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Hof, Tobias

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Hof, T. (2013). The "Moro Affair" - left-wing terrorism and conspiracy in Italy in the late 1970s. *Historical Social Research*, *38*(1), 232-256. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.38.2013.1.232-256

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The Moro Affair – Left-Wing Terrorism and Conspiracy in Italy in the Late 1970s

Tobias Hof[*]

Abstract: *»Die ‚Affäre Moro' – Linksterrorismus und Verschwörungstheorien im Italien der späten 1970er Jahre«.* Shortly after the left-wing terrorist group Red Brigades kidnapped the former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in March 1978 numerous conspiracy theories began to spread. At the core of many of these theories was – and still is – the belief that the Red Brigades were controlled by a foreign power. The headquarters of Italian left-wing terrorism was suspected everywhere but home. In the following article Tobias Hof describes the evolution and the different bearers of these theories and addresses their functional character by analyzing possible motives for injecting them into the public discourse. He shows how different groups from the far left to the far right of the political spectrum used conspiracy theories to de-legitimize the political opponent or legitimize their own policy in relation to the Moro abduction. The Moro murder case shines the clearest light on the triad of terrorism – conspiracy – and anti-terrorism policy in Italy in the late 1970s.

Keywords: Aldo Moro, terrorism, Italy, conspiracy theories, secret services.

1. Introduction

Rome, March 16, 1978, shortly after 9am: The president of the Christian Democratic Party (DC), Aldo Moro, is on his way to the Chamber of Deputies where a vote of confidence in the second minority government of Giulio Andreotti is about to occur. He is accompanied by his five bodyguards. Suddenly a Fiat blocks the way. The passengers of the Fiat, members of the left-wing terrorist group Red Brigades, open fire. More terrorists, dressed in the uniform of the Italian airline *Alitalia*, appear and attack the convoy. After a short time the shooting is over: Four security guards are dead, the fifth will die later in hospital. Moro is unharmed, but is abruptly dragged into a waiting car. He is held hostage for 55 days, during this time the police and security agencies are unable to rescue the politician. On May 9, Moro's body is found in the trunk of a red Renault in the Via Caetani in Rome. Today a memorial plaque can be

[*] Tobias Hof, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Leonrodstraße 27, 80636 München, Germany; hof@ifz-muenchen.de.

found at the spot where the grisly discovery was made (Giovagnoli 2005, 25-38; Casamassima 2007, 146-202).

Shortly after the ambush numerous conspiracy theories about the Moro case began to spread. At the core of many of these theories was – and still is – the belief that the Red Brigades were controlled by a foreign power. The list of potential masterminds reads like a "who's who" of secret services, states and clandestine organizations: From the American *Central Intelligence Agency* (CIA) to the German *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND), from the Soviet *Komitet Gossudarstwennoy Besopasnosti* (KGB) to the Israeli *Mossad*, from the American *State Department* to the *NATO* clandestine organization *Gladio*, from an international network of Masonic lodges to the language school Hyperion in Paris, from the Czechoslovakian to the British government – the headquarters of Italian terrorism were anywhere but home. It didn't take long for the notion to gain popularity: Only 10.1 percent of Italians surveyed in January 1982 believed that the Italian left-wing terrorism was a domestic phenomenon. 58.2 percent, however, believed the terrorists were controlled by a foreign power (*L'Espresso* January 10, 1982).

A controversial, sometimes polemic debate quickly developed between adherents and opponents of these theories. Sergio Flamigni, the former Senator for the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and a member of both the parliamentary commission for the Interior as well as the Moro Commission, has written several books in which he passionately argues that Moro fell victim to a sinister plot involving several secret agencies from around the world (Flamigni 1988; 1999; 2004; 2006). This inspired journalists and political commentators inside and outside Italy to spin their own theories, which often sounded even more bizarre than the original ones. The works by the German journalist Regine Igel are very good examples of this trend (Igel 2006; 2007). Other scholars count the book by the Swiss historian Daniele Ganser on Gladio as a contribution to conspiracy literature (Ganser 2005). Conspiracy theorists are challenged in particular by Giovanni Sabbatucci's and Vladimiro Satta's accounts of the Moro kidnapping, who try to deconstruct the theories by a careful analysis of various accessible documents (Sabbatucci 1999; Satta 2003; 2006).

Yet, unanswered questions about the agents of these theories, their possible motives, and why these debates are still ongoing are often overlooked. Until now, only the American historian Richard Drake – who published one of the first document-based, historical studies on the Moro case and its aftermath (Drake 1995) – and the Dutch historian Beatrice de Graaf have briefly touched upon these problems. However, the two academics have apparently come to different conclusions. Drake absolved the DC government and the heads of the security agencies from all charges to have promoted conspiracy theories in order to cover up the failures in the search for Moro. They did not, as Drake wrote, play "politics with the Moro murder case" (Drake 2007, 60). De Graaf, on the other hand, argues that the conspiracy theories of the left were a wel-

come escape route for the DC government and the security services. By not contributing to more transparency and a more effective prosecution and adjudicating of terrorist attacks on the one hand and pointing the finger at foreign interference on the other, government officials did not have to admit counter-terrorism mismanagement (De Graaf 2011, 116-7).

In the following paper I try to shed more light on the above questions and try to contextualize and evaluate the different interpretations by Drake and De Graaf. Therefore I will not join in the controversial discussion between believers and non-believers of the theories and attempt to "discern between 'real' conspiracies and purported ones" (De Graaf and Zwierlein 2013, in this HSR Special Issue), which is almost impossible on an epistemological plane anyway, because a conspiracy by definition cannot be countered since it is able to integrate and neutralize any invalidation in an alleged higher level master plan (De Graaf and Zwierlein 2013, in this HSR Special Issue). Instead I am going to analyze the possible functional character of the theories in a given moment in time, thus addressing conspiracy primarily as a legitimizing or de-legitimizing tool (De Graaf and Zwierlein 2013, in this HSR Special Issue). Based on this premise it becomes obvious that conspiracy theories have to be analyzed within the public discourse, for they can only wield their true potential as a legitimizing or de-legitimizing tool when they are perceived by the public as convincing. Thus it is very important to examine documents and records which display this discourse. Therefore the following study is primarily based on the analysis of parliamentary debates as well as Italian newspapers. Another very important source are the hearings and reports of the Parliamentary Commission to inquire into the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, which met between 23 May 1980 and 19 April 1983, and of the Parliamentary Commission to inquire into Italian terrorism, which gathered from May 1988 to July 2001.

Four central topics are addressed in the following remarks: Firstly, I want to examine the evolution, conjunctures, flows and peaks of conspiracy communications from the beginning of the kidnapping of Moro until the end of the Parliamentary Commission on Italian terrorism in 2001. Based on these results I am going to analyze, in a second step, possible motives of the different parties, factions or organizations for the dissemination of these theories. Thirdly, I am going to address the question of why the theories still dominate the memory of many Italians when it comes to the Aldo Moro case, despite the fact that the events surrounding the affair have been more or less correctly constructed (De Graaf 2011, 116). Finally, I will outline the benefits and problems of conspiracy theories relating to Italian anti-terrorism policy and to the historical analysis of the "years of lead" as a whole. However, before I start with the Moro affair it will be necessary to go back in time and have a look at the connection between conspiracy, terrorism and security in Italy before 1978.

2. Conspiracy, Terrorism and Security before 1978

Conspiracy theories and terrorism in Italy were intertwined even before the Moro kidnapping. They arose in connection with the terrorism of separatist groups in South Tyrol in the 1950s and 1960s, the violent suppression of the protest movements in the 1960s and the "strategy of tension" in the early 1970s. The theories surrounding right-wing terrorism during the "strategy of tension" are especially important in order to gain a better understanding of the events surrounding the Moro affair. Directly after the Piazza Fontana bombing on December 12, 1969, in Milan, which caused 16 deaths and left over 150 injured, the police concentrated their investigations against left-wing and anarchist groups. Despite the warnings of some members of the government, the security forces were convinced that the perpetrators were to be found in this milieu (Verbale 1969, 2). The extreme left, supported by Socialists and Communists, countered these accusations by blaming right-wing extremists as well as the state and suggesting that they were responsible for the terrorist act. They implied that the attack was part of a sinister plot tolerated or even carried out by the Italian security service. The public outcry after the bombing was to be an excuse to establish an authoritarian regime to block the left from gaining more and more power in politics and society. The thesis of the "*stragi dello stato*" – massacres operated by state institutes – was born (Giannuli 2008, 40-101).

The case of Giuseppe Pinelli is a good illustration of the theories surrounding the Piazza Fontana bombing and their consequences. Pinelli, an anarchist and Italian railway worker, was arrested shortly after the bombing in Milan. During one of his interrogations he tumbled out of a window of the police department and died later in hospital. Even now, the circumstances are dubious. Whereas the police spoke of suicide, the left accused the investigating commissioner Luigi Calabresi of killing Pinelli even though Calabresi was not present when the accident happened. The left started a smear campaign against the police officer: Dario Fò wrote his satirical comedy *Morte accidentale di un anarchic*, and several famous intellectuals such as Bernardo Bertolucci, Giorgio Bocca, Umberto Eco, Federico Fellini, Natalia Ginzburg, Franco Lefevre, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Tiziano Terzani wrote letters to newspapers accusing Calabresi of murdering Pinelli. All these allegations and theories about a "murder of the state" were rooted in a deep distrust within the left-wing milieu towards state authorities and institutions – a distrust which dates back to the Fascist era and which would cost Calabresi his life in the end. When Calabresi was shot dead on 17 May, 1972, many on the left interpreted his murder as the punishment he deserved (Brambilla 1993, 93-130).

During the "strategy of tension", the political left voiced many conspiracy theories to support their notion of a plot of right-wingers, security agencies and right-wing terrorists against the Italian left. This conviction was shared by

many intellectuals and prominent representatives of Italian culture such as the songwriter Claudio Lolli who implied a connection between the death of Pinelli and the bombing of the *Italicus* train in 1974 in his song *Agosto*:

> Non ci vuole molto a capire
> che è stata una strage,
> non ci vuole molto a capire che niente,
> niente è cambiato da quel quarto piano in questura,
> da quella finestra.
> Un treno è saltato.
>
> It is not difficult to understand
> that it was a massacre,
> it is not difficult to understand that nothing, nothing has changed since that fourth floor of the police station, since that window.
> A train has been blown up.

After 1974, independent public prosecutors were able to prove certain links between right-wing terrorist groups and members of the Italian secret service *SID*. The left felt vindicated by these discoveries. The revelations and the continuing scandals about government politicians brought the ruling DC into a severe dilemma just before the upcoming parliamentary elections in the summer 1976. For many contemporary observers, the time for a leftist takeover seemed to be very close (Ginsborg 1990, 349, 372-3).

However, the victory of the left parties – hoped for by some and feared by others – did not occur. Instead, the Communists decided to back a minority DC government under Giulio Andreotti without entering the government. Due to this decision, the PCI – and thus one of the main agents of conspiracy theories in the early 1970s – was absorbed into government politics. The Communists and Socialists, who followed the lead of their Communist rival, were now more interested in reforming the state from within than attacking the Christian Democratic Party with conspiracy theories. The first visible expression of this new political approach – the so-called "historic compromise" – was the adaption of the July agreement in 1977 by all parties of the *arco costituzionale* (Hof 2011, 160-70). Some Communists, however, were exceedingly disappointed by the decision of the party leadership to support a DC government. They abandoned the party and joined ranks with other politicians and intellectuals, who had already founded parties of the "new left" such as the Radical Party. Some began to dwell on conspiracy theories as to why the takeover of the left did not occur in 1976, while others fell back on pure violence as a means of political struggle (cf. Cappellini 2007*)*.

In the 1970s, conspiracy theories had become an integral part of the left-wing milieu in their attempts to de-legitimize the Italian governments that were run by the Christian Democratic Party. The scandals surrounding government politicians, the connections discovered between some state officials and right-wing terrorist groups, and the lack of governmental zeal to clear itself and to

uncover the exact extent of state official's interference in right-wing attacks kept distrust towards state institutions alive. The new political constellation and the escalation of street violence and left-wing terrorism in light of the trial against the founding fathers of the Red Brigades saw the emergence of new conspiracy theorists after the summer of 1976. Parties and politicians of the center picked up a theory which had been prominent before only in right-wing circles: They began to speculate about connections between Warsaw Pact states and left-wing terrorist groups to explain the escalation of violence (Senato 1976, 2074-5; 1977, 8652). However, due to the "historic compromise" they did not accuse the PCI of having anything to do with terrorist groups such as the Red Brigades (Senato 1976, 1485-6). The emergence and development of the conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro case must be seen in the context of this historical background.

3. The Moro Case – Conspiracy Theories from 1978 till 2001

On March 29, 1978 – almost two weeks after the kidnapping –, the Catholic newspaper *L'Avvenire* published a statement by senator Benjamino Andreatta (DC). Supposedly, he expressed his belief that the Red Brigades were operated by communist states such as the Soviet Union or the CSSR. However, in a subsequent interview Andreatta denied that he had ever uttered those words (Relazione 1983, 127). A second allusion to the fact that "something" was not right, that some obscure and sinister plotting must have been behind the incident and far greater things were at stake than just the life of one ordinary man came from Aldo Moro himself. During his abduction he wrote over 80 letters to members of the Christian Democratic Party, to his family and to the Pope. In these letters he expressed his astonishment that his "friends" were not obliged to negotiate with his kidnappers to free him. "Is it possible", he wondered, "that you all want my death for an alleged reason of state" (Gotor 2008, 72). He could not believe that his former colleagues had suddenly discovered a moral sense for some vague reason of state. Thus he rhetorically asked Emilio Taviani (DC): "Is there, maybe, an American or German instruction behind keeping it hard against me?" (Gotor 2008, 43). As the weeks passed by and hundreds of policemen, soldiers and *Carabinieri* were not able to find him, Moro's suspicion and anger grew until he gave in to pure resignation. In one letter, which was discovered by the police on April 8, he cursed his party colleagues for not doing everything possible to rescue him: "My blood", he wrote to his wife Eleonora Moro, "will fall upon them" (Gotor 2008, 31). What did Moro mean? Was there a hidden message in this biblically phrased sentence, or some clues about state secrets he was going to reveal?

In a parliamentary debate about the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, which took place on May 19, 1978, the Communist deputy Ugo Spagnoli raised the question of a possible conspiracy. For Spagnoli it was of the utmost importance to expose the people behind the kidnapping and killing of Moro, the networks between foreign secret services and Italian terrorists and the support the Red Brigades received from these connections (Camera 1978, 17918). Even though he did not specify the "external organizations", Spagnoli was one of the first prominent politicians to advance these theories. In another debate on the Moro kidnapping four days later in the Italian Senate, it was the Christian Democrat Vittorio Cervone who repeated Spagnoli's claim (Satta 2003, 21-2). Other members of the DC such as Giuseppe Costamagna, however, dismissed all the theories about some foreign mastermind of Italian terrorism (Camera 1978, 17841). Government officials, such as Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, usually acted with restraint. He said that he was aware of all the theories surrounding the Moro case and promised that the security services would follow every lead, however unbelievable it might be. Andreotti's statement was shared by the prominent Communist Alessandro Natta (Camera 1978, 14684; 1978, 14706; 1978, 17932). The big Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, which is considered to belong to the political center, was more straightforward in its judgement: No "foreign mastermind" of Italian terrorism exists, and it never has existed (Wucher 1978).

It was the Sicilian intellectual and writer Leonardo Sciascia, a Member of Parliament of the Radical Party at the time of the Moro kidnapping, who irrevocably and prominently embedded the conspiracy theories into the public discourse. In his book *L'affaire Moro*, which was published in 1978, he turned the question that was raised by Moro into an indictment of the government: "Did his 'friends' really want him to come back alive?" (Drake 2007, 37; Sciascia 1978). He agreed with the accusations Moro had put forward in his letters and "assigned ultimate responsibility for the crime of the Red Brigades to the government, although he did so without identifying particular malefactors" (Drake 2007, 37). Many of Sciascia's fellow party members, such as Emma Bonino, were more direct. They accused the United States, the CIA or other NATO members of masterminding the kidnapping (Camera 1978, 17871).

One year after the incident, the national and international situation changed radically. The Communist Party terminated their support for the DC government in January 1979 and with the Soviet Union's invasion in Afghanistan and NATO's decision to deploy missiles in Western Europe, the Cold War entered a new, tense period. In the light of these shifts, the theories surrounding the Moro case received renewed interest – especially from outside Italy. Political scientists and terrorism experts, such as the director of the conservative think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C., Walter Lacquer, accused Moscow of guiding left-wing terrorist groups to destabilize the Western world (Relazione 1983, 127). The most notorious book on this

topic was published in 1981, written by the American journalist Claire Sterling and suggesting a global Communist conspiracy (Sterling 1981, see also Livingston 1982; Livingston and Arnold 1986). In Italy, the thesis that the Moro kidnapping was orchestrated by the Soviet Union was picked up quickly. Not surprisingly, it was predominantly voiced by politicians from the Neo-Fascist party or from right-wingers within the DC such as the notorious anti-Communist Massimo De Carolis (Camera 1978, 14709; *L'Espresso* January 27, 1980; Satta 2003, 24-5). While attacking the Communists and blaming Moscow, they started at the same time a campaign to defend the work and the members of the former Italian security service SID, which was reformed in 1977 (Camera 1978, 17795, 17831-2). Even members of the Socialist Party such as its president Bettino Craxi stated that the execution of Moro's kidnapping was only possible because the KGB helped the Red Brigades to carry it out (*L'Espresso* January 14, 1979, 22-3; April 27, 1980, 11-7; Satta 2003, 28-9). No members of the DC government or of the security agencies in leading positions during the kidnapping participated in voicing any conspiracy theories. However, they did not seriously contribute to uncovering the real circumstances of the kidnapping and thus allowed conspiracy theories to gain more and more followers. Like the Communists they were initially unfavorable towards the establishment of a parliamentary commission to investigate the Moro abduction (Camera 1979, 8 and 18).

The next step in the development of the conspiracy theories surrounding the affair was the publication of the reports by the Parliamentary Commission to inquire into the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro in the early 1980s. The discussions of the commission centered on the role of the government and the parties during the kidnapping and on the question of why the security services were not able to rescue Moro. Sometimes the debates degenerated into party-political quarrels, only intended to legitimize the position of their own party during the kidnapping. The published findings of the commission, "coming soon after the controversial conclusion of the first trial, […] reinforced the public's confusion about Moro's abduction and death. As usual in such a climate of uncertainty, conspiracy theories gained the upper hand" (Drake 1995, 82-3). Especially Communist Sergio Flamigni, the member of the Radical Party Leonardo Sciascia and the representative of the Left Independent Party Raniero La Valle confronted politicians, security officers and Moro's family members with their theories of a US-administered plot. Francesco Cossiga (DC), minister of the interior from 1975 to 1978, stated that no foreigner was involved in the abduction and killing of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro (Cossiga 1980, 203). Giuseppe Santovito, the chief of the Italian military secret service SISME, went a step further when questioned about a link between the CIA-operated language school Hyperion in Paris and Italian left-wing terrorist groups. "It is not true," he told the audience, "that the Red Brigades' headquarter is in Paris or in Zurich. We have always said that this allegation is false.

Even the French secret service agrees with our opinion" (Santovito 1980, 154). Santovito was backed by the chiefs of the State Police Giuseppe Parlato and Giovanni Rinaldo Coronas, the *Carabinieri* General Carlos Alberto Dalla Chiesa as well as by the head of the secret service SISDE, Giulio Grassini. They all agreed that there was absolutely no convincing proof to account for any foreign interference in Italian terrorism. In their opinion, Italian left-wing terrorism was a home-grown phenomenon (Coronas 1980, 71; Grassini 1980, 210; Parlato 1980, 371; *L'Espresso* July 27, 1980, 10-2). Actually, it was one of the rare occasions on which the heads of the security services and government politicians agreed: When it came to the problem of why the search for Moro failed they started to blame each other, complaining about insufficient laws and too mild a jurisdiction (Parlato 1980, 343). In the end, the majority of the Commission concurred with the judgements of the security and government officials: They wrote that there was no convincing evidence for an operational cooperation between Italian and foreign terrorist groups. They admitted, however, that there were occasional attempts by foreign secret services to cooperate with groups like the Red Brigades, but this occurred after the Moro kidnapping. However, due to ideological differences and a deep distrust of terrorists towards any state agency, the Red Brigades never accepted these offers (Relazione 1983, 141). As for the theory of a foreign mastermind who controlled left-wing terrorist groups in Italy, the report was clear: such an institution or person did not exist (Relazione 1983, 15). Eleonora Moro, however, was not won over by all these testimonies. On the contrary, she was convinced – like the left-wing parties – that the United States were involved in the kidnapping and murder of her husband. To prove her allegations, she reminded the members of the Commission of the strained relationship between American officials and Aldo Moro, which dated back to 1974. Other close collaborators and friends of Aldo Moro such as Giovanni Galloni (DC) confirmed Eleonora's suspicion (Satta 2003, 22-3).

The meetings and reports of the Parliamentary Commission to inquire into the activities of the Masonic lodge *Propaganda 2* (P2) were another step in the distribution of conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro affair (Drake 2007, 45). The commission, which was headed by Christian Democrat Tina Anselmi, began its work in December 1981 and investigated the connection between politicians, army officers and state officials and the lodge P2. The fact that the heads of the Italian secret services during the Moro kidnapping all belonged to the lodge stirred up the notion that a deliberate obstruction of the search for Moro and of police investigations had occurred. However, it was not only the connection between P2 and the Moro affair that was investigated. In fact the commission focused on dozens of the greatest unsolved mysteries of the history of the Italian Republic – such as the failed coup of Borghese in 1970, the bombings of the *Italicus* train in 1974 or Bologna in 1980 – and their possible connections to the lodge or other clandestine organizations like *Gladio*. Besides

the "usual suspects" from the left-wing political milieu, new prominent promoters of conspiracy theories appeared – above all Anselmi herself, who wrote the final report of the commission (Relazione 1984).

The next important mark in the history of the development of the conspiracy theories concerning the Moro case was the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and its effects on Italy. The theories were not only helpful in legitimizing or de-legitimizing the actions during the Moro case. They were much more – they offered a way to justify the entire concept of Communist politics in Italy. Therefore it is not surprising that already in 1990 the new head of the Communist Party Achille Occhetto declared "that the kidnappers [of Moro] had been mere pawns 'piloted' by secret service agencies both domestic and foreign" (Drake 2007, 42). This notion was already expressed by his colleague Sergio Flamigni in several books on the Moro case. The first one, *La tela del ragno – Il delitto Moro*, published in 1988, may be taken as a "representative of the vast Moro conspiracy literature in its extreme form" (Drake 2007, 93). In his work, Flamigni advocated the theory that Moro was betrayed by his former colleagues and by state officials. Also a member of the P2 Commission, he was one of the most prominent people who suspected that the "mistakes" in the search for Moro did not occur "accidently." They were rather part of a plan made "in the secret rooms of power [by] men of State with the most sensitive offices […] [which] were at the service not of the country's republican institutions, but of 'venerable Masonic masters'" (Drake 2007, 39). Flamigni's conclusions sounded very similar to the accusations which extreme left-wing groups had already expressed during the "strategy of tension": Conservatives, right-wingers and their partners, both in and outside Italy, wanted Moro to die and to use his murder as "an excuse to establish an authoritarian regime" (Drake 2007, 39).

In the same year that Flamigni released his first book on the Moro affair, the Parliamentary Commission on Italian terrorism started its investigations. The first president was Libero Gualtieri, member of the Left Democratic Party. He was succeeded by his party colleague Giovanni Pellegrino. Unlike Gualtieri, Pellegrino can be counted among the numerous conspiracy theorists. In his book *Segreto di Stato – La verità da Gladio al caso Moro*, which was published in 2000 in cooperation with journalists Giovanni Fasanella and Claudio Sestiere, Pellegrino focused on the thesis of the "double hostage" (cf. Pellegrino et al. 2000). According to this belief, several Italian and foreign secret services had contacted the Red Brigades to obtain from the terrorists all the secrets which Moro had supposedly told his kidnappers. However, Pellegrino's theories were not generally accepted by the other members of the commission. In fact, the commissioners were so highly driven by political motives that even after thirteen years they were not able to publish a joint final report.

During its existence the commission not only focused on the Moro case but on the entire "terrorism" phenomenon in Italy from the 1950s to the late 1980s.

Therefore many of the conspiracy theories that were advanced during the hearings were not limited to the Moro affair. When they concerned the Moro case, however, the renewed questioning was in vain. As the following responses clearly demonstrate, neither government politicians nor the secret service functionaries changed their notion: In the opinion of Vincenzo Parisi, head of the SISDE from 1984 to 1987, there never was any "terrorism by secret services" or any interference of foreign nations. He only admitted that sporadic links between different terrorist groups in Europe existed, which were, however, restricted to a non-operational basis (Parisi 1988, 149). Emilio Taviani (DC), minister of the interior from 1973 to 1974, testified in front of the commission that he did not believe in any connection or cooperation between the CIA or the KGB and the Red Brigades during the kidnapping. The Red Brigades, he stressed, were an Italian phenomenon without any interference by a foreign power (Taviani 1997, 390). This belief was shared by Francesco Cossiga (Cossiga 1997, 556). Andreotti also rejected any "occult story" about clandestine powers and secret services. Furthermore, in his opinion the membership of several secret service officers in the P2 lodge was no reason why Moro was not found and rescued (Andreotti 1997, 551). In spite of all these denials, the left did not stop expressing their allegations. Even the first president of the commission, Libero Gualtieri, was irritated by this zeal. "It is so easy to say that there must have been some sort of a conspiracy. However", he asked, "how should that have been carried out? You cannot suggest on the one hand that such a plot was organized by secret services that you usually accuse of being totally inefficient on the other hand. That just does not make any sense!" (Bozzo 1998, 694). One of the reasons why conspiracy theories were once again a heatedly discussed topic was the renewed suspicion of former terrorist Alberto Franceschini. Franceschini, founding member of the Red Brigades, accused Mario Moretti, who was the leader of the Red Brigades during the Moro kidnapping, of having close connections to the language school Hyperion in Paris and of being an agent of the CIA (Relazione 1999, 10; Fasanella and Franceschini 2004, 150-69). Moretti, however, had earlier already dismissed all these speculations as an attempt on the part of Franceschini to "humanize" the historic nucleus of the Red Brigades (Moretti 1996, 208 and 211-2).

4. Actors and Motives

In the following I want to focus on the question of why conspiracy theories might have been put forward. By addressing the functional character of the theories I want to examine possible motives for advancing them. Due to the available records this area of investigation is rather complex and controversial. As it is not possible to analyze every single motive, I focus on factors which were closely related to security issues and the problem of terrorism and coun-

ter-terrorism. The chronological outline clearly demonstrates that conspiracy theorists can be found in nearly every political and social milieu. During the period analyzed here, the theorists can be arranged into five different main groups. This categorization is, as a matter of fact, above all a tool to examine different motives and should not be misunderstood as a clear-cut classification.

Due to shifting national and international conditions, not every group voiced conspiracy theories all the time – with one obvious exception: the members of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary extreme left-wing groups. They blamed Italian left-wing terrorism on Washington, sometimes West Germany, Great Britain or any other member state of NATO. Furthermore, the Italian government under *il divo* Giulio Andreotti was seen as an accomplice, if not the actual mastermind behind the affair. They accused these regimes and the Christian Democrats of having tried everything possible to block the further influence of the left in Italian society and politics. Aldo Moro, who was blamed for years for the poor economic, social and political conditions in Italy, became a martyr after his assassination. Sciascia, whose book offered the central reference point for conspiracy theories, is a perfect example to illustrate this metamorphosis: While in 1974 he attacked the Christian Democrats and above all Aldo Moro in his satirical book *Todo Modo*, accusing them of political scandals as well as illegal and criminal activities (cf. Sciascia 1974), in 1978, Moro became the victim of a sinister plot and a martyr. In the opinion of the members of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary extreme left-wing groups, Moro had been convinced that an inclusion of Communists into the government was inevitable. His kidnapping and murder were thus interpreted as another attempt to sabotage Moro's political strategy and to keep the left out of the government. Thus the conspiracy theories offered an escape route for the extremist left to explain why it was never able to constitute an alternative to the rule of the almighty Christian Democratic Party. By blaming foreign nations, security services and the Italian government, this group tried to distract from the internal quarrels between the different factions of the left milieu, which was the main reason why there never was a left alternative (Taviani 2010, 86-8).

For members of the extremist left – and indeed for many contemporary observers –, it was unbelievable that despite the effort of men and resources it was not possible for the Italian police and security services to locate Moro's prison and rescue him. Since the founding of the Republic, they argued, the Christian Democrats had been at the head of the state and held the post of minister of the interior and thus not much could have happened without the DC either knowing or being responsible for it. The conclusion they drew was simple: The DC government wanted Moro to die and to use his death as an excuse to establish an authoritarian regime. The similarities with the conspiracy theories that the left-wing milieu had expressed during the "strategy of tension" in the early 1970s were obvious. This time, however, the government could not again use right-wing extremists and terrorist organizations to evoke a state of

emergency. This attempt had already failed due to the investigation of judges and public prosecutors in 1974. Therefore the government and their allies had to find another group they could exploit for their sinister plans. They turned to the left-wing terrorist groups. Now, so the argument went, it paid off that the police deliberately had not smashed these groups in 1974/5, even though they were able to do so (Rodotà 1983, 176; De Lutiis 2007, 22). Arguments that Moro was not found owing to mistakes during the search and misjudgements were doubted. According to Sciascia, "the general opinion voiced by officials and politicians that the State was unprepared for such an attack cannot be accepted" (Drake 2007, 38).

Above all, the conspiracy theories offered the extreme left-wing groups a way to reject any responsibility for the emergence and radicalization of left-wing terrorism. Owing to public outcry after the kidnapping, the majority of the extremist left were forced to distance themselves from terrorism and violence as a means of political struggle, to prevent further isolation from the Italian public. They denied any connection with terrorists and at the same time blamed the government and its allies for the escalation. The reasons for the tense situation in Italy, they claimed, were rooted in thirty years of mismanagement by the Christian Democratic Party and not in the left-extremist movement and its legitimate claims. Thus the conspiracy theories were used as a self-defense mechanism and a way to deny any need for an anti-terrorism policy: Italy did not need a more oppressive security policy – what Italy needed was a political change which would end any need for political violence (Hof 2011, 313-4).

Measured by its parliamentary representation, this group of conspiracy theorists was small. In the election of 1976, the Radical Party for example only gained four seats in the Chamber of Deputies and in 1979, only eighteen. However, their ranks held many influential opinion-makers and respectable intellectuals, which gave their theories an enormous public resonance. The conspiracy thinking was therefore a way for the extremist left in Italy to become politically relevant even though they had less access to traditional and formal political channels. It was a way to attack and de-legitimize the entire policy of the government and particularly the anti-terrorism policy.

A second group which also suspected a sinister plot between Italian conservatives, right-wingers and American or NATO secret services as the true reason for Moro's death consisted of members of the Moro family and close collaborators of Moro. Besides personal motives, conspiracy theories were useful as a functional tool, even for this group. They offered a way to criticize the anti-terrorism policy of the government before the abduction of Moro and especially the handling of the kidnapping. Like Sciascia and Moro himself, they argued that Moro had to die, because countries like the United States wanted him dead to block Moro's opening to the Communist Party. This explained in their opinion why the government refused to negotiate with the terrorists. Christian Democrats like Galloni were too close to the Moro family for

their statements to be regarded as an official party viewpoint. On the contrary: Their allegations are further evidence for the fact that the statements of Christian Democratic politicians have to be treated very carefully when it comes to conspiracy theories in the Moro case. In contrast to other political parties such as the Communists or the Socialists, who had a strict party discipline, no single opinion existed in the DC. In fact, this party was torn between different factions reaching from right-wingers such as De Carolis to left-wingers such as Carlo Donat-Cattin, whose son was also a member of a left-wing terrorist group (Hof 2011, 295). All these factions within the DC followed their own ideological beliefs in assessing the Moro kidnapping, rather than obeying their party leadership, which was usually closely connected to the ruling government.

Many of the motives of the extremist left were shared by the Communists after they went into opposition in January 1979. The Communists also exploited conspiracy theories to reject any responsibility for the emergence and escalation of left-wing terrorism and to explain why they had never obtained a position in an Italian government (Pecchioli 1995, 122). However, they used the theories in another context too: to support their demands for another reform of the security services and the police corps. The PCI was one of the main promoters of the reform of the Italian security service in 1977. In light of the tragic death of Moro and the apparent failure of the security agencies, almost nobody was left defending the reform. It was much easier to go along with the general polemic than to face a barrage of unpleasant questions. The security service had the dubious honor of being the scapegoat for the failure of the entire security apparatus (Senato 1978, 11792). However, after 1981, the Communists spotted another chance to turn the table and defend the law of 1977. As mentioned above, it was discovered that, in the light of the P2 scandal, the heads of the security services during the Moro affair were all members of the Masonic lodge. Therefore, in the opinion of Communists the failures of the security forces were the consequence of an alliance between the lodge and the heads of the services. They argued that as puppets of P2, the heads of the security services had done everything they could to prevent a successful search for Moro. The Communists used this theory as an argument to press for new reforms of the security services and the police, especially regarding the selection of personnel, and to demand a mechanism for better parliamentary control (*L'Espresso* January 7, 1979, 12-3). In this context, it is interesting that the leading Communist conspiracy theorist, Sergio Flamigni, was a member of the committee on internal affairs of the Chamber of Deputies which was responsible for the control of the secret services and the police units. Therefore, in the case of Flamigni, his missionary zeal in distributing all kind of theories might also be explained by a desire to defend his own work within the committee.

However, what really separated the PCI from the extreme left was the fact that the Communists only randomly resorted to conspiracy theories during the

period between the kidnapping and January 1979. Reasons for this reluctance might be found in the party's support of the DC minority government as well as in the Communists' role during the kidnapping. As Agostino Giovagnoli pointed out, the PCI was jointly responsible for the fact that negotiations with the Red Brigades were rejected from the beginning. The Communists used every opportunity to defend and explain this "die-hard" attitude in public to distinguish themselves from the terrorists and extremists. Therefore, contemporaries not only branded the DC minority government responsible for the handling of the kidnapping but also the PCI (Giovagnoli 2005, 133). Thus, the conspiracy theories put forward by Communists in this period must been seen as a means of defending and legitimizing their actions, which were closely attached to the policy of the DC government. Therefore the sporadic conspiracy theories and the scenario of an "external threat" were used to legitimize their support for the minority government in the eyes of their own constituency. The party leaders argued that the terrorist enemy, feeding off the strength of "external forces", could only be defeated if all Italian parties stood together for the good of the nation. This would be the necessary precondition for any reform, which had been part of the Communist political platform for years (Ventrone 2010, 115).

Furthermore the conspiracy theories also proved to be helpful as anti-terrorism propaganda to strengthen the historic compromise between Communists and the Christian Democrats: The trial against the historical nucleus of the Red Brigades in Turin in 1976 convinced politicians that a response to terrorism could only be successful if the state was able to isolate terrorist groups from the rest of society (Senato 1977, 8590-1; AAPD 2008, 1655). It was hoped that the de-legitimizing of the terrorists' political aims, the stressing of democratic values and patriotic rituals would lead to an isolation of terrorist groups and to a renewed solidarity between segments of the population and state institutions. The conspiracy theories helped to accelerate this process of inclusion and exclusion by helping to construct a common view of "terrorism" as the enemy. In light of the Cold War, terrorists were isolated even more by portraying them as "traitors" and a "fifth column", thus strengthening the public's solidarity in the face of this "enemy from abroad" (Crelinsten 1998, 402). The theories, however, not only enabled greater solidarity between state and public, but also offered a common ground for Christian Democrats and Communists to cooperate in the field of security policy: Until January 1979, Communists, on the one hand, never clarified who the "external force" was. They never pointed to the United States as the mastermind of Italian terrorism as they did after 1979 and thus did not attack the NATO ally of the Italian government. Often the Communists were framed as a "fifth column" of Moscow. By using a similar argument – defining terrorist groups as a "fifth column" of an undefined "external power" – they directed public anger against the terrorists. Furthermore the Communists had been accused of being responsible for the formation and escalation of left-wing terrorism by right-wingers and Neo-

Fascists. Some Christian Democrats rejected these accusations, defended the Communists and, like Vittorio Cervone, also deflected blame to ominous "foreign powers". Therefore they secured a further backing of the Communists for the minority government, already during and after the Moro kidnapping. However, after the Communists went into opposition again, the DC abandoned this strategy. And therefore the Communists felt once more compelled to use conspiracy theories to legitimize their own policy, to attack the government and to distance themselves from the left-wing terrorist groups.

The Communists fluctuated between defending the government and its security forces on the one hand and condemning the Christian Democratic Party and their anti-terrorism strategy on the other by using conspiracy theories after January 1979. However, the renewed recourse to using conspiracy theories to accuse the DC and the NATO alliance of illegal activities was not only a reaction to national politics. It was also owing to the changing international scene of increasing tensions between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. It was a way to counter the constant attacks by national and international conservative think-tanks, accusing all Communist parties in the West of functioning as a "fifth column" of the Kremlin and as a sponsor of left-wing terrorism. The need to deny any connection with Moscow and terrorism was even greater for the leaders of the major Western Communist parties at a time when they wanted to promote their own, new way to Communism – Euro-Communism – and to defend this program against internal and external critics.

The people in Italy who implied that left-wing terrorism was controlled by the Soviet Union or one of its satellite states formed another, very heterogeneous group. These theorists considered the Italian state, government and society at large to be a victim of Communist subversion. They were typically right-wing Christian Democrats or belonged to other parties of the *arco costituzionale* such as the Socialists. By evoking a Communist conspiracy, this group not only criticized the regime in Moscow but also the PCI – in fact, the Italian Communists might have been the main target. It was a way to discredit a political opponent who had gained a major success in the parliamentary elections of 1976 and who had played a very important role during the kidnapping. Therefore, it is less surprising that the Socialist Bettino Craxi, a fierce adversary of any rapprochement with the Communists, tried to gain some advantage within the left political milieu by suggesting that the PCI and Moscow were the *spiritus rector* behind Moro's death. As shown above, while the Socialists had already expressed these theories during the tragic events, the Christian Democrats – with a few exceptions of radical right-wingers – joined in especially after the Communists went into opposition again. After January 1979 there was no longer any reason to treat the PCI with care to gain its further backing of the government. The time of the "historic compromise" was over.

The fifth group in which conspiracy theorists can be identified is composed of the Italian Neo-Fascist Party (MSI) and other radical right-wing parties and

groups. Due to their ideological background, it is not surprising that they also blamed Moscow and the Italian Communists for the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro. However, besides discrediting a political opponent, the conspiracy theories also offered other possibilities, which can best be seen by the argumentation of one of the most prominent theorists of this group, Vito Miceli. It is not too far-fetched to imply that theories coming from persons like Miceli were also self-defending tools. Vito Miceli was head of the Italian secret service SID from 1970 to 1974 – exactly the time when the "strategy of tension" struck Italy. In 1974 he was sacked because links between his service and right-wing extremist groups such as *Rosa dei Venti* were discovered (Galli 1986, 87; De Lutiis 1984, 120-1) – giving some credits and fuel to left-wing conspiracies about state-supported terrorism. By pointing out that he had already warned the government in 1974 of the imminent threat which left-wing terrorists represented for the stability of the Italian state, he rejected any blame for the escalation of left-wing terrorist violence. Furthermore, he attacked the DC and the Communists for having destroyed the only working and efficient instrument for combating terrorism by reforming the secret service in 1977. The latter motif was shared by many right-wing politicians and was the reaction to the accusations of the left of why the secret services were unable to find Moro: Neither the United States nor the Italian government were responsible for the failure of the secret agencies, but rather the destruction of the SID, mainly initiated by left-wing parties to enable a Communist take-over in Italy (Camera 1978, 17807 and 17795). Sometimes, right-wingers also used their theories to promote new and more severe anti-terrorism measures. They argued that the existing laws were not sufficient and that new measures were necessary to combat an "external threat", and to prevent a further destabilization of Italy by the states of the Warsaw Pact (Camera 1982, 41139-40; *L'Espresso* February 22, 1981, 6-8). There was, however, an important similarity between theorists of the extreme left and of the extreme right: Both groups reverted to conspiracy theories the entire time. This is further evidence for De Graaf's notion that conspiracy theories are an integral part "of almost every extremist ideology in which the legitimacy of the existing political and social order is condemned" (De Graaf and Zwierlein 2013, in this HSR Special Issue).

What about the current members of the government and the heads of the security services during the kidnapping when it comes to conspiracy theories? Shortly after Moro's abduction, the government and security agencies were confronted with some unpleasant inquiries: Why did one of the most prominent politicians of Italy not have a bullet-proofed car? Why were the bodyguards not trained sufficiently? Why were the police forces unable to locate the "people's prison"? Some of these mistakes were the result of a neglected and sometimes inappropriate anti-terrorism policy over recent years (Satta 2003, 450-1). Therefore, for members of the government, it must have seemed difficult and unflattering to confess to these mistakes, to initiate a self-critical discussion or

to start an immediate investigation into its failures. Was it not easier to explain the turn of events by pointing to a perfect attack, planned and executed by terrorists who were controlled by a foreign power? Interestingly enough, however, so far there is no evidence that members of the DC government, the secret services or the police forces who were in office during the Moro affair used in public any kind of conspiracy theories during the kidnapping and in the immediate aftermath. Drake already stated that the "Italian government kept its focus entirely on the real enemy, the domestic subversive groups, that the populace as a whole feared and opposed" (Drake 2007, 60). As in the case of the conspiracies, however, we should also look for possible motives as to why this group tended more towards denying the theories than promoting them. First, the rejection of any involvement of an "external force" was a direct reaction to the charges from the left- and right-wing milieu of either having destroyed the secret services or being involved in any conspiracy with NATO states or the Communists. It was an attempt to legitimize their own policy as well as anti-terrorism policy and to restore public loyalty towards the political and state institutions – especially in the governance of the DC – by denying involvement in any new scandal. Second, the categorical denial of any foreign involvement and the stressing that the Red Brigades were a home-grown phenomenon were helpful in legitimizing future anti-terrorism measures. This was demonstrated in the debate that unfolded about the two most important anti-terrorism laws of the 1970s: the *Legge Moro* of 1978 and the *Legge Cossiga* of 1979. The proponents of these laws argued that the new measures were necessary to prevent a further destabilization of Italy (Hof 2011, 223-30, 249-59). The mutual accusations of being responsible for the mistakes and failures during the search for Moro could also be used to reinforce the demand for new anti-terrorism measures. Only new rules and provisions would stop the chaos between the different security agencies which existed during the search and which left the Italian police "without eyes and ears" (Parlato 1980, 343). Last but not least, this tactic also offered an opportunity to defend the Italian security agencies against criticism and to boost their loyalty to the government, which was shaken in the wake of the reform debates during the 1970s (Della Porta and Reiter 2003, 275-7; Di Francesco 2009).

5. Conspiracies Today

After years of discussion and debate and convincing evidence that the Red Brigades were solely a home-grown phenomenon, why are the conspiracy theories still alive today? Drake already asserted that, in "terms of human psychology, great crimes inevitably draw many people to conspiracy theories" (Drake 2007, 60). This can be seen in the context of the murder of prominent politicians such as Olof Palme or John F. Kennedy. A recent example can be

found in the terrorist attack of unimaginable scale on September 11, 2001, which shocked the United States of America and caused worldwide outrage, horror and dismay. For many people, such an attack was inconceivable. In their desire to understand these events, some people found logic in conspiracy theories, some of which sound even more outrageous than the original events (Bülow 2004). Such behavior is reminiscent of the conspiracy theories that arose in connection with the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, and suggests one reason why the theories surrounding the Moro affair are still discussed so heatedly: the desire to explain the inexplicable and to rationalize the irrational. However, as Richard Drake pointed out, the Moro murder case

> exhibits a peculiarly vivid coloring due to the country's unstable political structures and to a judicial system that inspires very little confidence. […] The agitations of the present take place against a historical backdrop of lost wars, foreign invasions, and domestic treachery (Drake 2007, 61).

Political parties – now and in the past – are not as interested in a serious examination as they are in exploiting the Moro affair to gain a political leg-up against their rivals. The best examples are the numerous parliamentary commissions from the past. Instead of investigating the case and giving plausible answers to pressing questions, the politicians used the hearings and reports as a platform for political struggle. Therefore the commissions were not a solution to the problems, but rather part of the problem itself. A recent example of the abuse of parliamentary commissions as a way to gain political advantage in the context of the Moro affair is the so-called Mithrokin Commission, which held its meetings between 2002 and 2006. Politicians from Silvio Berlusconi's government implied that the left, supported by the former Soviet Union, carried – and still carries – the sole responsibility for left-wing terrorism, the murder of Aldo Moro and the "years of lead". One cannot help feeling, for example, that the final report of the *Casa delle Libertà* for the Mithrokin Commission in 2006 was written solely to discredit the opposition under Romano Prodi. Prodi was accused of knowing where Moro's "people's prison" was located all along, and of having indirect contact with the terrorists. Instead of helping the security forces as his patriotic duty would have demanded, they argued, he obstructed the search (Hof 2011, 210).

On the other hand, the political left, such as the former Communist Senator Sergio Flamigni, still tries to reject any responsibility for the emergence and escalation of left-wing terrorism and thus for one of the bloodiest episodes in Italian history after the Second World War. For the left, the conspiracy theories were and still are a mighty tool to criticize the former Christian Democratic Party and its political heirs for the economic, political and social decay of Italy in the years after the war. A political change, the left argued, which was desired by the Italian public and which would have stopped the epidemic of political violence, was blocked by an unholy alliance between the Christian Democrats and "external forces". The need "to obscure the ultimate cause of […] [Moro's]

death, in the culture of revolutionary Marxism, continues to be the primary force behind the political manipulation of the Moro murder case" (Drake 2007, 61).

The kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro and the "years of lead" caused a deep wound in Italian society which has not yet healed. In this context, popular films played an important part in reinforcing the view that the government had played politics with the Moro murder case. One of the first popular movies that dealt with conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro kidnapping was *Il caso Moro*, directed by Giuseppe Ferrara in 1986. The movie was mainly based on the book *Days of Wrath* by the American novelist Robert Katz, who also wrote the screenplay for the film (Katz 1980). On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Moro's death, another movie was screened for the first time: The film *Piazza delle Cinque Lune* by Renzo Martinelli was mainly based on the books of Sergio Flamigni, who also worked as a consultant for the director. Not surprisingly, the Red Brigades were portrayed as mere pawns of the American secret service CIA. The kidnapping and murder of Moro was shown as a way to block a Communist takeover of the Italian government. The movie, which was highly praised by Alberto Franceschini, was not only very successful because prominent actors such as Donald Sutherland took part in it, but because the success was also a sign that the theories were still very popular even 25 years after the actual events happened. Not even the criticism of former government politicians, such as Francesco Cossiga, who dismissed the films as pure science-fiction, compromised the success of the movies (Drake 2007, 46-8).

6. Conclusion

Conspiracy theories and terrorism in Italy have been two sides of the same coin of endemic corruption and serious flaws within the democratic system since the 1950s. They climaxed during the "strategy of tension" in the early 1970s. It is the Moro murder case, however, which shines the clearest light on the triad of terrorism, conspiracy, and anti-terrorism policy. The theories enabled the political parties to legitimize their own positions and to deflect responsibility for either the emergence of terrorism or a failed anti-terrorism policy. Furthermore, they helped to legitimize new anti-terrorism measures and to promote a broad support for these policies. Finally, in light of the Cold War, they played an important part in the state's anti-terrorism propaganda.

The left-wing parties and extra-parliamentary groups, however, did not direct the conspiracy theories against the terrorists, but rather against the regimes they believed were backing them. The main objective of this group was to delegitimize the political system, which was represented by the Christian Democrats and their security policy. Owing to their own experience with the security forces during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the "strategy of tension", the left instinctively blamed the state. They trusted neither the security forces nor the

government. Whether the state achieved success or failed, the left always suspected that there was some kind of illegal activity behind the scenes. In their conviction, the state and its allies first used right-wing terrorist groups to destabilize Italy in the early 1970s. When this strategy failed, they turned to left-wing terrorist groups. "For them", as Drake summed it up, "the principal villains of the Moro tragedy are not his Red Brigade killers, but the Christian Democrats" (Drake 2007, 60). In their desire to de-legitimize the government, the Communists joined ranks with this argumentation after they went into opposition. The PCI also used the conspiracy theories as an argument for a new anti-terrorism strategy, which can be seen by their demands for a reform of the security agencies. However, during the Communists' support of the DC minority government until January 1979, the PCI only uttered conspiracy theories reluctantly and, like some members of the Christian Democratic Party, they never blamed a specific "foreign power". The priority was not to endanger the 'historic compromise' with the DC.

The members of the government who were active during the Moro kidnapping have dismissed the theories since the beginning of the Parliamentary Commission to inquire into the Moro kidnapping. In doing so they were supported by officials of the secret services and police forces. Directly after the kidnapping and murder of Moro, however, the government representatives usually refrained from commenting on conspiracies. Therefore, one can agree with Richard Drake's notion that historical research clears them of the charge that they used theories to discredit the political opposition (Drake 2007, 60). They were more focused on legitimizing their own political standing and on introducing new anti-terrorism measures. In their opinion conspiracy theories were not helpful to achieve this goal. This, of course, cannot be said of right-wingers within different parties such as the DC or the MSI and members of the Socialist Party who participated in the dissemination of conspiracy theories. However, their objective was the same: to legitimize their own political standing and anti-terrorism policy.

The conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro affair should not be regarded as a sign of a weak government or a failed anti-terrorism policy in the years 1978/79, just because the members of the government and of the security services – and also the majority of the Communists who backed the DC minority government and its policy towards the terrorists – never voiced such theories. They did not let conspiracy theories get in the way of enacting new laws or strengthening the police services. However, many government representatives were already in office during the "strategy of tension" and they were thus responsible for a lack of transparency and will to uncover the connections between state officials and right-wing terrorist groups during this period. This fostered the public's distrust of the state, which was one of the main reasons why the conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro affair had so many followers, as the above-cited survey clearly shows. Therefore, De Graaf's notion that

the "dominance of conspiracy theories seriously inhibited counterterrorism policies", not least by undermining the government's credibility and legitimacy (De Graaf 2011, 116), should not be ruled out when we look at the entire period of the "years of lead". The Moro kidnapping was not the only affair in the 1970s and 1980s when conspiracy theories were expressed in relation to terrorism and security issues. They are an important feature of the Italian political culture owing to its deep division between the political left and the political right. Furthermore, politicians such as the Socialist Bettino Craxi, who voiced several theories during the Moro kidnapping, later became government officials and thus were responsible for anti-terrorism measures. Therefore a further examination of the functional connection between terrorism, security and conspiracy theories during the entire "years of lead" is strongly needed.

What were the consequences of the distribution of conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro affair? There is no doubt that conspiracy theories surrounding the Moro case have placed a heavy burden on political cooperation, especially between the Christian Democrats, Communists and other left-wing political parties after the end of the DC minority government – a burden that had not been overcome today. The theories, however, were not the reason for the renewed split between the Communists and the DC. It was the conviction of leading Communists that the political strategy of the "historic compromise" had not produced any practical result. It was the Communists' frustration, not the conspiracy theories, which brought about the end of the PCI – DC alliance. The theories that the Communists expressed after 1979 were a clear sign that the time of the "historic compromise" was over.

Conspiracy theories still dominate the Italian public discourse and a sometimes self-referential scientific research about the kidnapping of Aldo Moro and about the "years of lead" in Italy. The political situation in Italy between 1976 and 1979, the "historic compromise" between Communists and the DC, and the fact that neither the Italian state nor the Christian Democratic Party can be considered monolithic blocks, have often been overlooked even in academic research. The policy of the Italian government during the Moro kidnapping was, and is, too often identified with the DC party without taking into account the rivalry within the DC or the important role of the PCI. This still hinders a serious examination about different aspects of Italian anti-terrorism policy during the "years of lead", such as the different anti-terrorism strategies of the different parties and government coalitions as well as the public's reaction towards the anti-terrorism policy of the state. In this article, I have briefly outlined the genesis of conspiracy theories surrounding the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro and their functional character when it comes to the anti-terrorism policy. Furthermore, I have presented a few reasons why this domination still exists in Italy. However, one should never forget another reason for this: It is much easier to find an audience for thrilling conspiracies than for a matter-of-fact, sometimes dry historiography.

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