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In a 2012 review of Alessandro Orsini's "Anatomy of the Red Brigades," I referred to "the remarkable carnage" due to political terrorism in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ It was a carnage that received less global attention than the terrible but numerically far smaller numbers of people killed, injured, and traumatized by leftist political killers in West Germany. Luca Falciola, in this interesting account of the friendly contacts between Italian leftist radicals, and Palestinian members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), draws on an impressive amount of Italian scholarship to reveal that the toll of dead and wounded was even larger than Orsini reported. Italian scholars have established that between 1969 and 1982, the Italian radical left perpetrated 2,188 violent attacks which caused 134 deaths and 178 injuries. The West German Red Army Faction, Revolutionary Cells, and June 2nd Movement combined murdered a comparatively modest 34 persons from 1969 to 1998.² Both of these radical terrorist movements took place in the liberal democracies of West Germany and Italy in which the rights of protest and the option of electoral activity was there to be had, a reality which makes the absurdity and atrocities of the leftist terrorist era all the more appalling.

Before the attacks by al-Qaeda in London and Madrid in 2003, the worst mass casualty attack in Europe after World War II was a massive bomb explosion at the Bologna train station in 1980 that killed 85 people. Falciola calls the Bologna bombing "the most murderous terrorist action in Italy's history." That is true only if one discounts the terrorism of the Italian fascist regime and that of the Nazi occupation forces in World War II. Yet Falciola offers an interesting comment on the conclusions of two teams of Italian investigative journalists.

They viewed the bombing as offering a close-up view of the Italian political authorities' stance toward *Palestinian* (emphasis added) terrorism. However, the literature is oriented toward validating the hypothesis that the bombing, officially ascribed to extreme right terrorists, was actually a retaliation by the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)* (emphasis added) against the Italian government after the latter's violation of a "non-belligerence agreement." Although the hypothesis is worthy of further explanation, the history of Palestinian resistance in Italy deserves a broader analytical perspective and a more neutral approach (33).

Given that two sets of Italian investigative journalists concluded that the worst terrorist attack in Italy's postwar history up to that time was the work of the PFLP, one expects an exploration of the matter further. Unfortunately, that is not the

¹ Jeffrey Herf, review of Alessandro Orsini, "Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mindset of Modern Terrorism", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12:1 (2012): 137-139, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=795ce930-9575-4f73-af6d-72a57a87c487%40sdc-v-sessmgr03>

² Herf, "An Age of Murder: Ideology and Terror in Germany," *Telos* 144 (Fall 2008): 8-38.

case.³ For if the PFLP did perpetrate the Bologna bombing, that act would, at least in the English language scholarship, constitute a woefully underexamined chapter in the history of Palestinian terrorist operations in these years to Europe. It would indicate that the PFLP had used terror in Italy to create a credible threat of further murderous violence if the Italian government took sharp measures to curtail its activities in Italy. In an article about links between Italian leftists and Palestinian terror organizations, Falciola instead refers to the need for a “broader analytical perspective” and a “more neutral approach” (33). Rather what is required is an answer to the question of whether or not the PFLP was responsible for the worst terrorist attack in Italy since World War II.

Drawing on the extensive work of other Italian scholars, declassified intelligence reports, judicial materials, radical leftist publications. Italian state and private archives, and Falciola’s interviews with (presumably former) members of the PFLP, Falciola documents the friendly relations between Italian radical leftists and Palestinian terrorist organizations in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴ Italy’s geographical proximity to the Middle East, the ease of travel by air and sea, its relatively low cost of living, ease of entry into Italian universities, and the existence of a radical left for which the Italian Communist Party’s parliamentary road to socialism was anathema fostered a distinctive Italian radical leftist embrace of the PLO and its most radical member the PFLP. Money and weapons went back and forth.

He offers evidence that the PLO’s threats to engage in terrorism in Italy had the desired effect on the Italian government, leading it to release PLO and PFLP terrorists and give them lenient prison sentences even when they had been caught seeking to transport military grade weapons. Whether or not the PFLP perpetrated the Bologna bombing, Falciola findings suggest that its well-deserved reputation for politically motivated murder produced an Italian government policy of appeasement and leniency.

Falciola makes clear that for the Italian far left, as was the case for its West German counterpart, the appeal of the Palestinian terrorist organizations was that they combined Marxist-Leninist ideology with the actual practice of terror, or rather, in the nomenclature of those days, ‘armed struggle’ in the service of ‘resistance’ and advancement of ‘the revolutionary left.’ With reference to the 1970s he refers to “Fatah’s gradual de-escalation” (40). In fact, Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the PLO’s Executive Committee, played a double game of sweet reason and openness to negotiations in Europe combined with intensification of the civilians of the state of Israel. The escalation was evident in attacks on civilians including those on the Israeli towns of Kiryat Shmona and Maalot in 1974, and in the PFLP’s participation in the 1976 hijacking of an Air France flight and the separation of Jews and non-Jews in Entebbe. It was precisely in the years when the

³ Falciola’s footnote reads as follows: In 1995 the neofascist militants Valerio Fioravanti and Francesca Mambro were found guilty of the attack. See Valerio Cutonilli and Rosario Priore, *I segreti di Bologna: La verità sull’atto terroristico più grave della storia italiana* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2016); and Gabriele Paradisi, Gian Paolo Pelizzaro, and Francois de Quengo de Tonquedec, *Dossier strage di Bologna: La pista segreta* (Bologna: Giraldi, 2010).”Hence, it is not clear if these are the journalists who argue that the PFLP was responsible for the Bologna bombing.

⁴ See for example, Falciola refers to: Augustus R. Norton and Martin H. Greenberg, eds., *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); Andrea Jarach, *Terrorismo internazionale: Gruppi, collegamenti, lotta antiterroristica* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1979); Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981); Giovanni Fasanella and Alberto Franceschini, *Che cosa sono le Br* (Milan: BUR, 2004); Giovanni Fasanella and Rosario Priore, *Intrigo internazionale* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2010); and Silvano De Prosopo and Rosario Priore, *Chi manovrava le Brigate rosse?* (Milan: Ponte alle Grazie, 2011). On the revolutionary ethos and its terrorist outcomes in Italy, see Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). On the distinction between radical groups and clandestine militant organizations, see Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

terror waged against the Jewish state was at its worst that the Palestinian terror organizations found their greatest support from the radical left in West Germany, Italy, and Japan.⁵

Although the pews are emptier than in decades past, Italy remains an overwhelmingly Catholic country. In 1965, the Catholic Church as a result of a significant rethinking during the papacy of John XXIII, repudiated 1900 years of the accusation that the Jews murdered Jesus, the central accusation that spawned a millennium of Jew-hatred.⁶ Falciola reminds us that only four years later there began a warm friendship between Italian left-wing extremists and Palestinian terrorists when the latter had become world famous for killing Israelis and for trying to destroy the Jewish state. The Italian leftists, some veterans of 1968, some older renegades from the Italian Communist Party, steeped in Marxist-Leninist 'revolutionary' ideology, were oblivious to the extent to which, despite their presumed atheism, their support of the PFLP placed them in that much longer tradition of Jew-hatred which the Catholic Church in Italy had fostered for centuries and was only beginning to overcome. Though they would dispute that criticism, the fact was that the PFLP was well known for its attacks on the Jewish citizens of the state of Israel.

Falciola's research convincingly documents the realities of trans-national links between the PFLP and Italian leftists during the highpoint of Palestinian terrorist violence aimed at Israel. The trans-national dimension of these events is interesting, but less important than what the PFLP did in its terrorist war against the state and citizens of Israel, namely its very famous attacks on Jewish civilians. The rhetoric of revolutionary Communism appears to have obscured from the Palestinian's Italian comrades that their solidarity with these killers raises issues about the persistence of the longest hatred in Italian culture, on the far left and far right. Unfortunately, Falciola's article does not explore that issue.

Luca Falciola's article adds to our knowledge of the extent to which the radical left in Italy—and the other two post-fascist countries, the two Germanys, and Japan—made common cause with the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet there is much historical research to be done on a previous generation of Italian leftists, the Communists and Socialists of the late 1940s. They took up arms against actual fascists and Nazis in World War II. They recalled the fiercely anti-Zionist aspect of Mussolini's yearning for empire in Northern Africa, as well as Nazi Germany's search for Arab allies in a common cause against the Jews and Zionists of Palestine and the Middle East.⁷ After World War II and the Holocaust, and especially between 1945 and 1949, that generation of Italian leftists, in ports such as Naples and Genoa, like their counterparts in Marseille in France, supported the Mossad's program of clandestine Jewish immigration to Palestine. The regrettable Italian leftist embrace of Palestinian terror of the 1970s and 1980s was a repudiation of the meaning of the actual tradition of Italian anti-fascism and of a generation of Italian leftists for whom the fight against antisemitism and for the establishment of the Jewish state was an integral component of the traditions of Italian anti-fascism.⁸

⁵ On the PFLP attacks on towns in northern Israel, West German radical leftist participation in the Entebbe episode, and the role of the Japanese Red Army in the Lod Airport Massacre see chapters 5 and 8 in Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁶ See, for example, John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching about the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁷ On Nazi policy and strategy, see Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁸ An English language history of the Italian leftist support for establishment of the state of Israel in the years following World War II remains to be written. On the French connection, see Jeffrey Herf, *Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945-1949* forthcoming and in production with Cambridge University Press.

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