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**US COLD WAR PROPAGANDA AND CIA OPERATIONS:
THE MANIPULATION OF ITALIAN POLITICAL TERRORISM**

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CHAPTER 1

1.1. Introduction

The Years of Lead (Anni di Piombo) characterized a period of political and social turmoil inside the Italian society from the late 1960's to the late 1980's when left – and right – wing groups were conducting political terrorism. The period of red and black terrorism (Drake, 1984: 289) — which has been extensively researched by scholars involved in security studies — is strongly associated with the left – wing terrorist group Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse) and their violent attacks. The kidnapping and assassination of Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978 — their most notorious violent act — is still strongly projected to this day.

Far - left terrorism was targeted and symbolic, while far - right terrorism was indiscriminate and deadlier. Far - right terrorism in Italy aimed to create political and social tension and fear to the general public, but, most importantly, far - right groups were conducting false flag operations as part of the “strategy of tension” (De Lutiis, 2003: 96). Particularly, the aim of this strategy was to project the idea that left - wing groups were responsible for violent attacks in order to decrease the power of the leftist and communist political parties and cause an authoritarian and conservative shift in Italy's political life. On the other hand, left - wing terrorism constituted a response to the violent acts of the far - right groups.

It is known that during the Years of Lead, secret armies — part of a clandestine network called “Operation Gladio” — were operating in Italy in order to prevent a potential Soviet invasion during the Cold War (Ganser, 2004: 1). These secret armies were created by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and supervised by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). However, the confrontation of the Soviet threat was not their main goal, as it is known that these secret armies were operating in order to manipulate and influence domestic politics in Italy and the political and social behavior of the Italian population in general. Particularly, the US tried to control Italians’ political behavior by creating the idea that far - left groups were conducting violent and indiscriminate terrorist attacks when, in reality, far - right groups were the perpetrators.

Political terrorism in Italy was created by domestic circumstances; however, it was reinforced by US interference. Its interference in Italian political terrorism and how it attempted to shape people’s perceptions and beliefs can be examined through a constructivist lens. Constructivists argue that the international system is socially constructed; in other words, that actors shape their identities, interests, and behavior based on their interactions with each other. The constructivist approach also focuses on the role of perceptions in world politics (Pouliot, 2011: 428) and the importance of ideas. Therefore, the theory of constructivism can be used as a tool in order to examine how the US perceived the communist threat and, by extension, how this perception influenced American foreign policy. Additionally, the theory of constructivism can explain how the US manipulated terrorist incidents in Italy and created certain ideas regarding communism and far - left terrorism.

The American interference in Europe — specifically, in Italy — was a product of the Cold War. The discourse about the American interference in the domestic affairs of multiple European countries during the Cold War is not something recent, as it has been extensively discussed amongst academics throughout the years. It is known that the CIA was not only monitoring Italy's political and social life but also manipulating the country's elections since the end of World War II. Strategies such as funding anti - communist groups, political parties, and organizations, using propaganda against the communist ideology, and controlling newspapers, published books, and television broadcastings in order to manipulate the public opinion were part of the US foreign policy in Italy.

The reasons for the American manipulation of Italian elections are inextricably linked to the Cold War and the US foreign policy against the communist threat. This subject has been widely researched by scholars; however, the US influence in Italy and the manipulation of Italian political terrorism have not been fully explored. The Years of Lead reflect an era of extreme tension and violence between left - and right - wing Italian terrorist groups. It is known that during this time, the US political influence on Italy was substantial. Therefore, the US interference in Italian politics and the manipulation of Italian political terrorism is worthy of examining in order to understand the influential role of ideas and perceptions in international politics and relations.

The research question that this paper will attempt to answer is the following: *How did the US interference in Italy during the Years of Lead impact the perception of Italian political terrorism?* The topic of this research is based on the US strategy of interference in the domestic politics and public sphere of Italy. Chapter 2 analyzes the topic of the US foreign policy and strategy in Italy during the Cold War and outlines the political and social situation in Italy since 1945 with a focus on the Years of Lead era. Additionally, in order to investigate the topic, I will closely examine the variety of actions that the CIA carried out in Italy: sponsoring conservative parties, conducting espionage, using propaganda, controlling the media, and manipulating the tension between right - and left - wing terrorist groups. Chapters 3 and 4 will each focus on a specific case of political terrorism in Italy: the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969 and the Peteano bombing in 1972, respectively. These two incidents were the most distinguishing terrorist attacks conducted by far - right terrorist groups as part of the strategy of tension. Particularly, I will examine how these terrorist attacks were manipulated by the CIA, analyze how the US interference in Italy's domestic affairs reinforced the scale of Italian political terrorism, and finally, draw conclusions about the impact of the US influence in Italy.

1.2. Literature Review

US foreign policy in Italy and Italian Terrorism

The US interference in Italy's political and social sphere occurred during a period of extreme tension between the US and the Soviet Union, although there were no armed conflicts between the two superpowers¹. The US manipulation of the general public in Italy, the control of the media, the distortion of events, and — according to some evidence — the support of far - right paramilitary groups are associated with the Cold War. The question of why the US conducted these acts and manipulated the elections and the general tension in Italy can be answered if one examines the US national interests and strategies during the Cold War. In other words, the involvement of the US in Italy can be understood if one analyzes the US foreign policy after World War II.

Multiple scholars have examined the reasons for the US interference in Italy and its exact goals. Due to its fear of the Soviet Union's power and possible expansion (Gaddis, 2005: 4), the US shaped its foreign policy around aiming to eliminate or decrease the communist threat. Additionally, according to Aksan and Bailes (2013: 12) the US aimed to create a sphere of influence and spread an economic model that would promote American business interests around Europe. The strategy of containment (X. 1947: 566 – 582) included multiple doctrines² (Marshall Plan, Truman Doctrine, Eisenhower Doctrine

¹ However, there were small - scale conflicts and regional wars in which the Soviet Union and the US interfered, directly or indirectly.

² These doctrines aimed to help the US to gain allies and also keep European countries more economically dependent on the US.

etc.) which provided foreign aid to states in need after World War II. It also called for the creation of NATO, which started as a military coalition between the US and some European states. Notwithstanding these actions, secret armies and intelligence agencies were operating throughout Europe during the Cold War, coordinated by NATO and the CIA (Ganser, 2005: 69).

In Italy, the influence of the US was intense because the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano - PCI) was powerful, gaining more supporters after the end of World War II. The inability of the Italian government to implement political and social reforms caused the dissatisfaction and the revolt of students and laborers. The protests of 1968 in France, which created civil unrest throughout Europe, also played an important role in the Italian uprising. As a result, the leftist revolutionary movement in Italy was noticed by the US, which feared the Soviet expansion in Europe.

The US foreign policy in Italy, and particularly the strategy of tension (Ganser, 2004: 7), was implemented in order to decrease communist influence. Blum in his book "Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II", describes the US interference into the domestic politics of multiple states. In regards to the case of Italy, Blum analyzes the various non - military tactics that the US used to minimize the communist influence on the Italian population.

The US propaganda against communist ideology, the control of Italian media, and the sponsoring of conservative and anti – communist political parties (Blum, 2003: 119) were actions that partially describe the extent of the US

interference in the domestic politics of Italy. Specifically, Blum (2003: 120) emphasizes the fact that multiple Italian newspapers, such as *The Rome Daily American*, were owned and controlled by the CIA. He explains that the general fear about the communist threat was intensified in Italy because since 1946, the PCI had started gaining more and more votes and, at the same time, the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana - DC) were losing their power (Blum, 2003: 27). As a result, the CIA operated secretly and began to manipulate Italian elections right after World War II (Ganser, 2006a: 763). From 1948 to 1968, the CIA was spending between \$20 - \$30 million per year to support conservative parties, newspapers, and books that portrayed the communist ideology in an unfavorable manner (Blum, 2004: 120). During this time, it was clear that the population was revolting against the government and simultaneously, many Italian revolutionary groups emerged (Ginsborg, 1990: 312). Additionally, according to Ginsborg (1990: 301 – 302), Italians' perception of the US was negative, especially after the events of the Vietnam War. As a result, an anti – capitalistic and anti – American movement emerged and at the same time, the socialist and leftist ideology was reinforced, especially amongst young Italians.

One of the most criticized US actions in Italy was the projection of propaganda during the electoral campaigns and its support of the Christian Democratic Party ³ since 1945 and throughout the Cold War. Additionally, during the Years of Lead the US took advantage of the tense situation, allowed the violence to escalate, and even propagandized that far - left

³ The DC was a conservative political party that the United States created, aiming to keep the communists out of the Italian government (Aksan and Bailes, 2013: 222).

groups and communists were conducting indiscriminate terrorism attacks. De Lutiis (2003: 96) refers to the possible connection of the Italian military secret service with right - wing paramilitary groups. It is known that the Masonic lodge "Propaganda Due" (P2) was linked to terrorist attacks such as the Bologna Massacre in 1980. Most importantly, multiple members of the P2 were directors of the Italian secret services (DeRouen, 2005: 370) and, according to Ganser (2004: 73) they were in close communication and cooperation with the CIA. De Lutiis (2003: 96), however argues that the investigation of right - wing terrorist attacks was difficult because it was sabotaged by Italy's military secret service,⁴ which tried to protect the right - wing groups and "shift the country's political centre of gravity to the right" Moreover, Willan (2002: 13) claims that the investigation of the terrorist attacks was not only undermined and sabotaged by intelligence agencies, but Italian and foreign secret services were supporting and reinforcing the violence and following a strategy of terrorism in order to combat the communist ideology in Italy.

Red and Black Terrorism

A background of Italian society during the Years of Lead shows that Italy was dealing with widespread labor unrest, continuous strikes⁵, conflicts between left - and right - wing groups, and multiple instances of political violence and terrorism (Ceci, 2013: 31). Ginsborg, in his book "A History of Contemporary

⁴ The Italian military secret service, called SIFAR (Servizio Informazioni Forze Armate), was created when Italy joined NATO in 1949 (Ganser, 2006b: 116).

⁵ These large - scale strikes organized by workers in factories along with students became known as the 'Hot Autumn' (Ginsborg, 1990: 312).

Italy: Society and Politics 1943 – 1988” gives a very detailed outline of the political and social events that took place in Italy after World War II; he discusses the Italian elections, the US interference in Italian society, and the terrorist attacks during the Years of Lead.

For twenty years, Italy was dealing with the phenomenon of terrorism, conducted by two groups with polarized ideologies and goals. Together, they created political and social tension amongst the Italian population. From 1969 to 1987, 14.591 politically - motivated violent attacks on civilians or objects occurred in Italy (De Lutiis, 2003: 95). De Lutiis (2003), Weinber and Eubank (1988), and Ronchey (1979) stress that on the one hand, the involvement of left - wing groups in terrorist attacks was and still is purposely projected, and on the other hand the acts of fascist and right - wing groups were ignored, covered up, or understated. It is true that terrorist attacks were conducted by both left - and right - wing groups; however, it seems that leftist groups were engaged in targeted and symbolic attacks in comparison with the right - wing paramilitary groups which conducted indiscriminate terrorist attacks against civilians (De Lutiis, 2003: 95). According to Ronchey (1979: 924), fascist terrorism in Italy was blind, indiscriminate, and impersonal aiming to inspire fear in the general public and create turmoil in Italian society. On the other hand, left - wing groups such as the Red Brigades preferred well - planned and targeted attacks using the methods of assassination, kidnapping, and kneecapping (Von Tangen, 1998: 95).

Drake (1984) and Allum (1978) try to separate the events that took place in Italy into time periods: Drake separates the eras focusing on the perpetrators, and Allum divides the incidents into two main periods focusing on the distinct

kinds of violence that occurred. Drake (1984: 281) states that from 1969 to 1974, Italy was suffering primarily from right - wing terrorist acts, and from 1975 to 1979 the main attacks were from left - wing groups such as the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse), the Armed Proletarian Cells (Nuclei Armati Proletari), and the Front Line (Prima Linea) and the last phase was the Bologna Massacre in 1980 caused by right - wing extremists. Allum (1978: 75) divides the events that took place in Italy into two main periods: the initial phase from 1969 to 1975 where indiscriminate acts of violence such as bomb attacks took place in multiple Italian cities — especially in Northern Italy — and were conducted by neo - fascists with the assistance of the Italian Mafia (Piazza Fontana massacre in 1969, Milan Police Headquarters in 1973, Piazza della Loggia in 1974, the Italicus Express in 1974), and the second phase — which started in late 1974 — where mainly targeted attacks⁶ and assassinations were conducted by both left - and right - wing groups. The Piazza Fontana massacre in 1969 was the first large - scale terrorist attack in Italy during the Years of Lead that caused the death of multiple civilians (Ceci, 2013: 29). This incident constituted the escalation of the tremendous turmoil inside the Italian society between left - and right - wing paramilitary groups. From 1969 to 1984, terrorist attacks were more frequent, leading to the deaths or injuries of twelve hundred people (Drake, Winter 1999 – Spring 2000: 63).

⁶ With the exception of the indiscriminate violent attack in the Bologna Central railway station where a bomb killed 84 people and injured more than 200 innocent civilians (Williams, 2015: 103).

De Rouen (2005: 371) argues that these incidents in Italy were a result of a tense domestic political and social situation and therefore are not linked to the international environment. However, it should be taken into account the extent of the US influence on Italian politics and its possible links to the escalation of political violence during the Years of Lead — particularly the impact of US propaganda. The American media, the White House and the CIA stated and projected the idea that these indiscriminate terrorist attacks were conducted by Italian leftist, anarchist, and communist groups (Ceci, 2013: 30) in order to reinforce the effectiveness of NATO's and the CIA's false flag operation in Italy.

CIA Possible Connections with Far - Right Terrorism

Notable academic research about the US interference in Italy has been conducted by multiple scholars. Ganser (2004), Grivas (2009), and Williams (2015) support the theory of direct involvement of the US in Italian terrorist attacks. Ganser has extensively investigated the US interference in Italy during the Cold War and the Years of Lead and particularly the existence of NATO's secret armies, which were operating in multiple countries throughout Europe. It is estimated by *The Association for Responsible Dissent* (ARDIS) that by 1987, 6 million people had died as a result of CIA covert operations around the world (Kangas, 1994). Particularly in Italy, Ganser refers to possible links between these secret armies and far - right terrorist groups and provides significant evidence in order to support his arguments. He uses reliable sources such as declassified official documents as well as statements from the Italian government and members of the secret armies and right - wing terrorist groups. Ganser also bases his claims on official statements from

Italian President Giulio Andreotti and uses evidence from magistrates who investigated terrorist attacks in Italy during the Years of Lead.

Ganser (2005: 69) argues that these secret armies and paramilitary groups were operating in multiple countries in Europe under the supervision of CIA and the UK's MI6. The exposure of the Gladio army was made by magistrate Felice Casson, who was investigating terrorist attacks in Northern Italy. According to Grivas (2009), the disclosure of the secret army in Italy played a significant role in leading to the revelation that multiple secret armies were operating in European countries during the Cold War (Belgium, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Switzerland).

Ganser states that the reasons for US interference in the majority of the European countries are linked to the fear that the Soviet Union would occupy Europe. In other words, the possibility of a Soviet invasion led the US to create an underground network of armies in order to be able to confront the Soviet Union. Aside from the main goal, it was revealed that these armies were created in order to influence domestic politics in Italy even in the absence of a Soviet invasion (Aksan and Bailes, 2013: 219) and particularly with the purpose of confronting a domestic upheaval (Ganser, 2006b: 123). In other words, these secret armies aimed to suppress a potential leftist or communist uprising. The US feared that the Italian Communist party would eventually win the elections and Italian communists would penetrate NATO and betray or weaken the alliance (Aksan and Bailes, 2013: 223).

Williams (2015: 95) and Ganser (2005: 71) use the term “strategy of tension” to describe the attempt of the CIA to weaken the leftist political parties in Italy. This strategy aimed to reinforce conservatism amongst the population in Italy by causing people to view leftists and communists as a threat. Ganser, in his article “Terrorism in Western Europe: An Approach to NATO’s Secret Stay - Behind Armies” (2005: 91) concludes that the CIA’s secret operations in Italy and other European countries was not only an act of “prudent precaution” against a potential Soviet invasion but most importantly a “source of terror” for the public.

Ganser, in his research, focuses on a particular incident that took place during the Years of Lead which involved a car bomb that killed three police officers. People believed that the bombing in Peteano in 1972 was conducted by far - left extremists, specifically the Red Brigades (Aksan and Bailes, 2013: 220). During that time, 200 communists were falsely accused and held in custody (Williams, 2015: 99). However, Casson’s investigation revealed that not only were far - right terrorists the perpetrators, but they were protected by the Italian military intelligence agency and NATO’s secret armies.

The serious accusations of US support for terrorist groups in Italy cannot be officially confirmed due to the refusal of NATO and the US government to clarify the situation. Additionally, the difficulties of attempting to confirm these allegations are obvious due to the fact that the structure of these secret operations, which were organized by intelligence agencies, is confidential, and many of the official documents were destroyed purposely throughout the years. The difficulty of investigating the direct connection of the US with Italian terrorist groups is thus evident. However, the US manipulation of Italian

politics and the exploitation of Italian political terrorism can be examined through an empirical lens using existing, valid primary and secondary sources.

1.3. Research Design and Methodology

This paper constitutes a within - case study of the US influence on Italian society through the manipulation of Italian political terrorism. The main aim of this qualitative research is to investigate and analyze how the US attempted to decrease the power of the communist ideology in Italy by exploiting terrorist attacks in order to change people's perceptions and beliefs in the framework of the Cold War.

In Chapter 2, I will examine the US strategy in Italy during the Cold War and analyze the political and social situation in Italy particularly during the Years of Lead. The research focus on the tools that the US used in order to create the perception that communists were conducting indiscriminate terrorist attacks against innocent civilians.

The constructivist approach is used in order to show the importance of perceptions and the power of ideas. The importance of the idea that "a phenomenon is generated and maintained through collective human action, thought, discourse, or other social practices" (Psathas, 2013: 894) can be used in order to explain the US attempt to "construct" the idea of the communist threat. Even today, Italian political terrorism is associated with the violent acts of the Red Brigades and other far - left groups. However, in 1990, the Italian Parliamentary Commission on Terrorism (Commissione

parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo) stated that far - right terrorist groups were responsible for 68% of the terrorist attacks in Italy and indicated that far - right terrorist incidents were indisputably the deadliest (Grivas, 2009) not only in Italian but in European history as well.

According to constructivist scholar Finnemore (1996: 128), the social reality — social norms, rules, understandings and relationships — determine our behavior. Therefore, it is essential to analyze this subject through a constructivist approach in order to understand the importance and the impact of ideas and perceptions. Most importantly, the theory of constructivism also displays more effectively the attempt of the US to construct the idea that far - left and communist groups were conducting violent and indiscriminate attacks. The focus on the US attempt to construct certain perceptions and influence the Italian population is discussed in order to illustrate the impact of US interference in the escalation of political terrorism in Italy.

Data selection

In order to depict and analyze the political and social situation during the Years of Lead, I will use secondary sources such as academic books and articles which contain information about the Italian political terrorism that escalated during the 1970's. In regards to the US manipulation of Italian elections I will collect and analyze both primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources such as articles from both Italian and American popular newspapers are examined. Italian newspapers are included due to the fact

that multiple Italian newspapers were influenced or controlled by the US. I will use articles from newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* that were published during the Years of Lead and were projecting propaganda against left - wing groups. American articles were purposely promoting the idea that indiscriminate terrorist attacks were conducted by leftist and communist groups when, in reality, far - right extremists were responsible for these violent acts. The examination of these sources which refer to Italian politics, elections, and the communist ideology are used to reveal the attempt to decrease Italians' support for the communist party. The constructivist approach effectively explains that propaganda socially constructs reality. Therefore, I will focus on the use of propaganda in newspapers and analyze the content of these articles.

There is difficulty in collecting information from primary sources such as official documents due to the confidential nature of the subject. However, there are significant government documents which have been declassified as well as information discovered by prestigious figures such as Italian magistrates. Additionally, official statements from important political figures in Italy, former agents both from the CIA and the Italian intelligence agency are used.

Primary sources such as electoral statistics archived by the Italian Government are also used and analyzed, specifically those from national and regional Italian elections since 1945 and particularly from 1969 to 1989. Regional elections are significant because in cities such as Milan, Bologna,

and Brescia, the Italian Communist Party had a wide base of supporters and had won the regional elections multiple times. Most importantly, these regions of Northern Italy were targets of extreme and violent terrorist attacks conducted by far - right extremists.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze examples of both indiscriminate and targeted terrorist attacks: the bombing in Milan was the first and one of the deadliest indiscriminate attacks conducted by far - right terrorist groups and signified the start of the strategy of tension era, and the Peateano bombing in 1972 was a targeted attack that killed three police officers. Both terrorist attacks constitute clear examples of a false flag operation conducted by far - right groups and display the variety of methods that intelligence agencies used to create the perception that far - left extremists were responsible for these violent acts.

The selection of the Piazza Fontana bombing case is due to the severity and the indiscriminate nature of the attack, and the importance of the Peteano case can be attributed to the fact that it eventually led to the revelation of Operation Gladio and the CIA secret operation in Italy. The blame for these bombings was purposely attributed to leftist and communists groups while far - right paramilitary groups were the perpetrators. Most importantly, these bombings took place in Northern Italy, where the PCI was the strongest political party and was winning the regional elections in some provinces and cities. Therefore, it is essential for the research to focus on these specific regions and the electoral outcome in Northern Italy, because the theory that

the US exploited terrorist attacks particularly in these areas in order to decrease the communist influence is more easily applicable.

CHAPTER 2

2.1. The Italian Society After 1945

The political and social situation in Italy since the end of World War II is outlined in order to start the analysis on the US interference in Italy during the Years of Lead. After 1945, Italy was trying to reconstruct its society politically, socially, and economically. The American influence on Italy became apparent in many ways, notably through the Marshall Plan, which was part of the US strategy in Europe. The US wanted to help the Italian state to rebuild and strengthen its economy in order to keep communism at distance (DeRouen and Heo, 2005: 373).

Since the end of World War II, the Christian Democracy political party was the dominant party in Italy. However, after 1948, sections of the DC's electorate were starting to express dissatisfaction (Ginsborg, 1990: 141); therefore the DC tried to create coalitions with centrist parties in order to remain in power. Additionally, after the 1968 national elections, the DC seemed to lose its power and popularity amongst the Italian population, and the PCI was progressively increasing its votes⁷. The Italian communist party was popular amongst citizens in North and Central Italy, specifically in industrialized cities such as Milan, Turin, and Genoa where mostly working - class families lived.

⁷ Appendix 1: Italian General Elections Statistics: 1948 - 1968

The strengthening of the PCI, in combination with the weakening of the DC, caused agitation in the US government, which feared a potential victory for the PCI in future elections.

The Marshall Plan, in combination with the US support of conservative parties such as the DC, gave the US the opportunity to supervise and influence Italy politically and socially. The US backed and financed the Christian Democrats and other conservative political parties that were influenced by and inclined towards American ideology; it is known that between 1948 and 1968, the CIA paid \$65,150,000 to the Christian Democrats and other parties (Blum, 2003: 119). Additionally, the entry of Italy as a member of NATO took place early on, and it reinforced the US control of the Italian political and social affairs. Italian intelligence agencies were also influenced and controlled by the US. In other words, Italy was dependent on the US and known as its most faithful ally (Ginsborg, 1990: 158).

The US had been interfering in Italian elections since 1948 in many ways, using propaganda and creating a network of clandestine groups and intelligence agencies that were capable of monitoring the political and social affairs in Italy. William Colby, former Director of the CIA, has revealed valuable information about CIA's operation in Italy since the end of World War II. In his memoir "Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA", he describes the period when he was operating as an undercover agent in Rome. Colby (1978: 109) states clearly that his mission was to prevent the Italian communist party from winning the elections so that communists would not penetrate and undermine

NATO. Additionally, Colby (1978: 115) reveals that the CIA undertook political propaganda and paramilitary operations and was cooperating closely with the Italian secret service in order to constrain the communist ideology in Italy.

Using propaganda, the US and CIA tried to influence not only Italians but also the population around the world: American articles in newspapers and magazines used extravagant language to project the idea that if the communist party won the Italian elections, the country would face a tremendous catastrophe. Italian citizens were supposed to make a decision between communism and democracy — or in other words between atheism and Catholicism (Belloni, 1971: 119), considering the fact that communism was presented to be demonic, especially by the US. As a result, the US exploitation of Catholicism, which was deeply rooted into the Italian society, seemed to play an important role in Italians' electoral choices.

The Italian - American community in the US also influenced the DC's election campaigns; hundreds of letters were dispatched to Italy containing a few dollars and stressing the dangers of communism (Ginsborg, 1990: 116). Italian immigrants in the US played a significant role in shaping the political opinion of Italians who lived in Italy because they communicated closely via letters. Additionally, it is known that the government of the US and the CIA backed and finance the DC's campaigns. F. Mark Wyatt, a CIA operative in Italy during the Italian elections in 1948, has revealed that the CIA was sponsoring the DC party and other political parties in 1947 and 1948 and, in his own words, "the CIA delivered money to selected politicians in order to defray their political expenses, their campaign expenses, for posters, for pamphlets etc." (CNN, 1998).

2.2. Political and Social Situation since 1968

The living conditions of the working class were deteriorating during this time as they were dealing with poverty and unemployment. Aldo Moro, the Prime Minister of Italy during 1963 and 1968, did not manage to fulfill his promises with regards to reforms. Laborers who hoped for social and economic reform (Ginsborg, 1990: 82) were disappointed by the government, and they organized strikes, which created extreme social unrest in Italy. During this time, it became apparent that the PCI was starting to gain more and more votes, not only in the general but also in the municipal elections (Willan, 2002: 17). The PCI was acquiring more supporters, especially in Northern Italy, an important industrial zone, and Central Italy (particularly Rome), an administratively - important region.

The May of 1968 in France significantly influenced society in Italy and led to the revolt of Italian students and laborers. According to Ginsborg (1990: 301), the movement in Italy did not derive solely from poor living conditions but was also a revolt against capitalism and the predominantly conservative values that the government expressed. Italians were more critical and aware of international affairs than before; the outcry of people against the atrocities committed by the US in the Vietnam War created an anti - American movement that led the US to worry about its influence in the international community, particularly in Europe. During 1968 — the so-called “Hot Autumn” — a large number of leftist revolutionary groups emerged in North Italy (Ginsborg, 1990: 312 - 313). In combination with the PCI, which was one of

the strongest communist parties in Western Europe, they created a powerful leftist - communist movement, which caused frustration for the US.

2.3. The Emergence of Italian Political Terrorism

Some of the groups that were created during the rise of the leftist movement in Italy became radicalized. During the Years of Lead, the most well – known left - wing group was the Red Brigades which conducted targeted and symbolic attacks, kidnappings, and assassinations on key political figures and individuals with far - right ideology, primarily as a response to the violent terrorist attacks which were conducted by far - right extremists.

Generally, red terrorism derived from the communist ideology, and it sought to start a revolution. According to Von Tangen (1998: 88) far - left extremists believed that the use of political violence was the only way to fight both the capitalist state and the emergence of neo - fascists. However, their first violent acts included primarily arsons and destruction of properties, unlike far - right terrorist groups which conducted violent acts mainly against innocent civilians. In a few words, the far – left extremists became more violent as a response to the indiscriminate and deadly attacks of far - right extremists.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the fascist era of Italy ended in 1945, during the Cold War there was a neo - fascist movement in Italy, where groups such as New Order (Ordine Nuovo), National Vanguard (Avanguardia Nazionale) and National Front (Fronte Nazionale) were assaulting individuals and conducting acts of vandalism against left - wing political parties and newspapers (Weinberg and Eubank, 1988: 534). However, after 1968, these

groups were responsible for more violent acts including the assassinations of left - wing figures and indiscriminate terrorist attacks against civilians. Black terrorism, conducted by far - right groups, was not only a response to the reinforcement of the communists (DeRouen and Heo, 2005: 371) and the leftist movement in Italy; it was an attempt to implement a coup d'état or at least to establish an authoritarian government by convincing people that the terrorist attacks were conducted by communists (Celani, 2004). Far - right terrorists believed that the Italian population would fear a potential communist insurgency and therefore desire a conservative or authoritarian government or even protection by the military.

2.4. The Connection between Italian Terrorism and the Cold War Era

Terrorism in Italy derived from domestic political and social situations; right - wing terrorism developed due to the growth of communism in Italy, and left - wing terrorism was a response to the violent acts of far - right extremists. However, the framework of the Cold War and the relationship between the US and the Soviet Union can further explain the unprecedented scale of terrorism in Italy.

The theory of constructivism explains that reality is socially constructed; in other words, the international system “consists of the ways in which human beings think and interact with each other” (Chernoff, 2008: 68). The interaction between different actors — state actors, non - state actors, and individuals — creates a constructed reality, or in other words shapes the international system. Constructivists argue that actors are inherently social

and that their identities and interests are “the products of inter - subjective social structures” (Reus Smit, 2005: 93). These social structures shape actor’s behavior, interests, and most importantly the way they perceive themselves and other actors. In turn, powerful actors such as states create perceptions and influence the behavior of people based on their interaction with other actors. The US during the Cold War had developed a specific perception of the Soviet Union and the communist ideology. The idea that the Soviet Union was the most dangerous enemy of democratic states and that communism was a threat to states and their population was promoted to the countries under the influence of the US.

Right - and left - wing terrorism in Italy began during the Cold War, initially as a result of the tense situation between the US and the Soviet Union, but additionally due to the US attempt to shape people’s perceptions of communism. In other words the tensions of the violence were reinforced, and the trajectory of events was guided by the US. The constructivist approach explains that states shape perceptions through their interactions with each other. The US, as one of the most powerful actors in the international arena, shapes ideas and perceptions around the world. In the case of Italy, the US managed to influence Italian politics, shape people’s perception regarding communism, and connect indiscriminate terrorist attacks with communists and leftists. Besides the power of states to shape perceptions, institutions also influence people’s behavior. The Italian government, the media, the intelligence agencies, and the police are some of the agencies in Italy that shaped people’s perception of communism and terrorism during the Cold War. These institutions created the perception that communism was

synonymous with terrorism and violence and that communists were a serious threat in people's lives.

Media around the world — particularly English - speaking media — were focusing on terrorist attacks in Italy conducted by left - wing extremists even though right - wing terrorism was more ferocious⁸. Additionally, according to official testimonies and evidence, the CIA and NATO's operation Gladio was not only taking advantage of political and social tension but also supported the attacks and covered up traces of the perpetrators. Indiscriminate terrorist attacks were more frequent in Northern and Central Italy, where leftist movements and labor unrest had reached their peak. The evidence regarding the US attempt to take advantage of the tension and distort reality in Italy is compelling, particularly in the two cases which are analyzed in the following chapters.

⁸ Appendix 2: Death and Injuries to Persons caused by Italian Terrorist Organizations

CHAPTER 3

3.1. Piazza Fontana Bombing

The Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969 in Milan killed 16 and injured 80 civilians (Ganser, 2004: 119). This incident was the first major violent event that took place during the Years of Lead, and it signified the start of the strategy of tension era. The bomb exploded inside the Agricultural Bank near Piazza Fontana, and on the same day three other bombs also exploded in Rome. These first terrorist incidents, which took place the same year while labor unrest and strikes had reached their peak, were conducted due to the fact that far - right extremists thought that the civil and industrial unrest was the start of a communist insurgency (Von Tangen, 1998: 89).

Since the beginning, the Italian intelligence agency — with the support of the CIA — used a variety of methods to hide the truth and distort information. Firstly, the investigation was sabotaged, and traces were covered up. The Italian intelligence agency planted incriminating evidence inside the house of well - known leftist editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (Ganser, 2014: 4). The indiscriminate terrorist attacks were blamed on communists and the extreme left by the police and the Ministry of the Interior. As a result, multiple anarchists, leftists, and communists were arrested.

The strategy of false flag operations was used intensively by the Italian secret services during the Years of Lead. According to Martin Glen T. (2014: 208), false flag operations are covert operations that appear as though they are

being carried out by other entities in order to deceive someone. In the case of Italian far - right groups, false flag operations were conducted in order to deceive people into thinking that leftist and communist groups were conducting indiscriminate terrorist attacks. The fear of communists would eventually lead Italians to reduce their support to the leftist and communist political parties and simultaneously increase their support to more conservative parties such as the DC.

After the incident in Milan, the police arrested and held in custody multiple anarchist and communists. Only after many years did the far - right group Ordine Nuovo (New Order) come under suspicion. The investigation revealed that the perpetrators of the attack — members of Ordine Nuovo — were in close communication with the Italian intelligence agency (Ginsborg, 1990: 334). It is known that the investigation was hampered and the perpetrators protected by Italian secret services which were in close cooperation with the CIA. The connection of the US and Italian secret services has been confirmed by multiple official figures from the US. American Ambassador Wells Stabler, who was assigned as a Deputy Chief of Mission in Rome, revealed in an interview that the US was financing the Italian intelligence agency — specifically its chief, General Vito Miceli (Kennedy, 1991: 80 - 86) — during the time of the attacks.

3.2. Investigations and Trials

Months after the attack, neo - fascists Giovanni Ventura, Franco Freda, and Pino Rauti were arrested and charged with planning it (Williams, 2015: 96). During the trials, magistrates displayed compelling evidence against the three men, who were members of the far - right organization Ordine Nuovo. Additionally, the trials revealed evidence about the connection between far - right groups, the Italian intelligence agency, and the CIA. In 2001, General Giandelio Maletti, who was also head of the Italian intelligence agency during the terrorist incidents, revealed that the terrorist attacks in 1969 were guided by NATO's secret armies and the Italian intelligence agency and were supported by the White House and the CIA (Ganser, 2004: 6). Additionally, he stated that the CIA took advantage of right - wing terrorism because it planned to create an Italian nationalism capable of ceasing what it saw as a slide to the left (Williams, 2015: 97). In other words, the US made attempts to create a controlled nationalistic and conservative ideology by exploiting far - right terrorism and distorting events because it feared a potential increase of the communist and leftist ideology in Italy.

However, the news about the arrests of the far - right extremists was downplayed and almost went unnoticed. Additionally, the investigation was sabotaged through the destruction of important evidence and the fact that magistrates were prevented from obtaining access to important files. The cover - up of the real perpetrators and sabotage of the investigation were not the only obstacles that the magistrates had to deal with; there were also the testimonies of false witnesses. The US cover - up and sabotage operation in

Italy was well - planned, therefore Italian citizens had no other option but to believe that these indiscriminate and fatal terrorist attacks were conducted by communists. The attacks of right - wing perpetrators were intended to cause fear and create the impression that communism was a real threat to Italians' lives. Particularly in the areas of Northern Italy where most of terrorist attacks occurred, the communist influence was intense; therefore, the strategy of false flag operations was purposely implemented in this area. Most importantly, the civil and industrial unrest in Northern Italy in 1968 - 1969 was seen by the far - right as the starting point of a communist insurgency (Von Tangen, 1998: 89).

3.3. Media Propaganda

Both Soviet and US propaganda in the Cold War framework was intense. Since the end of World War II, American campaigns and propaganda against the communists was apparent in Italy. The elections in Italy were heavily influenced by the US and its political propaganda. The fear of the communist threat and particularly, the reinforcement of the leftist movement in Italy led the US to control every aspect of people's lives. In Italy, most of the media was controlled or even owned by the CIA. Generally, the CIA took extreme measures against the communist threat. It is known that the CIA owned at least one newspaper in every European capital during the Cold War (Blum, 2003: 120) and used propaganda in order to manipulate the public opinion. According to Pratkanis and Aronson (1991: 8), propaganda "is the communication of a point of view with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to "voluntarily" accept this position as if it were his or her

own". Propaganda is used as a tool by those in power in order to manipulate public consciousness (Dallier, 2011: 536) and is inextricably linked with the media and mass communication.

Constructivism supports the theory of a socially constructed reality. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), interaction between people creates reality; specifically communication and interaction between people, groups, institutions, and other structures creates perceptions of reality. The media plays a significant role in the social construction of reality (Adoni and Mane, 1984: 323). In other words, the media has the power to manipulate, shape and influence people's perceptions using propaganda.

Newspapers in Italy aimed to construct the idea that the communist and leftist ideology constituted a physical threat to people and danger to the functionality of the Italian state in general. According to scholar Jacques Ellul there are different types of propaganda depending on the sender, the receiver, and how the message has been communicated. The type of propaganda that was implemented in Italy was *political* and *rational*. Ellul (1965: 62 - 85) argues that political propaganda is organized and has political ends, and rational propaganda uses truthful information and solid evidence in order to convince people. Italian and American newspapers were repeatedly projecting the idea that far-left groups were conducting indiscriminate terrorist attacks in order to persuade Italians that leftists and communists were threats to their lives. Therefore the political nature of the US propaganda is apparent. Additionally, the newspapers displayed information that seemed to be rational and reliable

due to the fact that they referred to solid evidence, such as eyewitness testimonies and official statements from the police and the government that were incriminating the supposed perpetrators.

Italian Press

Italian newspapers of wide circulation projected the idea that the terrorist attack in Milan was conducted by leftist and communists. Daily newspapers tried to influence the Italian population by having articles on the front pages that directly associated the attack with leftists, anarchists, and communists. The Italian newspaper *La Stampa* (17 December 1969) wrote that the police discovered evidence at the scene that connected the attack in Milan with far - left groups and that anarchists were arrested for it. The first suspect of the terrorist incident in Milan was Guiseppe Pinelli who was an anarchist railway worker (Williams, 2015: 95). Immediately after the terrorist attack, he was arrested and held into custody. Newspaper *Il Giorno* (16 December 1969) wrote that during his interrogation, Pinelli committed suicide by throwing himself out of the window of the Milan police headquarters after his alibi collapsed. However, the suicide took place under mysterious circumstances.

Other Italian newspapers listed the personal details of the anarchists who were allegedly responsible for the attack in Milan. Milanese newspaper *Corriere Della Sera* (17 December 1969) wrote on its front page about the anarchist Piedro Valpreda, who was identified by an eyewitness and accused of placing the bomb inside the Agricultural Bank. Newspaper *Il Messagero* (17 December 1969) had on its front page photographs of Valpreda arrested by

the police and wrote that “the criminals are arrested” and that “the perpetrators of the massacre in Piazza Fontana are leftists extremists”. Another article in *Il Messaggero* (17 December 1969) reported on important evidence that incriminated Valperda: a Milan taxi driver recognized Valpreda as a passenger he had transported to the Agricultural Bank in Milan the day of the terrorist attack, and he said that Valpreda entered the building while carrying a bag and exit without it. It was evident that newspapers in Italy rashly drew conclusions about the guilt of leftist and anarchists and did not express any doubt regarding their guilt due to compelling evidence against them.

American Press

Besides Italian newspaper manipulation, American media propaganda was also present. Using loaded language, newspapers managed to intensify fear and insecurity. Multiple newspapers graphically described the attack in Milan and its results. The influential newspaper *The Washington Post* wrote about the massacre: “Dismembered bodies were flung about by the blast at the National Agricultural Bank After an instant of shock the hall turned into chaos, with dead scattered over the floor, wounded people screaming for help and bleeding clerks – who were protected by their counters – putting out fires among their papers and rescuing the injured. The bank and square outside were covered with broken glass and patches of blood” (Ceci, 2013: 29).

The American newspaper *The New York Times* also wrote about the bombing. Some articles remained neutral, created confusion, or left readers

with unanswered questions as regards to who the perpetrators were. A *New York Times* article wrote that the terrorist attack was conducted by “extremists of all directions” (13 December 1969). Later, another article mentioned that the bombing was conducted by “agitators” (New York Times, 1969). Besides the violent attack in Milan, articles referred to other terrorist incidents such as bombs inside trains. Some articles from *The New York Times* were purposely projecting the theory that the perpetrators were left - wing extremists: “the explosives might have been planted by extreme left – wing “Chinese” Communists of the so - called Marxist Leninist Party, a group believed to be responsible for half a dozen acts of violence” (Doty, 10 August 1969).

The US propaganda and focus on the atrocities of left - wing terrorists was a strategy to convince the Italian population to vote for the Christian Democrats, which was projected as the safest and most moderate option (O'Shaughnessy, 7 June 1992). At the same time, the accusation that the extreme left was responsible for the indiscriminate terrorist attacks was used in order to reduce Italians' preference for the communist ideology. The implementation of this strategy was especially important in the industrial triangle in Northern Italy (Milan, Turin, and Genoa)⁹ where the PCI was constantly winning regional elections and the labor unrest was extended.

⁹ Appendix 3: Map of Italian Provinces and Cities

3.4. The Birth of the Red Brigades

The far - left organization the Red Brigades became active a year after the Piazza Fontana bombing. They described themselves as an autonomous workers' organization and their main goal was to fight employers (Ginsborg, 1990: 361) and generally the Italian political system. The Red Brigades started to conduct symbolic arson attacks on cars and kidnappings of important right - wing Italian businessmen and other elites. However, after 1974 they became more radicalized as they started to use assassinations in order to declare their political messages. Their targets were industrialists, right - wing politicians, the judiciary, and the security forces (Von Tangen, 1990: 95).

The creation of the organization is attributed to the social, political, and labor problems in Italy, and it was also influenced by the revolt and the strikes of students and laborers. Additionally, the emergence of the Red Brigades was provoked by the Piazza Fontana bombing and other far - right terrorist incidents that happened in 1969. The radicalization of multiple leftist individuals and their decision to join the Red Brigades and other far - left groups was a product of the political and social unrest in Italy. Most importantly, the Red Brigades were created in Northern Italy, which was the area suffered the most from indiscriminate far - right terrorist attacks. Therefore, the birth of the Red Brigades was also a response to Italian far - right terrorism. Their radical acts constituted an intense reaction to the unjust prosecutions against anarchists, leftists, and communists who were falsely accused for organizing the 1969 terrorist attacks.

Far - left terrorism in Italy was characterized by well - planned and executed attacks (Von Tangen, 1990: 95). Far - left terrorists conducted symbolic and targeted kidnappings, kneecappings, and assassinations of Italian elites. On the other hand, far - right terrorist attacks were indiscriminate and constituted mass casualty incidents. According to Ganser (2014: 2), far - right terrorist attacks would take place only in a public place such as a railway station, a public square, or a market place in order to emphasize the unpredictability and the indiscriminate nature of the attack. Far - right terrorism was also symbolic, considering the fact that they did not send a political message to the victims since the people killed or wounded were not their main targets. Far - right terrorists aimed first to intimidate and influence the wider population, and second to discredit and harm the communists who were their opponents. In other words, far - right terrorists operated in order to create a chain reaction. Far - right terrorism aimed to cause as much harm as possible and to create insecurity and fear to the general public. The impression that the communists were violent terrorists and consequently dangerous for people's safety would eventually lead people to stop supporting the Italian communist party and become ideologically more conservative.

Although there is no unanimity in the definition of terrorism, Schmid and Jongman (1988: 2) argue that terrorism is "a method of combat in which random or symbolic victims serve as an instrumental target of violence". Based on this definition, both far - left and far - right violent acts constituted terrorism in Italy. Far - right extremists targeted random civilians in order to intimidate the wider population, while far - left extremists conducted symbolic

and targeted terrorist attacks. Most importantly, far - left and far - right terrorism aimed to send a political message not to the victims but to a wider group of people. However, depending on different definitions, far - left violent acts in Italy do not constitute terrorism. Fortna's definition of terrorism is more suitable for the Italian case; she argues that terrorism is the use of indiscriminate violence against public civilian targets in order to influence the wider population and consequently to achieve political, financial, or religious goals (Fortna, 2015: 522). This definition precisely describes the violent and indiscriminate actions conducted by far - right terrorists in Italy.

Despite the disagreement on whether far - left violent acts in Italy constitute terrorism, the Red Brigades are still to this day closely interwoven with the phenomenon of political terrorism in Italy during the Years of Lead. Their violent acts attracted not only domestic but also significant international attention. The extreme projection of Italian far - left terrorism, and simultaneously the understatement of far - right terrorism is the result of the US interference in Italy, its propaganda and other illegal and clandestine activities. Specifically, the kidnapping and murder of President Aldo Moro in 1978 was portrayed as the most important and serious event that took place during the Years of Lead in Italy. Moro's kidnapping and assassination by the Red Brigades is still used as an example of their violent nature, despite the fact that Operation Gladio's agents were responsible for his death. It is known that Moro's kidnapping and assassination was organized and executed by Operation Gladio and particularly by individuals that infiltrated the Red Brigades (Blum, 2003: 107).

The media played an influential role in the publicity of far - left terrorism and the terrorist acts conducted by the Red Brigades. On the other hand, the violent acts of the far - right, despite the fact that they were indiscriminate and deadlier, were understated in order to influence people's perception of terrorism. Even today, there is little discourse about how these far - right organizations operated. Far - right terrorism in Italy is a subject that has not been fully discussed and researched yet. This can be attributed to the fact that crucial information about the structure of Italian far - right groups and their connection with intelligence agencies both in Italy and the US are to this day hidden or classified.

CHAPTER 4

4.1. Peteano Bombing

The CIA manipulation of Italian political terrorists is also visible in the case of the Peteano bombing. The analysis of this particular case can adequately demonstrate the differences between Italian far - right and far - left terrorism. In 1972, a car exploded in a small village called Peteano in Northern Italy. The bomb inside the car killed three police officers (Carabinieri) who were lured there by an anonymous phone call. Two days after the incident, a phone call was made to the police revealing that the Red Brigades was responsible for the attack (Williams, 2015: 99). Immediately, multiple communists were arrested and held in custody.

The investigation into the scene indicated that the explosives inside the car were the same as the explosives used by the Red Brigades in their attacks. However, after further research by the judiciary, it was revealed that the investigation was undermined; the report on the explosives used in Peteano was a forgery, and the explosives expert in the Italian police had deliberately provided false conclusions (Ganser, 2004: 3). Additionally, during the judiciary investigation, multiple documents were destroyed, altered, or went missing. Magistrates were also prohibited from accessing the files of the case and multiple individuals interfered to prevent the course of justice.

4.2. The Strategy of Tension

The Peatano attack resembles the method of attack that was used almost exclusively by far - left groups. It constitutes the only incident where far - right terrorists attacked the police — who represent the state — and not an indiscriminate crowd (Ferraresi, 1996: 125). Analytically, far - left terrorists were kidnapping and murdering targeted individuals — usually elites, members of the security forces, and far - right extremists. Due to their targeted attacks, they were using mainly revolvers and submachine guns (Ronchey, 1979: 924). Far - left terrorism was targeted and symbolic: their messages were exclusively political, and their actions were a response to the failure of the Italian political system to treat the population fairly. Their actions were also a statement against the failure of the state to protect Italians and prosecute far - right extremists for the indiscriminate terrorist attacks (Von Tangen, 1998: 95).

On the other hand, the methods of the far - right terrorists were completely different. They were conducting indiscriminate attacks, because their goal was to kill as many people as possible and consequently to create fear to the general public. Therefore, they were using mainly explosives in order to cause as much harm as possible. Additionally, they did not have a clear political message, contrary to far - left terrorism. Their attacks aimed to create insecurity to the Italian population and social instability. Most importantly, far - right terrorists conducted false flag operations and infiltrated far - left groups such as the Red Brigades.

Many neo - fascists infiltrated far - left groups and were conducting terrorist attacks, aiming to create the perception that leftist and communist groups were responsible for the attacks; the 1973 grenade attack outside Milan police headquarters was conducted by Gianfranco Bertoli, who claimed to be an anarchist (Bale, 2007: 132). However, it was revealed that he was an informant and infiltrator for the Italian intelligence agency. Notably, the kidnapping and assassination of Prime Minister Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades is today considered a result of the infiltration of neo - fascists and right - wing individuals inside the Red Brigades. The validity of this theory is reinforced by the fact that before the kidnapping and the assassination, Moro had announced his desire to enter into a government coalition with the Italian Communist Party (Blum, 2003: 107).

False flag operations and infiltration were used as part of the strategy of tension, which started with the terrorist attack in Piazza Fontana in 1969 and ended with the explosion of a bomb inside the Italicus train in 1974 (Celani, 2004). The term strategy of tension has been explained by multiple scholars. 'Tension' refers to the emotional distress and psychological fear whereas 'strategy' refers to the technique that causes such distress and fear (Ganser, 2014: 2). Cook (1994: 117) refers to the strategy of tension as the use of disorder by Italian and foreign secret services in order to undermine and defame the left. After the attacks, the CIA and the Italian intelligence agencies removed and planted evidence in order to blame the communists, anarchists, and leftists for the terrorist incidents.

Italian secret services and the CIA were taking advantage of the tense situation in Italy and according to evidence they were supporting far - right groups in conducting terrorism. Their main goal was to create the impression that far - left groups were responsible for violent and indiscriminate terrorist attacks. The support of false flag operations and the undermining of investigations were some of the methods that were used to create these false impressions. The intelligence agencies displayed false evidence and relied on the power of the mass media and the use of propaganda. The idea that far - left groups were conducting violent attacks against innocent civilians would lead the Italian population to stop supporting leftist and communist political parties and vote for right - wing and more conservative political parties. Far - right terrorists wanted to create a situation in Italy where the military would take power by a coup d'état because the population would desire a more authoritarian and conservative government to restore order (Von Tangen, 1998: 89).

4.3. Judiciary Investigation

For many years, Italians believed that the terrorist attack in Peteano was conducted by the communists. However, Italian magistrates played a significant role in the investigation of the attack. It seems that during the turmoil, the judiciary managed to research the case independently and impartially. Felice Casson, who was thoroughly investigating the Peteano case, discovered that the initial police investigation was sabotaged. In 1984, he managed to prove not only that the explosives inside the car were not linked to the Red Brigades and other far - left groups but also that this type of

explosive (C4) was used by NATO and the US forces (Ganser, 2004: 3). Additionally, it was also revealed that an arms dump was discovered in the area several months before the Peatano attack. Initially, it was thought that the arms dump was owned by the Red Brigades. However, it contained C4 explosives, which were not only used by the US but also were not linked to the far - left groups, as they were using only explosives made of gelignite (Williams, 2015: 99). Eventually, Casson concluded that the NATO cache was linked to the terrorist attack in Peteano (Cook, 1994: 118). Casson's investigation also showed that the perpetrator of the Peteano incident was Vincenzo Vinciguerra, a member of the far - right organization Ordine Nuovo (Ganser, 2004: 4). The difficulty of the investigation and the late identification of the perpetrator is attributed to the fact that Vinciguerra was protected by the Italian intelligence agency and the CIA.

4.4. Operation Gladio

In 1990, Casson reopened the Peteano case and discovered information about the existence of a NATO secret army called Operation Gladio, which was operating in Italy during the Years of Lead (Pedrick, 1990). The CIA and the British MI6 were supervising and coordinating the secret army, recruiting men from the conservative political right including former Nazis and right - wing terrorists (Ganser, 2005: 70).

Casson's research constitutes the most important evidence of the US interference in Italy and its possible links with far - right terrorism. The revelation also led to the exposure of NATO's network of intelligence and

secret armies which were operating in multiple European countries. He discovered classified documents created by the Italian intelligence agency SIFAR which analytically describe Operation Gladio and connect this secret network with the US. A SIFAR document titled “The Special Forces of SIFAR and Operation Gladio” refers to the aim of this operation: to confront military invasion forces and domestic upheavals (Ganser, 2006b: 146). In other words, Operation Gladio was created not only to prevent a potential Soviet invasion but also a communist and leftist unrest in the framework of the Cold War. Italian parliamentary investigations displayed official documents about the agreement of the Italian intelligence agency and the CIA to cooperate in order to organize the operational activities of the clandestine network. It is confirmed by former members of the government that these documents were approved by the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic (Nuti, 2007: 967). After Casson’s investigation in 1990, Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti was pressured to publicly confirm the existence of Operation Gladio to the Italian Parliament. Andreotti revealed that Operation Gladio was created in the 1950’s, but according to him, the operation would be activated only in case of a communist invasion or insurgency.

However, there is strong evidence that NATO’s secret army was operating intensively inside Italian society in order to undermine the leftist and communist ideology by manipulating terrorist incidents. It is known that the Gladio army received around 1,3 million Italian lire from the US (Nuti, 2007: 972) in order to operate actively inside the Italian society. Paolo Inzerilli, the head of SISMI (Servizio per le Informazioni e la Sicurezza Militare - Military

Intelligence and Security Service) and commander of Gladio from 1974 to 1986, confirmed that connections had emerged between the Gladio and the strategy of tensions (Cook, 1994: 118). Inzerilli's statement implies that fractions of the Gladio soldiers were participating in the strategy of tension; however, he stresses that they operated without the clear command of their superiors.

Vincenzo Vinciguerra, the perpetrator of the Peteano attack, has referred multiple times to the connection of far - right terrorists, the Italian intelligence agency and the CIA. In 1984, he confirmed the existence of Operation Gladio and stated during his trial that the terrorist attacks in Italy were linked to NATO's secret network, which was operating with the assistance of Italian secret services and the political and military forces (Ganser, 2005: 71). Vinciguerra, who took responsibility for the terrorist attack in Peteano, also confirmed that many members of right - wing terrorist groups were cooperating with NATO's secret armies (Willan, 1991: 141). Additionally, in an interview to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, he clearly stated that far - right terrorists "were being mobilized into the battle as part of an anti - communist strategy originating not with organizations deviant from the institutions of power, but from within the state itself, and specifically from within the ambit of the state's relations within the Atlantic Alliance" (Vulliamy, 5 December 1990).

He also revealed important information in his trial and other interviews about the secrecy, complexity, and aim of this NATO network. His detailed

description of Operation Gladio shows that only a person closely related to this secret army could have known details about the structure and the aims of Gladio. Referring to Operation Gladio as “parallel structures”, Vinciguerra has stated that Gladio “was an invisible army that is not poised for battle against a hypothetical invader but rather one meant to be used internally against what the military always called the Fifth Column of USSR: The Communist Party and the extreme Left” (Francovich, 1992). Based on these statements, Operation Gladio was not a NATO structure intended to activate in case of a communist insurgency. On the contrary, it was a clandestine network that was operating inside the Italian society, undermining the Left and supporting — or at least allowing — political violence to take place.

In 1990, the European parliament published a resolution on the Gladio affair condemning these clandestine and manipulative networks. The resolution referred to Gladio as a network operating outside the law and urged the member states of the European Union to conduct further investigations about these secret networks that potentially jeopardized or even destabilized the democratic structures of the member states (Resolution on the Gladio Affair, 1990). The investigations into the illegal operation of these secret networks and their connection to acts of terrorism and political violence are ongoing. However, in 2000, a parliamentary investigation about Operation Gladio took place in Italy referring to the US connection with the strategy of tension: “Those massacres, those bombs, those military actions had been organized or promoted or supported by men inside Italian state institutions and, as has been discovered more recently, by men linked to the structures of United

States intelligence” (Ganser, 2005: 72). It was also revealed that US intelligence agents were informed in advance about terrorist attacks such as the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969, but they did not prevent the attack from taking place.

4.5. The Impact of the US Interference on the Italian Society

The Peteano case constitutes one of the clearest examples of cover - up and false flag operations in Italy during the Years of Lead. The judiciary investigation of the case was also pivotal for the exposure of Operation Gladio. The false accusations about far - left groups, the suppression of evidence, and the fabrication of trial documents (Willan, 1991: 140) were actions that seem to have been conducted by far - right groups with the acceptance — if not support — of Italian intelligence agencies and the CIA. In an interview, Vincenzo Vinciguerra explained the goals of the strategy of tension: “Far – right terrorists were attacking civilians, women, children, innocent people outside the political arena, for one simple reason: to force the Italian public to turn to the State, turn to the regime and ask for greater security” (Francovich, 1992).

This strategy was used to weaken the Italian leftist movement and lead Italians to vote for more conservative political parties such as the DC. It was evident that in Northern and Central Italy, the DC’s power was declining, and the communist party was consistently gaining support¹⁰. Regarding regional elections, in the 1970 Bologna elections, the PCI won 46.40% of the votes

¹⁰ Appendix 4: Map of Italian General Election Results: 1972

while the DC won only 22.46% of the votes (Historical election archive from the Government of Italy). However, the strategy of tension seemed to have an effect: in the 1972 general elections, the PCI gained 27.2%, the DC 38.7% of the votes and the neo - fascist political party MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano Italian Social Movement) gained 8.7% of the votes, compared to 4.4% in 1968 (Ginsborg, 1990: 336). Therefore, the Italian population started voting for more conservative political parties because these parties had the potential to restore the order in Italy due to their authoritarian ideology.

Despite the US attempt to reinforce support for the DC, the latter had lost its popularity, and its votes decreased dramatically within a 30 - year span: in 1948, the DC won 48.5% of the votes and in 1979 won only 38.3%¹¹. On the other hand, the PCI gained more supporters over time. The PCI was the most powerful communist political party in Europe and had a wide base of supporters, particularly in Northern Italy. For example, in Bologna — a city where the communist ideology was solid — the PCI gained 48.18% and the DC only 25.62% of the votes in the 1980 regional elections (Historical election archive from the Government of Italy). However, the terrorist attacks in Italy seemed to influence the electoral behavior of the Italian population. The tension caused by the terrorist attacks, the CIA's illegal activities, and the US strategy to blame the communists for the violent acts managed to control the increasing power of the Italian communist party. Most importantly, the publicity of the kidnapping and assassination of Aldo Moro — which is thought to be a result of neo – fascists' infiltration — impacted the power of the PCI.

¹¹ Appendix 5: General Elections Statistics: 1968 – 1979

The strategy of tension eventually managed to control rather than reduce the power of the PCI, which was on the increase. Secondly, it created chaos and fear in Italian society and managed to promote conservatism. Thirdly, it reinforced the scale of terrorism in Italy. The US allowed far - right terrorism to escalate and, according to the evidence, supported these violent acts. Additionally, the emergence of a plethora of new far - left groups is attributed to the US interference in the Italian society and the strategy of tension. Generally, the extreme hostility between far - left and far - right groups is attributed to the Cold War era and the US perception of communism.

The shift to the right in Italy was the main goal of the US, which wanted to reduce the communist power or at least keep the PCI's popular vote under control. Despite compelling evidence, the direct US support of right - wing terrorism cannot be officially confirmed due to the fact that the US government has not given any clarification yet. The investigation of the subject is also prevented due to the fact that official documents were destroyed after the exposure of Operation Gladio and other files are still classified (Ganser, 2006b: 113). The CIA and Operation Gladio intended to create turmoil and destabilize Italian society in order to re - stabilize it (Ganser, 2004: 7). However, the US exploited Italian political terrorism, allowing the situation to escalate in order to control and stabilize the political and social situation in Italy in its own terms.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The US interference in the domestic political and social affairs of Italy since the end of World War II is indisputable. Most importantly, as it was stressed in the analysis, the American influence in Italy and other European countries was a product of the Cold War. The theoretical framework of constructivism can explain that social structures and the interaction between different actors in the international arena shape their behavior, interests, and most importantly, the way they perceive themselves and other actors. The American perception of the communist threat influenced the US foreign policy. The US behavior towards the Soviet Union was characterized by the variety of actions against the potential expansion of communism. The American propaganda, the sponsoring of anti - communist groups, and the CIA's secret operations show the attempt of the US to influence the Italian population and create the perception that communism was a physical threat to people's lives. The main goals of the US were to control the power of the PCI and make Italian society more conservative, politically and socially, by exploiting terrorist incidents and generally taking advantage of the turmoil in Italy.

The present study analyzed the actions that the US took in order to control political and social life in Italy by using propaganda and manipulating terrorist incidents. The evidence that the CIA sabotaged the investigation of far - right terrorist attacks, covered up traces, and protected the perpetrators is based on official judiciary investigations and official statements from key figures. The

above analysis supports the theory that the US allowed and even caused the escalation of political terrorism and the tension between far - left and far - right groups in Italy. The unprecedented scale of terrorism in Italy was caused firstly, by the US theory that communism was a threat to democratic states and their population. The idea of the communist threat created tension and hostility not only between states but also between civilians. Secondly, the US protection of far - right terrorists, the sabotage of investigations, and the overt accusation that far - left groups were conducting indiscriminate violent attacks caused the emergence of multiple radical leftist groups which also started to create tension in the Italian society.

The above analysis explained the strategy of tension by investigating two cases of terrorist incidents that took place in Italy during the Years of Lead. Specifically, the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969 and the Peteano attack in 1972 constitute two examples of the strategy in tension in practice. Chapters 3 and 4 analyzed the variety of actions that the US took in order to influence the Italian population and decrease the communist ideology in Italy. The extent of the US interference in Italy is visible through the substantial evidence that is used in this analysis. Both primary and secondary sources reveal the US attempt to manipulate the political tension in Italy during the Years of Lead. The terrorist incidents in Italy were blamed initially on communists, anarchists, and leftists in order shift Italy to the political right and simultaneously to decrease the influence of the powerful PCI and the leftist movement in Italy. Through anti - communist propaganda, sabotage of investigations, and cover - up operations, the US managed to prevent the PCI

from increasing its votes in the Italian elections during the Years of Lead. However, the revelation of NATO's Operation Gladio in 1990 and the suspicion of Italian magistrates that this secret network was linked to terrorist incidents in Italy opened a discourse regarding the role of the US in the Years of Lead era.

Research on the direct connection between the US and Italian terrorism constitutes a challenge due to the confidentiality of the case and the refusal of the US to clarify the topic. There is a limitation to investigating in depth whether the US and the CIA were indeed supporting directly far - right terrorists groups. Additionally, research of this topic can easily be considered conspiracy theory rather than academic research. This qualitative analysis on the US interference in Italy does not support the theory of a direct involvement of the CIA in terrorist incidents in Italy. However, this analysis is based on reliable sources that show the role of the US in the escalation of political terrorism in Italy and the American manipulation of the tense situation in Italy during the Years of Lead. Further research can be conducted on the topic of the Years of Lead era in combination with the US interference in Italy during that time. Specifically, it would be worthy to examine the extent to which the extreme political and social tension from the late 1960's to 1989 — which was manipulated by the US — impacted the contemporary political and social structures in Italy.

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APPENDIX 1

Italian General Elections Statistics: 1948 – 1968

[Chambers of Deputies]

Parties	1968			1963			1958		1953		1948	
	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%	Seats	%	Seats*	%	Seats	%	Seats
DC	12,429,030	39.1	266	11,773,182	38.2	260	42.4	273	40.1	261	48.5	305
PCI	8,555,477	26.9	177	7,767,601	25.3	166	22.7	140	22.7	143		
PSIUP†	1,414,128	4.5	23								31.0	183
PSI	4,604,367	14.5	91	4,255,836	13.8	87	14.3	84	12.7	75		
PSDI				1,876,271	6.1	33	4.6	22	4.5	19	7.1	33
PLI	1,850,252	5.8	31	2,144,270	7.0	39	3.5	17	3.0	14	3.8	19
MSI	1,415,320	4.5	24	1,570,282	5.1	27	4.8	24	5.9	29	2.0	6
PDIUM‡	414,195	1.3	6	536,948	1.7	8	4.8	25	6.9	40	2.8	14
PRI	626,077	2.0	9	420,213	1.4	6	1.4	6	1.6	5	2.5	9
Others	458,464	1.4	3	408,268	1.3	4	1.5	4	2.6	3	2.3	5
Void Ballots	554,986	1.7		438,131	1.4		1.2		3.1		1.6	
Blank Ballots	635,392	1.9		526,237	1.8		1.5		1.5		0.6	

* Membership increased from 596 in 1958 to 630 in 1963.
† PSIUP was formed in January 1964 from a split of the PSI.
‡ PDIUM resulted from the merging in April 1959 of two parties, PMP and PMN. The election results of these two parties, which were separate prior to the 1963 election, have been combined in the above table.

(Belloni, 1971: 115)

APPENDIX 2

<i>Deaths and Injuries to Persons Caused by Italian Terrorist Organizations: 1969–82</i>				
Group	Deaths	Injuries	Deaths and injuries	Total violent events
Left	164	166	330	5,425
(per cent)	(47)*	(22)	(30)	(47)
Neo-Fascists	186	572	758	6,045
(per cent)	(53)	(78)	(70)	(53)
Total	350	738	1,088	11,470†
(per cent)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)

(Weinberg and Eubank, 1988: 532)

APPENDIX 3

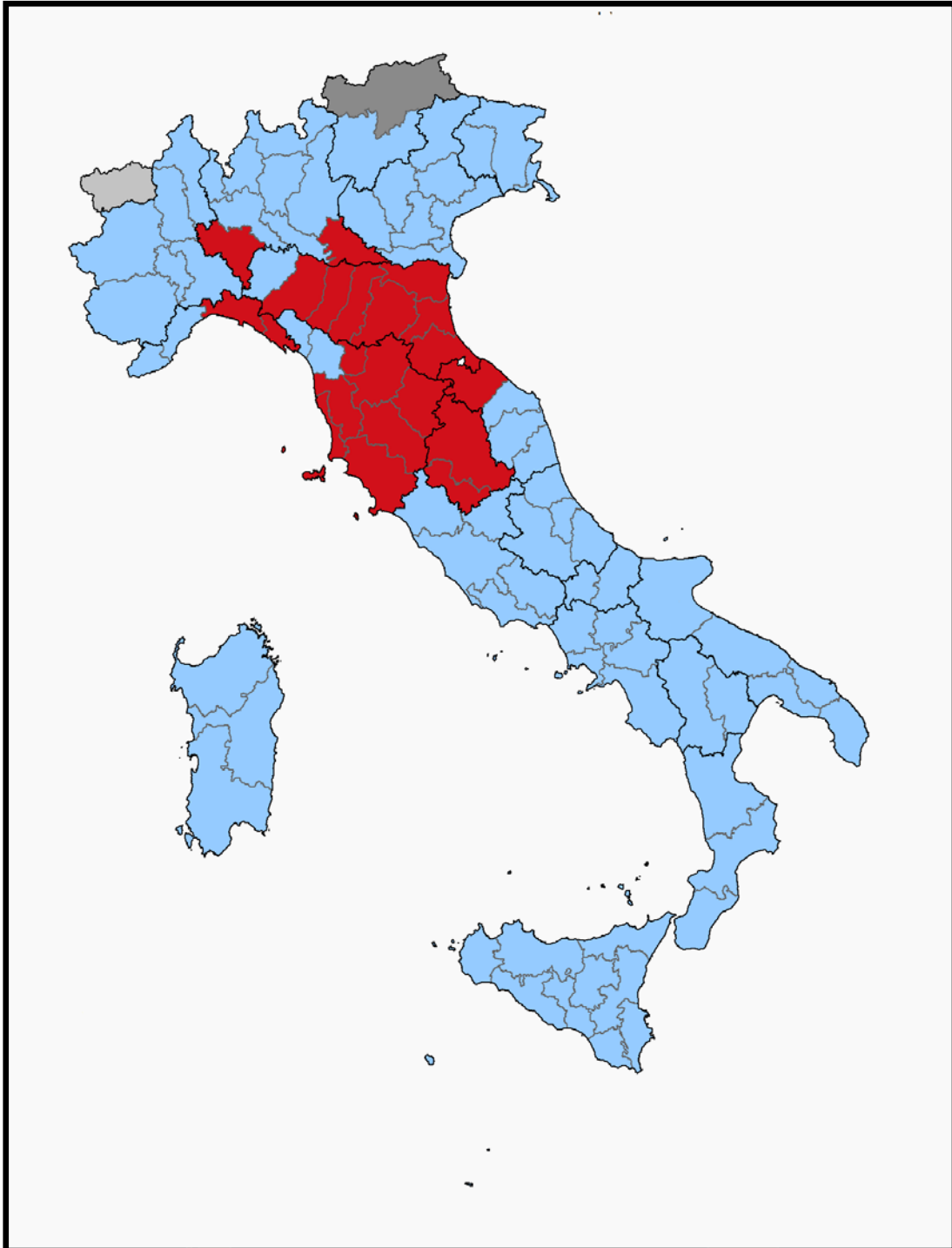
Map of Italian Provinces and Cities



(Ginsborg, 1990)

APPENDIX 4

Map of General Election Results: 1972



[Light blue denotes provinces with a Christian Democratic plurality and Red denotes those with a Communist plurality (nick.mon, 2013)] Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_general_election,_1972

APPENDIX 5

Italian General Elections Statistics: 1968 – 1979
[Chambers of Deputies]

	DC (Christian Democracy)	PCI (Italian Communist Party)
1968	39,1%	26,9%
1972	38,66%	27,15%
1976	38,71%	34,37%
1979	38,30%	30,38%

[Historical election archive/Government of Italy Ministry of the Interior]