p. 9.

5. **McDonald's of Brescia, Lombardy (March 28, 2004).** Moustafa Chaouki, Moroccan, also in the midst of depression phase, committed suicide by blowing up four cylinders of domestic gas in his car.
6. **Port of Naples (November 2005).** Three Algerians, Yamine Bouhrama, Khaled Serai, and Mohamed Larbi, affiliated with the GSPC group, planned to crash a ship loaded with explosives into the port of Naples. The three were arrested by the Carabinieri before they could put their plan into action.
7. **Bologna Cathedral and Milan Metro (March 2006).** Both designed by an AQIM-affiliated cell. The Carabinieri, thanks to some wiretaps, were able to arrest a dozen Moroccan and Tunisian citizens who had settled in Milan who wanted to hit the Basilica of San Petronio, in Piazza Maggiore in Bologna, where there was a Giovanni da Modena's fresco dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, depicting the Prophet Mohammed tortured in Hell by ferocious demons. The painting was judged offensive by Islam. The same extremist group was also planning an attack on the Milan metro (probably in the central station of the Duomo), on the occasion of the 2006 political elections.
8. **Santa Barbara Carabinieri station in Milan (October 12, 2009).** It was the only Islamic attack so far partially successful. Mohammed Game, a Libyan engineer in Italy since 2003, tried to blow himself up with a rudimentary device consisting of two kilos of nitrate in front of the station where some soldiers on a mission to Afghanistan had left. The attack, frustrated and low-level, caused serious injuries to the attacker's eyes and the loss of his right hand, while lightly wounded two Italian soldiers on guard outside the station. Game's radicalization path happened quickly online, where he read *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* by Abu Musab Al-Suri, one of the key figures of Al-Qaeda.<sup>327</sup> This attack was interpreted by the Italian Secret Services as a turning point in the context of Italian jihadism, although Game's background and the *modus operandi* used were common to that of previous terrorists.
9. **NATO Military Base of Ghedi, in Lombardy (July 2015).** The Tunisian Lassaad Briki and the Pakistani Muhammed Waqas, both residing in the province of Brescia and with documents in order, were planning attacks on the NATO base in Ghedi at the expense of the US Forces and against other targets in Italy, such as the Carabinieri. They were arrested before implementing the plan, and in 2016 they were sentenced to six years in prison on charges of

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<sup>327</sup> Abu Musab Al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call (Da'wat Al-Muqawamah Al-Islamiyyah Al-'Alamiyyah)*, INSPIRE, 2004.

terrorism. The two extremists, sympathizers of ISIS, had radicalized online. What worried the Italian authorities most was the fact that they both had stable jobs and seemed well integrated into Italian society.

**10. Rialto Bridge in Venice (March 2017).** An ISIS-inspired terrorist cell, made up of four young Kosovars (Arjan Babaj, Dake Haziraj, Fisnik Bekaj, and an underage boy) who worked as waiters and lived in the historic center of Venice, planned to blow up the historic Rialto Bridge in order to “gain paradise”. After Bekaj’s return from Syria in 2016, who had fought in the ranks of the IS, the rest of the group began their radicalization by consulting material on the Internet and expressing their intention to swear allegiance to ISIS. Wiretapped, the cell was dismantled by the Police, and the four arrested and sentenced to a total of thirteen years in prison.

These attempted attacks or attack plans show that Italy is not completely excluded from the network and from the targets of global Islamic terrorism. However, except perhaps for the partial success of the Game case, these episodes demonstrate how the Italian intelligence community knows how to combine its background, gained during the years of fighting domestic and international terrorism, and the organized criminality, with the professionalism of its agencies and its apparatuses. The attempts in which the global jihad has tried to hit Italy, therefore, are to be considered in all respects such as intelligence successes.

#### **4.4 – The Italian Involvement in the Middle East: The Unknown of Libya**

One of the factors that leads Muslim communities around the world to look favorably on Italy is undoubtedly its moderate approach to foreign policy and its low-profile involvement in the Middle East. Furthermore, unlike other European countries, Italy does not have a colonial past so strong to boast such that it has had to undergo important implications, such as massive immigration from controlled territories and the development of models of assimilative multiculturalism. Yet, the country was nevertheless able to experience a period of influence in the territories of North and East Africa, in countries such as Somalia (since 1889) and Libya (since 1911) where jihadist terrorism today finds its roots with organizations such as Al -Shabaab in Somalia, the Libyan Islamic Fighters Group (LIFG) and Ansar Al-Shari’a in Libya, groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda. At the end of World War II, Italy, as a defeated country, had to accept the harsh conditions imposed by the 1947 *Treaty*

of Paris, including the loss of all the colonies previously acquired except Somalia, which in 1950 would become an Italian Trusteeship under a mandate of the United Nations until 1960. In any case, Italy will continue to have a certain bond with its former colonies, as well as to preserve strategic interests there.

The Italian colonial experience in Libya has left an indelible mark on relations between the two countries and constitutes a very interesting case study. Military operations in Libya began against the Ottoman Empire in 1911, under the order of the Prime Minister of the then Kingdom of Italy Giovanni Giolitti. The Royal Italian Army managed to conquer the Libyan coast, in the regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, but not to penetrate inland. This control weakened during and after the years of World War I. The Italian colonization became particularly oppressive, however, with the beginning of Fascism during the 1920s. Under the authoritarian regime of Benito Mussolini, Italy managed to conquer the entire area corresponding to today's Libya, and to suppress the numerous revolts against its own colonial expansion. However, to do this, the Italian troops resorted to ruthless methods of reprisal and committed various war crimes, setting up concentration camps in Cyrenaica where they deported thousands of civilians and fighters, and then killed the leader of the revolt Omar Al-Mukhtar in 1931 through hanging. Al-Mukhtar is now considered a national hero, so much so that his face is printed on 10 Libyan dinar banknotes, a symbol of how Italian colonialism has left a bad memory in the minds of the Libyan people.<sup>328</sup>

Following the loss of its colony in 1947 established by the peace treaty with the allied powers that formally put an end to the hostilities of World War II, Italy maintained good relations with King Idris (1889-1983), who unified the entire country under a single monarchy, and a good number of Italians remained in Libya occupying privileged positions in the administration and economy. However, in 1970, with Mu'ammar Gaddafi's seizure of power, these same Italians were expelled from the country and their assets expropriated, while the regime that had established itself began a very harsh rhetoric against Italy, insisting on the necessity that Rome formulated an official apology and arranged appropriate compensation. Despite this, the foundations for the development of excellent economic-commercial relations between the two countries were also laid in this period. These relations continued almost unchanged even during the 1980s and 1990s, despite the political isolation of Libya following some bloody terrorist acts carried out by the Tripoli regime (for example, such as the explosion of a bomb in a nightclub frequented by US military in West Berlin on April 5, 1986, in which 3 people died, and the explosion of a bomb on Pan Am Flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie on December 21, 1988, in which 270 people died; these terrorist attacks belong to

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<sup>328</sup> Andrea Beccaro, Stefano Bonino, *Terrorism: Tackling the Threat to Italy's "Exceptionalism"*, ISPI - Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milano, 2020.



the category “*state-sponsored terrorism*”<sup>329</sup>) and to the imposition of international sanctions (such as United Nations Security Council *Resolution no. 748/1992* which enshrined a heavy economic embargo against Libya<sup>330</sup>).

In this context, the Italian governments between 1996 and 2008 recognized, with public apologies, Italy’s colonial responsibilities towards Libya, in order to maintain and strengthen cooperation between the two countries in economic and security matters. This reconciliation was sealed by the *Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation (Italy-Libya Treaty)* signed in Benghazi on August 30, 2008 by the Libyan leader Mu’ammar Gaddafi and the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.<sup>331</sup> The Treaty established rules for cooperation on security matters, in particular for the fight against illegal immigration and the containment of flows, and above all for extensive economic cooperation (with 5 billion dollars that Italy would have donated to Libya in the twenty years for works to be entrusted to Italian companies under the direction of a mixed commission<sup>332</sup>). Thus, a long and bitter official dispute ended, moreover accompanied by friendly and profitable relations between the two countries and their respective civil societies. However, the execution of the Treaty, ratified in early 2009, was soon interrupted by the Arab Spring and the revolution broke out in February 2011 in Libya, resulting in the military intervention authorized by the UN Security Council on March 17 with *Resolution no. 1973/2011* and led by France (“Operation Harmattan”).<sup>333</sup> The Berlusconi Government did not at all share the intervention initiative of France and the United Kingdom against the Gaddafi regime, but after the decision of the United States to intervene and for fear that Italy would remain isolated from its major allies, the decision to enter the coalition against the Libyan dictator prevailed.<sup>334</sup>

After the revolutionary phase, in 2012 Italian diplomacy set to work with the aim of resuming the execution of the Treaty and relaunching the privileged perspective it had envisaged with the new governments. Hence, the Italian government established excellent cooperative relations with the post-revolutionary governments of Abdel Rahim El-Kib, Ali Zeidan, and Abdullah Al-Thani, who were part of the National Transitional Council. However, the outbreak of a new civil war in mid-2014 between nationalist and secular forces and Islamist forces once again pushed the Italian objective away. Indeed, since the purge of the Gaddafi regime, Libya has been torn apart by battles between numerous rival armed militias affiliated with different regions, cities, and tribes, while the central

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<sup>329</sup> John P. Grant, *The Lockerbie Trial: A Documentary History*, Oceana TM Publication, 2004.

<sup>330</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 748 (1992)*, United Nations Digital Library, 1992.

<sup>331</sup> Natalino Ronzitti, *Il Trattato Italia-Libia di amicizia, partenariato e cooperazione*, Servizio Studi del Senato della Repubblica Italiana, Servizio Affari Internazionali, Roma, 2009.

<sup>332</sup> Roberto Aliboni, *La politica libica dell’Italia*, IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali, Roma, 2016, p. 3.

<sup>333</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution no. 1973 (2011)*, United Nations Digital Library, 2011.

<sup>334</sup> Roberto Aliboni, *La politica libica dell’Italia*, IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali, Roma, 2016, p. 3.

government (represented by the National Transitional Council, and then from August 2012 by the General National Congress) was weak and unable to establish his authority in the country. The country has also been subject to the proliferation of weapons, sectarian violence, and political chaos. Since the political elections of June 25, 2014 there has been a deep rift between the Islamist forces and the secular forces that has produced the division of the country into two separate and opposing governments, each of them with its own Parliament:

- **Government of National Accord (GNA):** chaired by Fayeze Al-Sarraj, based in Tripoli. It is recognized and supported by the United Nations, the United States, the European Union (except France, Greece, and Cyprus), Italy, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Qatar, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Iran. It is a “pro-revolutionary” government, advocating the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>335</sup>
- **Libya’s House of Representatives:** chaired by General Khalifa Belqasim Haftar, based in Tobruk. It is recognized and supported by Russia, France, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Chad, and Belarus. It is a “reactionary” government, aimed at a secular ideology and the protection of the *status quo*.<sup>336</sup>

For these reasons, today’s Libya can be considered a “failed State”, as it appears to be a country divided into two main adverse state entities and many smaller enemy military factions, despite attempts by both the United Nations and European Union to promote a government of national unity under the supervision of the United Nations with the UNSMIL mission.<sup>337</sup>

In this scenario, ISIS begins to make its appearance also in Libya, simultaneously with the proclamation of the Islamic Caliphate in Iraq and Syria. On October 3, 2014, in Derna, in Cyrenaica, a radical Islamist formation called the Advisory Council of Young Muslims (*Majilis Shura Shabab Al-Islam*), active since April, declared its affiliation to ISIS, proclaiming the territory under its control in the city as part of the “Caliphate” proclaimed by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in Mosul in June 2014.<sup>338</sup> On January 27, 2015, some ISIS militants claimed responsibility for the attack on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, in which 5 Libyan citizens and 5 foreign citizens died. On February 8, ISIS jihadists took control of Nofaliya, a village in the East of Sirte, with the help of some members of Ansar Al-Shari’a. On February 13, they managed to enter in Sirte and take over a television studio and two local radio

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<sup>335</sup> Eugenio Dacrema, *La proxy war libica e la nuova Guerra Fredda mediorientale*, in Eugenio Dacrema, Arturo Vanvitelli, *Le relazioni tra Italia e Libia: interessi e rischi*, ISPI - Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milano, 2020.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>337</sup> Servizio Studi della Camera dei Deputati, *Conclusioni della Conferenza sulla Libia di Berlino (19 Gennaio 2020)*, Camera dei Deputati – Documentazione Parlamentare, 2020.

<sup>338</sup> Aaron Zelin, *The Islamic State’s First Colony in Libya*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2014.

stations.<sup>339</sup> The next day, the Italian embassy in Tripoli, the last Western representation still active in the country, was evacuated. On February 15, ISIS militants in Libya released a video depicting the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts who had previously been kidnapped in Sirte.<sup>340</sup> Between late May and early June 2015, ISIS-affiliated forces launched a new offensive against the forces of the Government of National Accord in the West and South of Sirte, capturing the civil and military airport of Al-Gardabiya, in the South of Sirte, and attacking a checkpoint on the outskirts of Misrata.<sup>341</sup> In early June, ISIS captured the village of Harawa, in the East of Sirte.<sup>342</sup> The rooting of ISIS in Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown, was favored by defections of the local wing of Ansar Al-Shari'a, active in Sirte since June 2013, and by the support of former exponents of the Gaddafi regime, marginalized in following the first Libyan civil war of 2011 (similarly to the ex-Baathists of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq).<sup>343</sup>

The advance of ISIS into the Sirte area was counterbalanced by the expulsion of ISIS forces from most of Derna, their first stronghold in Libya, on June 14, 2015, after five days of violent clashes with the Advisory Council of Mujahideen of Derna, a coalition of jihadist armed groups not affiliated with ISIS, which also included the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade. Thus, also in Libya, the phenomenon of the clash between jihadist groups with different ideology and strategy, particularly between ISIS and groups close to Al-Qaeda, took place, as already observed during the civil war in Syria since January 2014.<sup>344</sup> Overall, in 2015, various groups affiliated to ISIS managed to establish their presence in the cities of Derna, Benghazi, Sirte, Nofaliya, Ajdabiya, and Sabratha, with a total of 3,000 men, of which only 1,200 in Sirte.<sup>345</sup> In addition to intensifying their offensives in Libya, ISIS is suspected of being involved in some attacks in neighboring Tunisia, in particular the attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, on March 18, 2015, and the attack on a touristic village in Port El Kantaoui, near Susa, on June 26, 2015. In the second half of 2015, ISIS militants consolidated their presence in Sirte, where they violently repressed a Salafist revolt that broke out in August and maintained close contact with the leadership of the IS in Iraq and Syria, which, under the pressure of military intervention by the international coalition led by the United States, saw in the conquered

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<sup>339</sup> Aaron Zelin, *The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015.

<sup>340</sup> Ian Black, *Isis claim of beheading Egyptian Copts in Libya shows group's spread*, on *The Guardian*, February 15, 2015.

<sup>341</sup> Michele Pierri, *Libia, ecco come l'Isis avanza ancora*, on *Formiche*, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

<sup>342</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, *Islamic State "province" advances in and around Libyan city of Sirte*, on *The Long War Journal*, June 9, 2015.

<sup>343</sup> Aaron Zelin, *The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015.

<sup>344</sup> Libya-Analysis, *Libya as the Levant? Jihadist Infighting in Derna*, on *Libya-Analysis.com*, June 14, 2015.

<sup>345</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *ISIS. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2016, p. 90.

Libyan provinces a territory where it could flee in case of further defeats.<sup>346</sup> On November 13, the United States carried out its first airstrike against ISIS in Libya near Derna aimed at Abu Nabil Al-Anbari, Iraqi representative of Al-Baghdadi in Libya, and killed him.<sup>347</sup>

In a climate of increasing political chaos, between January 4 and 5, 2016, ISIS launched an offensive in the East of Nofaliya to capture the Sidra and Ras Lanuf oil wells, controlled by the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG). The ISIS's offensive was repelled, but the group managed to seize the town of Ben Giaud, in the West of Sidra.<sup>348</sup> On January 7, a suicide attack against a Police academy in Zliten (between Tripoli and Misrata, under the control of the GNA) killed 65 people. The attack, one of the most serious in Libya's recent history, was attributed to ISIS.<sup>349</sup> The new ISIS's offensives in Libya, as well as the multiple episodes of violence for which it is responsible, mean that the probabilities of an imminent Western-led military intervention by the United States, France, United Kingdom and Italy against the group increase; on the other hand, reconnaissance flights and the presence of Western special forces on the ground have already been reported for some time to conduct surveillance operations and make contacts with local militias with a view to leading joint action against ISIS in Libyan territory.<sup>350</sup>

Following the advance of ISIS in Libya, a few kilometers away from the Italian coasts, and following the Islamic terrorist attacks claimed by the group in the rest of Europe, especially in neighboring France, Italian public opinion and its political class were particularly concerned about the possibility that Italy too would be hit by terrorist attacks, both because of the threats received from ISIS, and because Italy's relative proximity to the North African country and the possibility that ISIS could infiltrate terrorists into the flow of migrants and refugees leaving Libya to reach Europe, landing first in Italy. On the basis of the territorial conquests of ISIS in Libya and the resurgence of jihadist violence in Europe, was it really possible to say that ISIS wanted to strike Italy? According to Alessandro Orsini, the leaders of ISIS and those of Al-Qaeda would cause enormous damage to themselves if they hit Italy, unless Italy changes its foreign policy, because in addition to betraying their underlying logic, a country from which they have never been hit, would push all States to go to war since no one could be sure of anything anymore.<sup>351</sup> Furthermore, both groups would lose their logistical bases in Italy, which, as already mentioned, have over the years been important recruiting

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<sup>346</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, Ben Hubbard, Eric Schmitt, *ISIS' Grip on Libyan City Gives It a Fallback Option*, on *The New York Times*, November 28, 2015.

<sup>347</sup> Eric Schmitt, *ISIS Leader in Libya Is Targeted in U.S. Airstrike*, on *The New York Times*, November 14, 2015.

<sup>348</sup> Libya Channel, *IS attack on oil region continues for second day*, on *Libya Channel*, January 6, 2016.

<sup>349</sup> Suliman Ali Zway, Kareem Fahim, *Truck Bomb Kills at Least 65 at Libya Training Camps*, on *The New York Times*, January 7, 2016.

<sup>350</sup> Eric Schmitt, Helene Cooper, *U.S. and Allies Weigh Military Action Against ISIS in Libya*, on *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016.

<sup>351</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *ISIS. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2016, p. 87.

centers for perpetrating terrorist attacks abroad and for recruiting foreign fighters to be sent to the theaters of global jihad. Italy also represents an important landing point for migrants and refugees, and for terrorists disguised as such, and a jihadist terrorist attack perpetrated on Italian territory would also mean a drastic change in immigration policies, which would probably become more restrictive.

According to the sociologist, Director of the *Osservatorio sulla Sicurezza Internazionale* (Observatory on International Security) at the LUISS Guido Carli University in Rome, ISIS and Al-Qaeda, despite the different and obvious threats they have launched against Italy over time, have launched the country more messages of peace than messages of war, since terrorist organizations use attacks not only to strike, but also to coax.<sup>352</sup> The terrorist attack, in addition to containing a negative sanction, which is the one that monopolizes the attention of all because it is the most impressive, also contains a positive sanction, aimed at countries that are not hit. From this perspective, the terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015 in Paris can be read in two ways: the first is that ISIS wanted to punish France, following the intensification of French bombings against its positions in Syria; the second, less visible, is that ISIS wanted to reward Italy for its non-involvement (or marginal involvement) in the affairs of the Middle East. This hypothesis has been confirmed on several occasions over the past twenty years, both by ISIS and by Al-Qaeda. After the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States, the attack on Madrid trains on March 11, 2004 (first Al-Qaeda's massacre in Europe), the attack on the urban transport system in London on July 7, 2005, the attack on the headquarters of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on January 7, 2015, and finally, the attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, Al-Qaeda and ISIS implicitly demonstrated that they are not angry with Italy. Therefore, the exceptional nature of the Italian case in the jihadist panorama in the West does not depend only on the efficiency and preparation of the Secret Services, intelligence agencies, and the Italian law enforcement agencies, but also on a precise design of the terrorist organizations, in following the low profile maintained by Italy in foreign policy and Middle Eastern affairs.

The rhetoric of those who argue that if Al-Qaeda and ISIS hit Paris, then they will soon hit Rome too has no basis, either empirical or logical. Terrorist organizations follow a very precise logic of reasoning. Indeed, if the United States and France continue to conduct active policies and war actions in the Middle East and to hunt down terrorists, and Italy continues not to do so, these countries will continue to suffer terrorist attacks against their targets on their own national territory and abroad, while Italy will continue to be immune from large-scale terrorist attacks. If this seems to be good news for Italy, and it is, it is necessary however to evaluate a change in the conditions that allow this situation to continue, that is, a probable change in Italian foreign policy. Libya, in fact, represents a real unknown for Italy, as here the country has enormous economic and strategic interests. The

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<sup>352</sup> *Ibidem.*

decision to intervene militarily in Libya, with the aim of protecting their national interests and guaranteeing the security of Italy, could therefore be a counterproductive strategy, and could alter the perception that terrorist organizations (ISIS, in this case) have of Italy.

Firstly, Italy's concern about Libya's stability concerns energy security and the supply of hydrocarbons. ENI (*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*), an Italian-owned multinational active in the energy sector in particular with regard to oil and natural gas and present in the country since 1959, remains the only foreign company remaining to operate in Libya in a climate of constant instability.<sup>353</sup> Libya, therefore, continues to be a very important energy "storage" for Italy. Oil production, a pillar of the Libyan economy, plummeted from a high of 1.4 million barrels per day in April 2013 (similar to pre-2011 value) to a low of 200,000 barrels per day in April 2014, and then partially resumed in the second half of 2014 and again dropped to around 400,000 barrels per day during 2015.<sup>354</sup> The losses were aggravated by the simultaneous global collapse in oil prices starting from the second half of 2014.<sup>355</sup> As regards natural gas, Italy has invested a few billion euros to create the Greenstream, a jewel of contemporary engineering. The 520-kilometer pipeline is located in Mellitah, and carries the gas from Libya to Sicily, in Gela, via the Mediterranean Sea, where it reaches a depth of up to 1,200 meters. The total cost of the plant was 7 billion euros, of which 3.7 in ENI's share.<sup>356</sup> In this sector, the situation seemed more stable and the pipeline did not raise particular concerns at the level of activity. The Italian government did not intervene directly, leaving the necessary local security arrangements to ENI's experience, and contributing discreetly. It participated to supporting the security of supplies through the "*Operazione Mare Sicuro*" ("Operation Safe Sea"), launched on March 12, 2015, in order to protect national interests in the area and ensure adequate levels of maritime security, in particular in order to protect ENI's offshore plants and the pipelines that affect Italian supplying.

Secondly, the Libyan crisis also affects migration flows, a real emergency that impacts Italy's national security. In fact, it is precisely from Libya that huge human trafficking of various origins passes, especially from sub-Saharan Africa. If during the Gaddafi regime the migratory waves had been contained, also following the 2008 *Italy-Libya Treaty* (in which Libya actively committed itself to opposing the criminal organizations that manage the Libyan immigration route in exchange for Italian financial aid), during both the post-revolutionary and the new civil war phase, no Libyan

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<sup>353</sup> Il Post, *L'ENI, l'unica grande società rimasta in Libia*, on Il Post, April 8, 2015.

<sup>354</sup> Claudia Gazzini, *The Prize: Fighting for Libya's Energy Wealth*, Middle East and North Africa Report, No. 165, International Crisis Group, 2015.

<sup>355</sup> Anjali Raval, *War and strife have cost Libya \$68bn in lost oil revenues*, on Financial Times, January 24, 2016.

<sup>356</sup> Eni S.p.A., *Comunicato Stampa. Eni: al via il Western Libya Gas Project, il primo progetto che valorizza il gas naturale libico attraverso l'esportazione e la commercializzazione in Europa.*, EuroBorsa, 2004, <http://www.euroborsa.it/pdf/eni0117-59-2004.pdf>.

authority is able to deal with the problem of immigration in a structural way.<sup>357</sup> Italy, faced with the growing number of landings on its coasts, is unable to manage the problem according to the rules laid down by the *Convention of Dublin*, and yet does not receive adequate responses from the European Union.<sup>358</sup> It therefore begins to move on its own, activating the “Operation Mare Nostrum” (“*Operation Our Sea*”) on October 18, 2013 for the humanitarian purpose of providing aid to migrants, to prevent the tragic events of the shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa, which took place on October 3, 2013, from being re-verified. The operation was replaced as of November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 by “Operation Triton” (originally called “Frontex Plus”) launched by Frontex, the European border control agency, with the aim of monitoring the borders of the European Union in the Mediterranean Sea. Later, on May 18, 2015, “Operation Sophia” (officially called “European Union Naval Force” or “EUNAVFOR Med”) will also be launched with the aim of neutralizing the consolidated routes of migrant trafficking in the Mediterranean. The refugee crisis has exposed the impotence of national solutions, and the strong risks of delegitimization of the European Union institutions in charge of articulating common responses, as well as the need to overcome the impasse with an overall reform of European governance, not only limited to the migration issue.<sup>359</sup>

Hence, it is understandable how Italy could intervene in Libya to defend its strategic interests and to promote the stability of the country by trying to favor a government of national unity, something also hoped for by the European Union. Even though ISIS has now lost almost all the Libyan territories under its control after several offensives by rival militant groups, there are still cells within the country’s territorial structure. The launch of a peace operation has been discussed several times by the Italian Government, despite encountering conflicting opinions from various political forces and public opinion. In this case, the military engagement with a third country should first be discussed in Parliament and in the Foreign and Defense Commissions. Even if it is assumed that Libya is a failed State, interventions at will in that territory are not admissible. In fact, one or more of the causes of justification admitted by international law must apply<sup>360</sup>:

- 1. Intervention at the request of the established Government:** it concerns the practice of humanitarian intervention for which the consent of the State in which the intervention is required is necessary. In the case of Libya, it must be taken into account that the country is

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<sup>357</sup> Mauro Indelicato, *Da dove arrivano i migranti e perché*, on *InsideOver*, June 29, 2019.

<sup>358</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Regulation (EC) No. 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national*, Official Journal of the European Union, 2003, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003R0343&from=EN>.

<sup>359</sup> Roberto Aliboni, *La politica libica dell’Italia*, IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2016, pp. 7-8.

<sup>360</sup> Natalino Ronzitti, *Prospettive di soluzione della crisi libica: problemi di diritto internazionale*, in IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali, *La crisi libica. Situazione attuale e prospettive di soluzione*, Osservatorio di politica internazionale, Roma, 2016, p. 19.

controlled by two different governments, so it would be difficult to establish on the basis of the will of which of the two governments to intervene. The United Nations recognizes the government of Fayez Al-Sarraj as a legitimate Government, which is nevertheless *in fieri* (i.e., in the making), so its authority is based on the resolutions of the Security Council. This means that any request for intervention by the Al-Sarraj Government should be corroborated by a resolution of the Security Council. This is, moreover, the position taken by the Italian Government, which conditions any intervention to a resolution of the Security Council and to the request of Libya.

- 2. Intervention authorized by the United Nations Security Council (pursuant to Art. 42, Chap. VII of the *United Nations Charter*<sup>361</sup>):** The Security Council could authorize an intervention if the conditions established by Art. 39 of the *United Nations Charter* (threat to peace, violation of peace, act of aggression).<sup>362</sup> It could authorize the Member States individually considered or gathered in a regional organization. But it could also give the mandate to establish a “robust peace-keeping” mission to the Secretary General. Italy seems much more inclined to this type of intervention. However, the approach adopted by several UN member countries regarding Libya has not always been consistent with regard to the objectives to be achieved. The main critical issues concern in the first place the interference of other countries in the Middle East region in Libyan affairs (think of Turkey and Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which support different sides) and the ambiguity of Western countries towards these interferences, and secondly, the inclusion of Islamists in the political solution promoted by the UN, and here too, the uncertainties of Westerners in the face of this conclusion.<sup>363</sup>
- 3. Legitimate defense (pursuant to Art. 51 Chapter VII of the *United Nations Charter*<sup>364</sup>):** in the case of aggression, self-defense actions, both individual and collective, are envisaged. If a State were the object of an armed attack by ISIS, legitimate defense could be invoked to act, since the possibility is now admitted that it can be exercised not only against a State, but also against a non-state actor. The hypothesis is that of an ISIS missile attack on Italian territory or of terrorist attacks in Italy organized by the Libyan fringe of ISIS.
- 4. Protection of citizens abroad:** this is a minor action guaranteed by the doctrine of international law. It is the typical intervention that occurs when you have to save your citizens

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<sup>361</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, Art. 42, Chap. VII, United Nations Digital Library, 1945.

<sup>362</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, Art. 39, Chap. VII, United Nations Digital Library, 1945.

<sup>363</sup> Roberto Aliboni, *La politica libica dell'Italia*, IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>364</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, Art. 51, Chap. VII, United Nations Digital Library, 1945.



hostage to an armed group. In this case, the intervention is justified by the fact that the territorial State is unable to maintain law and order due to the paralysis of state structures. This scenario could occur, for example, in the case that the Islamist militias take hostage the military hospital in Misrata where the Italian Forces have established their own garrison.<sup>365</sup>

Regarding the possibility of intervention in Libya, there has often been a tendency to confuse, at the level of public debate and between political forces, stabilization and pacification operations entrusted to the Armed Forces and counter-terrorism operations entrusted to the Special Forces. Beyond these misunderstandings, and despite the succession of governments given the instability of the Italian political system, Italy's position in foreign policy and in the Libyan crisis has been linear: the execution of stabilization operations is supported as long as they are authorized by the United Nations Security Council and in the service of a legitimate and recognized Libyan government. In this regard, Paolo Gentiloni, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the Renzi Government, declared in an interview released on March 16, 2016<sup>366</sup>:

*«It is not from the fight against terrorism that we can expect the stabilization of Libya. Confusing self-defense with Libya's stability does not help; indeed, it can cause dangerous spirals. To those who raise the threat of Daesh, which is real and from which we must defend ourselves, in order to invoke military interventions, we reply that military interventions are not the solution; sometimes, they can even aggravate the problem. To those who rattle off numbers of soldiers ready to leave [...] I remember that Libya is a country that has an extension equal to six times that of Italy and that has about 200,000 armed men between militias and armies of different flags. No, it is not really an easy theater for muscle performances. In short, the Government is not sensitive to the roll of drums and will not be influenced by radiant interventionist days. The Government will defend the country from the terrorist threat with the proportionate actions that will be necessary. The Government will intervene, if and when possible, to respond to the security requests of a legitimate Government committed to gradually regaining control of the sovereignty of its territory and will do so on the decision of Parliament and coordinating the allied forces. The Government will not be drawn into useless and even dangerous adventures for our national security.»*

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<sup>365</sup> Fiorenza Sarzanini: *Libia, aumentano i timori per gli italiani sul campo: l'ospedale di Misurata rischia il trasferimento*, on *Corriere della Sera*, January 15, 2020.

<sup>366</sup> Paolo Gentiloni, *Libia, non ci faremo trascinare in avventure inutili e pericolose*, on *L'Unità*, March 10, 2016.

Therefore, the Italian government does not believe that the counter-terrorism actions against ISIS by the Security Services or Special Forces should fall within the responsibility of the stabilization forces. More generally, unlike other allied countries such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, Italy's interest is more about stabilizing Libya than fighting ISIS. For Italy, the fight against ISIS must be conducted by the Libyan Forces united at the national level, and therefore should be subordinated to the pursuit of national reconciliation and the reconstruction of state security institutions.<sup>367</sup> If the Libyan Forces confronted ISIS divided as they are today or were opportunistically employed by external powers to support their counter-terrorism actions, the process of resolving the Libyan crisis would be hampered or totally compromised, and the struggle itself against the ISIS would lose its effectiveness. This line of thinking was also shared by the successive Gentiloni, Conte I, and Conte II Governments.

Libya represents one of the greatest challenges of Italian foreign policy. Italy's interests at stake also clash with geostrategic and security assessments. If imposing oneself on the Mediterranean scene as a stabilizing power alongside the United States in the fight against international Islamic terrorism would mean increasing one's prestige in the Euro-Atlantic context, on the other hand it would mean exposing oneself to unnecessary risks. International jihadist organizations could in fact decide to punish Italy, just as they did with other European countries when they conducted hostile military actions in the Middle East. Furthermore, the perception of the country could also change in the eyes of Muslim communities, both in Italy and abroad. It is good, therefore, that Italy continues to weigh its choices in foreign policy and to adopt a moderate approach with regard to Middle East issues. What would happen in the event of a sudden change in its agenda of military operations abroad we are now able to predict.

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<sup>367</sup> Roberto Aliboni, *La politica libica dell'Italia*, IAI – Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2016, p. 7.

## CONCLUSIONS

The intelligence systems of Western countries, born in the context of the Cold War, are today often in difficulty in facing a new complex and insidious phenomenon such as Islamic terrorism. Indeed, most intelligence systems, before September 11, 2001, were used to dealing with state threats, but found themselves unprepared to manage and respond to the threats and dangers arising from non-state actors, typical of an asymmetric warfare. Although Samuel P. Huntington's prophecy regarding the "clash of civilizations" may seem true today in the light of the various attacks of Islamic origin that have hit the West and the rise of radicalization and violence in the suburbs of the great European cities<sup>368</sup>, it is necessary to understand that Islamic terrorism concerns more the political sphere than the ideological-religious one. This analysis highlighted the fact that the hatred that most Muslim communities around the world harbor towards the West depends on the interference it has in the Middle East, and on the type of foreign policy approach that the great powers adopt towards Islamic countries.

Terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have decided to hit the United States and France not only because these States represent value models repudiated by Salafist Islam, such as corruption and capitalism, but also as a result of the involvement that these powers have always had in the Middle East: the United States has always adopted a pro-active approach in foreign policy and in the Middle East region, trying to favor and establish pro-US regimes, in line with its national interests; France, at the time of its Colonial Empire in which it controlled vast areas of the Middle East and North Africa (the so-called MENA area), applying the *divide et impera* principle (i.e., divide and rule principle) in its colonial policy, promoted sectarian conflicts between the different Muslim ethnic groups and populations<sup>369</sup>, and today it finds itself on the one hand involved in the wars of its former colonies to try to maintain a relevant role on the international scene, and on the other hand it finds itself facing internal problems deriving from its own colonial experience and the result of decades of inadequate immigration policies. The case of France is particularly emblematic in the light of the explosion of jihadist violence in Europe since 2015, but the same can be said of other former European colonial powers, such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands, which today are experiencing the same problems and register the same radicalization trends.

An important difference between the 9/11 attacks and the Paris attacks of November 13 concerns the type of enemy from which these attacks were perpetrated: in the case of 9/11, the enemy

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<sup>368</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, on *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, pp. 22-49.

<sup>369</sup> Richard Morrock, *Heritage of Strife: The Effects of Colonialist "Divide and Rule" Strategy upon the Colonized Peoples*, on *Science & Society*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1973, pp. 129-151.

was external, because all terrorists were citizens of Islamic countries and the attacks have been conceived, planned and organized outside the borders of the United States (and this highlights the global dimension of Al-Qaeda's organization and operational capability); in the case of November 13, the enemy was internal, because most of the terrorists were young people born and raised between France and Belgium and had a European passport (and this underlines the more local dimension of the ISIS's radius of action). In both cases, however, it should be noted that the radicalization process of the individuals involved took place precisely in the West, and more precisely in Europe, and not in the theaters of global jihad where they then went to fight and be trained by the leaders of the organizations they were part of. This must lead us seriously to reflect on the well-being index of Muslim communities in Europe and their level of integration into European societies. It is possible, in fact, that the alienation experienced by terrorists during their European experience has made them vulnerable to the process of radicalization and to the preaching of radical Islam, a process that American intelligence and Islam expert Quintan Wiktorowicz divides into four stages called cognitive openness, religious seeking, enlightenment, and socialization<sup>370</sup>, while the New York Police Department's Intelligence Bureau (NYPD Intelligence Division) categorizes them into pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization.<sup>371</sup>

These phenomena were already evident from the early 2000s as a result of inadequate immigration policies undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s, well before the explosion of jihadist violence in the mid-2010s. In 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, following some political controversies and social tensions in Germany, spoke about *Überfremdung*, that is, of "over-foreignization" due to an excess of immigration into the country.<sup>372</sup> In 2011, French President Nicholas Sarkozy declared that multiculturalism in France had failed because «*we have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him*». <sup>373</sup> The European model of integration, based mostly on the assimilationist model, based on the idea of a secular State that guarantees the equality of all citizens before the law by not recognizing special rights and treatments for ethnic minorities, and by demanding that migrants comply completely to the culture and society of the host country, has thus failed.<sup>374</sup> As we have seen, Italy has been relatively immune from radicalization processes and attacks of Islamic origin on its territory (at least large-scale ones), thanks to its moderate line followed with continuity in foreign policy, and because it has not experienced the entry of huge migratory waves in the past, such as to have today a

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<sup>370</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford, 2005.

<sup>371</sup> Mitchell D. Silber, Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat. The NYPD Jihadist Report*, OccupyBawlStreet.com Press, 2007.

<sup>372</sup> Matthew Weaver, *Angela Merkel: German multiculturalism has "utterly failed"*, on *The Guardian*, October 17, 2010.

<sup>373</sup> France 24, *Sarkozy declares multiculturalism a "failure"*, on *France 24*, February 10, 2011.

<sup>374</sup> Laura Zanfrini, *Sociologia della convivenza interetnica*, Laterza, Milano, 2020, pp. 29-55.

second or third generation Muslim population. The Italian trend is in decisive contrast with other European countries, where the children and grandchildren of the first generation of immigrants, who arrived in Europe following the end of the colonial empires or because they were attracted by policies that encourage the employment of workforce, today experience social marginality, degradation and poverty, and are therefore more vulnerable to the phenomenon of radicalization. Therefore, Islamic terrorism in the West is the result of the preaching of a radical Islam, it does not have religious reasons as its triggering causes, but mostly political and social ones.

To understand why some large-scale events such as the 9/11 and the Paris attacks happened, it is important to start from a micro-level of analysis, and to understand the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization, and what causes some individuals to become radicalized. Secondly, the analysis must be conducted at a macro-level, and the explanation must concern the terrorist organizations that sponsored and organized the attacks and the intelligence systems that did not know or could not prevent certain events from occurring. There is no universally accepted explanation why intelligence systems have failed to predict and prevent attacks, and intelligence analysts themselves are at odds in explaining the causes of these intelligence failures. Like all Black Swan events, due to their rarity, extreme impact, and retrospective predictability, these events have been difficult to predict and thwart, and at the same time we tend to rationalize them by making us believe we can make them explainable and predictable on the basis of a hindsight bias. As already mentioned during the discussion, in both events there were various warnings issued by intelligence agencies about the possibility that Al-Qaeda and ISIS could hit the national territory of the United States and France. These warnings, neglected or misinterpreted, can be framed in the “signals-versus-noises dilemma”, for which in the face of all the information collected, placed in the domestic and international context in which one found itself, it was difficult even for the most experienced analysts and for the most foresighted decision-makers to distinguish true information (signals) from false and deceptive information (noises). Asymmetrical wars, such as those of terrorism, are largely based on launching surprise attacks on the enemy capable of damaging their essential interests, and in this way evading security systems and their ability to prevent these attacks.

Even assuming that we do not live in a safe environment, and that the world is and will always be full of dangers, threats, and unexpected events, it is still essential to understand how to prevent the formation of gray areas that allow the success of strategic surprises. Both US and French intelligence community, given their vast experience in the field, possessed an excellent level of strategic intelligence, as they were already aware of the threats that terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS represented for the country, as demonstrated by the various reports and briefings addressed to the decision-makers before the attacks occurred. What they lacked was an equally good level of

tactical intelligence, as terrorist attacks are mostly tactical events involving specific actors, targets, and means, and taking place in a specific place and at a specific time and timeframe. However, collecting tactical intelligence is not simple: huge resources are needed to be dedicated to the intelligence and defense sectors, to be invested in the information collection sector and in the development of disciplines such as human intelligence (HUMINT) and technical intelligence (TECHINT), and all its related sub-disciplines. These resources, as we know, depend on public expenditure. While the United States is the first nation in the world to invest in the defense sector, France had to reorganize its intelligence apparatus with its 2008 and 2013 *White Papers* in the context of a global economic crisis that began precisely in 2008, and therefore in having to reorganize its resources to be allocated to the intelligence and defense sector. Furthermore, before 2001 and 2015, terrorism was not a priority on the agenda of both the United States and France's intelligence agencies, and this must certainly have conditioned the attention they have placed in carefully evaluating the terrorist threat as well as the decision of the decision-makers of which and how many resources to allocate to the counter-terrorism departments and which threats to look with more concern. As we have already seen, in Italy the guard against the terrorist threat has never been lowered, both because once the period of the Years of Lead ended, new cells reappeared (and immediately dismantled), and because the Italian security and the counter-terrorism departments know how to deal with this type of threat and know the techniques and methods, even taking for granted that these evolve over time. Furthermore, the Italian investigative departments have always been at the forefront in combating phenomena such as organized crime, which in Italy have their origin and constitute the main threat, so their ability to counter illegal and subversive phenomena have evolved hand in hand with the growing of the threat of Islamic terrorism at the international level.

Based on the comparative analysis conducted in this thesis, it is clear that in the 9/11 and in the Paris attacks of November 13 there were multiple intelligence failures, on several levels. Assuming that the information collected about the attacks was true and that the level of "actionable" intelligence produced by the agencies was good, some mistakes in the intelligence cycle were made in the planning and direction phase, as the threat of terrorism had not been prioritized, and in the dissemination phase, since the intelligence produced had not given enough importance to the ongoing danger nor had enough attention paid to the imminence of the attacks. An intelligence failure is such even when it is not only the intelligence system that fails, but also when in the face of excellent "actionable" intelligence the political decision-maker does nothing or does little on the basis of the information received. In assessing the facts, an important factor must be observed: both in the United States and in France, the intelligence community is divided into several agencies operating under

different Departments or Ministries. In Italy, on the other hand, with *Law no. 124/2007*, the two main agencies AISI and AISI, once belonging respectively to the Ministry of the Interior (as SISDE) and to the Ministry of Defense (as SISMI), have been placed under a single department, the Information Department for the Security (DIS), who reports directly to the President of the Council of Ministers and to his Delegated Authority for the Security of the Republic (ADSR).<sup>375</sup> In this way, information jealousies, functional overlaps, waste and duplications typical of intelligence systems that are divided into several agencies, placed under different departments, are avoided.<sup>376</sup> Although the United States in the security and defense sector is the leading country in the world and has cutting-edge technologies, from the point of view of the organizational theories of the reformist school, it is seriously deficient, as Amy Zegart claims.<sup>377</sup> The United States tried to partially solve this problem by establishing the Department of Homeland Security in 2002, trying to facilitate communication among the agencies dealing with internal security. A similar attempt of reform was recommended by the Assemblée Nationale's inquiry commission in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, which recommended the creation of a single national counter-terrorism agency similar to the Department of Homeland Security in the United States.<sup>378</sup> Similarly, the Italian Ministry of the Interior also set up the Counter-Terrorism Strategic Analysis Committee (CASA) in 2004 after suffering the Nassiriya attack against its military personnel abroad. It is clear, therefore, that the intelligence failures, while constituting a shock for one's country in terms of pride and loss of life following attacks, are an opportunity to rethink one's security models and reorganize one's own bureaucratic apparatus.

In conclusion, it can be said that to avoid the risks of new intelligence failures in the fight against Islamic terrorism, it is necessary to act on two levels: at the micro-level, trying to reduce the causes and factors that lead individuals to experience radicalization phenomena, and at macro-level, seeking to improve the efficiency of national intelligence agencies and the communication among them. In addition, a moderate approach should be taken when entering Middle East affairs, to try not to antagonize terrorist organizations which, despite having their base in countries like Afghanistan or Syria, have terrorist cells all over the world due to their international dimension, and are capable of planning local attacks on Western targets. The Italian case represents (for the moment) a happy exception in the Western jihadist panorama on the basis of the simplification of the organization of

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<sup>375</sup> Parlamento Italiano, *Legge 3 Agosto 2007, n. 124 e nuove norme in favore delle vittime del terrorismo*, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2007, [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2007-08-13&atto.codiceRedazionale=007G0139&elenco30giorni=false](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2007-08-13&atto.codiceRedazionale=007G0139&elenco30giorni=false).

<sup>376</sup> Alberto Castelvocchi, *Intelligence, i nostri servizi segreti? Un'eccellenza nascosta*, on *Il Dubbio*, September 19, 2019.

<sup>377</sup> Amy Zegart, "CNN with Secret's": 9/11, the CIA, and the Organizational Roots of Failure, on *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2007.

<sup>378</sup> Georges Fenech, Sébastien Pietrasanta, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission d'Enquête relative aux moyens mis en œuvre par l'État pour lutter contre le terrorisme depuis le 7 janvier 2015*, Assemblée Nationale, July 5, 2016, <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-enq/r3922-t1.asp>.

its intelligence system and the years of experience of its operational apparatuses in the fight against terrorism, but as we have seen, this could change based on the choices that the Italian Government will make in foreign policy and as Italy will witness the growth of the second and third generation Muslim population. Finally, we must take into account the international context in which States and intelligence systems operate: to prevent future strategic surprise, terrorist attacks and threats, cooperation between agencies of different countries is important, both within bilateral relations, both within institutional frameworks such as the European Union, NATO (and therefore the countries of the Atlantic Alliance), and the United Nations, at the front of the common enemy of Islamic terrorism. The establishment of intelligence systems and agencies within each of these institutional frameworks could be an excellent starting point for trying to coordinate the efforts of Member States in the fight against terrorism and jihadist violence.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to explain why intelligence fails in countering Islamic terrorism. By analyzing some case studies, such as the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States and the attacks of November 13, 2015 in France, it is possible in part to explain the reasons why the intelligence process has sometimes failed. Similarly, by analyzing the exceptionalism of the Italian case, it is possible in part to understand in what, instead, intelligence is successful in countering the jihadist terrorist threat.

The comparative analysis of the intelligence systems of the United States, France and Italy allows us to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each system in these countries in interfacing with the phenomenon of international Islamic terrorism, which has become a real threat to national security throughout the West since the beginning of the 21st century. Terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, in wanting to export jihad globally, have dared to challenge the security systems of the Western world, taking intelligence agencies and analysts and the Security Forces by surprise. The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 can be defined as “strategic surprises”, because they arise from a specific desire to hit and punish the United States and France and their societies by focusing on the surprise effect and “intelligence failures” because they indicate something that did not work in the intelligence work and its ability to predict and prevent attacks.

The phenomenon of Islamic terrorism may turn out to be an expression of what Samuel P. Huntington has called a “clash of civilizations”, that is an ideological-religious war that sees the East (and in this case, the Islamic world) in contrast with the West, but this thesis explains how in reality jihadist terrorism, despite having a theological basis, has mainly political motivations. In fact, what drives the main international terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS to want to strike the West is the interference that the great powers exercise in the Middle East in pursuing their national interests. A country’s foreign policy is therefore an important variable when it comes to terrorism and international jihadist organizations.

However, Islamic terrorism, being a very complex phenomenon, also has social derivations. Accordingly, some factors such as social marginality, poverty, degradation, psychological fragility, which lead an individual to undergo the process of radicalization, and to become a terrorist, are not to be excluded. The processes of radicalization are experiences that the second and third generations of immigrants in some Western (especially) European countries go through, both for personal factors and for causes related to a lack of integration, as result of years of inadequate integration policies. The development of more-or-less valid models of multiculturalism and integration models, following

the migratory waves inherited from European colonialism, are another great variable of Islamic terrorism.

This thesis is divided into four levels, each of them associated with a chapter: in the first chapter, the work of intelligence is analyzed from a theoretical point of view; in the second, the case study of USA is examined, illustrating its intelligence system, the birth of Al-Qaeda, the facts, causes, and consequences of the 9/11 attacks, and the US involvement in Middle East with the War on Terror; the third chapter, on the other hand, deals with the case study of France, illustrating the French intelligence system, the birth of the Islamic State, the facts, the causes, and the consequences of the Paris attacks of November 13, and the involvement of France in the Middle East that takes shape with Operation Chammal; finally, in the fourth and final chapter, the Italian case will be examined, the real and only exception in the Western jihadist panorama and in relation to the intelligence failures related to Islamic terrorism, analyzing the Italian intelligence apparatus, the situation of the Muslim communities in Italy and the trends of radicalization, trying to explain why a large-scale attack of Islamic origin has never happened in Italy, and finally evaluating the possible Italian involvement in a war in the Middle East concerning Libya.

Explaining how intelligence works is important to explain its own failures as well. Intelligence is a particular form of information that allows political decision-makers (or policy-makers) or operational commanders to make more effective decisions. The work of intelligence analysts thus goes to support the decision-making process. Intelligence is a process that is divided into five phases (planning and directives, collection, processing and exploitation, analysis, and dissemination) that leads to the transformation of “raw” information into “finished” information (i.e., “actionable intelligence”), requested or addressed by/to a decision-maker. This process, however, is far from being perfect, and is subject to multiple malfunctions at each stage. In addition, intelligence is divided into two fundamental disciplines, HUMINT (human intelligence) and TECHINT (technical intelligence), and into several sub-disciplines, which indicate the ways in which to find useful information for the intelligence process. Malfunctions in the intelligence process can give rise to intelligence failures, which Mark Lowenthal identifies as overestimation of the threat, underestimation of the threat, subordination of intelligence to politics, lack of communication between the different intelligence agencies, unavailability of information, received opinions, mirror image, excess of self-confidence, complacency, and failure or inability to connect the facts. Furthermore, Erik J. Dahl identifies three schools of thought that collect the theories that explain the failures of intelligence: the “traditional” school (according to which failures are natural and inevitable), the “reformist” school (according to which failures depend on organizational issues,

linked to bureaucracy), and the “contrary” school (according to which it is the lack of information due to the collection phase that causes intelligence failures).

Intelligence failures explain why security systems fail to predict and prevent terrorist attacks. It is necessary to distinguish between strategic intelligence (long-term and broad-focused) and tactical intelligence (short-term and concerning specific events) to explain how strategic surprises can happen. These, in fact, are operations that arise in the military field, but which can also be used in other circumstances, such as the asymmetrical warfare typical of terrorism. They have two fundamental characteristics: they are “strategic”, that is, they strike an essential interest of the opponent, damaging him, and they are “surprises”, therefore they inhibit the enemy’s ability to prevent and foresee such surprises. While strategic surprises relate to strategic intelligence, surprise attacks (typical of terrorist attacks) mostly relate to tactical intelligence. The theory of preventive action, introduced by Erik J. Dahl, provides a possible solution to how to predict and prevent strategic surprises: the specificity of the alarm and the receptivity of the decision-maker are required. To achieve this, it is necessary to go back to re-evaluating tactical intelligence, much more than strategic intelligence, through a functional adjustment of the intelligence system. On the contrary, the Black Swan theory, introduced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, explains that some events, given their extreme unpredictability and rarity, are impossible to predict and prevent. These events (called “Black Swan events”) have a great impact on society and bring with them serious consequences, producing historical discontinuities; furthermore, they are events that tend to be rationalized once they occur, making us believe that it was possible to predict them, even if in reality there is no rationale that leads us to think that something highly improbable could occur, given that Black Swan events are something beyond human imagination. According to Taleb, resources must not be expended to try to prevent Black Swans, as they are unpredictable, but we must try to develop robustness within our society to try to prevent these events. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and Paris of November 13, 2015 may, due to their characteristics, fall within the definitions of strategic surprises and Black Swans. By analyzing the facts, and the “signals” (attributable to the theory of “signals-versus-noises dilemma”), it is possible to explain why intelligence has failed to predict and prevent them.

The first chapter on intelligence theory is very important, therefore, to analyze the three case studies that I set out to analyze. To this end, it is also necessary to analyze the actors involved in the attacks, that is the intelligence systems and state authorities, the terrorist organizations with their own organizational structures and their own motivations, the reasons for the intelligence failures that led to the occurrence of each attack, and the foreign policy of the countries under consideration, as a dependent variable.

The United States is the first country in the world for public expenditure in the defense and security sector. The United States Intelligence Community (US) was founded in 1981 with *Executive Order 12333* by then President Ronald Reagan and amended in 2004 with the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA)*. It is composed of seventeen different intelligence agencies, placed under different Departments, among which the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) stand out. After September 11, 2001, it was decided to coordinate efforts to ensure the internal security of the United States and its citizens, strengthening the counter-terrorism apparatus, with the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2002. Second Amy Zegart, exponent of the reformist school, before 9/11 the organizational design of the IC was seriously deficient under many aspects, including the lack of communication between the different agencies.

The Salafist-inspired Islamist Al-Qaeda terrorist organization was founded by Osama Bin Laden in the context of the Soviet-Afghan war in 1988, thanks also to the ideological contribution of Abdullah Azzam. Mujahideen who had fought against the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, and who had been financed by the United States to fight their rival in the context of the Cold War, also joined. However, relations between the United States and Al-Qaeda soon soured following the cut in US funding to the mujahideen after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the outbreak of the First Gulf War, and the deployment of US troops in Saudi Arabia, the holy land for Islam. In a 1998 fatwa (spiritual communiqué), Bin Laden calls on all Muslims to kill American citizens wherever they are, as a sacred duty to defend Islam. Thus, the first two terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda against US targets took place, the first at the US embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) on August 7, 1998, and the second against the missile destroyer USS Cole in Yemen on August 12, 2000.

Soon Al-Qaeda begins planning to attack the United States within its borders. Through its affiliate cell in Hamburg, made up of young students radicalized in the West, it carries out the most serious terrorist attack in contemporary history, as well as the most serious armed attack perpetrated on US soil by an external enemy, since the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The targets are the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Arlington (Virginia), near Washington, and probably the White House or the Capitol in Washington. This latest attack is not successful as one of the hijacked planes fails to reach its predestined goal, crashing into the Pennsylvania countryside. The death toll is nearly 3,000, in addition to significant economic damage. The intelligence failure was caused by a lack of prioritization of the terrorist threat, lack of imagination, organizational pathologies, political and strategic errors, but above all, lack of knowledge of the nature of the adversary. In fact, Islamic

terrorism appears in the eyes of intelligence analysts and decision-makers as a new phenomenon whose extent or ways to counter it are unknown.

One of the long-term consequences of 9/11 was undoubtedly the War on Terror waged by George W. Bush, and never really ended, against those nations suspected of hosting, aiding or sponsoring terrorism. Bush also spoke of the existence of an “Axis of Evil”. By invoking Art. 5 of the *North Atlantic Treaty*, which established NATO, the United States decided to intervene in Afghanistan as an act of self-defense, also pushing all the other NATO Member States to do the same. In Afghanistan, the United States overthrew the Taliban regime which was established in 1996. However, several areas of the country remained under Taliban control. After nearly twenty years of war and internal unrest, a turning point has come with the Doha Agreements that began in February 2020. In addition to Afghanistan, the United States also decided to invade Iraq in 2003, based on the “Bush Doctrine” of preventive war. Saddam Hussein’s regime was in fact accused of possessing and developing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), although some United Nations inspections conducted in the country shortly before the war denied or minimized this fact. Even after the US invasion, these WMDs were not found, nor was there evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda. This led the United States to a second intelligence failure after 9/11, because the threat of WMDs in Iraq had been overestimated. In Iraq, however, the United States managed to overthrow Saddam’s regime and establish a pro-Western Shia-led regime. The violence in the country, after the withdrawal of the US troops, however, did not subside, and this led to the outbreak of a new civil war in 2014.

The French Intelligence Community seems to suffer from the same organizational pathologies that affect the US Intelligence Community: different agencies, with various functions, located under different departments and lacking a central “brain”. In fact, the French IC is made up of six different agencies under the Ministry of the Armed Forces (formerly the Ministry of Defense), the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Among the generalist agencies are the *Direction générale de la sécurité intérieure* (“DGSI”, formerly DCRI, for internal security) and *Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure* (“DGSE”, for external security). The lack of a single central agency capable of coordinating efforts produces the fragmentation of information and makes communication between the various agencies complicated. According to Aldo Giannuli, the French Secret Services have a good theoretical tradition and have over time recorded good results in the military, economic, and in the fight against organized crime, but for which concerns terrorism, they have a certain cultural gap that prevents them of fully understands the phenomenon, a characteristic they have shown to have since the war in Algeria.

The Islamic State (IS, ISIS or Daesh) was born from the ashes of the various jihadist groups which during the years of the US occupation of Iraq had fought against the foreign presence and who gathered around the figure of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and his Organization of Monotheism and Jihad, Al-Qaeda's armed branch in Iraq. With the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2012, the group, which in the meantime became the Islamic State of Iraq, sought to expand into neighboring Syria and also include Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Al-Qaeda cell in Syria, under its control, against the opinion of Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who in the meantime became the leader of Al-Qaeda. This marked the rupture of relations between the two organizations, a change in their objectives and strategies, and the beginning of rivalries regarding the leadership of the global jihad. With the inclusion of several jihadist groups in Syria, who fought to overthrow the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, the organization still managed to spread into the country, taking the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In June 2014, having already achieved enough power, resources and controlled territories, it will proclaim itself the Islamic Caliphate and Al-Baghdadi will call itself Caliph. By coming to control large portions of Northern Iraq and North-Western Syria, the group will be responsible for sectarian violence and human rights violations to the detriment of many ethnic and religious minority populations other than Sunni in the territories under its control, and at the same time it will call all Muslims of the world to the duty of jihad.

ISIS, despite having a more local dimension than Al-Qaeda because it concentrated on building the Islamic Caliphate and its jihadist society in the Middle East, nevertheless began planning the first attacks against Western targets following raids against its positions in Syria and Iraq, interventions that were led by both the United States and Russia. Through its cells scattered around the world, it began to hit European cities in particular. Starting in 2015, France began to be hit by several Islamic attacks within its national borders. After the massacre of the newsroom of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and the siege of the kosher supermarket HyperCasher in January of the same year, Paris will again be hit by a new series of coordinated attacks on the evening of November 13, 2015. The attacks were organized by an ISIS-affiliated cell established in Verviers, near Liège, Belgium. The terrorists were mostly young second-generation Muslims with French or Belgian citizenship. The targets were the Saint-Denis Stadium during a match, several Parisian bars and restaurants between the 10th and 11th arrondissements, and the theater Bataclan during a rock music concert, where a real siege took place inside and where the highest number of victims was recorded. The total number of victims of the attacks amounts to 130. These are the most serious attacks in France since the end of World War II. The intelligence failures that led to the November 13 attacks mainly depend on the failure to detect and prioritize the terrorist threat, failure of surveillance as the perpetrators of the attacks were already known to Law Enforcement as well as some of them had gone to fight Syria,

and by the failure of intelligence-sharing between the different Member States of the European Union and NATO. Immediately after the attacks, President François Hollande suspended the Schengen Agreement and declared a state of emergency in France which lasted for almost a year, given the attacks that hit France also the following year.

French involvement in the Middle East had been decided long before the Paris attacks. In fact, since 2014, France has actively participated in military operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq together with a US-led coalition of 60 countries. Operation Chammal, the name given to the French intervention, not only provided logistical support to US military operations, but also carried out bombings against ISIS positions. After the Paris attacks, Hollande ordered further retaliatory bombings against Raqqa, an ISIS stronghold. The French involvement against ISIS had both geostrategic and security motivations. Indeed, historically Syria was part of France's sphere of influence following the *Sykes-Picot Agreement*, and here France continues to maintain its strategic interests; moreover, containing the terrorist threat on the spot also means containing the jihadist ideologies that can inspire extremists within the French Muslim population to commit further attacks. Operation Chammal thus guaranteed France the opportunity to be present in Middle East affairs, to consolidate its historic military alliance with the United States, and to establish itself as an important player on the international scene. However, it has certainly helped to push ISIS to declare war on France, and to inaugurate a new season of attacks against it.

The case of Italy represents an exception in the jihadist panorama in the West, in several respects. Italy has not in fact suffered any attacks on its territory of Islamic origin which had significant consequences comparable to those of 9/11 or the Paris attacks of November 13. This depends primarily on the structure of its intelligence system, called the *Sistema di informazione per la sicurezza della Repubblica* (Information System for the Security of the Republic), established by *Law no. 124/2007* on August 3, 2007. The reform aimed at reorganizing the previous structure of the intelligence apparatus by placing all the agencies under the command and control of the President of the Council of Ministers and his Delegated Authority for the Security of the Republic (ADSR), if appointed. The two generalist agencies, the *Agenzia informazioni e sicurezza interna* ("AISI", for internal security) and the *Agenzia informazioni e sicurezza esterna* ("AISE", for external security) are coordinated under the *Dipartimento delle informazioni per la sicurezza* ("DIS", Information Department for Security), to which they refer. In addition to the Information System for the Security of the Republic, there is also the Counter-Terrorism Strategic Analysis Committee (CASA), set up in 2004 by the Ministry of the Interior that supports the work of its Crisis Unit. CASA operates as a common platform where the Italian Security Forces (Police, Prison Services, and Secret Services) share information in their possession about internal and external terrorist threats and coordinate joint

efforts in the fight against terrorism. Italy has a long experience in the fight against terrorism during the Years of Lead (between the 1960s and 1980s), during which it suffered several attacks from both right- and left-wing terrorist organizations. In addition, the Italian security system and the Police Forces have improved their investigative skills and to combat criminal phenomena also thanks to the long fight against organized crime, i.e., the Mafias, which originate in Italy.

Unlike other European countries, Italy hosts a much smaller and recently formed Muslim community. Unlike the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium, Italy did not have such strong colonial “roots” in North Africa or the Middle East that it had to host huge migratory flows after the end of the colonial empires, nor did it adopt active policies that would encourage foreign workforce in the years of the economic boom, as did Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, immigration to Italy is a fairly recent phenomenon (started in the 1980s) and the Italian Muslim population is mostly of the first generation and is still able to define its social position and objectives in the host country. Therefore, it is immune to radicalization phenomena involving their European peers. Moreover, Italian society is founded on the culture of micro-inclusion, since most of the Italian economy is based on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), so it is easier for non-EU workers to feel included in the context where they work. In Italy, real ghettos within the cities are totally or almost absent. If in most European metropolises, especially in the suburbs, there are neighborhoods with a Muslim majority, where there is widespread degradation and criminality, the Italian suburbs are ethnically more homogeneous. These factors, together with the fact that Italy adopts a moderate approach in foreign policy, especially as regards the countries of the MENA area, ensure that the Islamic communities in Italy and in the world look favorably on the country, and Italy does not appear on the top-list of targets to be attacked by terrorist organizations.

Despite this, Italy still records jihadist activities within its national borders, especially in Lombardy, where the largest Italian Islamic community is concentrated. In the 1990s, an important number of radicalized individuals gravitated around the mosque in Viale Jenner and the Islamic Institute in Via Quaranta in Milan, who used those places as a logistical base to perpetrate attacks abroad or organize departures to go to fight in theaters of global jihad. The US Department of Treasury even defined Milan as “the main Al-Qaeda’s station in Europe”. While it is true that large-scale Islamic attacks have never occurred in Italy, some plans of attack by terrorist organizations have been discovered on Italian soil, or minor terrorist attacks have been conducted. The only partially successful is in fact the attack on the Santa Barbara Carabinieri station in Milan on October 12, 2009, which resulted in the injury of the same terrorist, the Libyan Mohammed Game, and the two carabinieri on guard outside the station. Thanks to the prompt intervention of the intelligence agencies and the Police Forces, most of the plots have been thwarted, also thanks to the frequent use of



expulsions of both extremists and suspected terrorists. A significant fact is that the number of Italian foreign fighters is 130, far less than the number of fighters who leave other European countries to join the ranks of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and then return to their home countries to use the combat experience and training received in the battlefield. The phenomenon of Islamic radicalization is, however, a constantly evolving phenomenon in Italy, and will grow as the second and third generation Muslim populations rise.

As already mentioned, Italy has generally always adopted a moderate approach in foreign policy, opting for a low-profile involvement in the War on Terror by limiting its support to coalition forces to logistical support. The penetration of ISIS in Libya, a few hundred kilometers away from the Italian coasts, however, has prompted Italy to seriously think about the opportunity to intervene in the North African country. In its former colony the country is present in various forms and cultivates numerous interests there. With the *Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation (Italy-Libya Treaty)* signed in 2008 by the Libyan leader Mu'ammur Gaddafi and the then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the foundations were laid for cooperation between the two countries in economic matters and on migration. Libya represents an important route to Italy for migratory flows from sub-Saharan Africa, and illegal immigration, in addition to representing a social priority for both Italy and Europe, also raises questions of security type, as terrorist organizations try to infiltrate terrorists in migratory flows in such a way as to be able to build jihadist networks and cells in the countries where they go to settle. Furthermore, Libya represents an important energy "storage" for Italy, as the Italian multinational ENI is present in the country for oil and natural gas extraction activities and has invested a few billion dollars for the construction of the gas pipeline Greenstream, which connects the Libyan coast to Sicily. The possibility of intervening in Libya for the protection of its own national interests, albeit being motivated by reasons consistent with international law, represents an important unknown factor for Italian foreign policy, and could change the top-priority list of targets to be hit by international terrorist organizations who would decide in this way to punish Italy by organizing attacks on its territory.

Thus, the intelligence failures in countering Islamic terrorism depend on a plurality of factors, both endogenous and exogenous. The internal security measures adopted by Italy and its choices in foreign policy have prevented the country from undergoing the strategic surprises of terrorist attacks of Islamic origin like those suffered by the United States, France, and other Western countries.