DECLINE AND DISSOLUTION OF ITALIAN TERRORISM: THE CASE OF THE BRIGATE ROSSE, 1970-2001

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INTRODUCTION: DECLINE AND DISSOLUTION, A MODEL

Italian terrorism has predominantly been studied by Donatella della Porta, who published various books and articles about the social context and political system within which the Red Brigades emerged. She carried out a research process both based on sociological research into political opportunity structures and social movement theory, as on individual pathways into radicalization. Her trinity of macropolitical, mesodynamic group level and individual psychological radicalization processes has proved to be very useful to study not only Italian but other left wing and even present day Islamic terrorism as well.[1]

However, radicalization processes, are not a film that can easily be rewinded, nor should deradicalization and decline of movements be taken as the reverse process of the mechanisms described above. Therefore, to gain better understanding in decline and dissolution processes, I have chosen to make use of another model, developed by a group of Dutch social scientists. Thus, although I will be using Della Porta's theory in this paper to describe the emergence of the Red Brigades, I will use Demant et al's theory to explain their demise.

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[1] Donatella Della Porta, 'Left-wing terrorism in Italy', in: Martha Crenshaw (ed.), *Terrorism in context* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 105-159; Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State. A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Demant et al. maintain that to understand the decline and dissolution of radical groupings, emphasis should be put on the interaction between radicals and their organisation or movement.[2] This interaction can be perceived in terms of demand and supply. In a given society, a considerable number of disgruntled citizens can strive for radical changes. This 'demand' for action can remain latent if it does not find an appropriate 'supply' of radical repertoires. Conversely, this supply of initiatives for radical change will remain untouched if there are no disenfranchised citizens. When demand and supply meet, a radical movement will blossom. Should the interaction between demand and supply become unbalanced, however, the movement will decline or even disappear.

On the 'supply side' (the radical movement) we can identify several factors that can cause a movement to become disconnected from the demands. The ideology of the movement can lose its appeal, either because the radical perspective on the existing order is no longer attractive or because the movement's vision for the future no longer mobilizes the constituency. The ideology can also lose its persuasive power because its adherents are no longer convinced of their strategy and method. In addition, the movement can fail on an organizational level. This could be induced by a weak leadership that no longer inspires or leads or is not flexible enough to react to changing circumstances.

On the 'demand side' (the sympathizers and potential members of a movement) changes can also occur that infringe on the radical movement's vigour. An important factor on this level is the absence of new recruits. Sometimes, a movement that once captivated a certain generation, lacks appeal for the next one. If the movement fails to adapt to the wishes of the new generation, it will (eventually) decline.

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[2] Demant et al.'s analytical framework for their study of deradicalization of radical groups is partly based on insights from among others: Bjorgo, T. and Carlsson, Y (2005), *Early intervention with violent and racist youth groups*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affaires; Klandermans, B. (1997), *The Social Psychology of Protest*, Oxford: Blackwell. Cf. the introduction and conclusion in: Bjorgo, T. & Horgan, J. (2008). *Leaving Terrorism Behind. Individual and collective disengagement.* Oxon/New York: Routledge; Horgan, J. (2005), *The Psychology of Terrorism*, London: Routledge (especially chapter 6).

This interplay between demand and supply does not take place in a vacuum. Social movements are located in a context that provides them with changing opportunities and restrictions that influence the movement's dynamics. Movements can be curtailed or amplified by external factors that influence their tactics, actions and decisions. These external factors can be political, cultural, social or economic in nature. How within a certain movement members react to these opportunities and restrictions depends on how they perceive and interpret them. One contextual factor might be a local or international conflict that radicals identify with. The way such a conflict develops has a bearing on the movement. Another contextual factor is the presence of other – probably radical – competing organisations.

List below, the factors contributing to decline and dissolution are laid down:

Factors linked to the movement
Failing ideology (view of current world and desired future)
Failing strategy (the outlined route)
Failing organisation
Failing leadership
Needs of the members
Members outgrowing the movement
New generations not attracted
External factors
(Inter)national or local conflict dis-appears/changes
Government: repression
Government: inclusion
Government: reform
Public opinion/ media/ *Zeitgeist* changes (image worsens)
Attractive competing interpretation
Breakdown of barriers
Social dependency
Psychological dependency
Amount of costs incurred
Group reprisals
Fear of loss of reputation and pro-tection
Fear of marginalisation

EMERGENCE OF THE BRIGATE ROSSE

But first, the emergence of the Red Brigades. The Brigate Rosse was perhaps the most powerful and enduring terrorist organisations of the various western European revolutionary terrorist organizations in the 1970s. In fact, some terrorist cells have again emerged, claiming to be the rightful heirs of the brigatista's of the 1970s. In the 1970s, terrorist violence claimed more victims in Italy than it did in any other country at that time. Between 1969 and 1982, leftwing and rightwing terrorists committed 4,362 acts of violence against people and 6,153 against buildings, resulting in 351 deaths and 768 people being injured.[3] According to a 1978 investigation by the Communist Party of Italy (*Partito Communista Italiano*, PCI) into the number of leftist terrorists, between 700 to 800 terrorists living underground were involved in these actions, while about 10,000 militant activists constituted a radical environment and recruitment pool around this inner group.[4] Less information is available regarding the number of rightwing terrorists, although an internal police document does suggest that 797 of them were arrested in 1975 and 325 in 1976, while it lists a total of 62 fugitive rightwing-extremist violent offenders in late 1976. The number of supporters of neo-fascist organizations was stimated at a few hundred.[5] Those numbers set aside, it can be stated that both terrorism and counterterrorism were high on the political agenda in this particular period. For the Italians, terrorism was one of their major problems. How did this social plague came about?

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[3] For an adequate overview of the history of the Red Brigades, see: Donatella della Porta, 'Left-wing terrorism in Italy', in: Crenshaw (ed.), *Terrorism in context*, pp. 105-159; Leonard Weinberg, 'The Red Brigades', in: Art and Richardson (ed.), *Democracy and counterterrorism*, pp. 25-62.
[4] See Vittorfranco S. Pisano, 'The Red Brigades: A challenge to Italian democracy', in: *Conflict Studies* (July 1980), No. 120, pp. 1-19, here: 3.
[5] 'Movimenti di destra', 17 December 1976. Archivio Moro, Buste 51, 'Ordine pubblico, da Cossiga'. ACS, Rome.

On a macropolitical level, a fertile breeding ground for political violence was created in the 1970s. First of all, political polarization contributed to a climate of public mistrust in the democratic system. In Italy, since the early sixties, the Christian Democratic Party had governed n a center-left coalition with the Socialist Party. This cautious marriage had not brought the highly necessary socio-economic reforms, but instead contributed to a consolidation of power interests and corruption. This caused a widespread distrust and contempt vis-à-vis regular political parties.

Secondly, the only party that profited from this stalemate was the Partito Communista Italiano, which gained popular support wide across the public because of its advancement pf the principles of pluralism, constitutional rights and economic reform. This reputation came however with a price attached. The cost was the disaffection of large numbers who felt the PCI had betrayed the cause of the proletarian revolution. By the end of the 1960s, a significant extraparlimentary left had appeared, amongst two of the most powerful movements, Potere Operaio (worker power) and Lotta Continua (continuous struggle) shared a belief in the necessity of violent revolution. This 'brother feud' became even more violent, after the PCI under Berlinguer negotiated a 'historical compromise' with DC-leader Aldo Moro in 1975, after the PCI had won the local elections.

Thirdly, unlike most other European countries, Italy had an extreme right, with leaders who were proud to name themselves neofascists, and did not cringe back from actually trying to attempt violent coups to take over the (socialist ridden)country. In 1967 and 1970 two such coups were just aborted. Against this background, antifascist, socialrevolutionary groups felt they had a righteous cause.

And fourthly, connected with this fascist presence, the level of violence in Italy was already relatively high, and the level of tolerance very low. Since 1964 the neofascist parties conspired together with members from the military security organizations to deploy a 'Strategia della tensione', a strategy of tension. This

implied the use of random attacks, that were not claimed, against public spaces (soft spots) in order to induce fear amongst the population and cause it to vote for a 'law and order coalition' and a strong state - under the motto 'the more disorder, the better'. The first example was the bombing of the National Agricultural Bank in Piazza Fontana in Milan, on 12 December 1969. At first, as was intended, anarchists were blamed, but after several complicated investigations neofascists turned out to be behind it. In this climate of right wing attacks – bearing similarity to the fascist seizure of power in 1922 – the Brigate Rosso emerged.

Meso-level

On the mesolevel, indicating the level of the social movements and radical groups, the Red Brigades came about as a strategic decisions within a social movement family. The BR came into existence first of all as the result of a 'strategic decision' by members of a Milanese group known as the Political Metropolitan Collective. Young workers, experienced in the use of violent protest at their Pirelli, Alfa Romeo and Sit-Siemens plan, together with students from the left-dominated University of Trent, who felt that the PCI and the trade unions had forfeited their revolutionary origins.

Secondly, to draw attention to their existence and to vy for new recruits, this group proclaimed the BR in August 1970 and announced an armed campaign. There were other, similar terrorist cells (Prima Linea, Nuclei of Armed Proletarians and others), but the BR was the largest and most murderous.

Micro-level

There is a lot of information gathered on Italian terrorist careers and biographical background by Donatella della Porta, Raimondo Catanzaro at the Institute in Bologna. In their conclusion they state that the Italian revolutionaries (not the fascist terrorists) were normal in a medical, psychological sense, came from intermediate classes, not poor, not rich and were generally 25-years old males. Interesting, though is their conclusion about the path towards terrorist engagement. Their road to violence was not a deterministic one, but it was embedded in a tradition of political violence (squadrismo), which served as a

historical ressource, of whom radicals could pick and choose forms and theories, and which agencies could flaunt as legitimate reason for the stepping up of repressive politics. Most of the radicals came to the first generation Red Brigades through the larger social movement groups: the communist trade union, the protest groups circling around Lotta Continua, or through student groups.

We could sum this three-layered process of radicalization up in the following sweeping statement: Peer group pressure, group think, in group competition and a resulting protest escalation vis a vis a decaying social system, surging unemployment, a stalemate political system, universities overcrowded with a new generation – spurred by a high level of violence in society, a brutal security apparatus and the pending threat of a right wing coup → this produced the incendiary mix that lead to the erection of the Red Brigades.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BR

From 1967, a wave of political violence erupted. From this year onwards, all sorts of worker riots, street protests, strikes and other wild actions were taking place in the northern industrial cities of Milan, Turin, Genoa and Padua. These disturbances were closely monitored by an increasingly troubled Council of Ministers. These forms of violence, however, were not deemed terrorism yet. The ministers were anxious about economic crises in the south, about the mass migration to the north and the labour unrest there, about housing problems and student unrest at overcrowded universities. Combating political violence, however, let alone terrorism, was not yet on their minds and, consequently, was absent on their political agenda as well.

This relative indifference with regard to political violence in both media and public opinion changed overnight. On Friday the 12th of December 1969, between four thirty and five thirty, five bombs went off in Milan and Rome. Three explosions took place in Rome, resulting in seventeen people being injured. In Milan, one bomb failed to explode, but, at 4:37pm, a second wreaked enormous

havoc in the *Banca Nazionale dell' Agricultura* on the Piazza Fontana in Milan. Seventeen people died and 88 were injured.[6]

The Milan attack was the start of the so-called 'strategy of tension'. The extreme rightwing parties were enormously distressed by the fact that the Christian Democrats had, from the early 1960s, allowed the *Partito Socialista Italia* (PSI) to join the government. A 1964 coupe attempt by the then head of the military intelligence service SIFAR, General De Lorenzo, nevertheless demonstrated that the time was not yet ripe for a sudden shift to the right. In 1965, neo-fascist politicians, members of military security services and other conspirators met in hotel Parco dei Principi in Rome and agreed to create a situation comparable to that of 1921–22, when Mussolini's National Fascist Party managed to seize power, aided by terrorist actions and intimidation.[7]

The coup successfully staged by Greek colonels in 1967 made the adherents of the 'strategy of tension' hopeful—after all, the Italian south was now completely surrounded by rightwing regimes (in Greece, Spain and Portugal). Aided by chaos and violence, staged as 'leftwing' terrorist actions, they deemed this state of affairs to be feasible in Italy as well. Between 1965–70, the number of unsolved terrorist actions, arson attacks and confrontations between leftwing protesters and rightwing assault groups increased rapidly. The ghost of a rightwing coup was continually present in Italian politics.[8] The December 1969 terrorist actions made clear that the 'strategy of tension' was not merely a figment of the imagination of a few *operetta* characters.[9]

The very same day the attacks took place, the Milan police arrested a leftist anarchist, Giuseppe Pinelli, who topped the list of suspects of the Piazza Fontana incident. However, after three days of being interrogated at the police

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[6] Giorgio Boatti, *Piazza Fontana. 12 dicembre 1969: il giorno dell'innocenza perduta* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999).
[7] See Regine Igel, *Terrorjahre. Die dunkle Seite der CIA in Italien* (Munich 2006), pp. 97-110.
[8] Giorgio Bocca, *Il terrorismo italiano, 1970-1978* (Milan 1978), pp. 15-16; Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta* (Rome 2005).
[9] Corrado Stajano and Marco Fini, *La forza della democrazia. La strategia della tensione in Italia (1969-1976)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977).

station, he died under mysterious circumstances—he fell to his death from the fourth floor, landing, without shoes, on the street. Despite the fact that the investigations focused on leftwing anarchists for several years to come, it soon became a public secret that the actions had not been committed by leftwing, but by rightwing terrorists.[10] However, the interior ministry gave the police forces free rein in combating left wing social movements. Demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes and the like were affairs of public order, which the ministry gladly allowed the autonomy of local authorities to handle. From the left and right, politicians gratefully employed the large number of terrorist actions and incidents to malign their opponents. In this climate, the BR announced the start of their 'armed propaganda' in 1971.

1970-1974

Autonomous study groups set up in Milan factories on the one hand and within universities (Trento) on the other, formed the base of groups like the Collettive Politica Metropolitano – an organization that as a centre for 'knowledge and work' started to debate the use of violence, since the state was seen as manifestly inclined to use violence as well. Sparked of by the Piazza Fontana attack in 1969, armed struggle was organized. Industrial action had not been effective enough. At the sites of Pirelli, Alfa Romeo and Siemens, the first Red Brigades was set up, to carry out counterinformation, identifying authoritatian supervisors, right wing foremen and other 'masterminds' of the reaction. First, their property became a target, the BR burned for example cars belonging the managers. But soon, kidnappings followed suit, mainly of company managers who were photographed against the backdrop of a red flag and then released. Violence was not intended to lead to insurrection, the BR regarded themselves as a nucleus within a revolutionary process, and revolution would take its own course. Their violence was first and utmost a response to industrial and state violence.

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[10] Cf. Fulvio Bellini and Gianfranco Bellini, *Il Segreto della Repubblica. La verità politica sulla strage di Piazza Fontana* (Selene 2005); See also Sergio Zavoli, *La notte della repubblica* (Rome/Milan 1992), pp. 47-70.

In this first period, 1970-1974, that of "armed propaganda", the BR remained confined to Milan and Turin, the two industrial cities in the north. BR activities were restricted to small scale actions, in which no one was hurt or killed yet. They aimed at demonstrating to working-class members from the plants, such as the Fiat Mirafiori plant outside Turin, what the real face of capitalism was. Unlike the RAF, the BR in this phase really could draw from a social base amongst the workers.

1974-1976: attack at the heart of the state
However, since society at large, the working class and the government remained relatively undisturbed by their actions, they decided to 'get out of the factory' and become an acknowledged political force. They decided to attack what they identified as 'the heart of the state'.

This second phase (1974-1976) was initiated by the arrest of the first generation Red Brigadists. In Genoa, the trial of the Gruppi di Azione PArtigiana (GPA) was taking place, and the BR decided to kidnap the judge. They succeeded in capturing the right-wing Genoves magistrate, Mario Sossi, who was released only after the promise of his superior Coco to release 9 BR prisoners in exchange. Their action brought the Red Brigades notoriety and attracted new followers.

The BR spread throughout the Veneto, Rome and Genoa with new columns and fronts, and also expanded its targets to reactionary political parties. In this period, pistols and machine guns were used, also to wound (ferimento, knee-capping) and kill political targets. This violence was however also part of a downwards spiral of terrorist atrocity inspired by the random bombings by neofascists. During this phase, prime minister Mariano Rumor set up a General Inspectorate against Terrorism and Armed Bands.

In 1974 Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa was appointed to head a task force to investigate the BR after the Sossi kidnap. Dalla Chiesa, who had experience fighting the Mafia in Sicily, was able to select a staff of forty carabinieri officers drawn from various regions. Thanks to patien investigation work and careful

gathering of information (through spies), between 1974 and 1975 he was able to arrest hundreds of BR-terrorists, supporters and sympathizers. By one estimate, only twelve BR 'regulars' remained at large, virtually the entire nucleus of founders and leaders was in custody awaiting trial.

However: the arrests of leaders Curcio and Franceschini caused a vacuum that was filled by second-rank member Mario Moretti. He solicited for public attention by choosing a much more violent tactic. The PCI-support to the sitting DC-minority government supported this revival of mass agitation and protest. Furthermore, a new generation of protesters had grown up, less ideologically motivated and more experienced in the use of violence on the streets.

1976-1978: 'strategy of destruction'
Here, phase three begins, the 'strategy of destruction', 1976-1978. Tension heightened. The PCU won a relative majority in all major cities. The Pinochet Coup in Chile showed what consequences that could have. The BR saw these events as proof that peaceful ways of gaining power were precluded – when even the communists backed off, scared by their own success, and handed themselves over to the establishment through the concept of 'compromesso storico'.

New leader Mario Moretti headed a series of political assassinations and kidnapping, starting with the killing of Genoa's state prosecutor Francesco Coco (who had broken his promise to release the BR prisoners). Since Dalla Chiesa's unit had been disbanded after the arrests in 1974 and 1975, the BR was able to fill his ranks and files anew, and the counterterrorist experience gained in his unit were lost. It took two years for a re-establishment of a special antiterrorism unit.

This phase culminated with the kidnap and murder of Aldo Moro on 16 March 1978. Moro's kidnapping and ensuing murder was the BR's greatest success and the worst blow to the Italian state. Only through that shock, the Digos, the Italian Division for General Investigations and Special Operations, was constructed and proved itself able to arrest the second generation BR-members

responsible for the Moro-kidnapping, based on sound investigative work, done by capable 'crime fighters' and prosecuting officers

1978-1982: military confrontation with the state
The Red Brigades had however not yet been defeated: after Moro's abduction, they had announced a 'military confrontation with the state', the fourth phase in their struggle, lasting from 1978–82. Avenging Patrizio Peci's 'betrayal', a number of Brigadists killed his brother Roberto in 1981.[11] This murder prompted the government to set up a 'witness protection scheme' for *pentiti*.[12] When, in June 1981, BR leader Alfredo Bonavita, who had been imprisoned since 1974, appealed to his comrades to terminate the armed struggle, they condemned him to death as well; only due to his being in captivity was this verdict not executed.[13]

After an internal split, the Milan column, lead by Moretti, continued their struggle. Kidnapping the American NATO General James Lee Dozier from his Verona apartment on the 17th of December 1981, the Venetian column aimed to demonstrate the BR's power, revive the anti-imperialist ideology and consequently regain the sympathy of leftwing radicals.

Instead, however, they were chased by a special intelligence unit of the American army, as well as the *Carabinieri's* Special Intervention Group (*Gruppo d'Intervento Speciale*, GIS) formed in 1977 and the State Police's Central Operational Security Service (*Nucleo Operativo Centrale di Sicurezza*, NOCS, successor to Santillo's unit). Under the pretext of '*Sicut nox silentes*' (silent as the night), Interior Minister Cossiga had, in 1977–8, once more reunited the professional counterterrorism officials of police and *Carabinieri* in a single team.[14] In 1982, it became apparent that the authorities had indeed learned from the numerous terrorist actions and intelligence failures. After 42 days, on

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[11] See Patrizio Peci and Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Io, l'infame* (Milan: Mondadori, 1983).
[12] Minutes of the Council of Ministers, 28 August 1981. PCM/V, 3 July – 29 December 1981, Buste 71. ACS, Rome.
[13] See interview with Bonavita, in: Zavoli, *La notte della repubblica*, pp. 88-92.
[14] http://www.poliziadistato.it/pds/chisiamo/territorio/reparti/nocs/storia.htm [25 October 2008].

the 28th of January, the NOCS managed to liberate Dozier from his Padua captivity. The anti-terrorist unit owed this result to the support of a SIGINT unit of the *US Army Intelligence Support Activity*, as well as to a lead provided by the local mafia.[15]

The imprisoned terrorists, amongst whom was the leader of the Antonio Savasta commando, were subsequently maltreated by the then head of NOCS, Salvatore Genova, to such an extent (by, among other things, pulling out their pubic hair and forcing them to drink large amounts of salt water) that they fully cooperated with the police and provided all information at their disposal.[16] The *Brigate Rosse* commandos never did genuinely recover from this blow. After this operation, they were no longer capable of committing similarly extreme actions. On 18 March 1982, the BR's military wing, the BR Partito Communista Combattente (PCC) announced 'Strategic Withdrawal' ('*Ritirata Strategica*').[17]

1982-1988: decline and de-escalation

Notwithstanding the 'ritirata strategica', a number of relatively 'smaller' (but by no means less lethal) actions followed in the subsequent years: five abductions and political murders (among others, that of American diplomat Leamon Hunt in 1984, economist Ezio Tarantelli (1985), Mayor of Florence Lando Conti (1986), General Licio Giorgieri (1987) and Senator Roberto Ruffilli (1988)). Most columns, however, had been rounded up at that point.

By 1983, 1,800 alleged terrorists were being detained in Italian prisons. In all, 389 prisoners made use of these regulations: 212 cooperated as *pentiti* (78 'super *pentiti*', 134 'ordinary *pentiti*'), 177 as *disassociati*.[18] Many fugitive

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[15] Jeffrey T. Richelson, 'Truth Conquers All Chains: The U.S. Army Intelligence Support Activity, 1981-1989', in: *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, Vol. 12 (1999), No. 2, pp. 168-200; 'Mafia's Help Reported In the Rescue of Dozier', *New York Times*, 21 February 1983.
[16] 'L'ombra del G8 incombe sul futuro capo della Polizia', *Secolo XIX*, 17 June 2007; Baldoni and Provvisionato, *La notte*, pp. 398-399.
[17] Brigate Rosse-PCC, 'A tutto il movimento rivoluzionario', 18 March 1982. http://www.bibliotecamarxista.org/brigate%20rosse/1982/volanitno%20ritirata%20strategica.htm [consulted on 30 October 2008].
[18] Weinberg, 'The Red Brigades', p. 53.

militants had emigrated to France, where they, as a result of the 'Mitterrand doctrine', were able to start a new life. From indignation over the severe Italian anti-terrorism legislation for leftist radicals, in 1985 the French president had made a verbal pledge that these people, should they flee to France, would not be extradited.

At this point, however, in the second half of the 1980s, a policy of de-escalation was being developed in Italy as well, serving to reintegrate radical activists and even terrorists into society. The general exit arrangements for terrorists, announced as early as 1982, were ultimately passed by parliament in 1987. Of the 1,400 jailed Brigadists, 80 per cent had distanced themselves from terrorism by 1987. On the 6th of January 1986, a last terrorist operation took place, close to Tivoli in Rome, for which the 'old' *Brigate Rosse* were held responsible: the '*gambizzazione*' (shooting the legs) of prison director Egidio De Luca.[19]

DECLINE AND DISSOLUTION:

How can we analyze this dissolution of the most powerful terrorist group on the European continent?

THE SUPPLY SIDE

First of all, if we take the factors linked to the movement – as the supplier of terrorist energy, strategy and action, we can state that the Marxist revolutionary *ideology* as a view on the current world of deprivation, oppression and exploitation as on the desired future – it never really lost its appeal. Even today, Toni Negri, who was convicted as a BR sympathizer, and his theory of the precariate attracts thousands of followers.

However, not their ideology, but *their commitment* to Marxist Leninist ideology as culture criticism and as a map for the future, crumbled in the wake

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[19] Responsibility was however not claimed for this attack, as was usually the case with BR actions.

of the first 5 years. The murder of Coco in June 1976 signalled the BR's ideological breakdown. Coco's assassination was the first deliberate and intended attempt to homicide - not a homicide on a symbolic representative of the SIM, but on an immediate and private enemy. From combining work and knowledge, acting on behalf of the oppressed factory workers, the BR had embarked on what was seen as a private war against the state, while civil society including social movements of the Left became pure spectators of a conflict they were unable of sustain. Since, how did the Italian workers benefit from Coco's death? 'Ever since, the only evaluation our political line was undertaken in relation to our own capacity to practice it, with a view to reproducing ourselves rather than establishing a dialogue with society', as Moretti stated (Moretti 1994, 98).

The *strategy* of leashing out against state representatives also proved a disaster, when the BR kidnapped Aldo Moro, two years later. Their 'risoluzione strategica', that led to the Moro kidnapping was that the state was complicit with the imperialist state controlled by multinational companies and that the Christian Democrats were the representatives in the country of the interests of such companies. But even although Moro himself admitted as much, spilling the beans about state corruption – the BR failed their aim. The protracted kidnapping and the tormented face of Moro undermined this abstract war declaration. They were no longer seen as the Robin Hoods for the oppressed workers, but they had manoeuvred themselves in the position of war criminals, fascists even, while Aldo Moro's image increasingly resembled the icon of an imprisoned partisan.

In the third place, also *organisation and leadership* were heavily pushed by the ensuing debate, the relentless hunt by the counterterrorists, and especially by the newly released crown witness laws (see below). The executive committee started to fall apart in 1978, when the Legge Moro and the LEgge Cossiga provided remorseful terrorists (pentiti), or even those who only distanced themselves from terrorism (dissassociazioni) serious reductions of their sentence in turn for information on the whereabouts, names, logistics of the remaining terrorists.

THE DEMAND SIDE

At the beginning, the many study groups and other 'knowledge and work' committeed inspired thousands of young workers and students in the north of Italy. The BR's intention to promote awareness that breaking the state monopoly in violence was possible, was embraced by hundreds of them. Too many youngsters had experienced brutal violence and oppression in the work place or on the streets. Not the BR were violent, the state was, and the right wing fascists lurking in the shadows. In the perspective of learning theories, violent behaviour is transmitted in enclaves of peers and through mimetic processes triggered by role models. The first generation BR provided these role models. Their claims about justice were accepted, their style was adopted by a *first generation of terrorist supporters*.

However, once the first generation was apprehended, the second generation lost touch with youth culture and social movement ideology. New generations were attracted to mere violence, the 1977 generation for example. Even after 1978, new recruits trickled towards the BR. But they no longer were representatives of a large support base of disenfranchised youngsters, nor were they able merely with their violent acts to inspire the masses. Therefore, this *second generation soon outgrew their support base.* After 1978, their resources became exhausted. Finance, infrastructure, authority and moral commitment, networks, trust – in short, their support base dwindled. Even although a large left wing constituency remained in place, and still is, the use of violence in its own ends – especially the murder of alleged traitors, or even the relatives of these traitors – deterred potential new recruits.

New generations rather joined new political parties, the greens, remained faithful to the communist party that had abandoned the compresso storico in 1978 and organized themselves in trade unions or youth centres.

EXTERNAL FACTORS: THE STATE

Regarding the external factors to the terrorist movement, two things stood out in the history of the Red Brigades. First, the *macropolitical climate of polarization*, the suspending threat of right wing coups, reinvigorated with the Pinochet experience in Chile in 1975, provided the BR with a sense of legitimacy, perceived urgency within the larger left wing constituency that something should be done to prevent a right wing coalition to overtake power in the country. The high level of violence, the low threshold for engaging in violence, engrained in Italian political culture was already firm in place in the late sixties, after wild strikes and clashes with the police amounted to dozens of casualties every week or month. The 16 CD-led coalitions that ruled Italy from 1945 onwards at the same time did not leave any opening for alternative voices. Even the historical compromise was viewed in this light as a capitulation for the powers that be instead of offering a new venue for Italian politics.

Second*, the role of the state* in both radicalizing the Red Brigades but also in stimulating disengagement after 1978 is a remarkable feature in the history of left wing gerrorism in Italy. Della Porta wrote extensively on the interaction process between state repression, notably by the regular police and the Carabinieri between 1967 and 1975. Contrary to Germany, Italian governments totally neglected terrorism as a specific crime different from ordinary crime until 1974. There was no politics of national security as the Germans had developed in 1972. No new laws were adopted. Terrorism was framed as crime, terrorists as regular outlaws, villains or even mafia groups.

Even worse, parts of the government apparatus, notably members within the military secret service, even played into the fear for terrorism by instigating bombings and trying to shove the blame to left wing terrorists – the above explained strategy of tension. It is no wonder, that in this way, street protesters, strikers, trade unionists and terrorists were forged together in their resistance to the state. The police and intelligence services provided the injustice frames that were fruitfully operated by the entrepreneurs of violence, by the leaders of terrorists columns.

Dalla Chiesa's unit in booked some remarkable successes in 1974/5, but his group was disbanded because political leaders still saw no political gain in prioritizing terrorism on their political agenda. This only changed after 1978. Between 1978 and 1982 police capabilities were stocked up, preventive custody was extended, interrogation without lawyers became possible, but most notably: pentiti laws and detachment-provsisions were adopted. The Asinara prison still provided footage for terrorist sympathizers, but the tables were turned. This time, the terrorists were in the defensive. Even communist trade union leader Luciano Lama publicly stated that he advised anyone to come forward with knowledge about terrorist's whereabouts to the police. So, both repressive and preventive measures were expanded. The national sense of unity perceived by the public over the memorial and burial of Aldo Moro provided the police with huge numbers of tip offs.

In the early 1980s, the thousands of terrorists crumbled away to dozens of them, the remaining ones that did not want to hand themselves in found asylum in Mitterrand's France. Terrorist violence did not peter out completely, but it fell back behind the Mafia attacks that grew more serious in that decade. Of course, the real political problems, the stalemate, the innate polarization and the rift between left and right in Italy, the corruption within the judiciary and the police were not solved, sparking off indignation and even attacks as late as in the 1990s and in 2001 and 2002, when to professors of industrial law were murdered in Bologna for having lend assistance to the state's economic policy. But terrorism lost its performative power, it was not able anymore to create social drama, to mobilize their masses – and nor did the state contribute to this powerplay anymore.

CONCLUSION: WHICH FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECLINE AND DISSOLUTION

Summarizing the factors contributing to the decline and dissolution of the Brigate Rosse we can thus draw the following list:

Factors linked to the movement	
Failing ideology (view of current world and desired future)	+
Failing strategy (the outlined route)	+++
Failing organisation	+
Failing leadership	+
Needs of the members	
Members outgrowing the movement	+
New generations not attracted	+++
External factors	
(Inter)national or local conflict dis-appears/changes	+++
Government: repression	+++
Government: inclusion	+++
Government: reform	+
Public opinion/ media/ *Zeitgeist* changes (image worsens)	+++
Attractive competing interpretation	+
Breakdown of barriers	
Social dependency	0
Psychological dependency	0
Amount of costs incurred	+++
Group reprisals	++
Fear of loss of reputation and protection	+++
Fear of marginalisation	0

What contributed most significantly to the demise of the BR started with their own *strategic miscalculation* during the kidnapping of Aldo Moro. Murdering the Christian Democrat Moro proved a major failure in keeping and gaining respect and support within the larger left wing constituency that provided the BR with infrastructure, new recruits and tacit consent. What does this show? That terrorism was and is communication. Attacks needed to be symbolically congruent with the ideology of the BR. Targeting the SIM appealed to disenfranchised and unemployed workers and to numerous students revolting against the political stalemate, overcrowded universities and repressive actions by the police and the authorities. Targeting Moro, although he was as a Christian democrat leader and indeed a representative of the old elite, could have been a right pick on paper. However, the protracted kidnap, the way Moro's image of an old, melancholic and exhausted figure was disseminated by the Red Brigades themselves, undermined the relative legitimacy they had. The iconographic image of Moro the martyrer did not match with their portrayal of him as a henchman of the capitalist system.

At this point, secondly, *the government's repressive and reactive measures were replaced by flexible, clever and tailor made responses* to target not the individuals on the street, but the group as a whole. Santorillo's and Dalla Chiesa's units were recalled and put on duty again. Intelligence led arrests, made possible through the new amnesty and crown witness laws, provided an influx of new information, that enabled the police to round up a cascade of columns and groups.

Indeed, imprisoned leaders even appealed to their followers and support base to quit future actions and to accept the integrative offer by the state. Instead of accepting these offers, the BR made their next strategic mistake. Instead of offering an alternative explanation why the struggle wasn't over yet, they framed pentiti and dissassociati as traitors, murdering even the brother of one of them. Thus, the murder of Peci in June 1981 and the murder of Guido Rossa in January 1979 – perceived as as a traitor since he betrayed a fellow worker for distributing BR flyers in his plant – took away the last credibility the remaining brigadists had.

In the third place, *the political climate* became more open to political reforms as well, resulting in new liberal and left wing parties entering Italian parliament, whereas at the same time the Strage di Bologna by right wing terrorists, resulting in 85 killings and 236 people wounded severely upset the whole of the Italian population. Although Italians were used to a high level of violence, ranging from clashes on the streets between gangs, factions and police to homicides by Mafia or terrorists, this totally random, indiscriminate and brutal act of violence enraged the masses. Thousands of people flooded the streets, demanding the end of terrorism in any form, be it red, black or otherwise. The 'strategic withdrawal' of 1981 should be viewed in this light.

POLICY ANGLES

- Terrorism is communication: terrorist are defending injustice frames, trying to sell them to their support base. The trick is: to undermine these terrorist narratives by counterterrorist ones.

- This communication policy should be flanked by flexible, intelligence led and reformist measures: undermining the legitimacy of the terrorists, targeting the real hard core leaders, stirring unrest by offering amnesty or reduction of sentences to the sympathizers and smaller cadres

- Opening up the political system for legitimate grievances, addressing feelings of exclusion and identifying to what extent terrorism really represents a larger base of dissatisfaction and alienation within larger constituencies.

- Terrorism is theatre, counterterrorism is as well: who dominates the play, who holds the strings to performative power, who convinced the public the most? And: who succeeds in terrorizing the public: the terrorists with their random acts of violence, or the counterterrorists with their overly repressive, indiscriminate arrests, clashes and imprisonments? Apart from focusing on technical repression and prevention the government should therefore always keep in mind that the thing terrorists are most after, is creating a social drama. Therefore, they should not let

21

themselves be turned into a puppet on a terrorist string, but keep the drama behind close curtains, to take away the wind that keeps the terrorists floating.