

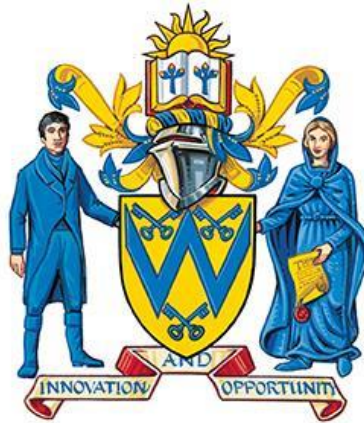
Counterintelligence methods of terrorist organisations and the factors that influence them: a comparative study of Revolutionary Organisation 17 November and the Red Army Faction

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Counterintelligence Methods of Terrorist Organisations and the Factors
That Influence Them: A Comparative Study Of Revolutionary
Organisation 17 November And The Red Army Faction

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1825715



A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Wolverhampton
for the degree of Master of Philosophy

Supervisors:

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November 2023

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Abstract

Continuing terrorist activities across the world create the impetus for a detailed, accurate and comprehensive understanding of the delicate intricacies that govern terrorist decision making. In order to achieve operational success and maintain secrecy, terrorist groups must constantly learn and adapt. In order to defeat them, their adversaries must be able to exhibit superior adaptive capability and strive to remain ahead of the terrorist learning curve. This thesis explores the terrorist counterintelligence methods and adaptation mechanisms of two organisations: the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November and the Red Army Faction. It examines the commonly accepted factors that influence the counterintelligence methods of terrorist groups and evaluates their impact on the group's strategy. The factors that are considered to be fundamental in a group's counterintelligence choices are (i) organisational structure, (ii) popular support, (iii) control of territory, (iv) resources and (v) adversary capability. The methods the groups chose are juxtaposed with the intelligence methods of their adversaries and the evolution of both is analysed. The analysis shows that there is a strong correlation between the ability of a group to adapt to changes in its environment and its long-term survival. Contrary to previous findings, the study shows that the most important factor influencing a group's counterintelligence strategy is the capability and effectiveness of its adversary. The Red Army Faction was facing an effective opponent and adapted accordingly, developing sophisticated capabilities despite the repeated decapitation of its leadership. 17 November, on the other hand, was facing an adversary which did not approach it as a threat, thus maintaining relatively basic intelligence capacity. The lack of adaptation of 17 November when its adversary's tactics suddenly improved led to its demise. By examining the methods used by terrorist organisations and understanding why these are chosen, concrete steps can be taken in creating an effective framework for counter-terrorism policy and international security.

Keywords

ALF=	Animal Liberation Front
EYP=	Greek National Intelligence Service
FARC=	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
GSG-9=	Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (German Counterterrorism Police Unit)
LTTE=	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
ISIS=	Islamic State
OPSEC=	Operational Security
PIRA=	Provisional Irish Republican Army
RAF=	Red Army Faction
RO17N=	Revolutionary Organisation 17 November
TTP=	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

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Introduction

Chapter I

As terrorist groups across the world are prosecuted, one of the most vital components of their operational capability lies in their ability to conduct their activities undetected. Simultaneously, the group's adversary needs to bypass these efforts of maintaining anonymity whilst ensuring that its methods and resources remain uncompromised. Both the terrorist group and its adversary need to strike a balance between operational success and secrecy. An improvement of methodology by one needs to be matched by an equal or better improvement by the other. Maintaining an equilibrium between operational effectiveness and covert activities is crucial for both the terrorist group and its adversary, showcased in the balance between intelligence gathered by the adversary and the counterintelligence tactics used by the organisation.

Even though the area of terrorism and counterintelligence is widely and extensively researched,¹ few scholars focus on the counterintelligence of terrorist groups. There is growing research on how groups elude detection, but is mostly focused on governmental counterintelligence methods,² corporate counterintelligence,³ secret societies⁴ or organised crime.⁵ Yet even in those cases, research and analysis specifically on counterintelligence of terrorist groups is sparse.⁶ This thesis will examine the counterintelligence methods used by two terrorist groups which managed to elude eradication for over twenty years: the Red Army Faction and the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November (RO17N). It will seek to explore the different variables that scholars argue play an instrumental role in shaping a group's counterintelligence tactics and evaluate the impact of each on the methods chosen by the organisations.

¹ Prunckun, H. (2019b) *Counterintelligence theory and practice*. Lanham (Maryland): Rowman & Littlefield. ; Britovšek, J. (2020) 'Comparing Counterintelligence and Counterterrorism – Similarities, Issues and Solutions', *Journal of Criminal Justice and Security*, (2), pp. 163–181.

² Van Cleave, M.K. (2013) 'What is Counterintelligence? A Guide to Thinking and Teaching about CI', *The Intelligencer: Journal of U.S. Intelligence Studies*, 20(2), pp. 57–65.

³ Ivanov, T.V. (2018) 'COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE – MODERN TOOLS FOR GENERATING PROACTIVE CORPORATE SECURITY', *SECURITY & FUTURE*, 13(4).

⁴ Erickson, B. (1981). Secret Societies and Social Structure. *Social Forces*, 60(1), p.188.

⁵ Baker, W. and Faulkner, R. (1993). The Social Organization of Conspiracy: Illegal Networks in the Heavy Electrical Equipment Industry. *American Sociological Review*, 58(6), p.837.

⁶ Ehrman, J. (2009). Op. Cit.

Mobley⁷ has argued that the five factors whose strength or weakness can have an impact on a group's counterintelligence methods are the organisational structure of the group, whether it enjoys popular support, whether it controls any territory, whether it enjoys a large number of resources and, finally, the capability of its adversary.⁸

The aim of this thesis is to apply Mobley's framework to break down and analyse the counterintelligence strategies of RO17N and the Red Army Faction and to investigate the impact of these five factors on their counterintelligence strategies. It will compare and contrast the tactics of the two groups in response to the capabilities of their adversaries and evaluate how each organisation's counterintelligence methods evolved in reaction to their respective adversaries. It will attempt to challenge Mobley's theory that argues that the resources an organisation enjoys is the most critical factor in shaping terrorist counterintelligence strategies and will seek to assess the hypothesis that adversary capability, more than any other factor, determines the effectiveness and sophistication of a terrorist group's counterintelligence efforts. Finally, the thesis aims to highlight the implications of its findings for current counter-terrorism policy. Although these two case studies are historical in nature, their analysis provides valuable insights for modern counterterrorism policy making. Understanding how both groups adapted their methods in response to evolving state countermeasures highlights the dynamic interplay between terrorist organisations and their adversaries, offering lessons in both the successes and shortcomings of contemporary state counterterrorism efforts.

This thesis will first (I) provide a background for counterintelligence and will briefly outline the factors that are believed to shape the counterintelligence methods that terrorist organisations choose to employ. It will then (II) examine the techniques of the RO17N before reviewing the intelligence methods used by the organisation's adversaries to defeat the organisation as well as the tactics (III) used by the Red Army Faction and the government forces aiming to defeat it. It will finally compare and contrast the counterintelligence tactics used by the organisations and will examine the impact of the influencing factors on the decision-making strategies of the two groups and demonstrate how its findings can be applied in counter-terrorism research.

⁷ Mobley, B. (2012). *Terrorism and Counterintelligence*. New York: Columbia University Press

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8

Choosing Mobley's Theoretical Framework

The decision to use Mobley's framework is primarily driven by the unique contribution it makes to the study of terrorist counterintelligence. Unlike other scholars,⁹ who have predominantly focused on the general theory of counterintelligence, or the specific tactics used by terrorist organisations, Mobley provides a comprehensive model that specifically addresses how various factors shape counterintelligence within terrorist groups, offering a crucial distinction between them which allows for a more nuanced understanding of both internal and external influencing dynamics. The model stands out as the only scholarly work that systematically categorises counterintelligence into basic denial, adaptive denial, and covert manipulation, while also linking these categories to five key factors: organisational structure, popular support, control of territory, resources, and adversary capability. This structure allows for a detailed and in-depth analysis of counterintelligence strategies and how they are shaped in the context of a terrorist organisations' defensive measures.

Mobley's framework is particularly relevant to this study, which aims to explore the counterintelligence methods of two specific terrorist organisations: RO17N and the Red Army Faction. By applying Mobley's categories of counterintelligence influence factors, the study can systematically analyse and compare how each organisation's defensive measures are shaped. Additionally, it can examine them in a structured way to best evaluate their effectiveness and evolution through time. This thesis seeks to build on Mobley's work by testing his theory against the case studies of RO17N and the Red Army Faction. While Mobley posits that resources are the key factor shaping terrorist group counterintelligence, this study will argue that adversary capability is the most critical factor. The analysis of the two organisations will demonstrate that, contrary to Mobley's broader claim, it is the effectiveness of the adversary that most significantly determines a terrorist group's counterintelligence strategies and overall adaptability.

In applying Mobley's framework to the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November and the Red Army Faction, this study will seek to address the following research questions:

⁹ Prunckun, H. (2019b) Op.Cit. ; Britovšek, J. (2020) 'Comparing Counterintelligence and Counterterrorism – Similarities, Issues and Solutions', *Journal of Criminal Justice and Security*, (2), pp. 163–181.

1. How do the five factors identified by Mobley—organisational structure, popular support, territorial control, resource availability, and adversary capability—shape the counterintelligence strategies of terrorist organisations such as the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November (RO17N)?
2. Is adversary capability, rather than resource availability, as Mobley suggests, the most critical factor determining the effectiveness and sophistication of a terrorist group’s counterintelligence methods?
3. What implications do the counterintelligence strategies of historical groups like RAF and RO17N have for modern counterterrorism policy?

The aims of this thesis are:

1. To apply and evaluate Mobley’s framework on the counterintelligence strategies of RAF and RO17N, systematically examining the influence of the five factors—organisational structure, popular support, territorial control, resources, and adversary capability—on each group’s methods of evading detection and countering state intelligence operations.
2. To critically challenge Mobley’s theory by testing the hypothesis that adversary capability, rather than resource availability, is the primary factor shaping a terrorist organisation’s counterintelligence strategies. By comparing the more sophisticated counterintelligence of the RAF against the RO17N’s responses to less capable adversaries, the thesis will assess this central claim.
3. To contribute to counterterrorism policy by drawing lessons from the successes and failures of these two groups’ counterintelligence strategies, providing insights into how modern terrorist organisations might adapt to contemporary counterterrorism measures and how state actors can effectively respond.

By choosing this structure, this thesis will build on existing literature but also push the boundaries of current understanding by challenging one of its central claims. The framework’s structured approach offers a clear pathway for analysing complex counterintelligence dynamics, while the study’s findings contribute to a more refined understanding of the factors that truly shape terrorist counterintelligence efforts.

An understanding of terrorist counterintelligence capabilities can have a significant impact on global security, allowing for the targeted and efficient allocation of resources to achieve maximal results. Gaining an insight into the counterintelligence choices of terrorist groups and the motivations behind them can allow us to predict their development, intercept that learning and minimise their operational capability. Evaluating and anticipating the actions and reactions of a terrorist group can lead to the development of a more effective and efficient approach to counterterrorism and thus increase the chances of eradicating terrorist groups across the world

1.2 Case Selection

The organisations whose counterintelligence methods will be examined are the Red Army Faction, which operated in Germany from 1970 to late 1990s and the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November, which was active in Greece from the mid 1970's until 2002. The two organisations were selected for various reasons. Historically, their period of operation is interesting as it was an incredibly tumultuous period for terrorism in Europe. Action Directe was operating in France, the Provisional Irish Republican Army was active in Ireland, Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre (GRAPO) and Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain and Forças Populares 25 de Abril (FP-25) in Portugal,¹⁰ forcing European countries to deal with the terrorist threat both separately and collectively. The two organisations were chosen both because of their similarities as well as because of their differences. The similarities of the groups include their modus operandi (mainly bombings, kidnappings and assassinations), the symbolic, rather than indiscriminate nature of their terrorist attacks and the fact that all groups were active and eluded dismantlement by authorities for over twenty years.

The fact that one of the groups was operating in north Europe and the other in the south allows for a more complete picture of counterintelligence methods in both very different and very similar sociocultural settings. Moreover, the groups cover several different terrorist group categories: one had hundreds of members and the other less than twenty; one was operating in complete secrecy, whilst the other had a more open political presence. One of the organisations was formed as “a loose network of minor groupings that shared general extreme-left

¹⁰ Lekea, I. (2014). *17N's philosophy of terror: An Analysis of the 17 November Revolutionary Organization*. Praeger, p.1.

orientations"¹¹ whilst the other shrouded its operations in complete secrecy. One organisation escalated the severity of its attacks from kneecappings to an eventual graduation to kidnappings and lethal attacks, whilst the other two launched their terrorist activity directly with bombings and assassinations.¹² The most important difference between the two cases, however, was the capability and commitment of their adversaries in eradicating each group, something that will be discussed in detail throughout this study.

1.3 An Overview of the Organisations

1.3.1 Red Army Faction

Formation

Movements against anti-imperialism, workers' and women's rights found fertile ground in a Europe at the end of colonialism, paired with the beginnings of globalisation and industrialisation. German students and young people alike were feeling alienated by a state in the aftermath of Nazism, the war and the onset of capitalism. The government and older generations were increasingly viewed with suspicion and anger, in part because of the large numbers of individuals who held government positions in the Third Reich maintaining their positions after the end of the war.¹³ Social and political developments, the adaptability of Communism in a Western setting, as well as writings on political philosophy, Leninism, Maoism and Marxism gave fuel to the creation of counter cultural and revolutionary thought.

Radical organisations started to emerge in order to create a more organised and ideologically streamlined response to the West German State, including “the Red Army Group, the ‘Black Cells’ and the ‘Tupamaros’”.¹⁴ The longest lasting and most notorious became the RAF, which would survive for over 30 years and span across three different “Generations”.

¹¹ Kassimeris, G. (2007). For a Place in History: Explaining Greece's Revolutionary Organization 17 November. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 27(2), pp. 131

¹² Corsun, A. (1991). Group profile: The revolutionary organization 17 November in Greece. *Terrorism*, 14(2), pp.77-104.

¹³ Mortimer, C. (2016) Nazi influence on Germany's post-war government to be investigated, The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/nazi-germany-postwar-government-investigation-far-right-hans-globke-nuremberg-a7441971.html> (Accessed: 22 July 2023).

¹⁴ Dyson, K.H. (1975) 'Left-wing political extremism and the problem of tolerance in western Germany', *Government and Opposition*, 10(3), pp. 306–331. doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.1975.tb00643.x.

The key characters of the nascent of 1968 were Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader, Horst Sohnlein, and Thorwald Proll.¹⁵

Ideology

Considering themselves to be liberal fighters struggling to achieve social justice and embracing the radicalism of the “New Left”, the Red Army Faction turned to armed struggle to achieve their goals.¹⁶ The organisation’s turn to violence is thought to have been made following the 2nd of June 1967 policeman killing of the student Benno Ohnesorg during a protest against the visit of the Shah of Iran in West Berlin¹⁷. Heavily critical of German institutions, the Red Army Faction believed that even the (until then illegal) Communist Party was incapable of unifying the workings class¹⁸ and that the only way to achieve true unification and unity of the proletariat would be through common armed revolutionary struggle, which they coined as the “highest form of class struggle”.¹⁹ As they wrote in their *Guerrilla Concept* in 1971, “Whether it is right to organise armed resistance now, depends on whether it is possible, and whether it is possible can only be determined in practice”.²⁰ The Paris Commune, the 1917 October Revolution of the Bolsheviks and the Mao Zedong led Chinese “People’s War” all informed what eventually became the Red Army Faction ideology.

However, following the arrest and imprisonment of the leaders of the RAF in 1972, an ideological shift occurred in the organisation. The armed struggle to communicate its “Grand Ideologies” pivoted to the prioritisation of the release of the group’s leadership.²¹ After 1972, the ideological constant that remained unchanged throughout the organisation’s operation was

¹⁵ Rothenberger, L. (2017) ‘A terrorist group’s strategic communication—the case of the Red Army Faction’, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(4), pp. 286–305. doi:10.1080/1553118x.2017.1339191.

¹⁶ Hager, R. (2011). Baader-Meinhof Complexities: Ideology and the “Root Causes” of Terrorism. *Democracy and Security*, 7(1), pp.57-65.

¹⁷ Aust, S. (1987). *The Baader-Meinhof group*. London: Bodley Head. pp. 116-117

¹⁸ Hager, R. (2011). Baader-Meinhof Complexities: Ideology and the “Root Causes” of Terrorism. *Democracy and Security*, 7(1), pp.57-65.

¹⁹ Herf, J. (2008) An Age of Murder: Ideology and Terror in Germany. *Telos*, 144, pp. 8-37.

²⁰ The Red Army Faction. (1971) *The Urban Guerilla Concept*. Available at: https://socialhistoryportal.org/sites/default/files/raf/en/0019710501%2520EN_2.pdf [Accessed 15 Feb. 2019]. P.96

²¹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

the liberation of its prisoners, with Pluchinsky noting that “the RAF essentially was born in the prisons”.²²

Structure

The Red Army Faction is interesting in its structure as its operations can be broken into three distinct periods of operational activity, also called “Generations”. The First ranged from 1970-1977, the Second from 1972-1982 and the Third from 1984-1998. The key mitigating factor in the shift between generations was the arrest of the organisation’s leadership. When the leaders of its first generation -Baader, Ensslin and Meinhof- were arrested in 1972, the ‘second generation’ initially operated with the key goal of releasing them and the other imprisoned members of the group from prison. Its new leadership, Brigitte Monhaupt and Christian Klar also shifted the focus of the attacks to NATO and US targets.²³ The third generation, which again came to be following the arrest of Monhaupt and Klar, was led by Wolfgang Grams and Birgit Hogefeld, who widened the focus of the organisation’s attacks beyond the German borders and with a wider scope: European terrorism.²⁴ Viewing Germany as being in the leading position of an imperialistic Europe, the group launched attacks against diplomats, bankers and industrialists. Moreover, the RAF started taking credit for attacks conducted in their name by terrorists across Europe. The RAF struggle became increasingly hard to internationalise as terrorist organisations faced increasing crackdowns by their respective governments.²⁵ By 1993, the organisation had once again been decapitated, following the killing of Grams and the arrest of Hogefeld, causing the RAF to remain dormant until the late 1990’s. The official dissolution of the organisation came in the form of a statement sent to Reuters in March 1998 in which the group announced that it would cease its operations. It closed its *communiqué*, however, with the ominous phrase “The revolution says: I was, I am, I will be again”.²⁶

²² Pluchinsky, D. (1993). Germany's red army faction: An obituary. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 16(2), pp.135-157.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Moghadam, A. (2012). Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35(2), pp.156-181.

²⁵ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

²⁶ Moghadam, A. (2012)., Op. Cit.

Activity

Throughout its years of activity, the Red Army Faction mainly operated through “murders, bank robberies, explosions at a variety of West German and American institutions” and aeroplane hijackings using “pistols, machine guns, bazookas, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) [and] remote-controlled bombs”.²⁷ The organisation launched its most lethal month of attacks in the 1972 “May Offensive” in which it launched bombings against US army bases, the press offices of right-wing newspapers and West German police forces.²⁸ In contrast to other terrorist organisations, where leadership is vital for playing an active and tactical role in its operations, the Red Army Faction entered its most violent phase once the leadership of its First Generation was imprisoned. Aiming to secure their release, members of the organisation launched a period of high-profile attacks and assassinations, coined “German Autumn”.²⁹ In these series of attacks, the RAF assassinated the chief public prosecutor, Siegfried Buback, the head of the Dresdner Bank, Jürgen Ponto, and the head of the German Association of Employers, Hanns Martin Schleyer.³⁰ With the tactical help of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the RAF also hijacked a plane flying to Frankfurt with the goal to increase pressure for the release of its prisoners, failing, however, to achieve any results.³¹

The Dismantling

The RAF shifted in size and leadership throughout its years of operation, constantly adjusting to the decapitation of its leadership and the responses of the West German State to its operations. The arrest of the organisation’s key members did not hinder its capabilities, but did limit its commitment to the armed struggle as its focus shifted to the freeing of its imprisoned leadership.³² The West German State, committed to the dismantling of the organisation from its early years of operations, strengthened its intelligence and counterterrorism capabilities through the decades, creating “centrally-controlled intelligence

²⁷ Herf, J. (2008) *An Age of Murder: Ideology and Terror in Germany*. *Telos*, 144, pp. 8-37.

²⁸ Weil, A. (2017). *Op. Cit.*

²⁹ Rethmann, P. (2006). *On Militancy, Sort Of*. *Cultural Critique*, 62(1), pp.67-91.

Scribner, C. (2015). *After the Red Army faction*. Columbia University Press, p.2.

³⁰ Geronimo (2014) *Fire and flames: A history of the German Autonomist Movement*. Oakland: PM Press.

³¹ Moghadam, A. (2012)., *Op. Cit.*

³² Horchem, H. (1991). The decline of the Red Army Faction. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, (2), 65.

and paramilitary organisations, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and GSG-9, respectively”.³³ Despite the varying levels of long term success of these measures because of the adaptability of the RAF to both the police methods as well as GSG-9, they showcase the dedication of the West German State to the dissolution of the organisation. The government continued to tackle the organisation with legal, intelligence, police and tactical measures throughout years, adapting and readapting to the group’s increasing sophistication. The strength and adherence of Germany to innovative solutions to the ‘Baader-Meinhof’ problem led to the “crushing” of the first two generations, with the “prisoner release program [becoming] the final step in convincing the elusive third generation to give up the fight”.³⁴ The RAF unilaterally declared a ceasefire on April 13, 1992, with a communique sent to the Agence France Presse office in Bonn, in which it asked for a “reconciliation and de-escalation of the conflict with the state”.³⁵

1.3.2 Revolutionary Organisation 17 November

Formation

Revolutionary Organisation 17 November (RO17N) formed in the mid-1970s, following the Greek ‘Regime of the Colonels’, a military junta that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974.³⁶ In addition to the complicated landscape of Europe at the time, the organisation was motivated by its perceived lack of political action taken by the Greek government on key issues regarding the rights of its citizens. These included the handling of the situation in Cyprus preceding and following the Turkish invasion in 1974, the country’s relationship with Turkey, the seemingly considerable influence of the US over Greece, manifested by the number of US bases on Greek soil, as well as by Greece’s NATO membership.³⁷

³³ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Pluchinsky, D. (1993). Op. Cit. pp.135-157.

³⁶ Psacharopoulos, G. and Kazamias, A. (1980). Student Activism in Greece: A Historical and Empirical Analysis. *Higher Education*, 9, pp.127-138.

³⁷ Corsun, A. (1991). Op. Cit.

Ideology

The name '17 November' was chosen in honour of the Athens Polytechnic Uprising, a mass revolutionary expression of resistance against the Greek Regime of the Colonels, in which students occupied the Athens Polytechnic University in 1973.³⁸ The 17th of November commemorates the final day of the occupation, where martial law was imposed, allowing for the driving of three armoured vehicles into the university, crushing several students to death.³⁹ These events were important to this case study as they further cemented the antipathy of the Greek population against authority, bred further mistrust for police and intelligence forces and propagated an anti-capitalist sentiment across the country.⁴⁰ The organisation initiated its terrorist activity by assassinating the Athens CIA station chief, Richard Welch in 1975.⁴¹ It identified as Marxist and anti-imperialistic and was 'fanatically nationalistic, (...) anti Greek establishment, bitterly anti-American, anti-Turkey and anti-NATO'. Among its aims were the 'removal of US bases from Greece, the Turkish military presence from Cyprus and severing [Greek] ties with NATO and the European Union'.⁴²

Structure

Despite its small size (less than twenty members), RO17N was divided into smaller cells of three or four members to ensure that a compromise in the group's security would only jeopardise a fraction of the organisation's members.⁴³ Each cell voted for its head officer and contacts between cells were made through these elected head officers.⁴⁴ The organisation had an ideological leader, Alexandros Yiotopoulos, who during the Regime of the Colonels was

³⁸ Brown, K. (1974) *The 1974 World Book Year Book: The Annual Supplement To The World Book Encyclopedia: A review of the events of 1973*. Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corp., p. 341

³⁹ Psacharopoulos, G. and Kazamias, A. (1980). Op. Cit.

⁴⁰ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Europe's last red terrorists: The Revolutionary Organisation 17 November*. London: Hurst & Co., p.23

⁴¹ Fakitsas, M. (2003). Op. Cit.

⁴² Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op.Cit., p.2

⁴³ Dolnik, A. (2007). *Understanding terrorist innovation: Technology, Tactics and Global Trends*. London: Routledge., p.139

⁴⁴ Papachelas, A. and Telloğlu, T. (2003). Op. Cit. p.136

active in the ‘resistance circles’ of Paris. Its other most notable members included Dimitris Koufontinas, the brothers Savvas, Christodoulos and Vasilis Ksiros, Thomas Serifis and Kostas Karatsolis and they served to support the organisation both ideologically, tactically as well as in terms of counterintelligence.

Activity

Unlike most terrorist organisations, which gradually escalate the lethality of their attacks,⁴⁵ RO17N began its terrorist activity with assassinations and bombings. Using fairly simple strategies that required little to no logistical planning, the organisation initiated its attacks with the assassination of CIA station chief in Athens, Richard Welch.⁴⁶ In its twenty-seven years of activity, RO17N assassinated twenty- three Greek and foreign officials (including policemen, soldiers, politicians and diplomats), robbed banks, shot rockets at buildings and detonated bombs.⁴⁷ Following the attacks, the organisation would issue *communiqués* in which they would rationalise their actions as revolutionary steps toward a change in the Greek class system and the national and international political status quo.⁴⁸ In its last years of activity, the organisation conducted prolific bank robberies, aiming to collect funds in order to continue its attacks.⁴⁹

Dismantling

As there was no legal framework to provide for the judicial management of terrorist attacks until 1987, the ruling New Democracy party attempted to introduce an Anti-Terrorism bill for ‘The Suppression of Terrorism and the Protection of the Democratic Regime’ (774/1978) in 1978. The bill aimed to provide a legal doctrine for the prevention of terrorist attacks and their prosecution, but it faced great resistance from the opposition and was repealed two years later, as it was deemed ‘the first step to a despotic, undemocratic, tyrannical rule of

⁴⁵ Dolnik, A. (2007). Op. Cit., p.128

⁴⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2007). Op. Cit., pp.129-145.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Fakitsas, M. (2003). Op. Cit.

⁴⁹ Lialios, G. (2002). Robbery with the 17N stamp [Ληστεία με τη σφραγίδα της «17 Νοέμβρη»]. *Kathimerini*. [online] Available at: <http://www.kathimerini.gr/124227/article/epikairothta/ellada/lhsteia-me-th-sfragida-ths-17-noemvrh> [Accessed 25 Feb. 2019].

law'.⁵⁰ This back-and-forth between the two main political parties, New Democracy and PASOK, meant that the Greek state did not have a strong and consistent legal strategy or framework for the first two decades of the organisation's operation to combat terrorism, something that RO17N used to its advantage.

International pressure to find and arrest the members of RO17N mounted continuously and with the threat of losing the opportunity to host the 2004 Olympic games looming, the necessity to make effective moves escalated rapidly.⁵¹ Even though authorities had begun to inch closer to the organisation, the end for RO17N came in 2002, when a bomb exploded prematurely in the hands of Savvas Ksiros in the port of Piraeus.⁵² Ksiros was arrested and testified about his involvement in the organisation to the state prosecutor sparking off a series of arrests, leading to the eventual trial and conviction of fourteen out of the nineteen members tried.⁵³

1.4 Data and Limitations

This study will compile and analyse both primary and secondary sources before comparing, contrasting, and evaluating them. This paper will not seek to resolve the debate regarding any contested interpretations of the terms and will use broad and relatively widely accepted definitions for its key terms to allow for both the practical and theoretical application of its study's findings. Terrorism will be defined as "the deliberate creation of a sense of fear, usually by the use or threat of use of symbolic acts of physical violence, to influence the political behaviour of a given target group".⁵⁴ Counterintelligence is "the process - or constellation of activities, analysis and decision-making - that a group engages in to prevent adversaries from acquiring accurate information about its actions, personnel, and plans".⁵⁵ Counterintelligence is used by organisations in order to overcome a group's main security challenges: the inadvertent recruitment of an informer, the interception of its communications

⁵⁰ Kassimeris, G. (1995). Greece: Twenty years of political terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(2), pp.74-92.

⁵¹ Papachelas, A. (2000). Η αμερικανική εμμονή με τη «17N» [The American Obsession with "N17"]. *To Vima*. (online) Available at: <http://www.tovima.gr/relatedarticles/article/?aid=129144> (Accessed 30 Jul. 2015).

⁵² Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). Op. Cit.

⁵³ Kassimeris, G. (2007). Op. Cit.

⁵⁴ Neumann, P. and Smith, M. (2005). Strategic terrorism: The framework and its fallacies. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28(4), pp.571-595.

⁵⁵ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.8

and the exposure of the group members or group operations by the media or the authorities.⁵⁶ Finally, because of the secret nature of a significant amount of information regarding counterintelligence, the data is approached tentatively. A significant amount of information on terrorist operations is classified, is provided under the condition of anonymity or has been contested. This essay will attempt to only use information that has been confirmed or corroborated, in aiming to achieve a complete and comprehensive representation of the organisations' counterintelligence methods.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.11

Counterintelligence of Terrorist Organisations - A Literature Review

Chapter II

2.1 Counterintelligence

On September 19th, 1992, a 3000lb bomb detonated in the Northern Ireland Forensic Science Laboratory (NIFSL), classifying it amongst the biggest bomb explosions in the Northern Ireland Troubles. The bomb caused damage to over 700 houses in the surrounding area and over a dozen people had to be treated in nearby hospitals. The PIRA concealed the bomb in a van that was taken to and abandoned outside the NIFSL. A call was then placed to the lab ‘warning [...] that [the PIRA] had planted a ‘massive van bomb’ in the van”.¹ The sophistication of this act in terms of counterintelligence becomes clear with the series of events that followed the phone call. The van was taken inside the forensics lab, in which evidence against the PIRA was stored and analysed, to be investigated. Upon its detonation, the explosion is believed to have destroyed an array of forensic evidence against the organisation, rendering it an act of both counterforensics and counterintelligence.² In addition to being a significant attack by the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the attack was also a sophisticated counterintelligence attack - coined a “Trojan Horse” attack.³

In regard to national security, according to the CIA, counterintelligence is “the process of procuring, developing, recording and disseminating information concerning espionage”. However, for terrorist organisations, counterintelligence

compiles and analyses information on the enemy’s security services to disrupt their intelligence collection [...]. It establishes mechanisms to protect sensitive intelligence through

¹ Kearney, V. (2017) Ira Belvoir Park science labs bomb targeted Ni Justice, BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-41306262> (Accessed: 23 July 2023).

² Mobley, B. (2012). Terrorism and Counterintelligence. New York: Columbia University Press., p.55

³ Ibid., p.56

*compartmentation yet disseminate that intelligence to appropriate consumers. [...] The very nature of terrorist tactics relies on surprise, clandestinity and compartmentation.*⁴

This chapter will undertake a literature review to examine counterintelligence and its variations and applications across terrorist organisations. While existing literature provides a broad analysis of intelligence as a whole, it lacks a focused examination of the specific factors influencing the counterintelligence methods of terrorist groups. As noted by Ehrman, the theoretical framework within the field of intelligence does not adequately extend into counterintelligence.⁵ Ehrman highlights a significant gap in the theoretical foundation, noting that only two studies have specifically addressed counterintelligence theory, and neither provided an in-depth analysis of the subject.⁶ Strachan-Morris also notes that a “gap in the academic and professional literature on how insurgents use intelligence persists”, going on to highlight case studies on different organisations that discuss the use of counterintelligence by insurgent groups separately.⁷ This underscores the challenge of identifying comprehensive models within the existing literature that directly relate to the counterintelligence practices of terrorist organisations.

Given this gap in the literature, this chapter will offer an overview of existing theories on violent non-state actor counterintelligence and will focus on Mobley's, as it is unique in its comprehensive approach to categorising and understanding how various factors shape terrorist counterintelligence terrorist groups. The chapter will explore how Mobley's theory addresses the five key factors that are often argued to have the most prominent impact on a group's counterintelligence methods: the organisational structure of the group, its level of popular support, control over territory, access to substantial resources, and the capability of its

⁴ Sulick, M.J. (2014) ‘Maintaining Vigilance: Counterintelligence in the War Against Terrorism’, *Studies in Intelligence*, 48(4), pp. 25–34.

⁵ Ehrman, J. (2009) “What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Counterintelligence?,” *Studies in Intelligence*, 53 (2) , Extracts, pp. 5–20., Bridgeman, V.H. (2007) “Defense Counterintelligence, Reconceptualized,” in Sims, J. and Gerber, B eds., *Vaults, Mirrors, and Masks* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008); Taylor, S. “Definitions and Theories of Counterintelligence,” in Johnson, L (2007) ed., *Strategic Intelligence*, Vol. 4: Counterintelligence and Counterterrorism

⁶ Varouhakis, M. (2011) ‘An institution-level theoretical approach for counterintelligence’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 24(3), pp. 494–509. doi:10.1080/08850607.2011.568293.

⁷ Strachan-Morris, D. (2019) ‘Developing theory on the use of intelligence by non-state actors: Five case studies on Insurgent Intelligence’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 34(7), pp. 980–984. doi:10.1080/02684527.2019.1672034.

adversary. By analysing Mobley's contributions in the context of these factors, this review aims to bridge the gap in the literature and provide a clearer understanding of how these variables shape counterintelligence tactics within terrorist organisations.⁸

According to Blomberg, Gaibullov and Sandler,⁹ terrorist groups rarely survive for over a year and only 5% survive for over five years. Almost all terrorist organisations confront a persistent threat from state security officials who work to disrupt their operations.¹⁰ The groups face existential threats daily, ranging from the decapitation of the organisation to defectors to discovery and hindering of their plots by authorities. The demise of the group can also come about due to bad decision making by its leaders or its members. Groups that do not effectively secure their activities, communications, and planned attacks risk being exposed.¹¹ For this reason, methods and strategies need to be created in order to take advantage of gaps in the group's adversary's capability for it to continue to elude detection without being apprehended. As terrorist groups utilise counterintelligence to re-shape their operations to adapt to a changing landscape, Bridgeman offers a useful departure point: "The broad subset of intelligence focused on the intelligence efforts of a competitor".¹² The success of "counterintelligence can determine the survival of [terrorist organisations], and counterintelligence elements correspondingly often wield veto power over offensive military operations, making counterintelligence a much more important part of overall intelligence activities of many [terrorist groups] than of states".¹³ This chapter will analyse the different types of counterintelligence as well as the factors that can influence and shape them.

Scholars usually divide counterintelligence of terrorist groups into two categories: passive and aggressive: *Passive counterintelligence* involves preventing one's opponent from gathering any valuable intelligence on their organisation.¹⁴ Passive measures aim to obscure

⁸ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.p.3

⁹ Blomberg, S.B., Gaibullov, K. and Sandler, T. (2011) 'Terrorist group survival: Ideology, tactics, and base of Operations', *Public Choice*, 149(3-4), pp. 441-463. doi:10.1007/s11127-011-9837-4.

¹⁰ Kheyre, Z.A. (2022) 'The evolution of the al-shabaab jihadist intelligence structure', *Intelligence and National Security*, 37(7), pp. 1061-1082. doi:10.1080/02684527.2022.2095599.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stouder, M.D. and Gallagher, S. (2013) 'Crafting Operational Counterintelligence Strategy: A guide for managers', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 26(3), pp. 583-596. doi:10.1080/08850607.2013.780560.

¹³ Gentry, J.A. (2015) 'Toward a theory of non-state actors' intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security*, 31(4), pp. 465-489. doi:10.1080/02684527.2015.1062320.

¹⁴ Ilardi, G. (2009). Irish Republican Army Counterintelligence. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 23(1), pp.1-26.

information from the group's adversary as well as conceal tactics, equipment and plans from sabotage.¹⁵ This includes creation and protection of classified documents and material, data security concealment, camouflage and basic protection against disruption.¹⁶ *Aggressive, or active, counterintelligence* involves gaining an understanding of the adversary's capabilities in an attempt to "frustrate, disrupt or manipulate these activities to secure an advantage".¹⁷ Active counterintelligence methods are those "designed to neutralise the multi-discipline intelligence effort and hostile efforts toward sabotage, subversion and terrorism."¹⁸

Mobley¹⁹ builds on this theory and divides counterintelligence into three main categories: basic denial, adaptive denial and covert manipulation. *Basic denial* is the "the attempt to block information which could be used by an opponent to learn some truth".²⁰ The primary goal of basic denial is to safeguard information regarding the group and its activities, rendering it crucial for the group's survival.²¹ Basic denial aims to hinder the group's "enemy from gaining access to classified and sensitive information, subverting personnel, and penetrating security barriers established".²² It comprises basic counterintelligence techniques that all members of an organisation must learn in order to avoid the transmission, deliberate or not, of information to the group's adversaries.²³ In general, a large majority of techniques and strategies used by terrorist organisations fit under this category. Basic denial methods include prohibiting the members of the organisation to discuss the group or its methods with non-members, associating with the adversary in any setting (including bars and social clubs) and exchanging information with other group members in open spaces or by electronic/telephonic media. Moreover, straightforward basic denial methods can involve

hiding objects under opaque covers, indoors or in forests or caves, encrypting communications or making them hard to intercept by other means—jamming, moving in

¹⁵ MCWP 2-14 and Knutson, J. (2000) *Counterintelligence*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ilardi, G. (2009). Irish Republican Army Counterintelligence. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 23(1), pp.1-26.

¹⁸ MCWP 2-14 and Knutson, J. (2000), Op. Cit.

¹⁹ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.

²⁰ Godson, R. and Wirtz, J. (2017) 'Strategic denial and deception', *Strategic Denial and Deception*, 13(4), pp. 1–14. doi:10.4324/9781315130316-1.

²¹ Wattering, F.L. (2000) 'Counterintelligence: The broken triad', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 13(3), pp. 265–300. doi:10.1080/08850600050140607.

²² MCWP 2-14 and Knutson, J. (2000)., Op. Cit.

²³ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.,p.8

darkness, reducing incidental emissions of observable signals (this can be as simple as blackouts and radio silence), closing communications channels, etc.²⁴

Adaptive Denial, or detection measures, is a more active form of counterintelligence which includes attempting to identify the techniques and abilities of one's adversary and altering or fine-tuning the organisation's procedures accordingly.²⁵ It consists of "measures used to expose and to neutralise enemy efforts directed toward intelligence collection, sabotage, subversion and terrorism".²⁶ Physical surveillance is a widely used technique of adaptive denial, usually performed to assess targets and strategize an organisation's attacks. It is highly labour-intensive and often tedious, and it increases the risk of the organisation and its members being exposed to authorities. This type of surveillance is generally categorised into three forms: static surveillance, mobile surveillance, and electronic or other types of surveillance.²⁷ Adaptive denial involves the interrogation of suspected spies, cataloguing detailed biographical and lifestyle information about each group member to assist in investigations, keeping track of group members' access to sensitive information (...) and conducting damage assessments following a leak'²⁸ as well as attempting to infiltrate the adversary's systems. Finally, **Covert Manipulation**, the most sophisticated form of counterintelligence, involves exploiting the weaknesses of a group's adversary and supplying them with erroneous information regarding the group. Covert manipulation involves planting false information, infiltrating the adversary's organisation, distracting or misleading one's opponent along with using double agents.²⁹ It "involves supplying false information rather than denying true information. It depends on successful prediction of how an adversary will use that false information, [...]. It requires understanding the adversary's thought processes ("getting inside his decision loop") and manipulating them to the deceiver's advantage".³⁰ Because of its high level of sophistication, covert manipulation is very rarely used by terrorist organisations, as it requires very high levels of coordination and a deep understanding of the opponents' strategies. The use of covert manipulation or adaptive denial by a terrorist group

²⁴ Katz, J.I. (2006). Deception and Denial in Iraq: The Intelligence Adversary Corollary. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 19: 577–585,

²⁵ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.9

²⁶ MCWP 2-14 and Knutson, J. (2000) Op. Cit.

²⁷ Wattering, F.L. (2000) 'Counterintelligence: The broken triad', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 13(3), pp. 265–300. doi:10.1080/08850600050140607.

²⁸ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.9

²⁹ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.10

³⁰ Katz, J.I. (2006). Op. Cit.

can potentially mean that the group is dedicating more of its attention and resources to counterintelligence, or that the group's adversaries have lowered their defences allowing them to be compromised by the group.³¹

Scholars have argued that counterintelligence of terrorist groups is shaped by five different factors:

- 1- The organisational structure of the group
- 2- The popular support the group enjoys
- 3- Whether the group has access to controlled territory
- 4- The resources available to the group
- 5- The capability of the organisation's adversary

The following sections will explore each category separately and illustrate how these methods have influenced counterintelligence methods of different organisations.

2.2 Organisational structure

The necessity of secrecy in eluding detection faced by terrorist organisations places constraints on both the activities of the group as well as its communications. Often, this can mean that the group must adopt specific organisational structure and act in ways that could compromise the efficiency of its activities to ensure covertness. Organisational structure refers to the connections between the members of an organisation and the information those members have about the organisation and its operations.³² A loose organisational structure can be described as a group of individuals with similar ideology, a common goal and (usually) the absence of a leader to make strategic decisions that affect the group in its entirety.³³ A tight organisational structure usually involves one leader and little member knowledge regarding the members of the organisation and its structure. Organisational structure is often dependent on how openly a group is allowed to operate. For example, in the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon,

³¹ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.

³² Kilberg, J. (2012). A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35(11), pp.810-830.

³³ Jackson, B.A. (2006) Groups, Networks, or Movements: A Command-and-Control-Driven Approach to Classifying Terrorist Organizations and Its Application to Al Qaeda, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29(3), pp.241-262.

where the group was allowed to operate relatively freely, recruiting new members openly and speak freely about its ideology, the organisational structure was quite loose.³⁴ On the other hand, as surveillance and police presence increased across Italy, the Red Brigades adopted a rigid and tight organisational structure in order to elude detection.³⁵

Different types of organisational structure offer different types of counterintelligence benefits for an organisation. The advantages of a tight organisational structure include decreased probability that the group will be detected by authorities, the capability of the group leader to communicate information to the group quickly and minimising the amount of information that a dissident can provide authorities.³⁶ The tighter structure however makes the development of new methods laborious and hinders the alteration of ‘tried-and-tested’ methods.³⁷ A tight organisational structure can manifest itself in the form of a clandestine cell system. In this form of structural grouping, members of an organisation are divided in different cells in which they are only familiar to members of their own cell and have no knowledge regarding members of other cells. This structure allows for amplified security for the group as in the event that one of the members is apprehended, it only has a limited scope of knowledge regarding the members, strategies and activities of the group, thus not compromising the organisation in its entirety. A clandestine cell system can either have a strict hierarchy between and within cells or a much looser distribution of ranking. In order to compensate for the lack of information flow between cells, an organisation with tight organisational structure needs high levels of coordination and planning in order to achieve a coherent stream of information across the group.³⁸ A group that has adopted a tight organisational structure with clean hierarchies and a clear ideological programme is *Front de la Liberation Nationale* (FLN) in Algeria, who utilised a tight organisational structure in a pyramidal shape. Members of the group only knew “two members: the person that recruited the and the person they themselves recruited”.³⁹ This structure offered the benefit of increased security, but once the French soldiers were aware of the group’s structure they were able to systematically dismantle it by

³⁴Kilberg, J. (2012). A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35(11), pp.810-830.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), (2007). A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century. *Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Intelligence Support Activity*, pp.3, 3-34, 14.

³⁷ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.12

³⁸ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.12

³⁹ Kilberg, J. (2012). Op. Cit.

torturing its members to garner information about the organisation and its structure.⁴⁰ Groups that have adopted clandestine cell structure include the PIRA in Ireland, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, and the African National Congress in South Africa.⁴¹

Looser organisational structure allows for easy and open access to recruiting new members and the larger number of independent actors encourages innovation and experimentation.⁴² A group with a looser structure 'has no discernible leadership, is not centrally controlled and has a low level of functional differentiation'.⁴³ These groups are almost more of a movement than they are a typical organisation. The Animal Liberation front, whose activities started in the United Kingdom but expanded internationally, is "often cited as a prime example of terrorism from within a movement", built on leaderless resistance and lack of central coordination or rigid communication structures between cells.⁴⁴ Looser organisational structure allows for "flexibility and opportunity", in which the structure serves as a device for quick and straightforward communication and has "coordinating but not integrative effects".⁴⁵ A hierarchical organisational structure is defined by its 'centralised decision making structure and clear command structure'.⁴⁶ Larger organisations often benefit from clear boundaries and mechanisms as well as distinct authority, departmental definitions and requiring documentation and reporting of activities for decision making processes.⁴⁷ The looser structure however makes the group more vulnerable to penetration by authorities, allows for easier detection of the group's members and makes communication of common goals more difficult.⁴⁸ Finally, a loose organisational structure also carries the danger of members losing sight of the end goal of the organisation with less hardline members joining the group and a lack of clear leadership to reinforce the group's agenda.

The organisational structure of the group can shift from loose to tight (and vice versa) depending on both internal and external factors. A group that has popular support and a lucrative, to some, agenda may encounter increased membership and growth, which in turn

⁴⁰ Kilberg, J. (2012)., Op. Cit.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jackson, B.A. (2006) Op. Cit.

⁴³ Kilberg, J. (2012)., Op. Cit.

⁴⁴ Jackson, B.A. (2006)., Op. Cit.

⁴⁵ Powell, W. M. (1990). Neither Market nor Hierarchy; Network Forms of Organization. In B. M. Staw, & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior* (Vol. 12, pp. 295-336). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, pp. 303

⁴⁶ Kilberg, J. (2012)., Op. Cit

⁴⁷ Powell, W. M. (1990)., Op. Cit.

⁴⁸ Kilberg, J. (2012)., Op. Cit

may force the group to adopt a looser structure.⁴⁹ An organisation's structure may also be affected by the leadership of the group. "A strong, charismatic leader [may cause the group] to become dependent on her or him to provide motivation and justification for attacks".⁵⁰ Thus, change in leadership may also affect the group's structure as well as pose an existential threat to the group if the successor differs in their values or the chosen methodology of the previous leader.⁵¹

The organisational structure of a terrorist group can be shaped by different factors, both internal and external. Internal factors are the factors that "arise from a group's motivations and the choices it makes while planning and executing attacks. External factors are the forces acting on the group that are beyond its control; they describe the environment in which the group operates."⁵² The division of a terrorist group into smaller cells, in which only the leaders of each cell could communicate with other cells, can function as a counterintelligence technique in and of itself. Della Porta argues that an environment that accommodates an open political presence by the group, in which the group can recruit freely as well as publish and distribute propaganda may offer faster and more efficient growth and radicalisation, but can also mean that the group will not survive for very long.⁵³

In the example of the PIRA when by 1973, the British army and the RUC had improved their intelligence gathering and operational methods significantly, leading to an increased number of arrests across PIRA ranks.⁵⁴ It was clear that the structure of the organisation had to change in order to reduce the number of arrests, internment and interrogation of its volunteers and diminish the number of informants. The PIRA thus produced the 'Staff Report' in 1977, which advised that the organisation be split into cells which 'consisted of four people, of whom only one, the leader, was in contact with a higher authority'.⁵⁵ The results of the change in the command and control structure were astounding;

⁴⁹ Gupta, D.K. (2005) 'Exploring roots of terrorism', in T. Bjørgo (ed.) *Root causes of terrorism: Myths, reality, and Ways Forward*. London: Routledge, pp. 16–32.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Price, B.C. (2012) 'Targeting top terrorists: How leadership decapitation contributes to Counterterrorism', *International Security*, 36(4), pp. 9–46. doi:10.1162/isec_a_00075.

⁵² Kilberg, J. (2012)., Op. Cit

⁵³ Porta, D.D. (2006) *Social movements, political violence, and the State*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁴ Bell, J.B. (2000). *The IRA 1968-2000: Analysis of a Secret Army*. London: Frank Cass.,p.226

⁵⁵ Coogan, T. (1996). *The troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace*. Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, p.244

the number of volunteer arrests dropped significantly and the charges for participation in a paramilitary organisation fell by 465 from the previous year.⁵⁶

A loose organisational structure can become severely problematic when faced with an improved adversary capability and a tightening of the structure can lead to immediate and successful results. A tightening of the structure can solve several of the problems an organisation could potentially face. Firstly, it gives interrogators less information about the organisation, regardless of the methods used - any individuals arrested most likely simply do not know what is happening in other cells. Secondly, a tighter structure can make infiltration by hostile individuals more difficult. If cells are small enough, every member of the cell can monitor the other and report suspicious activity. The problems of tightening the organisational structure however, can also be several. Firstly, communication between mid-level and high-level organisation members will need to increase significantly, which can mean that an informer in a mid-level position can become significantly more valuable than before; these positions are also much easier to infiltrate.⁵⁷ Secondly, as the knowledge and responsibility of leaders grows, the loss of a leader can have much more devastating effects than it previously did.⁵⁸ Thirdly, the tight organisational structure can make the groups vulnerable because of their predictability; a loose command and control structure allows for a level of uncertainty and thus decreases the likelihood of an ambush. Finally, the change in structure can mean that formerly well-guarded information will be diffused across camps, making it easier for the group's adversary to learn about them and produce countermeasures.⁵⁹

2.3 Popular Support

Strong popular support for a group and its operations can be beneficial for group morale, can increase the number of recruits and can lead to a higher amount of resources. Popular support can influence both the longevity of a group as well as its tactics and counterintelligence procedures. Because of the “usual superiority of government forces”, “winning the hearts and minds of people becomes paramount for both contending sides” the larger following a group has among segments of the population, the more difficult it becomes

⁵⁶ Smith, M. (1995). *Fighting for Ireland?*. London: Routledge. p.145

⁵⁷ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.p.96

⁵⁸ Smith, M. (1995). Op. Cit.

⁵⁹ Moloney, E. (2007). *A secret history of the IRA*. London: Penguin. p.161

for government forces to subdue and control terrorists'.⁶⁰ Popular support for a group has been noted to depend on four distinct factors: its effectiveness, whether its ideology is attractive to the public, whether its grievances are seen as legitimate and a balancing of costs and risks.⁶¹ In order to garner support, the group has to, firstly, exist, and secondly produce results by successfully completing actions that are relevant to its ideology. The ideology itself also plays a major role in civilian support. 'Some attractions are rooted in religion or other ideology, a sense of identity, [...] the glory and excitement of the cause or activity, or some combination'.⁶² Ideology can also include a sense of honour, a commitment to country, tribe, or ethnic group. The legitimacy of the group is gained by whether its acts of terror are seen as necessary and unavoidable in order to serve its cause. In deciding whether to support a group, one has to consider the potential benefits of doing so or the dangers of being a supporter of the organisation. Therefore, groups benefit by having causes that are already supported by the wider public as they are more likely to gain sympathisers. Groups with less popular ideologies, or ideologies that become irrelevant have significantly shorter lifespans. For example, the Weather Underground enjoyed some popular support and effectively evaded arrest "but the end of the Vietnam War, for reasons that had nothing to do with their activities, spelled its demise".⁶³

Popular support can be translated into both material as well as financial aid and this support can come from the local community, as well as from diaspora associations. This in turn can have an impact on the organisation's counterintelligence tactics as the group can use these to further obscure its plans and activities as well as increase the sophistication of its actions and attacks.⁶⁴ Factors like religion⁶⁵, anti-Americanism⁶⁶, the number of attacks against

⁶⁰ Lindberg, Jo-Eystein. 2008. Running on Faith? A Quantitative Analysis of the Effect of Religious Cleavages on the Intensity and Duration of Internal Conflicts. MA thesis, *Department of Political Science*, University of Oslo, Norway.

⁶¹ Helfstein, S. (2011) *Towards a framework for dealing with potential unintended consequences of Influence Activities, National Security Information*. Available at: https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/U_IVEO_Framework_Report_21Dec11-Finalv2.pdf (Accessed: 10 August 2023).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cronin, A.K. (2011) in *How terrorism ends: Understanding the decline and demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 106.

⁶⁴ Bhattacharya, S. (2017) 'Comparing civilian support for terrorism', *Journal of Strategic Security*, 10(2), pp. 1–32. doi:10.5038/1944-0472.10.2.1562.

⁶⁵ Fair, C. C., & Shepherd, B. (2006). Who Supports Terrorism? Evidence from Fourteen Muslim Countries. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29(1), 51–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500351318>

⁶⁶ Tessler, M., & Robbins, M. D. H. (2007). What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts Against the United States? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(2), 305–328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706298135>

civilians⁶⁷ are also influencing factors in swaying public opinion. The fact that terrorist groups can often supply communities with public goods can become the underpinning of the support the group enjoys. Following a severe military overreaction by the British in 1972, where the British army killed several unarmed members of the Catholic community during a riot in Derry, popular support and numbers of recruits for the PIRA increased significantly.⁶⁸ The attack served as the final blow to an increasingly frustrated Catholic community, leading to “thousands of people who had never been Republicans now gave their active support to the IRA; others, who had never had any time for physical force now accepted it as a practical necessity”.⁶⁹

A strong and wide basis of support for an organisation can potentially have very beneficial results in terms of counterintelligence, as its supporters are unlikely to betray the movements of the organisation. As the goal of the organisation is often in line with the goals of the community, the community can support the organisation by providing it with safe houses, storage spaces or medical care.⁷⁰ Lack of popular support can lead to individuals reporting the organisation’s activities to authorities as well as social pressure for the group to halt its terrorist operations.⁷¹ Popular support can also be manipulated by the group’s activities, by using “violence in such a way as to provoke counter-terrorism responses that result in backlash against the government by the constituent population”.⁷² Reactions to the Nepalese government’s counterterrorism activities, which proved to be extremely violent and repressive, led to international outcry and to an increase of popular support toward the revolutionary Maoist insurgents.⁷³

Terrorist organisations often work hard to encourage public support and cultivate a positive attitude toward it by communities. Hamas, in Palestine, spent the vast majority of its budget to support local charitable organisations and following the 1989 earthquake in Algeria, “NGO’s affiliated to the Islamic Salvation Front provided aid to the victims more efficiently

⁶⁷ Bhattacharya, S. (2017)., Op. Cit.

⁶⁸ Gregory, K. (2010). Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) (aka, PIRA, "the provos," Óglaigh na hÉireann) (UK separatists). *Council on Foreign Relations*. (online) Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/provisional-irish-republican-army-ira-aka-pira-provos-oglaigh-na-heireann-uk> (Accessed 17 Dec. 2019).

⁶⁹ Vertigans, S. (2008). *Terrorism and societies*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate., p.79

⁷⁰ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.13

⁷¹ Gerges, F. (2000). The End of the Islamist Insurgency in Egypt?: Costs and Prospects. *Middle East Journal*, 54(4), pp.592-612.

⁷² Bhattacharya, S. (2017). Op. Cit.

⁷³ Ibid.

than the government” increasing the popularity of the group in both Palestine and neighbouring countries.⁷⁴ Donating money to local charities can provide a terrorist group with money laundering capabilities but also serves both the organisation and the local communities, further legitimising the group in their eyes.

A strong and popular leader can also play a role in an organisation’s popularity. However, the need of a group or a group leader to take credit for its attacks, to be talked about in the media and to garner praise can compromise the security of the organisation as a whole. Fatah, for example, following the success of its operations in the late 1960’s developed a seemingly endless appetite for media exposure.⁷⁵ They transmitted messages through the radio, walked openly with their bodyguards and Arafat even gave the media access to the caves he and his fighters lived in.⁷⁶ The continuous exposure of the group however raised fears that Israel would be able to locate its leaders.⁷⁷ Moreover, a high number of interviews can equip their adversary’s intelligence services with ‘valuable assessment data on his location and health in addition to valuable information about his group’.⁷⁸ In the case of Osama Bin Laden, a local recognized the Waziristani cap and local dress that he was wearing in one of his interviews and this information led authorities closer to capturing him.⁷⁹

Popular support may indeed play an important role for the survival of an organisation, as public backup can benefit the organisation significantly; not only in its operations, but also in its counterintelligence capability. Community support can allow members of the group to find shelter in houses of supporters that are not monitored by its adversary and are less likely to be betrayed by someone in their community.⁸⁰ In Ireland, because of the support of the Catholic community, PIRA members could find shelter in houses of supporters that were not monitored by its adversary and were less likely to be betrayed by someone in their community.⁸¹ Moreover, individuals sympathetic to the PIRA cause helped the organisation

⁷⁴ Ly, P.-E. (2006). The charitable activities of terrorist organizations. *Public Choice*, 131(1–2), 177–195. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-006-9112-2>

⁷⁵ Rubin, B. and Rubin, J.C. (2005) *Yasir Arafat: A political biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.259

⁷⁶ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.p.75

⁷⁷ O’Ballance, E. *Arab Guerilla Power: 1967–1972*. London: Archon Books, p.26.

⁷⁸ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.13

⁷⁹ Tohid, O. (2003). Tribesmen take cash, count ‘blessings’ from Al Qaeda (2003) *The Christian Science Monitor*. Available at: <https://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1029/p01s03-wosc.html> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

⁸⁰ Bishop, P. and Mallie, E. (1987). *The Provisional IRA*. London: Heinemann., p.227

⁸¹ Ibid.

with counterintelligence. Women formed ‘hen patrols’ and would often patrol the streets and start banging garbage can lids, yelling and whistling in order to alert PIRA members that an army incursion was taking place.⁸² Unknown and suspicious looking individuals frequenting bars were also confronted and even expelled by locals sympathetic to the organisation.⁸³

In contrast, popular indifference can also play a role in a group’s survival. A disinterested community is less likely to put pressure on authorities which in turn may influence the commitment of the group’s adversary to persecute it. Indifference can also mean that the group can operate with more relevant freedom as the people are less likely to be suspicious of the group’s members if they assimilate well with the community. Moreover, informers are less likely to approach the police and witnesses and suspicious neighbours can also be unwilling to volunteer information as the benefits of doing so can be lower than they would be if the group faces strong popular support.

2.4 *Controlled Territory*

Another variable that has been considered to affect counterintelligence methods is whether or not a terrorist organisation controls any territory. Controlled territory “describes a space that the terrorist group actively patrols and manages. The territory is managed occasionally, but not always, with the support of a state sponsor or additional nonstate actors such as local militias, insurgents, or criminal groups”.⁸⁴ This territory is not necessarily safe from adversaries but the group is capable of enforcing its authority within it. Territory can be acquired through a state sponsor who offers land to the organisation for it to conduct its operations (as was the case with Al Qaeda in Sudan in the early 1990s)⁸⁵ or in case a state is too weak to object to the control of the territory by an organisation. In Ireland, Belfast, which had very active PIRA cells, was not controlled by the PIRA at all, but its Catholic ghettos (also called ‘no-go’ areas) were less likely to be approached by police forces.⁸⁶ PIRA no-go areas paired with popular support increased the ease with which the organisation could operate greatly. Creggan and Bogside, two areas in Derry ‘had been sealed off to the army and the

⁸² Bloom, M. (2011). *Bombshell*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p.86.

⁸³ Gilmour, R. (1998). *Dead ground: Infiltrating the IRA* London: Warner Books.

⁸⁴ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.14

⁸⁵ Coll, S. (2004). *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press., p.267

⁸⁶ Bell, J. B. (1979). *The secret army: The IRA 1916-1979*. Dublin, The Academy Press., p.382

police by barricades, and inside the no-go areas of Free Derry (...) the Provisionals and Officials were able to operate openly, patrolling the street with weapons on display'.⁸⁷

Controlling territory offers significant counterintelligence capabilities to a group. Members of the group can openly train and interact, ensuring an environment safer for the group's enemies, with greater communication security. As the group is more likely to enjoy popular support in an area it controls, by offering services to the population ranging from protection, to policing to religious education, it can easily recruit new members from the sympathetic population and meet and exchange information as well as discuss and plan operations. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) controlled territory in Northern Sri Lanka and had its own full socioeconomic structure, creating a postal, a judicial and a policing system, as well as a military force in the form of a parallel state, "to the point that it engaged the army of Sri Lanka in conventional warfare".⁸⁸

Gaining control of territory allows for a group to also develop its tactics and capabilities and develop more sophisticated weaponry as well as establish stronger military power. In controlled territory, the group can train its recruits in a variety of counterintelligence techniques as well as in the use of different types of weapons. Fatah took advantage of its controlled and sympathetic territories to both recruit from the Palestinian population as well as to train its recruits. The organisation can also monitor the entry and exit of individuals or groups from the bordered area, enabling the identification of hostile entities and potential informers leaving to liaise with the organisation's adversary.⁸⁹

Controlling a territory however, has several disadvantages. Firstly, the enemies of the organisation can locate the territory more easily and thus target it directly, destroying training camps and organisation headquarters. Such targeting took place in 1998 with Al Qaeda training camps, in both Sudan and Afghanistan.⁹⁰ Moreover, if an adversary is close to the organisation's territory, it can closely and easily monitor the activities of the group or the individuals that have access to the grounds. A controlled area can also offer the group's adversary an easy target for overhead imagery intelligence collection, which can provide

⁸⁷ Bishop, P. and Mallie, E. (1987). Op. Cit.

⁸⁸ de la Calle, L., & Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2015). How Armed Groups Fight: Territorial Control and Violent Tactics. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38(10), 795–813.

⁸⁹ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.15

⁹⁰ Rashid, A. (2001). *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*. London: Pan, p.134.

information on the ‘group’s size, training facilities and weapons supplies’.⁹¹ This visual capability also allows the adversary to potentially recruit these individuals as informers, who in turn will have access to a lot of the organisation’s territory. Lack of control over territory can thus conversely allow the group to operate clandestinely and in secrecy, keeping its plans and activities completely anonymous. Finally, an organisation which controls territory is faced with the challenge of maintaining popular support in the area in order to minimise the number of potential defectors that might provide its adversary with information.

An organisation which controls territory is therefore faced with both positive and negative consequences. It can offer an organisation relative control and policing capabilities, allowing them to act as soon as they detect anything suspicious. It also enables the members of the organisation to communicate with relative security as well as easily train its recruits. However, the fact that these areas were known to the group’s adversary can mean that they can be targeted directly, leading to their loss. Moreover, they can be monitored and individuals entering and exiting the areas can be investigated more closely to determine their links with the organisation. A lack of controlled territory means that the organisation must be vigilant at all times and extremely strict with its counterintelligence methods.

2.5 Resources

It has been argued that the resources that an organisation has, both financial and numbers of recruits, can shape its counterintelligence capabilities. In the words of Mobley, “A well-funded terrorist group can purchase better technologies, recruit more spies, bribe more officials, and better secure its communications and facilities”.⁹² Funding can also give an advantage to the group facing a state adversary, as it can -almost- safely be assumed that the group’s opponent has significantly more resources. Money can also increase the allure of the group to the population and thus give it the capacity to recruit more and better educated members by increasing its propaganda in local populations as well as online, compensating them financially and offering them improved living and working conditions.⁹³ Funding can

⁹¹ Shelton, C. (2013). Applying Counterintelligence Tradecraft to Defeat Terrorist Threats. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 26(4), 813–822.

⁹² Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.p.16

⁹³ Byman, D. (2005). *Deadly connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.61.

also contribute to a group's counterintelligence as it can lead to increased loyalty by its members, who are less likely to be prone to defection if they are amply compensated.⁹⁴ Financial resources also allow for the specialisation of recruits in specific tasks, enabling an increased focus on concentrating in the group's counterintelligence capacity.

Funds may also be provided by a state sponsorship, which can commonly be a source of a terrorist organisation's 'diplomatic assistance, geographic sanctuary, financial help, training, organisational assistance, intelligence [and] supply of weapons'.⁹⁵ State sponsorship may also provide a 'buffer' between the group and its adversary, as groups are protected by state sponsorship and sovereignty over its land.⁹⁶ Groups that have enjoyed state sponsorship include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Chechen groups, Kashmiri groups, Hamas, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front and Hezbollah.⁹⁷

Despite its benefits, state sponsorship can have several disadvantages for an organisation. As profitable as the sponsorship may be, it does not always come without strings attached; a state may impose its ideologies as well as its own agenda on the group, often using it as a proxy to achieve its own aims. Moreover, a state can often become hostile against the group because of external pressures. An example of such a case is Al Qaeda, which was enjoying territory and resources provided by the Sudanese government until 1996, when international pressure led to the Sudanese government to force Al Qaeda out of Sudan and to relocate to Afghanistan.⁹⁸ State sponsors "may have incentives to provide groups with resources so that they can successfully attack the target state [but] they also gave incentives to avoid any costs or repercussions that may result from providing support".⁹⁹ This may be especially true when groups operate within the sponsor state's borders as sponsors may also be willing to turn against the group, providing key information to the group's adversary when threatened with sanctions or military operations on its land by the international community.¹⁰⁰ Finally, if the state sponsorship includes operations and counterintelligence support, it can

⁹⁴ de Mesquita, E. B. (2005). The Quality of Terror. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 515.

⁹⁵ Alexander, Y. and Pluchinsky, D. (1992). *European terrorism*. Washington: Brassey's., p.8

⁹⁶ Carter, D. B. (2012). A Blessing or a Curse? State Support for Terrorist Groups. *International Organization*, 66(1), 129–151.

⁹⁷ Byman, D. (2005). Op. Cit.

⁹⁸ Seliktar, O. (2008). *The Politics of Intelligence and American Wars With Iraq*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.63.

⁹⁹ Carter, D. B. (2012). A Blessing or a Curse? State Support for Terrorist Groups. *International Organization*, 66(1), 129–151.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

further compromise the group as a state agency might be easier to penetrate by the organisation's adversary and thus jeopardise the secrecy and security of the organisation.

Finances and resources can fluctuate throughout an organisation's lifespan. The PIRA started off with very low resources (some have claimed that in 1969, the organisation only had ten guns)¹⁰¹ but quickly improved and expanded their weapons caches particularly thanks to the Irish-Americans sending money to the organisation from the United States and Libya sending shipments of ammunition.¹⁰² The financial resources of the PIRA were so good that 'When the group could not gain access to desired weapons, it turned to manufacturing them internally, producing its own explosives when stocks ran short, engineering and constructing its own mortars, and even seeking to manufacture its own anti-aircraft missiles'.¹⁰³ The high amount of resources also allowed the PIRA to acquire devices that further improved its counterintelligence capabilities by acquiring sophisticated surveillance equipment.¹⁰⁴ When the PIRA was suffering from low resources, however, an intelligence advantage was offered to the British, as they were able to offer financial incentives to young and unemployed PIRA members.¹⁰⁵

In order to expand their resources, terrorist organisations may attempt robberies against banks and police stations as well as collect money from sympathisers in their country of operations and beyond. For example, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and ETA in Spain both received financial support from diaspora sympathisers.¹⁰⁶ Resources can also be collected by the organisations' posing as charitable organisations. Aum Shinrikyo, an extremely wealthy terrorist organisation operating in Japan used its charitable status in order to avoid paying taxes, allowing it to accumulate even more resources.¹⁰⁷

Resources do not necessarily influence counterintelligence methods per se. Even though they can improve the quality of counterintelligence, they do not affect the quantity and

¹⁰¹ Coogan, T. (1993). *The IRA*. London: HarperCollins., p.278

¹⁰² Bell, J. B. (1979). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰³ Jackson, B.A., et al. (2020). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Bell, J.B. (2000). *Op. Cit.* p.246

¹⁰⁵ Davies, N. (1999). *Ten-thirty-three: The Inside Story of Britain's Secret Killing Machine in Northern Ireland*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publ, p.34.

¹⁰⁶ Cronin, A.K. (2011) in *How terrorism ends: Understanding the decline and demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 79.

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, B.A., Jackson, B.A., Baker, J.C., Baker, J.C., Chalk, P., Chalk, P., Cragin, K., Cragin, K., Parachini, J.V., Parachini, J.V., Trujillo, H.R. and Trujillo, H.R. (2020). *Aptitude for Destruction, Volume 2: Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups*. [online] Rand.org. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG332.html> [Accessed 8 Jan. 2020]

rarely affect the type of counterintelligence used. However, resources can be fundamental in allowing an organisation to shift its counterintelligence methods of a group from basic to adaptive denial, through surveillance of its adversary.

2.6 Adversary Capability

Some tentative steps have been taken to theorise how the capability of a group's adversary could affect the group's counterintelligence, but the area of inquiry mostly approaches adversary capability as a side note in an array of different categories.¹⁰⁸ Because of the nature of their actions, terrorist groups will always have adversaries whose aims are to disrupt and intercept the activities of the group. A well-coordinated state actor, with an efficient and committed intelligence agency, an industrious police force and a political drive to eliminate the organisation will most likely have much better results in doing so than a state actor that does not. Terrorist groups that survive for long periods of time are thus either operating against weak adversaries or have adapted to the high capability of their adversary. When both the group and its adversary are very capable, the relationship between them is a dynamic one; an innovation by the group will often be followed by an innovation by its adversary and vice versa. A group capable of discovering, understanding and adapting to its adversary's techniques has a significantly higher chance of survival than a group that does not.¹⁰⁹ The ability to *learn*, either from mistakes or successes will give a group the opportunity to either "continuously improve skills in activities the group already carries out such as improving marksmanship or bomb construction skills, or more dramatic discontinuous changes, such as adopting entirely new weapons and tactical approaches".¹¹⁰ A group operating a weaker or less committed adversary on the other hand, will likely not have incentives to innovate or experiment with new counterintelligence methods. Moreover, when the adversary's capability improves suddenly, a group that fails to adapt to the change in time is usually eradicated very quickly. An example of how an adversary can affect a group's counterintelligence techniques was clearly seen in the example of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. Despite their initial rudimentary resources, the British were committed to controlling the insurgent organisations in Northern Ireland from the very beginning of 'The Troubles'. In the mid-1970s, the PIRA realised that it needed to

¹⁰⁸ Dolnik, A. (2007). *Op. Cit*; Mobley, B. (2012). *Op. Cit.*, Jackson, B.A., et al., (2020). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Jackson, B.A., et al. (2020). *Op. Cit.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

change its approach and strategies as it came to understand that the battle against the British was unlikely to end in the near future. Changing its strategy to a ‘long war’ strategy meant that the focus changed from attempting to win as many battles and assaults as possible, but changing into a strategy that involved ‘applying an entirely different, sometimes antithetical set of tools than those optimised for achieving victory through rapid, decisive action’.¹¹¹ Al Qaeda also offers a clear example of an organisation that has managed to maintain operational capability despite the scrutiny of international intelligence agencies.¹¹² The Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah on the other hand was eradicated following an improvement in the intelligence capabilities of its adversaries.¹¹³

The capability of the adversary can thus play an important role in the development of sophisticated counterintelligence methods. A group faced with a capable adversary needs to identify the technologies susceptible to being intercepted and adjust their communications accordingly, stay updated on the movements of intelligence agencies through the press and the internet and read court cases to identify the government's strategies in capturing terrorist groups.¹¹⁴ Almost paradoxically, the groups with the most effective and refined counterintelligence strategies are the groups facing the most efficient adversaries.¹¹⁵

2.7 Conclusion

Each aspect examined, from organisational structure, to resources, to adversary capability to control of territory can significantly affect a group’s counterintelligence techniques and by extension, its survival. Counterintelligence strategies offer advantages and disadvantages to an organisation, and the survival of a group is influenced by how it approaches the trade-off between operational effectiveness and security. The following section will explore how the Red Brigades, the Red Army Faction and Revolutionary Organisation 17 November chose particular counterintelligence methods and the advantages and disadvantages that those had to the groups’ activities. The methods will be analysed through the factors that are believed

¹¹¹ Jackson, B.A. (2006) Op. Cit.

¹¹² Kenney, M. (2003). Op. Cit., pp.187-206.

¹¹³ Hastings, J. (2010). *No man’s land: Globalization, Territory, and Clandestine Groups in Southeast Asia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p.183.

¹¹⁴ National Institute of Justice, *Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/226808.pdf> (Accessed 11 Jul. 2023).

¹¹⁵ Moblely, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.15

to shape counterintelligence in order to determine the role they played in the selection of each strategy for each organisation. RO17 November's popular support was a contributing factor to its organisational structure and counterintelligence methods, seeing as many of the group's operations were considered careless and hasty from an intelligence point of view - but a lack of tremendous public animosity toward the group meant that governing bodies were less inclined to develop aggressive counterterrorist strategies toward the organisation. Similarly, the organisational structure of the Red Army Faction changed from loose to a tighter and more compartmentalised cell structure in its third Generation, after West German authorities, with an more organised and targeted campaign against the group in the mid-1970's had decapitated its leadership twice.¹¹⁶ By conducting bank robberies with loot as high as \$700,000, the RAF was allowed to act clandestinely without further exposing itself to dangers that could occur with members of the group seeking sustenance through other means.¹¹⁷ In the following chapters, each organisation's structure, popular support, control of territory and resources will be examined both as a result of its counterintelligence strategies as well as a factor shaping them.

¹¹⁶ Meade, R. (1990). *Red Brigades: The Story of Italian Terrorism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, p.192.

¹¹⁷ Kirschbaum, E. (2018). Decades later, Germany is still hunting for holdouts from the radical Red Army Faction. *Los Angeles Times*. [online] Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-germany-red-army-20180914-story.html> [Accessed 10 March 2020]

Organisational Profile: Revolutionary Organisation 17

November

Chapter III

3.1 Introduction

Revolutionary Organisation 17 November (RO17N) was Greece's most elusive and lethal terrorist group, operating for nearly three decades. Known for its high-profile attacks, including assassinations and bombings, RO17N gained notoriety not only for the effectiveness of its operations but also for the group's ability to evade detection and operate in secrecy from the 1970's to the early 2000's. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the sociopolitical climate in Greece during the mid-1970s, especially in the aftermath of the military junta, which shaped the ideological foundation of RO17N and prompted its decision to take up arms. It will examine the formation of the organisation, its ideological motivations, and its counterintelligence tactics, which allowed it to remain underground for so long, despite the efforts of Greek authorities and international agencies such as the CIA, both of which initially underestimated the group's threat potential. The chapter will trace the evolution of RO17N, including the operational stagnation of its counterintelligence tactics over three decades, while exploring the counterterrorism efforts deployed by the Greek state and foreign actors. Throughout its three decades of operation, four key counterintelligence threads persist:

Secrecy, Compartmentalisation and Minimal Communication: RO17N maintained a strict policy of secrecy and compartmentalisation within the organisation. Members were often unaware of the identities or activities of other members outside their immediate circle, which minimised the risk of the entire group being compromised if an individual was captured or turned by authorities.

Basic Counterintelligence and Safe Houses: Members of RO17N were trained in basic counter-surveillance techniques to detect and evade law enforcement monitoring. This included

checking for tails, varying travel routes, and using nicknames instead of the actual names of the groups' members. RO17N members utilised safe houses to hide from law enforcement, store weapons, and plan operations, with access to these locations being highly controlled.

Target Selection as Operational Security: The targets of the organisation were carefully selected, aiming to maximise impact while minimising the risk of capture. Extensive reconnaissance was conducted to ensure that operations were executed with precision and minimal exposure to law enforcement. Instead of tightening following increased adversary scrutiny, the group's operational security loosened, with less rigorous planning and execution protocols. The group became decreasingly selective in its operations, focusing on targets that offered high exposure but less symbolic value. ¹

Historical Background

After the end of the Second World War, the situation in Greece was in constant flux: the Nazi occupation was followed by a civil war whose divisions were felt long after its end. This period was succeeded by a period of low legitimacy rule and in turn, a military dictatorship.² The country was divided ideologically and systemically into two groups: the nationalist and orthodox Christian Right (the victors of the civil war) and the communist-leaning Left, discriminated against openly by a fiercely anti-communist government in all aspects of social and economic life. The military dictatorship, or *Regime of the Colonels*, remained in power for over 7 years “through its use of open political repression and with the help of an unprecedented international boom”.³ Economic prosperity meant that Greek people were less motivated to resist, both because of the increasing economic and living standards but also because, for many, the Regime was a better option than its alternatives.⁴ However, the economic situation in Greece started to slowly erode, with a looming economic recession and a rising unemployment rate. The political situation and unrest in continental Europe, including the May 1968 revolt in France and Italy, as well as the victory of the Vietnamese army against US occupying forces generated a strong ideological sway in Greek University students, who

¹ Kassimeris, G. (2007). For a Place in History: Explaining Greece's Revolutionary Organization 17 November. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 27(2), pp.129-145.

² Lyrantzis, C., (2011). Greek Politics in the Era of Economic Crisis: Reassessing Causes and Effects. *Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe*, (45).

³ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.22

⁴ Dimitras, P., (1987). *Changes in Public Attitudes*. In: K. Featherstone and D. Katsoudas, ed., *Political Change in Greece: Before and after the Colonels*. London: Croom Helm., p.78

were becoming increasingly restless. The pressure culminated in the 1974 Athens Polytechnic occupation, which began as a student protest but, despite it lasting for only three days, escalated to a full scale national revolt against the Regime, in which 34 students were killed and 800 were injured.⁵ This uprising, followed by the inability of the Regime to handle and prevent the invasion of Cyprus in July 1974, losing 38% of the island to Turkey, led to the collapse of the dictatorship and the eventual transition to civilian rule led by Konstantinos Karamanlis.⁶ This period is known as *Metapolitefsi*, political changeover.

The arrival of *Metapolitefsi* did not seem to bring about the necessary changes. Many saw the changeover from junta to a democracy as a mere evolution of the oppressive state that did not lead to the overthrow of the system.⁷ This idea, that the potential of achieving change could only come about through armed struggle, slowly culminated in the minds of Greeks and eventually led to the emergence of the extreme-left terrorist groups, RO17N and the ELA, which aimed ‘to effect a change in the body politic’⁸ with violence. Among other similarly minded organisations emerged one of the ‘most active and lethal indigenous terrorist groups operating in Western Europe’, Revolutionary Organisation 17 November (hereafter, RO17N).⁹

Strongly affected by both national and international social and political phenomena and “a strong, and sometimes, clear sense of national history and political tradition, RO17N misinterpreted the post-1974 political realities which pertained through the initial period of its activity”.¹⁰ The group’s ideological influence stemmed from the aftermath of the Athens Polytechnic uprising, the culmination of the Greek revolutionary communist resistance movement, as well as the actions of international terrorist groups, especially Germany’s Red Army Faction and Italy’s Red Brigades. Overall, the group’s main ideological focus revolved around anti-capitalism, anti-European and anti-NATO sentiments as well as national

⁵ Elefantis, A., (1991). *Ston Asterismo Tou Laikismou*. Athens: O Politis, pp.77-83.

⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.22

⁷ Karakousis, A. (2002). Η ιστορία και τα πρόσωπα της «17N» [The story and the personalities of "17N"]. *Kathimerini*. Retrieved 31 July 2020, from <https://www.kathimerini.gr/124231/article/epikairothta/ellada/h-istoria-kai-ta-proswpa-ths-17n>.

⁸ Mouzelis, N. (1995). *Greece in the 21st century: Institutions and political culture*. In *Greece prepares for the 21st century*, eds. Dimitri Conostas and Theofanis Stavrou, pp.17 – 34. Washington, DC : The Woodrow Wilson Press .

⁹ Corsun, A., (1992). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.71

sovereignty and economic interdependence, issues that have divided Greek political ideologies since *Metapolitefsi*.¹¹

The group's operations began on December 23, 1975, with the assassination of the CIA Station Chief in Athens, Richard Welch.¹² The organisation's first attacks, only a year after the end of Greece's military junta, targeted individuals that were either perceived to, or actually did, play a role in people's oppression during the Regime of the Colonels. Richard Welch was a symbol of US power in Greece, who according to Koufontinas, one of the organisation's key members, "[the position of CIA Station Chief] remains the long hand of American power in our country. [...] He controls and directs the political, social and economic life of our country in relation to the interests of the USA".¹³

Distinguishing itself from other terrorist organisations operating in Europe at the time, whose tactical development eventually escalated to assassinations following smaller scale non-lethal attacks, RO17N launched its campaign of armed struggle with the killing of Welch at point-blank range.¹⁴ The group's first attack was so seamlessly conducted, with such "high precision and efficiency, the Greek authorities dismissed the responsibility claims of a previously unknown organisation calling itself Revolutionary Organisation 17 November as the work of cranks".¹⁵ The group's next attack twelve months later was against a police captain, Evangelos Mallios, who was allegedly involved in the torture of dissidents during the Regime of the Colonels. Ten days after the attack, the group's first communiqué was released to the French newspaper *Libération*, giving explicit details on both the Mallios and Welch assassinations.

In October 1981, PASOK, the socialist party led by Andreas Papandreou was elected into power and with it, strong motivations for political violence dissipated.¹⁶ PASOK, elected on a platform of "root and branch reform and renewal" aimed to "redistribute wealth, punish

¹¹ Anagnostou, D., & Skleparis, D. (2015). Trends in Radicalisation That May Lead to Violence. *Hellenic Foundation For European And Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Report.Greece.FINALGR.pdf>

¹² Nomikos, J.M. (2007) 'Terrorism, media, and intelligence in Greece: Capturing the 17 november group', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 20(1), pp. 65–78. doi:10.1080/08850600600888896.

¹³ Court proceedings, (2003) *Korydallos prison chambers*, 24 July 2003.

¹⁴ Kollias, C. *et al.* (2009) 'Terrorism and the effectiveness of security spending in Greece: Policy implications of some empirical findings', *Journal of Policy Modeling*, 31(5), pp. 788–802. doi:10.1016/j.jpolmod.2008.09.008.

¹⁵ Kassimeris, G. (2013) 'Greece: The persistence of political terrorism', *International Affairs*, 89(1), pp. 131–142. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12008.

¹⁶ Fakitsas, M. (2003). *Op. Cit.*

tax evasion and tax exemptions, increase salaries and pensions, raise the floors of agricultural prices, increase subsidies to enterprises, maintain the stability of incomes [...] and improve education” in addition to strengthening the autonomy of Greece and its position on a global scale.¹⁷

Indeed, with a socialist party in power, many of the RO17N ideological positions were met (as PASOK held a “flamboyant anti-American, anti-EEC, anti-NATO and anti-Turkey stance”)¹⁸ and acknowledging the popular mandate, the group did not pursue any attacks for two years following the election, in order to not create ‘additional obstacles’ to the potential reform a socialist government could bring about.¹⁹ The number of violent attacks in Greece was lowered decidedly from 1981 to 1984, with a drop from 56 to 3 attacks respectively.²⁰

However, this time of relative peace was short-lived, as the promises made by Papandreou proved to be empty. Increasing wages and welfare payments came at the cost of public sector borrowing, bringing inflation to double digits. With three quarters of the country’s GDP derived from public sector services, a deterioration of the national economy quickly came about. Unemployment rose to 10 per cent and the drachma was devalued by over 60 per cent, leading to a significant drop in PASOK’s approval ratings.²¹ The attempt to rectify an overheated economy by addressing it with an austerity program only further served to make PASOK even more unpopular.²²

In 1983, just as many believed that RO17N had auto-dissolved, the organisation stunned the nation by killing US Navy Captain George Tsantes and his Greek driver.²³ In its communiqué, RO17N explained its reasons behind the attack, focusing on the ‘continuing US military presence in Greece’ and attacking PASOK for ‘abandoning socialism and betraying the trust of its electorate’²⁴ With this assassination began a new generation for the organisation, shifting from revenge-focused attacks to a political campaign of terror that would continue for

¹⁷ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit., p.32

¹⁸ Clogg, R. ‘The Ideology of the Revolution of 21 April 1967’, in Richard Clogg and George Yannopoulos (eds), *Greece Under Military Rule*, (London:Secker & Warburg, 1972), p. 36.

¹⁹ 17 November (2002) *I Prokirikseis, 1975-2002: Ola Ta Keimena tis Organosis ; The communiques, 1975-2002: All the Texts of the Organisation*. Athens: Kaktos.

²⁰ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Corsun, A., (1992). Op. Cit., Inc.

²³ Nomikos, J.M. (2007) ‘Terrorism, media, and intelligence in Greece: Capturing the 17 november group’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 20(1), pp. 65–78. doi:10.1080/08850600600888896.

²⁴ 17 November (2002) *I Prokirikseis, 1975-2002: Ola Ta Keimena tis Organosis ; The communiques, 1975-2002: All the Texts of the Organisation*. Athens: Kaktos.

the following 17 years. After a bombing attack against a police bus in November 1985, which killed one policeman and injured 13, RO17N delved even further into its second operational phase, “characterised by a higher level of tactical sophistication as well as an increase in the number and lethality of attacks”.²⁵ For the next five years, the organisation would carry over forty attacks, which accounted for ‘87 percent of the group’s operations since 1975’ until the early 1990’s.²⁶ The inefficiency of the police forces in achieving an arrest became a running joke in the Greek media and public and the organisation became iconic, coined an *Organosi Phantasma* (Phantom Organisation).²⁷

Entering the 1990’s, RO17N once again changed its ideological and operational strategy: the group’s operational frequency increased dramatically yet the group no longer followed a consistent political strategy. The group conducted 16 attacks in less than a year with its targets ranging from French, British, Turkish and American banks to German companies and the Greek police. From these, “eleven of the attacks occurred in just 12 days and were made against Western targets involved in the US-led military coalition against Iraq”.²⁸ This shift from an internal-looking to a Western focused plan of attacks showcased a potential attempt of the organisation to mimic international groups by integrating issues faced by other organisations to create a revolutionary unity. The group’s attacks lost focus, with operations in this period including a kneecapping of ‘little known New Democracy backbencher’, low level bombings, the assassination of a high-profile Greek businessman and former Bank of Greece governor, a Turkish diplomat and rocket attacks launched against international firms.²⁹

Even though authorities had begun to inch closer to the organisation, the end for the organisation came in 2002, when a bomb exploded prematurely in the hands of RO17N member’s, Savvas Xiros, in the port of Piraeus.³⁰ Xiros was arrested and testified about his involvement in the organisation to the state prosecutor sparking off a series of arrests, leading to the eventual trial and conviction of fourteen out of the nineteen members tried.³¹

²⁵ Corsun, A., (1992). Op. Cit.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Dolnik, A., (2007). Understanding terrorist innovation. New York: Routledge., p.132

²⁸ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit., p.93

²⁹ Kollias, C. *et al.* (2009) ‘Terrorism and the effectiveness of security spending in Greece: Policy implications of some empirical findings’, *Journal of Policy Modeling*, 31(5), pp. 788–802. doi:10.1016/j.jpolmod.2008.09.008.

³⁰ Papachelas, A. and Teloglou, T. (2003). *φάκελος 17 νοέμβρη - Phakelos 17 Noemvri*. Athens: Estia Editions.

³¹ Karyotis, G. (2007) ‘Securitization of greek terrorism and arrest of the ‘Revolutionary Organization November 17’’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(3), pp. 271–293. doi:10.1177/0010836707079932.

Ideologically and tactically, the organisation's development can be divided into its (1) Beginnings (1975-1983), (2) its Heavy Operational phase (1984-1990) and (3) the Beginning of the End (1991-2002). Across these time periods, the organisation varied between motives, arguments, behaviour and use of violence.³² This chapter will explore the organisation's activity, focusing on its key counterintelligence determinants: its Organisational Structure, its Popular Support, its Resources and its Actual Counterintelligence strategies, before investigating the actions and reactions of the Greek government. It aims to demonstrate how the lack of adaptability of RO17N to the increased capacity of its adversary led to the eventual arrest and trial of its members.

3.2 Organisational Structure

The group, like many in its time, emerged from University political groups, which were incredibly active in “coordinating delegations and organising petitions, leafleting, protest marches and public meetings”.³³ Differing however from other European terrorist groups, which initially existed as a loose framework (such as the Italian Red Brigades and the French *Action Directe*), RO17N held a tight organisational structure from its very beginning, with its core members (Alexandros Giotopoulos, who was RO17N's chief ideologue and Dimitris Koufontinas who was the group's head of operations) maintaining their positions until the organisation's eventual prosecution almost three decades later.³⁴

From its first stage, the group was incredibly careful in its recruitment of new members. Patroklos Tselentis, one of the group's early members describes his recruitment beginning with discussions with Koufontinas over their socio-political ideas in marches, meetings, and demonstrations. He finally announced to Koufontinas that “he was now prepared and willing to sacrifice his life and his future to fight for a cause and for fundamental social change”.³⁵ Tselentis, having convinced Koufontinas about the legitimacy of his ideology, was gradually introduced to some of the organisation's key members, like the Xiros brothers (Christodoulos

³² Kassimeris, G. (2001).Op. Cit., p.149

³³ Kassimeris, G., (2013). Op. Cit., p.40

³⁴ Kassimeris, G. (2005) Urban Guerrilla or Revolutionary Fantasist? Dimitris Koufontinas and the Revolutionary Organization 17 November, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28:1, 21-31, DOI: 10.1080/10576100490513738

³⁵ Kassimeris, G. (2013) Op. Cit. p.41

and Savvas) and Yiannis Skandalis. Tselentis was only introduced to the group's leader after he had successfully taken part in an attack.

The close relationships between its members as well as the decision of the organisation to not expand its scope and that it “never attempted to expand its sphere of influence in the national territory” was, perhaps unwittingly, one of the key reasons behind RO17N's “operational continuity and remarkable resistance to infiltration”.³⁶ Despite its small size, RO17N was divided into smaller cells of three or four members to ensure that a compromise in the group's security would only jeopardise a fraction of the organisation's members.³⁷ According to the testimony of Patroklos Tselentis “My understanding was that the organisation consisted of teams of three or four people, with one team that was ‘above’ us. My general understanding was that a leading team existed”.³⁸

Each cell voted for its head officer and contacts between cells were made through these elected head officers.³⁹ According to the organisation's own handbook, its members worked in cells of 3-5 members and when that was not possible, a member worked in a bipartisan manner with another comrade, with communications between cells only able to be made through their elected head officers.⁴⁰ The success of this counterintelligence method was demonstrated in court, where a majority of the associates of the organisation testified that “they had never met more than a couple of their RO17N colleagues and in most cases had not even seen the faces of these few”.⁴¹

New members of the organisation were mostly recruited from universities. According to a handbook with descriptions of conspiracy rules and instructions for members' actions found in the safehouse of Patmou str.:

The recruitment of new members is conducted from the ranks of the labour movement and from the ranks of university students. Individuals who should be

³⁶ Xenakis, S. (2012). A New Dawn? Change and Continuity in Political Violence in Greece. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24(3), 437–464. doi:10.1080/09546553.2011.6331; Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.72

³⁷ Dolnik, A. (2007). *Op. Cit.*, p.139

³⁸ Karamanoli, E. (2002). Strong "popular" colour in the Tselentis Testimony. *Ta Nea*. Retrieved from <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/128011/entono-laiko-chroma-stin-apologia-tselenti/>

³⁹ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). *Op. Cit.* p.136

⁴⁰ 17 November (1984) *Ya To Organotiko; 'For the organisational'*. Available at: <http://kufontinas.blogspot.com/2013/12/1984-00-00.html> (Accessed 28 September 2023).

⁴¹ Dolnik, A. (2007). *Op. Cit.*, p.139

*approached, must be distinguished for their determination and commitment to the struggle, and, simultaneously, are in good physical condition*⁴²

3.3 Popular Support

In its first phase, the ‘armed propaganda’ phase, in which the group tried to highlight the importance and need of an armed struggle, RO17N wanted to establish itself as “the vanguard of the working masses” attacking the “watchdogs of the capitalist system”.⁴³ Following its first attacks with a detailed communiqué, in which the group explained its rationale behind the assassinations of Mallios and Welch, as well as after the killing of Pantelis Petrou (a police officer allegedly involved in the junta torturing) the group gained ‘national recognition, if not public sympathy’.⁴⁴ The symbolic nature of the killings created a feeling of ‘justice served’ of the ‘vigilante’ organisation to the public⁴⁵ and “by the end of the decade Greek public opinion and the media came to accept [17N] as an ephemeral group of ultra-left militants who, outraged by the new regime’s lenient treatment of the fascists in courts, simply took the law into their own hands”.⁴⁶

Unlike other terrorist groups that issued publications in order to communicate their motives with the public, such as the Red Brigades and the RAF, RO17N only communicated through its communiqués.⁴⁷ In these essays, the group rationalised its attacks and expanded on its ideology, emphasising that the group’s activities were carefully selected in order to ensure that ‘the majority of the Greek people did not go to sleep every night fearing that their lives

⁴² Antoniou, D. (2002). *This is the Sepolia .45er*,; *Αυτό είναι το 45άρι των Σεπολίων*; Kathimerini. (online) Available at: <http://www.kathimerini.gr/124410/article/epikairothta/ellada/ayto-einai-to-45ari-twn-sepoliwn> (Accessed 27 Jul. 2018).

⁴³ Corsun, A. (1991). Group profile: The revolutionary organization 17 November in Greece. *Terrorism*, 14(2), pp.99

⁴⁴ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Europe's last red terrorists: The Revolutionary Organisation 17 November*. London: Hurst & Co.

⁴⁵ Sakellariou, A., (2003). 17 Νοέμβρη, Η Οργάνωση: Μία Μελέτη Για Την Τρομοκρατία, Την Ταυτότητά Της Και Την Επιρροή Της [17 November, The Organisation: A Study On Terrorism, Its Identity And Its Influence]. [online] *Pandemos*. Available at: <http://pandemos.panteion.gr/index.php?op=record&type=0&q=17%20%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%AD%CE%BC%CE%B2%CF%81%CE%B7&page=1&scope=0&lang=el&pid=iid:415> [Accessed 28 July 2020].

⁴⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Europe's last red terrorists: The Revolutionary Organisation 17 November*. London: Hurst & Co., p.71

⁴⁷ Karyotis, G. (2007) ‘Securitization of greek terrorism and arrest of the `Revolutionary Organization November 17’’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(3), pp. 271–293. doi:10.1177/0010836707079932.

were in danger from RO17N'.⁴⁸ By removing the element of fear from ordinary citizens and choosing the targets carefully, to be recognisable but not “in the heart of the Greek state” in addition to selecting targets that “expose and delegitimise the Regime without having any negative political or material consequences for the workers and the mass movement”⁴⁹, the organisation achieved notoriety but not intense public outcry. In a poll that was conducted by DIMEL in February 1989, 85,6% of the Greek population responded ‘No’ on whether they would vote for RON17 were they to run for parliament. A 5,82% however, did respond yes and a 17% of the poll’s respondents claimed to agree with the content of the organisation’s communiqués.⁵⁰

In this operational period, RO17N adjusted its operations and made a shift from a ‘revenge’ focused organisation to a group that conducted attacks with a sociopolitical agenda, highlighting issues and problems it identified in Greece and with Greece’s international relationships. Again, the group seemed concerned with the impact the attacks would have in the eyes of the Greek public. It introduced new weapons, expanding from the use of the .45 Colt M1911 to “a 9-millimetre handgun and two .38 calibre pistols, and [conducts] kneecappings and non-fatal injuries, against a doctor and public prosecutors”. The fact that rather than assassinating its victims the group chose “to wound, suggests that [...] the group may regard these targets as public servants whose murders would result in negative repercussions for the group”.⁵¹

In this period, it was both the ideology itself as well as the commitment to the ideology that made the group more popular, perceived as a revolutionary organisation rather than a terrorist group by the public. By remaining consistent with its values, the group maintained a feeling of authenticity that was pervasive. Even during his eventual trial, Dimitris Koufontinas, maintained his “advocating [of] revolutionary violence as an ideological response to declining radicalism and reformism”, insisting that “there was no shadow of doubt [...] that Greece was run by thieves and that the people mainly responsible for turning the Greek polity into a kleptocracy were the country’s established political elites”,⁵² a line of thinking consistent with that of a fair amount of the Greek population.

⁴⁸ Corsun, A., (1992). Op. Cit., Inc.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Pappas, T. (2002). «17 Νοέμβρη», απ’ το μύθο στην πραγματικότητα [*November 17: From myth to reality*]. (p. 13). Ellinika Grammata.

⁵¹ Corsun, A., (1992). Op. Cit., p.97

⁵² Kassimeris, G. (2005), Op. Cit.

In the beginning of the 1990's, despite the seemingly increasingly senseless and unjustified targets of its attacks, the group continued to hold a strong ideology against harming civilians. Either as a method of harnessing popular support, or as a legitimate concern, RO17N often actively attempted to protect civilians and bystanders from its attacks. In one of its 1990 communiqués, following the assassination attempt against Vardis Vardinoyiannis, a Greek shipping magnate, the group mentions that the attack had already been postponed twice in order to avoid potential civilian deaths.⁵³ The following month, the organisation launched a rocket attack against the EC offices using a timing device. Ten minutes before the attack, an anonymous phone call was made to the *Eleftherotypia* newspaper with a warning of what was about to transpire in order for the police to block off the road and avoid any victims. According to the organisation's communiqué following the attack “the police did absolutely nothing, either through incompetence or deliberately so”.⁵⁴

However, this concern for avoiding civilian casualties started to wane as the group's operational frequency increased - showcased in the attack against Giannis Palaiokrasas, the Greek finance minister during rush hour in a busy street in the centre of Athens. N17's seeming “indifference to the risk of inflicting civilian casualties became apparent when the 3mm rocket glanced off the Minister's armoured-plate Mercedes and exploded on the pavement” creating a 1 metre crater, destroying two vehicles, injuring 5 bystanders and, disastrously, killing a 20-year-old student.⁵⁵

Gradually, the group's targets started becoming increasingly irrelevant to the Greek population and the rationales behind the attacks were also likely to have been found lacking, as the group's communiques were making less sense but had become “more bombastic [and] less jargonistic”.⁵⁶ Aiming to claim back some of notoriety, the group attempted a rocket attack against the country's major news stations, Mega Channel, during its nightly bulletin. Despite the damage to property the 100 potential victims that were in the building that night, closely

⁵³ 17 November (1989) *1989-09-18 Mpakogiannis, 17 November Communiqué, 1989-09-18 Μπακογιάννης*. Available at: <http://kufontinas.blogspot.com/2013/12/1989-09-18.html> (Accessed: 15 August 2023).

⁵⁴ Corsun, A. (1991). *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁵ Diamantis, G., T., (2023) The murder of Thanos Axarlian: The tragic day and the testimony of the 17N perpetrators /Δολοφονία Θάνου αξαρλιάν: Η τραγική ημέρα και όσα κατέθεσαν οι ένοχοι της 17 νοέμβρη, *TO VIMA*. Available at: <https://www.tovima.gr/2023/07/14/istoriko-arxeio/dolofonia-thanou-aksarlian-i-tragiki-imerai-kai-osa-katethesan-oi-enoxoi-tis-17-noemvri/> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

⁵⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p/97

avoided coming in harm's way.⁵⁷ This attack, which once again could have had numerous civilian victims, was followed by both media and public outcry, despite the group's claims that it wanted to avoid casualties. In a research poll conducted by ALKO in 2002, following the arrest of most of the N17 members, 23,7% of respondents answered that they agreed with the political and ideological positions of RO17N, with an additional 4,6% answering that they would like for the organisation to continue its attacks.⁵⁸ These responses showcase the shift in perception that RO17N had on the greek public as well as the lasting impact the group had on greek socio-political ideation.

3.4 Resources

On a tactical level, RO17N showcased a relatively minimal capability in its beginnings. Seven of its eight victims until 1985 were assassinated with the same .45 calibre weapon.⁵⁹ Several explanations have been offered for this by different scholars, ranging from that this method would “ensure that no other group could take credit for its operations”,⁶⁰ to the fact that the group had limited access to weapons, especially at these early stages.⁶¹ Largely because of its lack of international alliances, RO17N did not have external resources or foreign government-backed supporters. For monetary resources, the organisation mainly resorted to bank robberies, some of which had lethal consequences. In 1984, the group conducted a robbery at the Kato Petralona branch of the Greek National Bank, which did not go according to plan. In escaping the bank with ‘bags of money’ they were confronted by a security guard, who Koufontinas, dressed as a police officer, proceeded to assassinate on the spot with a Beretta pistol.⁶² The bank robberies served as the main monetary resource of the organisation,

⁵⁷ Demetis, C. (2018) When 17 November struck MEGA / Όταν η 17 νοέμβρη χτύπησε το mega, *News 24/7*. Available at: <https://www.news247.gr/media/otan-i-17-noemvri-ctypise-to-mega-ti-elegeo-koyfontinas-sti-diki> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

⁵⁸ Pretenteris, G. (2002). *I Anametrisi* [The Confrontation] (pp. 40-41). Estia.

⁵⁹ Newsroom (2002) ‘To 45ari symvolo milise ya polla gegonota; The 45er “symbol” spoke for many incidents’, *Kathimerini*, 18 July <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/124520/to-ena-45ari-symvolo-milise-gia-polla-gegonota/> and Corsun, A., (1992). *Op. Cit.*, Inc., p.110

⁶⁰ Corsun, A. (1991). *Op. Cit.*.

⁶¹ Kassimeris, G., (2013). *Op. Cit.*

⁶² Moustaka, M. (2002) Mystery woman in Petralona / Γυναίκα-μυστήριο στα πετράλωνα, *TA NEA*. Available at: <https://www.tanea.gr/2002/09/20/greece/gynaika-mystirio-sta-petralwna/> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

of which they completed eleven in their twenty-seven years of operation, collecting an estimated total of 3,148,000 GBP.⁶³

Weapons were sourced from robberies of arm caches in military bases. The main weapons supply operations consist of the 1988 raid of a police station by six members of the group in Vyronas, a neighbourhood close to the centre of Athens, with the loot including two .38 calibre pistols, two automatic weapons, two long barrelled rifles, six walkie-talkies and the official stamps of the police station.⁶⁴ In the second raid, made ‘partly in an effort to embarrass the government’ before the upcoming elections, RO17N stormed the National War Museum in February 1990 and stole two bazookas, conducting the entire operation in broad daylight, calmly leaving the museum and escaping in a waiting car.⁶⁵ The acquired weapons served as both a statement as well as a significant addition to the group’s operational capabilities, as the bazookas can be “effective against armoured cars, but can also be launched (with or without a timing device) against buildings”.⁶⁶

The attack was preceded by the 1989 raid of the Sykourio military base, a base located approximately 3 hours from Athens, from which the organisation stole a ‘whole armoury’. Further embarrassing the government, in its communiqué RO17N highlighted that “although the storage rooms were guarded [their] commandos remained undetected”.⁶⁷ The Sykourio raid was completed so seamlessly and with such good apparent knowledge of the base, raised no alarm from soldiers and members of the National Guard, that suspicions arose from the Greek media for the potential of an insider.⁶⁸ The loot from the military base included “a large amount of rockets of 2.36 and 3.5 inches, bullets of 0.45, 0.38, 0.30, 7.62 calibre, grenades, electrical and mechanical detonators and other ‘useful material’”.⁶⁹

⁶³ Antoniou, D. (2002). *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁴ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁵ Bossi, M. (1996) *Ellada & Tromokratia- Ethnikes & Diethneis Diastaseis/ Greece & Terrorism- National and International Perspectives Athens: Sakkoulas and Corsun, A., (1992). Op. Cit., Inc., p.110*

⁶⁶ Corsun, A., (1992). *Op. Cit., Inc., p.110*

⁶⁷ 17 November Communiqué in Christopoulos, N. (2019) From Sykourio to “17N” and the strange case of Leros, “Από το συκούριο και τη ‘17N’ στην περιέργη υπόθεση της λέρου”, *ΤΟ VIMA*. Available at: <https://www.tovima.gr/2019/09/10/society/apo-to-sykourio-kai-ti-17n-stin-periergi-ypothesi-tis-lerou/> (Accessed: 29 July 2023)

⁶⁸ Newsroom (2002a) *Οι 3 ‘επιχειρήσεις εφοδιασμού’, The three ‘supply missions’, ΤΑ ΝΕΑ*. Available at: <https://www.tanea.gr/2002/07/04/greece/oi-3-epixeiriseis-efodiasmoy/> (Accessed: 15 August 2023).

⁶⁹ 17 November Communiqué in Christopoulos, N. (2019) From Sykourio to “17N” and the strange case of Leros, “Από το συκούριο και τη ‘17N’ στην περιέργη υπόθεση της λέρου”, *ΤΟ VIMA*. Available at: <https://www.tovima.gr/2019/09/10/society/apo-to-sykourio-kai-ti-17n-stin-periergi-ypothesi-tis-lerou/> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

The organisation conducted robberies for financial as well as for prestige reasons.⁷⁰ Money taken was used to pay the rent for the RO17N safe houses as well as to purchase disguises, rent vans and use taxis to add a further layer of anonymity to its operations. Moreover, the members of the group received monthly compensation for their activities in the organisation. In his deposition, Pavlos Serifis also said that he received payments from the group in order to pay for necessary treatments following a car crash he was injured in in 1980.⁷¹ Dimitris Koufontinas was tasked with allocating the money to the group's members monthly, but the policy of the group toward stipends was austere, with newer members receiving a “symbolic” amount.⁷² As time went by, Giotopoulos started to take money from the common fund and Koufontinas and the Xiros brothers also followed suit.⁷³

The organisation was surprisingly organised when it came to its financials, something that would provide authorities with further evidence against RON17 during their prosecution. When raiding the safehouse of RON17 at Patmou street, police found charge sheets with explanations for various expenses, handwritten lists, and notes on earnings from bank robberies.⁷⁴ According to data collected by the police following the arrest of the organisation's members, the yearly expenses of the group were calculated to about 30,000,000 drachma (approx. 115,000 GBP).

3.5 Counterintelligence

All of the counterintelligence methods used by RO17N can be classified as basic denial. The organisation tried to ensure that it would remain undetected by authorities but made no attempt to penetrate or confuse the police forces in any way. Most of the members had basic

⁷⁰ Newsroom (2014) *Επιστολή Τζωρτζάτου για τον θάνατο Αξαριλιάν και την 'κατάντια της 17N το 2002'*; *Tzortzos letter about Axarlian's death and the 'demise of 17N in 2002'*, TO BHMA. Available at: <https://www.tovima.gr/2014/05/03/society/epistoli-tzwrtzato-y-gia-ton-thanato-aksarlian-kai-tin-katantia-tis-17n-to-2002/> (Accessed: 15 August 2023).

⁷¹ Deposition of T Serifis in Karamanoli, E. (2002) What T Serifis said in his deposition, 'Τι είπε ο Θ. Σερίφης στην απολογία του', I KATHIMERINI. Available at: <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/125215/ti-eipe-o-th-serifis-stin-apologia-toy/> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

⁷² Court proceedings, (2003) Korydallos prison chambers, 24 July 2003.

⁷³ Antoniou, D. (2002) Op. Cit.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

military training, which they had received as military service in Greece is mandatory for all men over the age of eighteen.⁷⁵

Unlike most European terrorist groups, who followed “a gradual transition from low-level bombings to more lethal attacks”, such as the Belgian Cellules Communistes Combattantes, which only launched a lethal attack following 46 non-lethal bomb attacks, RO17N launched its reign of terror with a point-blank range assassination.⁷⁶ In terms of tactics, RO17N “demonstrated a limited operational capability before 1985’ and their operations ‘required minimal logistical planning’.⁷⁷ The group conducted its attacks relatively sparingly, allowing for time between operations. This could potentially have been a self-imposed strategy in order to avoid detection and compromise the organisation.⁷⁸

As the organisation increased the frequency of its attacks and gained further notoriety, its members had to increase the sophistication of its counterintelligence methods. Members of RO17N were encouraged to lead ‘clean and innocent’ lives, to have several ‘pre-prepared’ stories to use to cover their criminal activities and find ways to combine their personal, working and family lives with the organisational activities.⁷⁹ Members were not allowed to share information about the organisation with anyone, including their family members and from writing anything down, ranging from names, addresses and phone numbers of other members, to operational details. Each member had to find three locations in which to conduct meetings and change these locations often. Moreover, each of the safe houses had to be periodically checked, preferably by the person who rented them in the first place, in order to confirm that everything was in order.⁸⁰

A likely unintentional layer of counterintelligence capability were the relationships between several RO17N members. The organisation’s core members included three brothers: Vassilis, Christodoulos and Savvas Xiros. The ex-wife of Savvas was also the partner of Dimitris Koufontinas, the organisation’s second-in-command.⁸¹ These close ties could have served to ensure that informants within the group would be unlikely to act as informants or

⁷⁵ Brett, D. (2020). European Union without Compulsory Military Service: Consequences for Alternative Service. *European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)*, Brussels Office. (online) Available at: https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/attachments/2020-02-14-EBCO%20_Annual_Report_2019.pdf (Accessed 11 Jul. 2020).

⁷⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.73

⁷⁷ Corsun, A., (1992). *Op. Cit.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). *Op. Cit.* p.135

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.137

⁸¹ Dolnik, A., (2007). *Op. Cit.*

betray the movements of the group. The bonds, which extended beyond ideological alignment, fostered a high degree of mutual trust, reducing the likelihood of infiltration or betrayal from within and functioning as a form of internal security. The emotional and personal connections among the members would have acted as a disincentive for betrayal, as any disloyalty would not only endanger the group, but also damage deeply personal relationships. The challenge of penetrating such a closed network of trusted individuals would have made it significantly more difficult for the group's adversary to infiltrate or disrupt the organisation.

In their operations, the members usually used simple disguises, used several taxis to take them to a location, stole cars, rented their safe houses under pseudonyms, and used nicknames for each other.⁸² Prior to an attack, they would scout for cars that were easy to steal and would wait until the day of the operation to take a taxi to where the cars were parked. They would then steal the car(s) they needed using a master key.⁸³ Using a taxi to get to the cars allowed for an added degree of anonymity, whilst having checked that the master key could be used in these cars decreased the possibility that a neighbour or passer-by would notice anything unusual.⁸⁴

Koufontinas, describes the counterintelligence methods used in the ambush of the Vironas police department:

Many of us took part in that operation. Well dressed, in suits or casual business outfits. The ones waiting for us downstairs were wearing shorts and t-shirts. The escape vehicles had several bags with snorkels, towels and beach mats [in the boot], which would make [the members of the group] look like people waiting for the bus to go to the beach. We also rented a safe house in that area. 'Single use', temporary storage for the bulky G3 rifles we would take. A little shop. We started painting it, fixing it up, used newspapers to cover the store window. We later left it: "The recession..." we told the owner, "You know...". He knew.⁸⁵

In order to remain aligned and avoid compromising conversations between group members, the group had created a 54-page manual which was heavily based on translations of manuals of South American terrorist groups. The document included conspiracy rules, security

⁸² Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit., p.95

⁸³ Ibid., p. 99.

⁸⁴ Papachelas, A. and Telloğlu, T. (2003). Op. Cit.p.188

⁸⁵ Koufontinas, D. (2014) in *Γεννήθηκα 17 Νοέμβρη, Gennithika 17 Noemvri*. Ekdotikos Organismos Livani, p. 309.

measures, modes of action, preparation techniques, explosives, etc. The multi-page typed text bearing the signature of RO17N, was ranked among the most valuable findings of the prosecution authorities when it was found in 1978.⁸⁶ The first pages of the manual are devoted to suggestions regarding the personal, organisational and operational security of the members and the organisation, the criteria for selecting the hideouts, the contacts and the "communication codes", the techniques of avoiding or neutralising the authorities, etc. Members of the group were told to always have a "legend" (that is, excuse and coverage). They were instructed not to carry incriminating papers, not to drive if they didn't have a licence, to avoid locations monitored by police, such as hangouts of known leftists or progressives, as well as to avoid large gatherings and quarrels.⁸⁷ During an operation, the group was to have backups in both contacts as well as materials and people. Links, relationships and safehouses were to disappear if a member was arrested and those who had contact with them were trained to go into hiding. Were a member were to be released, they would have to be "tested" in order to determine whether they had become an instrument of law enforcement.⁸⁸ In terms of tracking targets and planning a post-strike escape, according to the manual "frequent changes of persons should be made in the posts selected for monitoring, as this minimises the risk of the target perceiving that they are being monitored".⁸⁹ In addition, the manual states that "when planning a strike, special attention should be paid to the choice of escape route. A route without traffic lights, dead ends and one-way streets should be chosen, which allows the rapid departure from the point of attack, around which a police cordon will be formed very quickly".⁹⁰

In the Patmos street safehouse, a medical manual was also found which contained details on dealing and taking care of injuries as well as information on the provision of first aid in the event of an accident.⁹¹ The capability to deal with potential trauma added an increased layer of protection to the organisation, as showing up with injuries to a hospital or a doctor following an attack could compromise the elusiveness of the group.

During this period of the organisation, recruitment of new members happened in three stages. Once an individual was 'spotted' and their opinions were found to be consistent to those of the organisation, they were referred to an executive secretary, who then did a background

⁸⁶ 17 November (1984) Op. Cit.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. and Antoniou, D. (2002). The gun makes 17N a target, 'Op. Cit.

⁹¹ Ibid.

check of the individual in question.⁹² If nothing in their background raised any suspicion, the organisation moved to phase two. The recruit was asked to do several trivial tasks in order to ‘be tried out’. The name of the organisation was not mentioned at all; even if the individual was to suspect that they were being recruited by RO17N, no one was to confirm it. The length of this ‘trial period’ varied depending on the member and the situation. Once the recruit completed all of the tasks assigned to them successfully, they were told the name of the organisation, became an official member and were then integrated into one of the cells.⁹³

Unlike most known terrorist groups, RO17N had an almost unique approach when handling those that wanted to leave the organisation. In the ‘Good Terrorist Manual’ a document found in one of the safe houses, the rules for someone’s departure were as follows: ‘If a member decides to leave the organisation, they are bound by total secrecy. They are not to mention anything they have learned about the members, the organisational structure or the methods and materials that the organisation uses’.⁹⁴

A distinctive characteristic of RO17N was its approach to members who expressed a desire to leave the organisation. This is exemplified by the case of Patroklos Tselentis, one of the group’s early members, who in 1987 decided that he could no longer rationalise the actions of the group. Rather than being met with coercion or threats, Tselentis was allowed to leave without any repercussions. According to Tselentis, when he informed Koufontinas of his decision to leave, he encountered no resistance: “he posed no objections whatsoever. Nor did he try to dissuade me by mentioning any tacit parts of any bargain that I was meant to keep... And no member of the group threatened me because of my decision to leave”.⁹⁵ This response is particularly unusual for a militant organisation, where defection is often met with suspicion and, in many cases, violence.

This lenient attitude towards a member who decides to leave a group contrasts sharply with the practices of other militant groups. Terrorist organisations often maintain rigid internal structures and enforce loyalty through coercion, often threatening or punishing those who attempt to leave. For example, groups such as the Red Brigades⁹⁶ and the Provisional Irish

⁹² Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). *Op. Cit.*p.140

⁹³ Court proceedings, (2003) *Korydallos prison chambers*, 24 July 2003.

⁹⁴ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). *Op. Cit.*p.136

⁹⁵ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*

⁹⁶ Jamieson, A. (1990) ‘Entry, discipline and exit in the Italian Red Brigades’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2(1), pp. 1–20. doi:10.1080/09546559008427047.

Republican Army (PIRA)⁹⁷ dealt harshly with defectors, driven by concerns over potential exposure to law enforcement. Even in cases where members are allowed to leave due to physical or psychological trauma, their departure was typically accompanied by a degree of monitoring and mistrust. Some parallels can be drawn to certain cases in which militant organisations have allowed members to leave under specific circumstances, though these are rare and usually associated with inactive or incapacitated members.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, RO17N's approach, particularly the absence of violence or coercion towards departing members, remains exceptional and highly unusual. It should be noted, however, that defectors were not common and Tselentis is the only known case of a member of the organisation deciding to leave. Tselentis' decision not to betray the group, even after his departure, underscores the deep personal loyalty that existed within RO17N. His assertion that “you don't betray people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for what they believe in, even if you have come to disagree with them”⁹⁹ illustrates the extent to which personal loyalty, rather than solely ideological commitment, played a crucial role in the organisation's internal dynamics. This personal bond may have functioned as an additional layer of security, preventing the group from fragmenting, or being compromised by former members.

In order to ensure that members would not only partially commit to the organisation and potentially raise the possibility that the organisation would be betrayed, but members were also required to be parts of both the operational and the political operations of the group.¹⁰⁰ This provided a safeguard against people joining the organisation and potentially becoming disillusioned with its military side, reporting the group to the authorities. The ‘all or nothing’ policy ensured that members would have to take part in operations, thus making them as liable as the rest of the organisation.

In the 1990's , the basic denial strategies of the group continued to be its main barrier of defence. By increasing its operational frequency, the group also increased the margin of potential mistakes and many of its counterintelligence strategies were attributed to chance or luck. For example, the fact that most, if not all, members of the organisation had full time jobs

97 Tonge, J. (2013) “They haven't gone away, you know”: Irish Republican “dissidents” and “Armed struggle”, *Terrorism Studies*, 16(3), pp. 474–488. doi:10.4324/9780203717622-42.

98 Ibid.

99 Karamanoli, E. (2002). Strong "popular" colour in the Tselentis Testimony. *Ta Nea*. Retrieved from <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/128011/entono-laiko-chroma-stin-apologia-tselenti/>

¹⁰⁰ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). *Op. Cit.*, 135

and were in a way ‘part-time terrorists’ and were not depending on the organisation for their livelihood, served to ‘enhance the veil of secrecy over the organisation’¹⁰¹, but it is unlikely that this was a deliberate counterintelligence strategy.

The increase of the group's operations and the increasing impetus for its arrest, meant that the organisation was faced with more areas which could compromise it. The use of the group's signature weapon for the majority of its assassinations would pose a counterintelligence risk, as it enabled authorities to link the weapon with several of the organisation's attacks. The prominence of the weapon was so evident in the attacks that the identity of the gun and the operations it was used in were determined only several hours after it was found.¹⁰² Moreover, the organisation's re-use of weapons taken from police officers, would make them incredibly easy to track. A similar ‘symbolic’ device, but perilous in terms of counterintelligence was the group's typewriter, an AEG OLYMPIA CARRERA, which was used for over twenty years to write the group's with communiqués, and would serve as key evidence in the prosecution of RO17N.¹⁰³

3.6 Adversary Counterintelligence Capabilities

The Greek National Intelligence Service (EYP) was set up by the CIA in 1953 and it was funded by it until 1964. During the Regime of the Colonels, from 1967-1974, EYP was complacent in assisting the dictatorship with intelligence gathering on ‘enemies of the state’.¹⁰⁴ Before RO17N came to be, both Giotopoulos (the de facto leader of the organisation) and Kyriakides, a RO17N member, were involved in organisations opposing the junta. Both of them were known to the vigilant and relentless EYP, which mentioned them in a report, writing that the goals of their organisation was ‘the recruitment of young, active and bold members, finding houses in the outskirts of the city (preferably close to the shore) in order to conceal members (...) and the creation of all necessary conditions for violent and terrorist acts for the

¹⁰¹ Corsun, A. (1991). Group profile: The revolutionary organization 17 November in Greece. *Terrorism*, 14(2), pp. 94

¹⁰² Kassimeris, G., (2013). *Inside Greek Terrorism*. Cary: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰³ Dolnik, A. (2007). Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁴ National Intelligence Service, (2015). National Intelligence Service - History - *Military Dictatorship*. (online) Available at: <http://www.nis.gr/portal/page/portal/NIS/History/Diktatoria/> (Accessed 11 Aug. 2019).

toppling of the Regime'¹⁰⁵ , indicating that the intelligence capabilities of the Regime had been effective.

When RO17N launched its first attack, 'Greece was in a civil and moral state of flux' with 'the legacy of decades of authoritarianism, together with the lack of civil expertise [marking] the limits of *Metapolitefsi*'.¹⁰⁶ The Greek government attempted to handle the issue of domestic terrorism for the first time in 1978, alarmed by the assassination of Welch in combination with the terrorist attacks across Europe.¹⁰⁷ The new anti-terrorism law (774/1978) was written using bills passed by Italy and Germany as a basis, naming crimes against the Greek state using 'weapons, hand grenades, explosives and bomb parcels' with those guilty 'facing life imprisonment or the death sentence'.¹⁰⁸ However, as the country that had so recently faced infringement on its civil liberties and oppression by the government and its police force, the bill was not welcomed by the public, with large demonstrations against it taking place across its biggest cities.¹⁰⁹ The opposition party, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), also denounced the bill and claimed that terrorism did not exist in Greece and thus saw no reason for the creation of such a 'despotic' law, noting that 'if terrorism became a problem, existing legislation was more than sufficient to deal with it'.¹¹⁰ Despite PASOK's fierce opposition, Law 778 was passed, but it served as no deterrent: by 1980 more than 200 terrorist incidents had taken place in Greece.¹¹¹

The importance for the creation of a strong legal and scientific framework in counterterrorism was made clear following an operational malfunction suffered by the group when attempting to shoot a rocket at the house of the German Ambassador in Chalandri. The operation was running smoothly until the plastic tube used as a makeshift launcher broke when the rocket was shot by Xiros injuring him in the hands and forehead. Xiros, his brother Vassilis and Koufontinas managed to make a quick escape but the tube, his hat and some blood stains

¹⁰⁵ National Intelligence Service, (1973). Παράνομοι Οργανώσεις Εμφανίσθησαν Εν Ελλάδι 21.4.67 Ως 30.6.72 [Illegal Organisations Appearing in Greece From 21.4.67 To 30.6.1972]. In: A. Papachelas and T. Telloglou, ed., *Fakelos 17 Noemvri* [The Case of 17 November], 6th ed. Athens: I. D. Kollarou & Co, p.22.

¹⁰⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.155

¹⁰⁷ Karyotis, G. (2007) 'Securitization of greek terrorism and arrest of the 'Revolutionary Organization November 17'', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(3), pp. 271–293. doi:10.1177/0010836707079932.

¹⁰⁸ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.156

¹⁰⁹ Calotychos, V. (2022) 'The beekeeper, the icon painter, family, and friends: "November 17" and the end of Greek history', *Anti-Americanism*, pp. 179–194. doi:10.18574/nyu/9780814769096.003.0013.

¹¹⁰ Parliamentary Proceedings, *Greek Parliament*, 18 April 1978, p. 2776

¹¹¹ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.156

were left at the scene. The police arrived at the scene quickly but were unable to analyse the DNA as their labs lacked the necessary apparatus.¹¹² Even if they were to analyse it, however, and were able to link the blood stains to Xiros, there was no legal framework to make them admissible in court as evidence.¹¹³

Almost two years after coming into office, PASOK abolished the 1978 anti-terrorism legislation that had been passed by the New Democracy, its ministers again insisting that terrorism in Greece was ‘non-existent’.¹¹⁴ However, at this point bombing attacks, ambushes and assassinations were taking place on Greek land, sea and airspace against both Greek and international citizens. Other than the terrorist activities of RO17N, Greece had also become a symbolic and geographically useful battleground for organisations such as the Palestinian Abu Nidal or for Jordanian nationalists. Attacks such as the one made against the *City of Poros* cruise ship, which counted 9 victims or the assassination of the Turkish Embassy attaché to Athens, Galip Gozmen by a member of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia,¹¹⁵ only served as further evidence that more stringent measures had to be taken against terrorist groups. The opinion of foreign governments on Greece’s lax attitude toward terrorism and the ineptitude of its police force, was best highlighted in the cover page of the French *Le Monde* newspaper, which coined the country ‘the soft underbelly of Europe’.¹¹⁶

Despite (or because of) these accusations, Greek authorities were growing increasingly frustrated with RO17N and its brazen attacks. In one of its attempts to lure the organisation out of hiding but what would be an embarrassing turn of events, EYP created a mock-17N ‘in a desperate attempt to wrong foot the terrorists’, an ‘experiment which backfired with humiliating consequences for the security apparatus when a very obviously fake with communiqué of RO17N’s ‘break up due to disagreements’ reached *Epikairotitita*, which the newspaper initially refused to publish’.¹¹⁷

By 1990, RO17N had been active for well over a decade and had faced little to no tangible threat from Greek authorities. In the words of Bossis, the Greek National Intelligence

¹¹² Thodorakis, S. (2002). ΤΑ ΧΤΥΠΗΜΑΤΑ ΤΗΣ «17 ΝΟΕΜΒΡΗ» Νο 113-115 [The 17 November Hits, No. 113-115]. *To Vima*. (online) Available at: <http://www.tovima.gr/relatedarticles/article/?aid=144476> (Accessed 22 Aug. 2015).

¹¹³ Fakitsas, M. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹¹⁴ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit., p.156

¹¹⁵ Furkan, A. (2018) Turkey commemorates martyred Turkish diplomat, *Anadolu Ajansı*. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/todays-headlines/turkey-commemorates-martyred-turkish-diplomat-/1218376> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

¹¹⁶ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.91

Service had ‘dealt exclusively with terrorist organisations, their ideology, modus operandi, frequency of appearances and press releases concerning future hits, but with stunningly little success’.¹¹⁸ In December 1990, the Greek Government introduced a bill to combat organised crime; even though the word ‘terrorism’ was not mentioned in the bill at all, it was clear that it was what was being addressed. The bill allowed authorities to increase surveillance, to read and analyse letters, bank accounts and bank records and authorised the questioning of suspects without the presence of a lawyer.¹¹⁹ The bill also allowed for the detainment of suspects for up to ten days ‘without specific charges and without evidence if disclosures might harm an investigation.’¹²⁰ It also gave financial incentives to informants and members of organisations that collaborate with the authorities. Most importantly however, it allowed Supreme Court Attorneys to ban the publishing of any terrorist group proclamation by the Press, an article which made the bill incredibly controversial.¹²¹ Again, the PASOK-led opposition found the bill to be ‘another attempt to degenerate the country’s democratic institutions and as a threat to civil liberties’.¹²² In addition to its controversial status, the bill failed to garner any results; between its implementation in 1990 and its abolishment in 1993, thirty-one terrorist attacks took place in Greece.¹²³

The country’s tumultuous internal political landscape, with its constant changes of the security and intelligence personnel, made, like clockwork, following elections did not allow for the continuation of strategies and streamlined procedures by governmental entities.¹²⁴ These frequent changes prevented an efficient, organised and strategically robust system to be put in place as skilled individuals with an array of knowledge were replaced by supporters of the ruling government.¹²⁵ The frequent changes of employees of the National Security Agency hindered the possibility of consistent and efficient growth and knowledge accumulation. This was illustrated by several incidents that took place in the twenty-seven years that RO17N was evading arrest.

¹¹⁸ Bossis, M. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹¹⁹ Papachelas, A. and Teloglou, T. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹²⁰ Kassimeris, G. (1995). *Greece: Twenty years of political terrorism. Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(2), pp.74-92.

¹²¹ Papachelas, A. and Teloglou, T. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹²² Fakitsas, M. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹²³ Kassimeris, G. (2001)., Op. Cit., p.164

¹²⁴ Kassimeris, G., (1993). Op. Cit.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

The Riankour fiasco of 1992 provides one of the clearest illustrations of the inefficiency of the Greek authorities. In March 1992, an anonymous call to the Office of the Minister of Public Order was made by a woman claiming to have ‘serious information’ about the organisation.¹²⁶ She informed the Chief of Police General Makris that the next RO17N attack would take place in Louizis Riankour street in the Ampelokipoi area of Athens. She explained that the group would use a police car and an ambulance and that she would be dressed as a policewoman. Makris took the warnings seriously and ordered the instalment of a camera to record anything unusual, surrounded the area with 30 members of the EKAM special police unit and sent patrols in civilian clothing to monitor suspicious activity¹²⁷. One of the officers found that a white van parked on Riankour looked suspicious and called the police headquarters from a payphone, finding that the licence plates belonged to a different vehicle type. The members of the organisation however suspected that they might be in danger and quickly escaped. The police officer in charge of the operation, John Mavrouleas, failed to get in touch with the other police vehicles that were surrounding the area, allowing the group to escape successfully, coining the operation the ultimate fiasco by the media¹²⁸.

As international pressure to find and arrest the members of RO17N continued to mount and with the threat of losing the opportunity to host the 2004 Olympic games looming, the necessity to make effective moves escalated rapidly.¹²⁹ Following the assassination of British Brigadier Stephen Saunders on Kifissias avenue, Scotland Yard sent several policemen to assist the Greek authorities in investigating the murder, who were shocked to find despite ‘the heavy international pressure to be seen to be doing something’ and the 1 billion drachma reward (2.6 million GBP), the investigators failed even ‘to find the assassins’ motorbike which could have provided DNA evidence.¹³⁰

With the assistance of international authorities improvements in the intelligence collection capabilities of the Greek authorities were rapid and effective. Increased security measures were applied around Kifissias avenue, including the instalment of CCTVs, the use of a police helicopter that could record licence plates and higher numbers of police officers in civilian clothing in the area.¹³¹ All of the material the police had collected about the

¹²⁶ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹²⁷ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit.

¹²⁸ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹²⁹ Papachelas, A. (2000). Op. Cit.

¹³⁰ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit., p. 105

¹³¹ Papachelas, A. and Telloglou, T. (2003). Op. Cit.p.218

organisation was compiled in a digital archive, which allowed authorities to make connections between any and every individual that had somehow been associated with the attacks.¹³² This enabled the Greek police to create a map of anyone that could be close to the members of RO17N. The focus was placed on individuals in the far left that were potentially politically active during the junta and the first years of the *Metapolitefsi*, slowly tightening the circle around the organisation.

3.7 Conclusion

RO17N and the Greek government, specifically its police force and intelligence agencies, engaged in a prolonged struggle marked by the use of different counterintelligence methods. These methods differed significantly in both nature and application. While RO17N's counterintelligence efforts focused on secrecy, compartmentalisation, and operational security to avoid detection, the Greek government employed surveillance, intelligence sharing, and investigative efforts to dismantle the group. For the majority of the three decades of the group's operation, both the organisation and its adversary employed basic and relatively unsophisticated counterintelligence tactics.

RO17N's internal structure relied heavily on secrecy and compartmentalisation. The group deliberately kept its membership small, composed of family members, close friends, and heavily vetted new members, creating an inherent trust network that minimised the likelihood of infiltration. Members often did not know the identities of others outside their immediate cells, limiting exposure in case of arrest or surveillance. This compartmentalisation increased the difficulty for law enforcement to infiltrate the group, as even potential captured members often had little information to offer beyond their immediate collaborators. The group communicated minimally, avoiding electronic communication, and maintaining a need-to-know basis for operational planning.

RO17N's approach to target selection was highly methodical during its early years. The group carefully selected targets that were both symbolically significant and offered a low risk of capture. The assassinations of key figures such as Richard Welch and U.S. Navy Captain George Tsantes in the late 1970s exemplified this careful planning. In these cases, RO17N

¹³² Ibid.

conducted weeks of surveillance to determine the targets' habits, security measures, and the best time to strike with minimal exposure. However, as the group continued its operations into the 1990s, their target selection and operational planning became less rigorous. RO17N began focusing more on high-exposure targets, such as businesspeople or politicians, in an effort to regain the public's attention. These attacks were often hastily planned, and the group's operational security weakened, leading to more mistakes that exposed them to law enforcement.

Conversely, Greece's post-junta police and intelligence services were not well-prepared to handle even fundamentally sophisticated, yet highly secretive urban guerrilla groups like RO17N. The capabilities of the group were underestimated by authorities, who viewed it as a low-level threat, allowing the group to operate with relative impunity. Thus, the group's adversary was also a likely reason for the organisation's relatively unsophisticated counterintelligence strategies.

Greek authorities were unable to collect any valuable information on RO17N throughout its 27 years of operation. Before the explosion in Piraeus which led to the arrest of Xiros, the police held 'no confirmed fingerprints, no blood samples, no strands of hair or scraps of clothing - not a single item of forensic evidence that could bring them closer to an arrest'.¹³³ It is likely that the lack of ambition and capability in part of the Greek authorities allowed RO17N to have a more lax attitude regarding its counterintelligence and operational security. This inefficiency can be attributed to several factors. Dolnik argues that as RO17N 'did not have an ambition to govern' and it did not 'seek to develop cadres for the purposes of taking over government posts in the event of a successful revolution'¹³⁴- this could have reduced potential friction with its adversary. Moreover, the organisation did not seek support or expressions of solidarity from other international organisations with similar goals or Soviet-bloc countries.¹³⁵ As the organisation was not seeking to impress or motivate the Greek population, it maintained a modest and stable strategy and exhibited 'a very limited sense of urgency' and thus 'had little motivation to invent new, more effective and more eye-catching tactics'.¹³⁶ This lack of ambition to produce spectacular, eye-catching results is likely one of

¹³³ Kassimeris, G. (1995). Greece: Twenty years of political terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(2), pp.74-92.

¹³⁴ Dolnik, A., (2007). Op. Cit.

¹³⁵ Dolnik, A., (2007). Op. Cit.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.134

the reasons why the Greek government did not view the organisation as a massive threat, thus, especially initially, using a minimal amount of resources for its elimination.

In countering RO17N's attacks, the Greek authorities adapted by enhancing intelligence coordination between domestic law enforcement and international agencies, particularly the CIA and Interpol. By increasing intelligence sharing and applying pressure to other leftist groups to root out sympathisers, the Greek police gradually closed in on RO17N's operations. The Greek government shifted towards proactive intelligence gathering, and after years of operating reactively, this shift to proactive counterterrorism was essential in eventually apprehending members of the group. The group's declining operational discipline and an increasing need for public visibility led to mistakes, weakening its security, and ultimately contributing to its downfall. The effectiveness of these methods was still limited until the breakthrough following the explosion in Piraeus in 2002.

Spanning over three decades in activity, it is hard to argue that RO17N did not have an effective counterintelligence capability. This can be coined down to several reasons:

Firstly, to the group's commitment to secretive operations: In its first stages and throughout its period of operations, RO17N cleverly avoided the temptation to become an armed political party by resorting to mass recruiting of new members. This could have been as a result of a purposeful counterintelligence strategy, an attempt at self preservation, or a political statement, but it actively contributed to the group's eluding of authorities.¹³⁷

Secondly, especially in its first two phases of operation, the importance RO17N placed on protecting the 'everyday man'. The delicate balance of harnessing popular support whilst maintaining the interest of the public can play a pivotal role in a group's survival, as it can shape both its operational tactics as well as the willingness of the ruling government to dismantle the group.¹³⁸ In its beginnings, Firstly, RO17N found fertile ground in a population that was incredibly suspicious and negatively predisposed against the police forces, with a huge stigma existing against *chafiethes* (police informers)¹³⁹. Automatically, this placed the police at a disadvantage: informers were unlikely to approach the police and witnesses or suspicious

¹³⁷ Lygeros, S. (2003). 17 Νοέμβρη: η παρακμιακή φάση του τρομοκρατικού φαινομένου [17 November: the decline of the terrorist phenomenon]. *Τετράδια: Πολιτικού Διαλόγου Έρευνας Και Κριτικής*, 47(13-18). Retrieved 19 October 2020, from http://pandemos.panteion.gr/getfile.php?uri=http://localhost:8080/fedora/objects/iid:3349/datastreams/PDF1/content&mimetype=application%2Fpdf&filename=lygeros_tetradia_47.pdf.

¹³⁸ Sakellariou, A., (2003). Op. Cit.

¹³⁹ Kassimeris, G. (2001). Op. Cit., p. 165

neighbours were also unwilling to volunteer information. Public sentiment toward the organisation only started to change when the targets of the group shifted from bringing justice for grievances of the past, to attacks on individuals based on sociopolitical differences the group had with politicians and prominent personalities based on current affairs.¹⁴⁰ Steadily, public support started to wane following attacks that the public found unnecessary or not relatable, and by 2003, in a poll conducted by Metron Analysis 37% of people questioned labelled RO17N a terrorist organisation and 42,8% labelled them “common criminals”.¹⁴¹

Thirdly, the group’s counterintelligence capabilities, ranging from basic denial tactics such as using nicknames and disguises to the performing of ‘dry operations’ in order to identify potential problems that could arise in an attack, or by strategically choosing the dates in which their adversary was likely to be less vigilant (the assassination of Welch and Mallios, the Sykourio military base raid and the robbery of the Petralona branch of the National Bank all took place around Christmas).

When the organisation started being perceived by the government as a threat whose continued presence could be detrimental for both internal and external politics the efficiency of policing improved significantly. The organisation, however, did not take any steps to improve its counterintelligence or adapt to the improved capacity of its adversary, further illustrating that the elusiveness of the organisation was both because of the authorities’ incompetence but also because of their own unwillingness or inadequacy to adapt to changing external factors.

¹⁴⁰ Lygeros, S. (2003). Op. Cit.

¹⁴¹ Sakellariou, A., (2003). Op. Cit.

Organisational Profile: The Red Army Faction

Chapter IV

4.1 Introduction

The Red Army Faction (RAF) was one of Europe's longest-running, lethal and dangerous terrorist groups. Its notoriety was achieved from carrying out "some of the most spectacular terrorist operations of all the indigenous groups in Europe" and on the heavy publicity of the organisation's first attacks.¹ This chapter will give a brief historical context of the sociopolitical reality of West Germany in the late 1960's which provided the background for the group's taking to arms, the formation of the organisation and the counterintelligence capabilities of the RAF and its adversary, the West German State. It will explore the group's three generations and the counterintelligence methods it utilised throughout them, before investigating the actions and reactions of the West German government, demonstrating the group's constant evolution and adaptability in response to setbacks. It will showcase how the targeting of the organisation by the West German State and its increasing sophistication in both legal and tactical measures led to the apprehension of the group's leadership and contributed to the group's eventual dissolution in 1998.

All aspects of the RAF's counterintelligence methods will be discussed in detail, as well as the responses and strategies of the group's adversary. Throughout its three generations of operations, four key counterintelligence threads persist:

1- *Organisational Structure as Counterintelligence*: The RAF adopted a highly decentralised and compartmentalised cell structure, limiting communication between different factions and aiming to reduce the risk that the capture of one member would compromise others.² The independent operation of each cell also made it difficult for law enforcement to dismantle the entire organisation through the capture of a few members. The organisational

¹ Pluchinsky D. An Organizational and Operational Analysis of Germany's Red Army Faction Terrorist Group (1972-91). In: Alexander Y, Pluchinsky D, ed. by. *European Terrorism Today & Tomorrow*. 1st ed. McLean, Virginia: Brassey's (US); 1992. p. 43-83.

² della Porta, D. (1995). *Terrorism in Context: Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995)., p.117-18

structure of the group evolved from a more centralised structure in the group's First Generation to a cell-based model as state pressure increased, in order to enhance secrecy and reduce vulnerability.

2- *Basic Counterintelligence Tactics to Ensure Operational Security*: The RAF was meticulous about operational security, implementing the use of code names between its members, avoiding routine patterns, and frequently changing safe houses to avoid detection. The group used forged documents and stolen identities, producing high-quality fake IDs, passports, and other documents to avoid detection during travels and operations.³ The organisation also took extensive measures to avoid police surveillance, using basic counter-surveillance techniques and dead drops for communication. The counterintelligence methods of the group evolved from basic denial to include adaptive denial as a response to increasing state capability through its generations, increasing the sophistication of its security measures and the quality of their forgeries and learning from its past mistakes.

3- *Sympathiser Networks as Counterintelligence*: The organisation maintained a network of safe houses in many parts of Germany and across Europe, many of which were often provided by sympathisers of the group. These safe houses offered the RAF a crucial capability to hide its members, store its weapons, and strategize its operations.⁴ With the rapidly increasing capabilities of its adversary, it expanded its underground network and its members constantly rotated between safe houses, avoiding long-term stays at any single location.

4- *Popular Support and Media Manipulation*: Possibly due to the founding members' connection to newspapers and media, through Meinhof's position in the left-wing magazine *konkret*, the RAF understood the power of media and public perception from its early days of operation.⁵ The arrested members of the organisation used their trial appearances to make political statements, furthering their cause while also protecting sensitive information.⁶ Through time, the group became even more active in its use of media, understanding its role in both recruiting new members and demoralising their opponents.

³ Aust, S. (1987). Baader-Meinhof Group. *The Inside Story of a Phenomenon*. Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome and London.

⁴ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 46

⁵ Rothenberger, L. (2017) 'A terrorist group's strategic communication—the case of the Red Army Faction', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(4), pp. 286–305. doi:10.1080/1553118x.2017.1339191.

⁶ Aust, S. (1987). Baader-Meinhof Group. *The Inside Story of a Phenomenon*. Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome and London.

Historical Background

The end of World War II saw Germany as a hybrid state split into two parts, occupied by the Soviet Union in the East and France, Britain and the United States in the West.⁷ Focusing on rebuilding itself and achieving economic stability, the West German state invested heavily in social reconciliation, financial solidity and the rebuilding of Germany's image internationally.⁸ The process led to West Germany's post-war economic boom, which was a result of a combination of heavy investments, the U.S. European Relief program and a change in the country's economic strategy. The combination of strategies created economic growth so significant that it was coined *Wirtschaftswunder*, the "German Economic Miracle" with the country's GDP increasing by 8% annually between 1950 and 1959.⁹

In order to achieve this significant growth and maintain high levels of economic prosperity, the country reinstated many members of authority to their positions held before the war, despite their close relations with the Third Reich. According to Graf, "almost all of the representatives of big business labelled as war criminals by the American Kilgore Commission in 1945 were back in their former positions by 1948; and of roughly 53,000 civil servants dismissed on account of their Nazi pasts after 1945 only about 1,000 remained permanently excluded, while the judiciary was almost 100 percent restored as early as 1946".¹⁰

The RAF was formed out of the 1960's student protest movement, in which the "children of the Nazi generation" revolted against what they feared was once again becoming an oppressive and authoritarian state, as well as due to the culmination of negative sentiments against the United States of America and American imperialism as demonstrated in the U.S. led War in Vietnam.¹¹ In the three decades of its operation, the group made significant changes in its leadership, counterintelligence, goals and operational strategy, leading to the distinction between three "Generations" of RAF activity.

The *first generation*, which was active between 1968 and 1977, started its operations with the goal of protesting against the perceived indifference of the West German population to the treatment of the Vietnamese by the United States as well as rebelling against a generation

⁷ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013) *The Red Army Faction*. Montreal, Quebec: Kersplebedeb; p. 3

⁸ Thomas N. (2003) *Protest movements in 1960s West Germany*. Oxford: Berg; 2003., p.13

⁹ Eichengreen, B., Ritschl, A. (2008). Understanding West German economic growth in the 1950s. *Cliometrica*. 3(3):191-219.

¹⁰ Graf W. (1984). Anti- Communism in the Federal Republic of Germany. *Socialist Register*., p.167.

¹¹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

that had accepted the atrocities of Nazism,¹² as was stated in the trial following their first attack against two Frankfurt department stores in 1968.¹³ The group's leadership were Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof and Jan-Carl Raspe. Baader and Ensslin were a couple studying in the Free University of Berlin whose first fire bomb attacks drew "the attention of the politically engaged, disaffected Berlin youth, including Ulrike Meinhof, a journalist-turned-political activist who became one of the group's core members" and eventually part of its leadership.¹⁴ During this period, the RAF launched several attacks, mainly bombings, seeking to use methods that would incite support from the public toward their cause.¹⁵ In this era of the organisation's operations, coined the "Baader-Meinhof years", the organisation was composed by between twenty to thirty core members who were responsible for the logistical tasks of the RAF (acquiring anything the group might need ranging from money, weapons, safe houses, cars and documents) as well as operational tasks and orchestrating and participating in attacks. The rest of its members were sympathisers who provided the group with other, not as fundamental, services.¹⁶ In 1972, ten members of the group, including its leadership, were arrested and imprisoned. The leadership of the group was then forced to operate from inside the prisons and continued to guide the RAF's operations and attacks by communicating with its supporters outside of prison - the time between 1973 and 1976, often called "the prison years".¹⁷ With the efforts of the group supporters to free its leadership failing, three of the leading members of the group, Baader, Raspe and Ensslin, committed suicide.¹⁸

The *second generation*, which was active between 1972 and 1982 consisted of two distinct periods: the first period (1972-1977) in which the goal of the organisation was to free its imprisoned leadership, and the second period (1977-1984) in which the group's operational strategy shifted to launching attacks against U.S. and NATO targets.¹⁹ The leadership of the second generation shifted from the imprisoned leaders to Brigitte Monhaupt and Christian Klar,

¹² Aust, S, (2008) *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F*, trans. by Anthea Bell, (London: The Bodley Head,), p. 37.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kometer, M. W. (2004). *The New Terrorism: The Nature of the War on Terrorism*. Air University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13900>

¹⁵ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

¹⁶ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 46

¹⁷ Moghadam, A. (2012), Op. Cit.

¹⁸ Aust, S, (2008) *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F*, trans. by Anthea Bell, (London: The Bodley Head,), p. 37.

¹⁹ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 47

coining this era as the “Mohnhaupt-Klar years”.²⁰ Mohnhaupt and Klar were eventually arrested in November 1978 and provided the group with some operational guidance from prison but their presence in the RAF was not as prominent as that of Baader and Ensslin during their own imprisonment.²¹ Terrorist operations during the second generation included a 1975 attack against West Germany’s Embassy in Stockholm, in which the group attempted to negotiate the release of the RAF prisoners by taking hostages, the kidnapping and eventual assassination of industrialist and former SS member Hans Martin Schleyer, and the assassinations of “representatives of the 'Military-Industrial Complex’”.²² Additionally, the operational focus of the RAF was not centred around the release of the leadership of the second generation from prison.²³ During this period, the group engaged heavily with its support base which provided it with safehouses and operational support. After the arrest of the organisation’s leadership as well as a large proportion of the RAF’s staunchest supporters, control of the group passed on to what would become the RAF’s third generation. The third generation of the group, which lasted from 1984 until the RAF’s eventual dissolution in 1998, saw the group change again, both in leadership and operational strategy. The RAF’s new leaders, Wolfgang Grams and Birgit Hogefeld “carried on the tradition of "anti-imperialist" rhetoric but picked a new target for their aggression – the continent of Europe itself”.²⁴ The organisation’s new targets were state representatives, bankers and industry leaders and the RAF now sought to establish a “West European Guerrilla”, calling upon all European terrorist groups to join them in creating it. Following the collapse of the USSR and the gradual receding of Communism from Europe, the group faced difficulties in redefining and reorienting itself, causing its eventual dissolution.²⁵ The group announced its cease-fire in April 1998 in a communiqué sent to Reuters.²⁶

²⁰ Herf, J. (2007). “An Age of Murder: Ideology and Terror in Germany”. Originally delivered as the opening lecture of the lecture series “The ‘German Autumn’ of 1977: Terror, State, and Society in West Germany,” held at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, on Thursday, September 27, 2007.

²¹ Horchem, H. (1991). "The Decline of the Red Army Faction," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 2, 65.

²² Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

²³ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 47

²⁴ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

²⁵ Pluchinsky, (1993). Op. Cit. p. 135-157.

²⁶ The Red Army Faction communique, April 10, 1992

Counterintelligence

The RAF had to constantly adapt to the rapidly improving methods of the West German state, its high levels of adaptability and willingness to learn from past mistakes rendering it one of the longest lasting European terrorist organisations. Starting with rudimentary or non-existent counterintelligence tactics and improving in each generation, the RAF persistently bettered its counterintelligence methods to achieve more sophisticated and strategically technical operations. In its years of operation, the RAF had a fluid relationship with the public, which initially supported it, but losing its support after its attacks were perceived as too violent, only to regain popular support while its leadership and key members were in prison. The group's sympathisers played a major part in the group's capability to evade authorities as well as carry out attacks both nationally and internationally, with the support network of the group allowing it to "plug into for operational or evasive purposes".²⁷ The RAF would expand its counterintelligence capabilities gradually, increasing its resources and leveraging popular support to expand its size and network of supporters. The counterintelligence tactics of the Three Generations of the RAF and how those were reflected through the group's popular support and organisational structure will be analysed below.

4.2 Organisational Structure

Throughout its generations, the RAF did not form a monolithic organisation and consisted of different parts, each with different strategic and operational capabilities. The group utilised a loose organisational structure with cells in different cities, differentiating itself from contemporary left-wing West German groups like the *Revolutionary Cells* and the *2 June Movement*, by making their cell structures more structured and hierarchical.²⁸ Utilising the structure of the group to achieve improved counterintelligence capabilities, the organisation was divided into four components. These were, as described by Pluchinsky,

- (1) the commando or command level,

²⁷ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 44

²⁸ della Porta, D. (1995). *Terrorism in Context: Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p.117-18

- (2) the prison level,
- (3) the resistance level, and
- (4) the sympathiser level.²⁹

The (1) *commando level* consisted of between fifteen to twenty-five of the group's most committed and devoted members, responsible for the completion of the group's most complex and lethal operations. These members lived "an illegal, totally clandestine life".³⁰ The (2) *prison level*, which was established following the incarceration of the group's leadership, constituted of the group's imprisoned members. The main task of the prison level was to "maintain group discipline and cohesion in the prisons and to conduct the occasional hunger strike to mobilise the outside".³¹ The prison level was the most important and fundamental part of the organisation, responsible for operational decisions as well as being the RAF's "raison d'être". Essentially, especially in its second generation, the group existed with the sole goal of ensuring the release of its leadership from prison and its attacks were utilised as a means of increasing pressure to achieve that.

Following the 1977 suicides of Ensslin and Baader the dominance of the group shifted from the prison level to the commando level. RAF imprisoned members continued to provide the group with operational input in its next years of operation and coordination with the commando level continued to stay strong, especially during the hunger strikes undertaken by the group's imprisoned members, eleven of which took place between 1973 to 1990.

The (3) *resistance level* consisted of the RAF's approximately 200 militant supporters, who did not live clandestinely but supported the commando level in periods of non-operation. If the resistance level was to launch attacks, these would be low-level bombings in support of the group's bigger operations or the RAF's imprisoned members. The resistance level also offered the RAF with a pool from which to recruit from should the commando level was to incur any losses because of arrests or death.³²

The (4) *sympathiser level*, consisted of the group's more general popular support who were aligned with the RAF's goals and mission but did not take part in clandestine operations

²⁹ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 50

³⁰ Amados, B. S., (2003) "The Federal Republic of Germany and Left-Wing Terrorism" *Naval Postgraduate School*, Monterey, California. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA420476.pdf> [Retrieved 10/03/2022]

³¹ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 52

³² Pluchinsky D. (1992) Ibid.

or illegal activity.³³ This level maintained the same amount of responsibility in the group's years of operation, providing the group with support (both propaganda and physical) and communicating the RAF's cause and the situation of its prisoners. This level was responsible for the publication of and distribution of RAF propaganda, and the "mobilisation of the militant left scene in Germany to support the RAF and its goals".³⁴ Support included "going to various meetings, workshops, protests and so forth in other European countries (mostly Spain, France, Italy and Belgium) where terrorist sympathisers in those countries are also trying to attract publicity for their imprisoned members".³⁵

Brigitte Mohnhaupt, described the group's structure in her testimony at the Stammheim trial:

*There were eight groups established in six cities, and of these there were two strong groups in two cities. The groups, the different units were integrated into a logistical system. There was contact between the different groups for discussion, but they were autonomous in their decisions regarding how to carry out operations. That was left to the individual groups. [...] We didn't know anything in advance about these actions. [...] Even if we had known, we wouldn't have prevented them, because it's not a simple thing to stop a group from doing what it has decided to do.*³⁶

The RAF's loose organisational structure, its rampant recruitment of new members and its low vetting practices, caused the group to face difficulties in maintaining strong bonds between its members, thus compromising its counterintelligence capabilities. The shifts in support from the public and the organisation's sympathisers made the group vulnerable to betrayal and police collusion. Members of the group would leave the group constantly, often collaborating with police when arrested.³⁷ Karl-Heinz Ruhland, who was arrested in December 1970 "cooperated with police, helping to reveal the location of safehouses and testifying in court against RAF members".³⁸ Following anonymous tips made to the police, five members

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p.50

³⁶ Testimony of Brigitte Monhaupt, Stammheim trial, July 22, 1976, in Smith and Moncourt, p.173

³⁷ Colvin, S. (2009) *Ulrike Meinhof and West German terrorism: Language, violence, and identity*. Rochester, UNITED STATES: Camden House., p.100

³⁸ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013)., Op. Cit.

of the group were arrested on October 8 1970, including Mahler.³⁹ By the group's own admission in *The Urban Guerilla Concept*, (Mahler's arrest) "was not done due to carelessness on our part, but to betrayal. The traitor was one of us. There is no guarantee against that for people who do what we do".⁴⁰ Ulrike Meinhof was turned in by the left-wing trade unionist who had offered her shelter for the night on June 15, 1972.⁴¹ Klaus Junschke and Irmgard Moller were also arrested after they were turned in by a nineteen-year-old recruit of the organisation on July 17th, 1972.⁴² The arrest of group members created both a physical and emotional distance between its imprisoned and free members, further alienating the core of the group from its sympathisers.

The lack of close relationships between the group's members was also highlighted in the willingness many members of the organisation had to speak to the media after leaving the group. After leaving the RAF, Beate Sturm contacted the Spiegel newspaper and painted the group in a highly unflattering light, coining her a "traitor" by the group.⁴³

The organisation had expressed its thoughts on traitors in its manifesto *Serve the People: The Urban Guerrilla and Class Struggle*:

*Traitors must be excluded from the ranks of the revolution. Tolerance in the face of traitors produces more treason. Traitors in the ranks of the revolution cause more harm than the police can without traitors. We believe that is a general rule. It is impossible to know how much they will betray if they are threatened. Given that they are little pigs, one cannot permit them to be in a situation where they can be blackmailed. Capital will continue to turn people into little pigs until we overthrow its rule. We are not responsible for the capital's crimes.*⁴⁴

However, despite this strong statement and the high number of informants and defectors the RAF was eventually faced with, there are only two documented cases of informants facing consequences from the organisation. The first is that of Edelgard Graefer, who was arrested and threatened that "she would never see her child again unless she told [police] what she

³⁹ Billig, O. (1985) 'The lawyer terrorist and his comrades', *Political Psychology*, 6(1), p. 29. doi:10.2307/3791269.

⁴⁰ The Urban Guerilla concept, Smith and Moncourt, p.85

⁴¹Eager, P.W. (2016) *From Freedom Fighters to terrorists' women and political violence*. London: Taylor and Francis.

⁴²Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p.172

⁴³ Colvin, S. (2009) *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁴ The Red Army Faction (1972) *Serve the People: The Urban Guerilla and Class Struggle*, p.21 (online) Available at: https://socialhistoryportal.org/sites/default/files/raf/en/0019720501%2520EN_4.pdf (Retrieved 28 October 2022)

knew”, leading to the arrest of twelve RAF members.⁴⁵ In March 1972, an envelope enclosing a picture of Graefer covered in what was thought to be tar holding a typed note with the words “This is Eldegard Graefer, an informer who is hand in glove with the killer pigs. Long live the RAF!” was sent to the German Press Agency in Berlin. Graefer stopped working with the police following this attack.⁴⁶ Other than this case and a physical assault on a known informant by RAF members, as described by Brigitte Mohnhaupt in Stammheim, there is no record of the RAF attempting to silence or assassinate defectors or informants.⁴⁷ In terms of counterintelligence, informants not facing consequences poses a dangerous risk to the organisation, as informants can both compromise attacks as well as the safety of the group’s members. In comparison to other organisations, like Al-Qaeda, which executed defectors to punish as well as make an example out of,⁴⁸ or the PIRA who punished informants severely in order to achieve confidentiality from the community⁴⁹, this lack of vengefulness from the RAF is worth noting in terms of the group’s counterintelligence capability.

4.3 Popular Support

Public opinion was shaped by both the group’s operation and their ideological background, as well as police reaction in response to the RAF. The killing of individuals that were either related to the organisation or perceived to have a relation to it by the police drove public outrage and led to demonstrations taking place all over Germany. The July, 1971 killing of Petra Schelm, a 19-year-old RAF member, during a firefight involving police in Hamburg led to widespread outrage.⁵⁰ In a 1971 poll regarding the actions of the organisation, “40 percent of respondents described the RAF’s violence as political, not criminal, in motive; 20 percent indicated that they could understand efforts to protect fugitives from capture; and 6 percent confessed that they were themselves willing to conceal a fugitive”.⁵¹ This sentiment by

⁴⁵Aust, S. and Bell, A. (2009). *Baader-Meinhof. The Inside Story of the R.A.F.* New York: Oxford University Press. P.133-34

⁴⁶Ibid., p.133

⁴⁷ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit p.161

⁴⁸ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.115

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.40

⁵⁰ Stefanik, C.L. (2009). *West German Terror: The Lasting Legacy of the Red Army Faction.*

Available at:

https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1245696702&disposition=in line (Retrieved 02/03/2022)

⁵¹ Varon J. *Bringing the war home.* Berkeley: Univ. of California Press; 2007., p.199

the public was one of the biggest supportive factors to the group's counterintelligence capability, as the fact that they could find refuge in the homes of sympathisers, allowed them to avoid police investigations and raids.

In its harnessing of popular support for human resources, the group increased its recruitment efforts expanding its numbers and making new contacts - some of the new recruits would play a significant role in the future of the RAF, as they would dedicate their lives to the RAF's armed struggle. Initially, the group recruited "through the court-mandated social work of Baader and Ensslin", attracting members such as "Peter-Jürgen Book, a lost and impressionable young man who had dropped out of his apprenticeship, was arrested for drug possession, and ended up helping to start a riot in juvenile detention".⁵²

The second generation of the group thus expanded the RAF's counterintelligence capabilities especially in terms of popular support. Rather than aiming for a wide base of supporters, the RAF structured its sympathisers to accommodate its tactical counterintelligence as well as its organisational structure. The group shifted in focus between aiming for the release of the RAF leadership from prison to more tactical attacks, giving way to the Third Generation once Mohnhaupt and Klar were arrested. As a method of aggrandizing itself and demonstrating that the group enjoyed international support, the group began dedicating its attacks to terrorists that were not part of the RAF in 1984 showcasing their support of an anti-imperialist European terrorist front.⁵³ By making dedications to members of GRAPO, the Red Brigades, an American Black Panther militant and the PFLP-GC "was a way to propagandise the front and give the impression, albeit a false one, that the front had broad support among the other European terrorist groups".⁵⁴ As a method of revitalising its popular support and rousing sympathy from the public, the RAF imprisoned members also often used hunger strikes as a tool for attracting attention both within Germany and internationally as well as increasing sympathy for its cause.⁵⁵

The group employed strategic use of the media, not only through its violent actions but also through the carefully managed representation of its members in legal and public contexts,

⁵² Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.10(2).

⁵³ Horchem, H. (1989). The Lost Revolution of West Germany's Terrorists. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1, no. 3: 353-360.

⁵⁴ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit.,. p. 49

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 51

a tactic referred to as "propaganda of the deed".⁵⁶ In court proceedings, the defendants did not deny their involvement in the attacks but instead leveraged the attention of the press to construct an image of defiance. Using such calculated displays, the organisation captured public and media attention, amplifying its message through symbolic gestures.

The accused, who did not deny their offence, offered the press what it had been waiting for by their habitus and gestures. Baader and Ensslin acted like Bonnie and Clyde and hugged each other in front of the photographers, Gudrun Ensslin even dressed up for the hearing with a new red leather jacket, and put on dark eye make-up in the style of the French existentialists⁵⁷

The group's media strategy evolved with the RAF's second generation, its development becoming particularly evident during the hostage-taking and occupation of the German embassy in Stockholm in 1975. For the first time, the group sought to directly involve established media outlets in its communication strategy, explicitly demanding that the media broadcast their communiqués and letters claiming responsibility without any edits or delays.⁵⁸ The group also dictated that any government communications, including the announcement of any decisions made regarding prisoner releases, should be delivered through the media. This change in strategy reflected the RAF's desire not only to shape its narrative but also to impose procedural expectations on both media and government.

The developing approach to the media was also represented in the abduction of Hanns Martin Schleyer in 1977, serving as the most calculated and deliberate example of the RAF's attempt to influence public opinion.⁵⁹ Over the course of 43 days, the group issued nine written statements, made several phone calls and produced videos, employing both violent and nonviolent communication methods. While the RAF's media strategy succeeded in generating "agenda-setting" and "status conferring" public awareness,⁶⁰ it fell short in mobilising

⁵⁶ Waldmann, P. (2005). Terrorismus und öffentliche Wahrnehmung. [Terrorism and public perception] In J. Klußmann (Ed.), *Terrorismus und Medien: Eine komplexe Beziehung* (Dokumentation der Tagung 25/2004, 6.-8. September 2004) (pp. 9–20). Bonn, Germany: Evangelische Akademie im Rheinland.

⁵⁷ Elter, A. (2008). *Propaganda der Tat: Die RAF und die Medien*. [Propaganda of the deed: the RAF in action]. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Weisbrod, B. (2010). Terrorism as performance: The assassinations of Walther Rathenau and Hanns-Martin Schleyer. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 365–394). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0383-9_15

⁶⁰ Elter, A. (2008). Op. Cit.

meaningful public support. As the German public did not see the organisation as a viable alternative to the status quo, despite its sophisticated use of public relations and propaganda, the RAF failed to transform the attention it garnered into political consensus or action mobilisation. Instead, the group's efforts resulted only in recognition, rather than the active support it sought to foster. Despite "the extreme professionalism in its "media management," its publicity activities, the RAF was able to achieve a status—in a communication sense, but not in achieving its real-world political objectives. Here, the RAF failed miserably".⁶¹

The popular support enjoyed by the group remained constant during the Mohnhaupt-Klar years. As a result, the sympathisers of the group increased and the interaction between them and the RAF's commando levels grew. The sympathiser sector of the group started getting involved in terrorist attacks, when "during a hunger strike by the prisoners or after a commando-level operation, carry out low-level bombings designed to cause property damage and not casualties", designed to complement the RAF's operations.⁶² The support sector also became an important recruiting tool for the group, allowing the RAF to quickly replace its personnel losses with sympathisers. According to Pluchinsky, during the Mohnhaupt-Klar years, about twenty commando members were arrested, five were killed by police, two surrendered and ten left the organisation voluntarily.⁶³ These individuals were replaced by the support sector for the group, further increasing the interaction between the two levels. A letter from the RAF commando level to the police following two attacks against a U.S. Air Force base in 1981, highlights the importance of the group's support system and the arrest of RAF members and sympathisers.⁶⁴ The group stated that "both operations have been pre-checked, prepared and executed from beginning to end by RAF members. Much is possible in cooperation between us and non-illegals, but not the kind of closeness and intensity in the actual operation that the police allege".⁶⁵ The uniqueness of this letter lies in that the RAF had never before sent a personal letter to police, and had never so openly revealed its operational capacity - but did so for the first time to draw a distinction between the commando level and

⁶¹ Rothenberger, L. (2017). A Terrorist Group's Strategic Communication—The case of the Red Army faction. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(4), 286–305.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2017.1339191>

⁶² Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit. p. 47

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ The Red Army Faction, (1981) communiqué, "On the Arrests of the "Legal" Resistance, dated November 7, 1981

⁶⁵ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 45

its supporters and urge the release of its supporters from prison. It thus engaged in a counterintelligence trade-off: revealing some tactical information to authorities (the pre-checking and preparation of the attack as well as the collaboration of the commando level with “non-illegals”) but backing up the organisation’s support level to reinforce its supporters and thus their loyalty to the RAF.

Popular support started to shift and public perception began to change following the “May Offensive”, a violent period in the group’s operation which claimed multiple victims, as the frequency and brutality of the attacks alienated many of the group’s sympathisers. Smith and Moncourt note that “Those who had seen them as modern day Robin Hoods, or as romantic idealists, took a step back once they realised that this was for real”.⁶⁶ The attacks also alienated liberal sympathisers, including the Maoist K-groups, the Communist Student Association (KSV) and the Communist League (KB).⁶⁷ The KSV pointedly commented that *[the RAF violence is] neither practised by the masses...nor is it understood by the masses as an expression of their interests. The masses, on the contrary, perceive the actions as a threat and therefore identify with the reactions of the state apparatus... The violence is not revolutionary. It sabotages the struggle against state repression in that it helps to conceal the class character of this repression and encourages the isolation of communists*⁶⁸

Increased policing in city streets and borders started to affect public perception even further, as citizens who had little or no involvement with the RAF became subject to police scrutiny. Until the “May Offensive”, the public experienced the group’s activities through the media, but after the attacks the public “became direct participants to the drama” as they now “encountered roadblocks and checkpoints, endured searches, and responded to pleas for information to aid state investigators”.⁶⁹ Liberal sympathisers also started to withdraw their support following the injuries sustained by the workers at Springer headquarters with an RAF member noting that sympathisers would no longer support fugitives, threatening to turn them in to the police.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p. 166

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 168

⁶⁸ Varon, J. (2004) Op. Cit., p.214-215

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Baumann M. *Terror or love? Bommi Baumann's Own Story of His Life as a West German Urban Guerrilla*. New York: Grove Press; 1979., p.110

The generational transitions of the group led to its increasing introspection, decreasing its capacity to inspire a long-lasting following.⁷¹ Entering its final decade of operation, the RAF “became increasingly isolated and irrelevant, arguably bearing little relation to its founders” and by the organisation's own admission in a 1992 communiqué, “none of its current members predated 1984”.⁷² With popular support waning as its ideology was becoming increasingly irrelevant, the dissolution of the group was announced in 1998.

4.4 Resources

In its first years of operation and throughout its activity, the RAF would need resources, operational deliverables and a strategy to achieve its political goals. Prioritising the acquisition of resources, the RAF started collecting tools to enhance its counterintelligence capabilities, including funds, cars and safehouses,⁷³ burglarising small town halls and taking documents, passports and official stamps to use for the creation of false identities.⁷⁴ Focused on expanding its resources, the group committed nine bank robberies between September 1970 to February 1972.⁷⁵ Following Meinhof's arrest on June 15th 1972, police found an arsenal of pistols, hand-grenades, a machine pistol, ammunition that included expanding bullets and a 4.5kg bomb in Meinhof's apartment.⁷⁶ The group would continue its operations with bombings in different West German cities, May 1972 seeing the most violent era of the group come to life, in what would later be called the “May Offensive”.⁷⁷ Within one month, the RAF launched a campaign of bombing attacks, with targets including the U.S. army V corps headquarters in Frankfurt, the police station of Augsburg, a Federal Supreme Court Judge and the Springer Press headquarters. The attacks caused damage to infrastructure and killed three individuals whilst injuring over fifty.⁷⁸ It has been noted that in the “May Offensive”, “although people were injured or killed in most of these bombings, with the exception of the Buddenberg

⁷¹ Cronin, A.K. (2011) in *How terrorism ends: Understanding the decline and demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 98

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷³ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). *Op. Cit.*, p. 59

⁷⁴ Passmore, L. (2011) *Ulrike Meinhof and the Red Army Faction: Performing Terrorism*. Palgrave Macmillan., p.34

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.33

⁷⁶ Thomas, p.210

⁷⁷ Passmore, L. (2011) *Op. Cit.* p.34

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211

bombing, they differ from later RAF attacks in not being directed against specific individuals”.⁷⁹

For the acquisition of funds, the group resorted to bank robberies, including the September 1970 simultaneous armed robbery of three banks in Berlin, totalling 220,000 DM. The group would continue with the armed bank robbery of three banks in January and December 1971 and one in February 1972.⁸⁰ A former member of the RAF, Monika Berberich would later say that “It was not about redistributing wealth, it was about getting money, and we weren’t going to mug grannies on the streets”.⁸¹ The expansion of the group’s resources and the establishment of its ideology and tactical capability, meant that the organisation could also focus on leveraging popular support to expand its network of sympathisers in order to provide for better cover and protection in the conduct of its operations.

4.5 Counterintelligence

In the earliest stages of the group’s activity, its counterintelligence methods were few, if non-existent, as demonstrated by the immediate arrest of the members who organised the group’s first attack. In April 1968, petrol bombs with timing devices detonated in two department stores in Frankfurt, causing 700,000 DM worth of damage. The attacks claimed no victims as the explosions were planned for midnight, when the stores would be closed.⁸² The four perpetrators of the firebombings, Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader, Horst Söhnlein and Thorwald Proll, were arrested two days after the attacks. It was noted that the group showcased “few precautions to protect their identities and avoid arrest [...] and, in retrospect, the action appearing almost flippant in its execution”.⁸³ The counterintelligence failures of the attack led to the group’s peers to “wonder privately”, “at how clumsily the whole thing had been carried out, some even supposing that the four might suffer from some “psychic failure”, a

⁷⁹ A Brief History of the Red Army Fraction [Internet]. Hartford-hwp.com. 2021 [cited 8 September 2021]. Available from: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/61/191.html>

⁸⁰ Passmore, L. (2011) *Op. Cit.* p.34

⁸¹ De Groot, G. (2011). *The Seventies Unplugged*. Pan Publishing; Unabridged edition.

⁸² Aust, S. and Bell, A. (2009). *Op. Cit.* p.32

⁸³ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). *Op. Cit.*, p.48

subconscious desire to go to jail”.⁸⁴ The members were imprisoned but when they were released on appeal and ordered to return to prison, only Söhnlein did. Ensslin and Baader fled to Paris and upon their return, Baader was rearrested and imprisoned on April 3d, 1970.⁸⁵

After Baader’s rearrest in 1970, the group created a plan to break him out of prison, in a significantly counterintelligence-heavy operation. Meinhof used her position as a journalist and the guise of writing a book about youth centres with Baader as a contributor, in order to gain access to him at the Institute for Social Issues Library in West Berlin.⁸⁶ Once Meinhof was granted access, three more armed members of the group entered the building after a short crossfire in which a librarian, Georg Linke, was shot in the liver.⁸⁷ The members of the group, including Baader, escaped by jumping from the library’s window and into a getaway car.⁸⁸ The successful operation showcased what would become an increasing refinement and sophistication of an organisation that was growing both in size and operational capability. The escape was one of the organisation’s most advanced operations in terms of counterintelligence, putting the newly established organisation in headlines across the world, which according to Astrid Proll, who had been the driver of the getaway car, “accelerated the development of the underground life of the group”.⁸⁹ Breaking Baader out of prison solidified the group as an organisation, indicating the unofficial start date of the “Baader-Meinhof” gang, as it was called by the government and press at the time.⁹⁰

After Baader’s prison break, the need for more organised and strategic planning arose as the group needed to gain practical skills to conduct its attacks as well as avoid detection. By using false identities, the group travelled to Jordan with the assistance of Said Dudin, an RAF member who acted as an intermediary between the organisation and the PLO’s Al Fatah.⁹¹ The group received arms training from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)⁹², which included learning to shoot with various weapons, throwing of hand grenades and guerrilla tactics.⁹³ Thereafter, the RAF would find temporary refuge as well as gain many of

⁸⁴ Aust, S. (1987). Op. Cit.. p. 51-2

⁸⁵ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p.50

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.44

⁸⁷ Rethmann, P. (2006)., Op. Cit.

⁸⁸ Aust, S. (1987). Op. Cit., p. 6-7

⁸⁹ Proll, A. (1998) Baader Meinhof: Pictures on the Run 67-77: Zurich: Scalo, p.10

⁹⁰ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

⁹¹ Vague, T. (2005) in *Televisionaries: The Red Army Faction Story 1963-1993*. Edinburgh: AK Press, p. 21.

⁹² Thomas, N. (2003) *Protest movements in 1960s West Germany*. Oxford: Berg., p. 34

⁹³ Aust, S. (1987). Op. Cit., p.67-68

its operational skills in Arab countries like Lebanon and Yemen where they would be hosted and trained by revolutionary Palestinian organisations.⁹⁴ Following their return to Germany from Jordan, the members of the nascent RAF would remain on the run.⁹⁵ In order to remain undetected, the group utilised Carlos Marighella's concept of the "Urban Guerrilla" and followed Marighella's instructions as they were presented in his "Mini Handbook of the Urban Guerrilla".⁹⁶ According to his guidelines, RAF members "prepared for life in the underground, began carrying false identification documents, conducted bank-robberies to finance themselves, used safe houses, and always carried hand weapons on their bodies in order to forcefully resist arrest, if necessary".⁹⁷

Following the 1972 "May Offensive", a month of RAF attacks against the German judiciary, American military forces and the conservative publishing house Springer Press in which a total of four people were killed and over sixty were injured, the West German Government doubled down in its efforts to dismantle the organisation.⁹⁸ Several RAF members were arrested, including the group's key members Baader, Meinhof, and Ensslin. The arrest and imprisonment of so many of the group's members led many to think that the operational devastation of the RAF meant that the organisation's operations were over. However, the group maintained its ideological positioning and tactical capability from prison, using its lawyers as a conduit of communication with the rest of the organisation.⁹⁹ This counterintelligence tactic of the organisation meant that the leadership could participate and organise RAF operations indirectly, until their suicide in 1977. Isolated in the high-security wing of Stammheim prison, the prisoners received the news with mail sent to and from their lawyers, rendering the offices of the group's lawyer Kurt Groenewold "the contact and switchboard centre for information for all prisoners and between lawyers offices as well as for the committees".¹⁰⁰ The imprisoned RAF members utilised their defence attorneys (or "Red Lawyers") as a counterintelligence method for the dissemination of information between the imprisoned members as well as between the group's leadership and the outside world, communicating with the commandos to

⁹⁴ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p. 57

⁹⁵ Passmore, L. (2011) Op. Cit.

⁹⁶ Moghadam, A. (2012), Op. Cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Hanshew, K. (2012) "sympathy for the devil?" the West German left and the challenge of terrorism', *Contemporary European History*, 21(4), pp. 511–532. doi:10.1017/s0960777312000355.

⁹⁹ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p. 187

¹⁰⁰ Aust, S. (1987). Op. Cit., p.196

stage more attacks.¹⁰¹ The prisoners' mail was sent to each other utilising the lawyers as a conduit and the lack of censoring by the remand judges enabled them to both communicate as well as create "an extensive library of handbooks on the detonation of explosive devices, means of preventing such devices from being deactivated, on recent police methods of hunting suspects, on new weapons, alarm systems, industrial security forces, miniaturised spying devices, the construction of police roadblocks and similar subjects".¹⁰²

In its second generation, the RAF would continue to learn to adapt to its adversary, both in terms of attack sophistication as well as counterintelligence tradecraft. The group's operations became more targeted and symbolic (aeroplane hijackings, bombings, assassinations and kidnappings) claiming few victims but achieving high impact and visibility for the organisation's cause. The group would follow its potential targets extensively, noting their habits and routine before acting out an attack¹⁰³ and would be consistent in trying to identify potential weaknesses of a target's protection it could exploit rather than moving on to a target that would be easier to approach.¹⁰⁴ According to Pluchinsky, during this period the RAF was willing to go after well-protected targets "indicating the audacity and stubbornness of [the organisation's] commando level", utilising counterintelligence techniques to "look for a flaw in the target's security measures and [constructing] an operational plan to take advantage of that flaw".¹⁰⁵

In aiming to make their counterintelligence tactics more sophisticated, the group utilised several methods of basic denial. It started using regular cars to avoid being detected - in contrast to "the flashy sports cars that Baader liked" that were used in the first years of the RAF's operations.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the RAF started borrowing apartments from friends and supporters instead of renting them, in order to minimise the number of individuals that could act as witnesses and compromise the members of the group. Following the 1982 arrest of the group's commando level, in which authorities discovered the group's safehouses and confiscated the organisation's weapons, documents and money, the RAF had to establish new

¹⁰¹ Weil, A. (2017). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰² Aust, S. and Bell, A. (2009). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰³ Horchem, H. (1980). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Pluchinsky D. (1992) *Op. Cit.* p. 55

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Weil, A. (2017). *Op. Cit.* 10(2).

caches and “acquire weapons and explosives, procure money and develop a political-military strategy” as well as put new operational leaders in place.¹⁰⁷

The Third Generation of the RAF increased the levels of counterintelligence sophistication even further, utilising both basic and adaptive denial techniques. In order to avoid repeating previous mistakes and to stay ahead of its adversary, the group studied the court cases of the previous two generations to identify weaknesses and weak spots in the RAF’s counterintelligence methods.¹⁰⁸ Members of the third generation “even began to apply an ointment to their fingertips when they realised that police were lifting fingerprints from toilet seats and refrigerators”.¹⁰⁹ By utilising such methods, the third generation increased its capability to evade arrest and identification by authorities and while the RAF first generation was largely arrested within two months in 1972, “not a single safe house used by RAF members was found” after 1984, despite the group’s operational activity remaining equal to that of previous years.¹¹⁰

However, the RAF started to decline despite its tactical successes, failing to galvanise popular support, shifting in ideology and objectives often and turning away potential recruits and supporters.¹¹¹ The dissolution of the Soviet Union also contributed to the “perfect storm”, as the RAF suffered from “ideological fatigue”, lacking a robust ideological background and a northern star for its operational goals.¹¹²

4.6 Adversary Counterintelligence Capabilities

Throughout its years of operation, the RAF had a formidable and capable opponent - the West German State, which adjusted its intelligence efforts constantly, capitalising on both its tactical and legal capability to adapt to the increasing terrorist threat. The fear of the government in appearing to be incompetent was existential, as noted by its Attorney General Ludwig Martin, who said that “the longer the Baader-Meinhof gang remains at large, the easier it will be for the public to gain the impression that the powers of the state have broken down”.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit.. p. 48

¹⁰⁸ Kempe, Frederick (1991), Quoted in Weil, 2017., Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.10(2).

¹¹⁰ Moghadam, A. (2012) Op. Cit.; Pluchinsky, (1992), Op. Cit., p.53

¹¹¹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.10(2).

¹¹² Pluchinsky, D. (1993). Op. Cit., pp.135-157.

¹¹³ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p.169

The centralised structure of the German State, which granted each state equal power with the central government initially caused difficulties in the effective and uniform targeting of the RAF. In order to achieve better management and cohesion to combat the RAF effectively, states voted to give the Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt*, or BKA) “final authority over all police activity” within the country in 1972.¹¹⁴ The BKA increased significantly both in size and budget in the 1970s and 1980s and the RAF was targeted both with paramilitary measures as well as with strict legal measures that were implemented throughout the two decades. As noted by Beatrice de Graaf, "until 1975, a national strategy was virtually absent"¹¹⁵, but once the RAF was recognized as a threat the West German State moved quickly and effectively to neutralise the threat, achieving the group’s decapitation two times and seeing the RAF to its eventual dissolution in 1998.

Tactical Approach

When the RAF first started its operations, both police and the RAF showed little to no sophistication in their capabilities. Despite the swift arrest and imprisonment of the organisation’s members in its early period of activity, the arrests had less to do with police efficiency and more with the group’s lack of sophisticated counterintelligence capability. The German State’s political police, the *Verfassungsschutz*, were responsible for tracking insurgent thought and expression in publicly available text (pamphlets, information in the press, speeches etc.) in addition to conducting and engaging in “covert surveillance, concealed photography, mail opening and telephone tapping and has used agents provocateurs and informers”.¹¹⁶ However, the validity of the information collected has been questioned, accused of being “hearsay evidence, malice, or mistaken identities”, with a Constitutional Court judge declaring that the files given as evidence by the service were “not worth the paper on which they are written”.¹¹⁷ The German state increased its efforts to dismantle the group following the publishing of the RAF’s *Urban Guerilla Concept*. In an operation labelled *Aktion Kora* in July 1971, armed police were tasked with patrolling cities and checkpoints were set across Northern

¹¹⁴ Rosenfeld, A. (2014). Militant Democracy: The Legacy of West Germany’s War on Terror in the 1970s, *The European Legacy* 19, no. 5, 577.

¹¹⁵ Graaf, B. D. (1990) *Op. Cit.* p.65

¹¹⁶ Braunthal G. (1990) Political loyalty and public service in West Germany. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press., p.42

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Germany.¹¹⁸ Arrests of key members quickly started taking place, with Andreas Baader, Holger Meins and Jan-Carl Raspe being identified upon their arrival to a safehouse in Frankfurt. Meins turned himself in, Raspe was arrested after an attempt to escape and Baader was shot in the leg by police and arrested.¹¹⁹ A week later, Gudrun Ennslin was also arrested in a store in Hamburg and Gerhard Möller and Ulrike Meinhof were apprehended in Hannover.¹²⁰

Following the “May Offensive” and the 1972 Black September terrorist attacks in Munich, in which 11 Israelis were killed in the Olympic Village during the Summer Olympics, the inefficiency of the German state at both preventing attacks and apprehending the group’s members was made embarrassingly clear - the West German State’s intelligence and policing tactics had to be drastically improved. The RAF bomb attacks of 1970 and 1971 led to “increasing and increasingly visible police control” with increased funds and resources directed to the State’s counterterrorism efforts.¹²¹ Horst Herold, previously the chief of the Nuremberg police, was appointed as the new Chief Commissioner to the *Bundeskriminalamt (BKA)*, the Federal Crime Bureau. With Herold at the helm of the BKA, the budget of the organisation increased from DM 54.8 million in 1971 to DM 290 million by 1991 and its staff size rose from 930 to 3,536 within two decades.¹²² Herold was appointed in the efforts to “approach the task in a scientific manner”, creating databases and filing systems of information to assist police procedures.¹²³ In the next eight years, Herold would collect “thirty-seven data files containing 4,7 million names and some 3,100 organisations[...] The fingerprints collection contained the prints of 2.1 million people. There was a photographic section with the pictures of 1.9 million people”.¹²⁴ Herold also set up a “Baader-Meinhof Special Commission”, making the takedown of the organisation a priority for the BKA. A crackdown operation was also launched, with the support of both West German and U.S. intelligence units and had over 130,000 police patrolling highways, cities and borders in West Germany for RAF fugitives.¹²⁵ A reward of 59,000USD was offered to anyone who assisted in their capture and lighter sentences were offered to those

¹¹⁸ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013) Op. City., p.107

¹¹⁹ Thomas, N. (2003) Op. Cit., p. 210

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Thomas, N. (2003) Op. Cit., p. 207; Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p.115

¹²² Rosenfeld, A. (2014). Op. Cit.

¹²³ Dobson, C. and Payne, R. (1993) *Counterattack: The West's battle against the terrorists*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International., p.103

¹²⁴ Aust, S. (1987). Op. Cit. pp. 141

¹²⁵ Varon, J. (2004) Op. Cit. ,p.214

who turned themselves in.¹²⁶ Axel Springer also offered a reward of 250,000DM for the arrest of the RAF.¹²⁷ The amount of information the police had collected was so vast, however, that it proved to be a hindrance in police operations as police had to sift through an enormous amount of information as well as establish cooperation in several governmental levels to achieve results. In 1977, a critical hint that would provide information on the location of kidnapped Schleyer was missed for almost a week as state and city level officials had difficulty cooperating.¹²⁸

Moreover, West Germany's interior ministers voted to establish a new unit to act as the country's frontline of defence. Responsible for the creation of this unit was the Federal Border Guard (BGS) because of its central control and its position as the main form of protection in embassies and airports.¹²⁹ The federal counterterrorism police unit that was created was called the GSG-9 (*Grenzschutzgruppe 9*)¹³⁰ and its members received months of additional training in comparison to their counterparts in other police units. GSG-9 members were trained in target practice and martial arts as well as psychology and "the origins, ideology, and tactics of terrorist groups".¹³¹ The training was "devoted to knowledge of the law, especially as it applies to anti-terrorist operations" and on special operations such as kidnappings and hijackings.¹³² An incident which showcased Herold's successful model of tracking terrorist activities was the investigation of the car crash that killed two RAF members in July 1980 (Wolfgang Beer and Juliane Plambeck) from which over 2.500 pieces of evidence and information was collected, providing police with warnings of an impending attack and leading to the seizing of four stolen cars that were planned to be used in an upcoming RAF operation.¹³³ GSG-9 saw its most major operations after 1977, during the activity of the RAF's second generation. The unit would go on to complete several special operations successfully, including "Operation Fire Magic", a 1977 hostage rescue mission in response to an aeroplane hijacking by the PFLP in Mogadishu,

¹²⁶ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op. Cit., p.170

¹²⁷ Thomas, N. (2003), Op. Cit.

¹²⁸ Sobieck, S M.(1994) Democratic Responses to International Terrorism in Germany. In *The Deadly Sin of Terrorism: Its Effect on Democracy and Civil Liberty in Six Countries*, edited by David Charters, 43-72. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994. p.60

¹²⁹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.10(2).

¹³⁰ Sobieck, S M. (1994) Op. Cit.

¹³¹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.10(2).

¹³² Dobson, C. and Payne, R. (1993) *Counterattack: The West's battle against the terrorists*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International., p.104.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.104.

Somalia¹³⁴ and “Operation Squirrel”, a 1982 mission led to the arrest of Mohnhaupt, Schulz and Klar, the leadership of the group’s second generation.¹³⁵ The early success of GSG-9, with the operational highlight of the Mogadishu raid, “served as a strong deterrent-no West German plane was ever hijacked afterwards”¹³⁶ provided the RAF with further motivation to circumvent the tactics and intelligence capabilities of that specific force.¹³⁷ The RAF’s third generation bypassed GSG-9’s capabilities by conducting “hit-and-run” attacks, which GSG-9 could not plan or prepare for in order to prevent.¹³⁸

Legal Approach

The West German state adjusted its federal legislation several times in order to combat and eradicate the RAF.¹³⁹ Laws were first passed to criminalise political and ideological dissent, with Article 21 of the Federal Republic’s Constitution stating that “Parties that, by reason of their aims or the behaviour of their adherents, seek to undermine or abolish the free democratic basic order or to endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany shall be unconstitutional”.¹⁴⁰ These constraints were rationalised as necessary, in order to “prevent the resurgence of Nazism” but the Article was also utilised to serve political means, as it led to the rendering illegal of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1951.¹⁴¹ In May 1968, the German Federal Parliament (*Bundestag*) passed an Emergency Powers Act (*Notstandsgesetze*) which provided the state with instruments to handle crises such as natural disasters or war, aimed to also allow for greater intervention capabilities against civil disobedience and dissent.¹⁴² Article 10 also removed previously set limitations on surveillance, and “empowered state officials, when necessary, [in order to] combat foreign or domestic enemies, to conduct telephone wiretaps and to interfere with postal correspondence”.¹⁴³

¹³⁴ Rosenfeld, A. (2014) "Militant Democracy: The Legacy of West Germany's War on Terror in the 1970s," *The European Legacy* 19, no. 5, p.568.

¹³⁵ Moghadam, A. (2012). *Op. Cit.*

¹³⁶ Weil, A. (2017). *Op. Cit.*10(2).

and Sobieck, S M. (1994) *Op. Cit* P.61

¹³⁷ Hoffman, B., and Taw, J. M., (1992). *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Insurgency*. RAND Corporation., p.133.

¹³⁸ Hoffman, B., and Taw, J. M., (1992). *Op. Cit.*

¹³⁹ Weil, A. (2017). *Op. Cit.*10(2).

¹⁴⁰ Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, Article 21 [Internet]. *Btg-bestellservice.de*. 2021 [cited 5 September 2021]. Available from: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/index.html

¹⁴¹ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). *Op. Cit.*, p.38

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³Collings J. (2015) *Democracy's guardians*. New York: Oxford University Press., p. 100

In 1971, legislation was passed to define terrorist acts and specify them as such under German law.¹⁴⁴ The planning, preparation or perpetration of acts such as hostage taking or aeroplane hijacking were criminalised and defined as terrorist acts and Amendment 129A, which “criminalised membership in a terrorist organisation, even if one had not participated in a terrorist act, with a five year maximum sentence”.¹⁴⁵ In 1972, the Anti-Radical Act, *Radikalenerlass*, was passed allowing for “loyalty checks of 3,5 million persons and the rejection of 2,250 civil service applicants”. Surveillance was so intense that “84 percent of university students [in Mannheim] refrained from regularly checking leftist materials out of public libraries for fear of being blacklisted” from civil service positions.¹⁴⁶ Concern for the collection of data on citizens grew and calls came for the passing of laws in restricting police surveillance and highlighting the individual’s right to privacy and protection against the collection of personal data.¹⁴⁷ In Braun’s words, which expressed the sentiment of ordinary Germans at the time, “we can always call for new laws when what we really need is more composure”¹⁴⁸

By 1977, when it became clear that the RAF lawyers were acting as communication vessels for RAF ideology as well as strategic planning of attacks, “provisions were made so that lawyers with terrorist sympathies could be banned from representing terrorists”.¹⁴⁹ A “contact ban” law, the *Kontaktsperre*, was also passed to allow for the isolation of inmates both from the outside world and from each other if it was deemed necessary by authorities.¹⁵⁰ RAF prisoners were placed in total isolation in order to prevent them from talking to each other or their lawyers before or during RAF terrorist attacks.¹⁵¹ Following the arrests of the RAF’s ideological leadership, the German state proceeded to implement what was to be later called “The Stammheim Model”. The period after the arrests “climaxed with the most expensive trial in West German history in a purpose-built courthouse next to the Stammheim prison, where the RAF leaders were held”, a trial that lasted from the 21st of May 1975 to April 28, 1977.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁴ Hoffman, B., and Taw, J. M., (1992). Op. Cit. p.61-2.

¹⁴⁵ Weil, 2017 and Rosenfeld, A. (2014). Op. Cit., p. 581

¹⁴⁶ Klandermans, B. and Katsiaficas, G. (1998) ‘The subversion of politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the decolonization of everyday life’, *Contemporary Sociology*, 27(4), p. 408. doi:10.2307/2655512.

¹⁴⁷ Rosenfeld, A. (2014). Op. Cit, p. 581

¹⁴⁸ Dobson, C. and Payne, R. (1993) *Counterattack: The West’s battle against the terrorists*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International., p.108

¹⁴⁹ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.10(2).

¹⁵⁰ Horbatiuk K. G. (1979). Anti-Terrorism: The West German Approach, *Fordham International Law Journal* 3, no. 2 (1979), 182-3.

¹⁵¹ Hoffman, B., and Taw, J. M., (1992). Op. Cit. p.61-2.

¹⁵² Passmore, L. (2011) *Op. Cit.* p. xii

In order to crack down on the group's operations as well as counterintelligence strength, the prisoners were held under severe conditions. The leaders of the RAF were sent to different prisons throughout Germany, put in isolation and often with the stipulation that lights in the prison cell should constantly be on.¹⁵³ Baader was held in total isolation for over seventeen months, Meins' cell was surrounded by empty cells in every direction and was denied any social activity with other prisoners and Meinhof was sent to the "dead wing" of the Cologne-Ossendorf prison, which included both isolation and sensory deprivation.¹⁵⁴

In 1989, West German State utilised a new strategy to elicit more information from informants as well as provide an incentive for prisoners to provide the State with information on the RAF. The authorities employed extensive infiltration tactics and the use of informants to dismantle the RAF, relying heavily on undercover operatives to gather intelligence on the organisation's inner workings. Infiltrators were often placed within leftist circles to establish credibility and gain the trust of key figures. Informants, who had once been RAF members or sympathisers, were offered leniency or financial incentives to provide information. This strategy aimed to break the solidarity within the group and expose its operations, as the group operated in strict secrecy.

One of the most notable infiltrations occurred when a former RAF member, Peter-Jürgen Boock, became an informant for the West German government in the late 1981.¹⁵⁵ His cooperation was crucial in providing detailed insights into the planning and execution of various terrorist attacks, including the 1977 kidnapping and murder of industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer. In a communiqué released in 1988, the RAF stated that "We weren't going to say anything about Boock. The main point we want to make here is that he knowingly betrayed the group for months, wasting a significant amount of its energy and—after his lies were out in the open—preventing a reasonable resolution of the issues".¹⁵⁶

Additionally, informants provided key intelligence that led to several arrests. Mahler was arrested with four more members of the group, following a call to the Berlin police by an informant.¹⁵⁷ The raid uncovered many compromising material including "recipes for making explosives, materials for the explosives, forgery equipment, pamphlets and the RAF's detailed

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 65

¹⁵⁴ Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). *Op. Cit.* p. 238

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p.565

¹⁵⁶ Moncourt A. and Smith J. (2013). *Ibid.*, p. 328-332.

¹⁵⁷ Stefanik, C. L. (2009). *Op. Cit.*

expenditures”.¹⁵⁸ Hogefeld was also arrested in June 1993, following a successful infiltration of an informant into the group's leadership.¹⁵⁹ Authorities used such insider information to track the movement of RAF members, monitor safe houses, and ultimately arrest its key leaders.

Christian Lochte, the chief of the Office of the Protection of the Constitution in Hamburg noted that terrorism “can be combatted most successfully by such measures as offers and amnesty or dialogue, that may lead to the RAF’s internal erosion and disintegration”.¹⁶⁰ The law changed to allow for repentant terrorists (*Aussteiger*) who were willing to share information with law enforcement regarding the activities and individuals of the organisation to receive reduced sentences.¹⁶¹ Within the program’s first year, five of the RAF’s imprisoned members were released and by 1996 at least eight prisoners, “all of whom had already served anywhere from 17 to 22 years in prison” were released as part of the program.¹⁶² As popular support for the group decreased, the intelligence efforts of the German state were largely facilitated with the prolific anonymous tips that were made against the group by its network.

Despite the 1972 letter to the press in which Andreas Baader claimed that security agencies and police knew “nothing about the size, the number of members, the organisation, the firepower, or the tactics of the group”,¹⁶³ police and governmental agencies made multiple arrests utilising informers and their implementing their improving intelligence capabilities, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of many RAF members, including its leadership. With the German state increasingly demonstrating a capability to infiltrate the group and the police’s ability to utilise informants to secure intelligence that led to the arrests and eventual decimation of RAF’s leadership, a major weakness in the group’s counterintelligence tactics was highlighted. Even if the letter was an attempt to project confidence and maintain the morale of its members and sympathisers, its claim was incongruous with the reality of the state's knowledge and capability. The arrest of several RAF members before and after 1972, including Baader himself, showcases the dissonance between the statement in the letter and the operational reality, suggesting that the group’s leadership was out of touch with the extent of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. and Aust, S. (1987). Baader-Meinhof Group. The Inside Story of a Phenomenon. Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome and London, p.80-83.

¹⁵⁹ Aust, S. (1987). Op. Cit., p.436

¹⁶⁰ Hoffman, B., and Taw, J. M., (1992). Op. Cit., p.63

¹⁶¹ Sobieck, S M. (1994) Op. Cit., p.55

¹⁶² Moghadam, A. (2012)., Op. Cit.

¹⁶³ Baader, A. (1972), quoted Moncourt A, Smith J. (2013). Op.Cit., p.120

state penetration. The RAF's vulnerability to informers, which led to multiple arrests, illustrates the counterintelligence failures of the organisation in anticipating the effectiveness of the state's intelligence apparatus.

4.7 Conclusion

Tactically, the organisation evolved constantly, both in response to the capability of its adversary but also in its strategies and operational goals, adjusted depending on the setbacks and issues it faced in its three decades of operation. The group demonstrated its ability to conduct major operations by collaborating with international groups in joint operations, the seizing and hostage taking of diplomats, its willingness to operate outside of Germany, as well as to conduct high-profile kidnappings and assassinations.¹⁶⁴ The RAF's attacks were made against targets symbolic to both the United States and the West German State, including prominent personalities, U.S. Army bases, the police and the right-wing press, showcasing the group's confidence in conducting high-profile attacks. A distinguishing factor that differentiated the RAF from other European terrorist groups was its capability to reorganise and keep its structure after the arrest of its leading members.¹⁶⁵ The group's entire leadership was arrested on two occasions, in 1972 and in 1982, with new leaders stepping forward to preserve the group and continue its activities.¹⁶⁶ These changes caused the group's operational timeline to be broken into three distinct categories, or "Generations", showcasing the adaptability of the RAF to setbacks incurred from the West German State. The RAF also faced different phases in the popular support it enjoyed, depending on their own resort to violence or the reaction of the government to their activities. When the group was seen as a small organisation fighting for the rights of the proletariat with what were considered to be "victimless" crimes such as bank robberies and property damage, public opinion was positively skewed, but popular support shifted when the organisation started conduct attacks that claimed multiple victims, especially when those were perceived to have been innocent and unrelated to what the organisation was fighting for.

¹⁶⁴ Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit. 44.

¹⁶⁵ Moghadam, A. (2012)., Op. Cit.

¹⁶⁶Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit. p. 44.

The first generation of the group can be described by its rudimentary counterintelligence capability, capitalising on public sentiment to galvanise ideological support and its ability to continue its operations despite the imprisonment of its ideological leaders.¹⁶⁷ The RAF continued to utilise basic counterintelligence tactics throughout its operations, as showcased by the arrest and imprisonment of all its key members following West German State crackdowns. Despite the group's use of safehouses, the transfer of its members across borders to avoid detection and the use of basic counterintelligence tactics such as fake papers and passports, the RAF was often in a perilous position in terms of counterintelligence. The large size of the group and its spread across Germany made communication between cells difficult and increased the potential of interception. The low or no vetting processes in the recruitment of new members, which led to a lack of strong bonds of trust between most group members, enabled authorities to appeal to RAF defectors and capture its members, including key members of its hierarchy. The group's counterintelligence strategy, however, was shaped by the competence and persistence of the West German state's security apparatus and the organisation constantly sought to adjust and adapt its counterintelligence tactics to the state's tactical and legal actions. In this sense, the RAF's success is evidenced by its ability to evolve in response to state pressure.

The relationship between the RAF and the West German state was marked, as a whole, by a process of "competitive adaptation", with both parties locked in a continuous cycle of tactical evolution. Each side attempted to outsmart the other, leading to increasingly sophisticated counterintelligence strategies. The state's high level of commitment to dismantling the RAF forced the group into a dynamic, where it was constantly compelled to develop new strategies to survive and operate.¹ While the organisation's members were ultimately arrested, the group's success lied in its ability to persist, adapt, and carry out significant operations over nearly three decades, even in the face of a highly capable and resourceful adversary.

In terms of adversary capability, the West German state constantly adjusted police response according to the organisation's attacks. The state utilised heavy surveillance tactics, patrolling mechanisms and recruitment of defectors in order to infiltrate the group and closely

¹⁶⁷ Varon, J. (2004). *Op. Cit.*, p.234.

¹ Weil, A. (2017)., *Op. Cit.*

monitor the group members and activities. Its attempts at decapitating the organisation by arresting and isolating its leadership several times did not work at eliminating the group, which as noted by Pluchinsky on “two occasions, in 1972 and 1982, the whole RAF leadership was arrested by German authorities; however, new leaders stepped forward and were able to continue the RAF's activities”.² At the first decapitation, the RAF organised its operations from inside the prison and at the second decapitation the group had created such a strong network of supporters and sympathisers that the void of Mohnhaupt and Klar was quickly filled by equally motivated sympathisers.³ This cycle of competitive adaptation demonstrates that despite numerous arrests, the group remained operational and capable of executing high-profile actions. The RAF's ability to collaborate with international groups, execute kidnappings, assassinations, and even stage operations outside Germany, highlights the tactical success of the group as an organisation that was not merely surviving but actively adapting its methods to outmanoeuvre state counterintelligence efforts. The arrest of individual RAF members, including the group's leadership, while a tactical setback, does not negate the overall success of the organisation's counterintelligence and operational achievements. In fact, the constant evolution of the group's methods in response to state efforts highlights its ability to remain a threat despite direct challenges from the state. Each major setback (arrests, deaths, or defections) led to an adjustment, allowing the group to continue its operations even as the West German state intensified its intelligence and policing efforts. The RAF's capacity to endure through waves of arrests is a testament to its adaptive counterintelligence measures. Unlike terrorist groups that operate against less committed adversaries and therefore stagnate in terms of strategy, the RAF was constantly pushed to refine its counterintelligence and operational methods. What eventually led to the group's dissolution however was not the sophistication of the West German State's capability, but the lack of ideological backdrop following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the democratic revolutions that followed it across Europe. “The West had won, Marxism was discredited, and the RAF appeared to be a relic of a bygone age”.⁴

² Pluchinsky D. (1992) Op. Cit., p. 44.

³ Weil, A. (2017)., Op. Cit.

⁴ Weil, A. (2017). Op. Cit.

Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter V

The delicate equilibrium between operational effectiveness and security plays a pivotal role in the survival of clandestine groups. Counterintelligence measures encompass various strategies and tactics to safeguard the group's operations, members, and information from detection or infiltration by security agencies or rival groups. This includes practising strict operational security (OPSEC), counter-surveillance, encryption, and limiting internal information sharing. Robust counterintelligence measures are designed to mitigate the risks associated with terrorist activities, such as arrests, neutralisation, or the disruption of operational plans. However, an overly security-centric approach can stifle the group's operational effectiveness. Tight security measures may hamper recruitment efforts, limit the group's outreach, and restrict its ability to carry out attacks without being detected. The balance between the two necessitates a careful selection of counterintelligence methods, as exemplified by the cases of RO17N and the RAF. The survival of a group is influenced by how it approaches the trade-off between operational effectiveness and security.

This section will revisit the research questions posed at the beginning of this study and assess how they are answered through the findings of this thesis. By applying Mobley's framework to the counterintelligence strategies of the RAF and RO17N and exploring the choice of the counterintelligence methods chosen by the organisations and their advantages, this analysis will seek to comprehensively evaluate the factors shaping terrorist counterintelligence and challenge existing assumptions in the literature. The discussion will first focus on how the five key factors - (i) Organisational Structure, (ii) Popular Support, (iii) Controlled Territory, (iv) Resources and (v) Adversary Capability - have influenced the counterintelligence methods of these groups, followed by an examination of the relative importance of adversary capability. Finally, I will consider the broader implications of these findings for modern counterterrorism policy. By scrutinising the interplay of these elements and placing them in a wider counterintelligence context, this chapter will seek to unveil the critical role these methods played in shaping the overarching strategies of RO17N and the RAF, ultimately contributing to their operational sustainability. Moreover, it will evaluate how the investigation of counterintelligence tactics of the two organisations can contribute to inform counterintelligence research and policy on contemporary terrorist groups.

5.1 Organisational structure

Terrorist organisations often exhibit a diverse range of organisational structures, which significantly influence their counterintelligence methods. The group's chosen organisational structure can depend on its objectives and the environment it exists in, but research has shown that "integrated militant organisations based on robust social ties are more capable of allocating resources effectively, keeping lower-ranking members in line with the group's broader objectives, and withstanding government counterinsurgency efforts".⁵ Changing the organisational structure of a terrorist group when faced with a capable adversary underscores the critical importance of adaptability in asymmetric conflicts, as it allows groups to maintain operational effectiveness while mitigating the risks posed by counterintelligence efforts.

Organisations that changed their organisational structure and adapted in response to their adversary include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. FARC, a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group operating in Colombia, has undergone significant organisational changes since its formation in 1964. Facing increased military pressure and the significant intelligence efforts of the Colombian government, FARC transitioned from a highly hierarchical organisation to a more decentralised network of independent fronts.⁶ This structural shift allowed FARC to evade government forces and engage in guerrilla warfare across vast and varied terrain. The decentralisation made it difficult for authorities to target the organisation's leadership or gain valuable intelligence on its operations.⁷ ISIS also initially operated with a somewhat centralised structure, but as international military efforts against the group intensified, it adapted by becoming more decentralised. The organisation facilitated the shift to a dispersed model by encouraging its followers to carry out attacks in their home countries and by utilising online propaganda to increase its recruitment of foreign fighters and independent attacks.⁸ By encouraging self-initiated attacks, ISIS reduced the reliance on a traditional hierarchy, making it harder for

⁵ Shkolnik, M. (2020). Organizational Capacity and Constituency Dominance: Why Some Militant Groups Wage Sustained Insurgencies. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14(5), 103–116. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26940041>

⁶ Eccarius-Kelly, V. (2012) Surreptitious Lifelines: A Structural Analysis of the FARC and the PKK, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:2, 235-258, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2011.651182

⁷ ESISC (2010) 'Colombia: an overview of the Farc's military structure', *European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center*.

⁸ Gürer, C. (2017). Presenting a Strategic Model to Understand Spillover Effects of ISIS Terrorism. *Connections*, 16(2), 41–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326480>

intelligence agencies internationally to detect and thwart attacks.⁹ Al-Qaeda followed a centralised hierarchy which allowed for the effective coordination of its global terrorist activities. Following the increased counterterrorism efforts by the United States of America and its allies, Al-Qaeda adapted by decentralising its operations and giving bigger autonomy to its regional franchises, like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), autonomy.¹⁰ This decentralisation made it more challenging for intelligence agencies to disrupt their activities, as decision-making and operational planning occurred at a local level.

The RAF's organisational structure was marked by its evolution and adaptability in response to its changing objectives and the counterintelligence measures of the West German government. Initially, the group embraced a relatively loose, cell-based structure characterised by decentralised decision-making, with a prominent, however, organisational ideological leadership. This structure allowed for autonomy among various members and cells, making it challenging for its adversary to infiltrate or disrupt the organisation effectively.

For RO17N, the organisation kept a tight and rigid organisational structure from its inception. It could be argued that the tight structure came to be because of the notoriously capable and unforgiving National Greek National Intelligence Agency during the military junta. As some of the founding members of the organisation were known to the authorities in the 1960's¹¹, it is likely that they adjusted their organisational structure from the beginning to avoid being detected. The regime change in 1974 and the transition of the National Intelligence Agency from being managed by the CIA to being managed by the Greeks could have perhaps allowed for a looser organisational structure. However, the efficiency of the tight organisational structure was likely satisfactory in terms of counterintelligence and did not need to change. Its adaptability underscores the importance of organisational flexibility in the face of changing operational needs and external pressures.

An added, most likely unintentional, layer of counterintelligence capability of RO17N was the size of the organisation and the relationships between its members. The tightly knit

⁹ Jefferis, J. (2016) *Isis administrative and territorial organization*, IEMed. Available at: <https://www.iemed.org/publication/isis-administrative-and-territorial-organization/> (Accessed: 01 September 2023).

¹⁰ Farrall, L. (2011). How al Qaeda Works: What the Organization's Subsidiaries Say About Its Strength. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(2), 128–138. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800463>

¹¹ Papachelas, A. and Telloğlu, T. (2003). *φάκελος 17 νοέμβρη - Phakelos 17 Noemvri*. Athens: Estia Editions., p.57

structure and small-scale nature of the organisation meant that penetration by authorities was also almost impossible and the lack of state sponsorship kept the organisation outside the radar of international intelligence agencies.¹²

The RAF did not have a “military style organisation with an elaborate division of labour” in its inception, but its leadership maintained strong influence on the cells both at the early days of the organisations but also following their incarceration in each generation.¹³ As the RAF’s size and activities escalated, shifting towards more high-profile attacks, such as kidnappings and assassinations, it recognized the need for a tighter and more centralised structure to improve operational security and coordination. This shift involved the reinforcement of the group’s core leadership, including figures like Baader, Ensslin and Meinhof, and allowed the organisation to maintain a higher level of operational security and effectiveness in carrying out complex, targeted attacks. Its members operated on a “need to know” basis with each cell having little to no knowledge on the tactical decisions of other cells.¹⁴ The change in the organisational structure of the RAF reflected a dynamic and strategic response to the evolving landscape of the West German state’s counterterrorism efforts. The benefits of this shift in structure became evident in the successful completion of operations and evasion of capture of its members for a longer period, with the West German State having little knowledge about the members of the organisation and its safehouses by the RAF’s third generation.

The advantages of tightening the structure solved several of the problems the RAF was facing at the time. Firstly, it gave interrogators less information about the organisation, regardless of the methods they used- most of those arrested simply did not know what was happening in other cells. Secondly, the tighter structure made infiltration by hostile individuals harder. As cells were small, every member of the cell could monitor the other and report suspicious activity. Finally, in contrast to other terrorist organisations, where the high knowledge and responsibility of leaders means that their loss or their incarceration can have devastating effects to the organisation and its strategies, this was not the case with the RAF.¹⁵

¹² Dolnik, A., (2007). Op. Cit.

¹³ van Dongen, T. (2014) *The Science of Fighting Terrorism: The relation between Terrorist actor type and Counterterrorism Effectiveness*. Netherlands: Faculty of The Hague, Leiden University.

¹⁴ Pflieger, K. (2011) *Die rote-armee-fraktion RAF; 14.5.1970 bis 20.4.1998*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, p.44-45

¹⁵ Cronin, A.K. (2011) in *How terrorism ends: Understanding the decline and demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 111

The tighter organisational structure also served to protect the group from internal, ideological struggles or skirmishes as it made it more difficult “for members to go against the prevailing consensus on major issues”, which guaranteed loyalty to the group.¹⁶

The problems of a tight organisational structure however, were several, especially for the RAF. Firstly, the communication between mid-level and high-level RAF members increased significantly, which meant that an informer in a mid-level position became significantly more valuable than before; these positions were also easier to infiltrate by the West German State.¹⁷ Secondly, the former loose organisational structure made the group less vulnerable because of their unpredictability; a loose command and control structure allows for a level of uncertainty and thus decreases the likelihood of an ambush. Finally, the tightening organisational structure meant that information formerly well-guarded was now diffused across cells, making it easier for its adversary to learn about them and produce counter-measures.

In the case of the RAF and RO17N, a tighter organisational structure enhanced their counterintelligence advantages. This was not without costs, as a tighter command-and-control structure often required more centralised decision-making and increased internal control, which could slow down the decision-making process. However, the gains in operational security and longevity proved to outweigh these costs, emphasising the strategic significance of organisational flexibility in the face of evolving counterintelligence challenges. The two cases thus demonstrate the importance of changing the organisational structure of a group when faced with a capable adversary. Both the RAF and RO17N gained significant counterintelligence advantages by choosing a tighter command-and-control structure and the benefits of that choice outweighed its costs. Even though researchers have argued that organisational structure of an organisation will affect its counterintelligence methods,¹⁸ these two cases demonstrate that organisational structure can serve as a counterintelligence strategy in and of itself.

5.2 Popular Support

Popular support plays a pivotal role in the survival and longevity of terrorist organisations. The backing of a sympathetic or indifferent population provides non-state actors

¹⁶ van Dongen, T. (2014) *The Science of Fighting Terrorism: The relation between Terrorist actor type and Counterterrorism Effectiveness*. Netherlands: Faculty of The Hague, Leiden University.

¹⁷ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit., p.96

¹⁸ Ibid, p.229

with essential resources, recruits, and safe havens, enabling them to sustain their activities. Without a degree of popular support, many terrorist organisations struggle to endure.¹⁹ A notable example of this dynamic is seen in the case of the Tamil Tigers, or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in Sri Lanka. The LTTE enjoyed significant support from the Tamil minority population in the country, which allowed them to maintain a powerful presence for decades. This support included recruitment of fighters, fundraising, and intelligence provided by sympathetic communities.²⁰ Another illustrative example are the Afghan Taliban, whose resilience and ability to withstand international military efforts can be attributed, in part, to the group's support within segments of the Afghan population.²¹ In certain rural areas, the Taliban has served as a de facto governance structure, providing justice, security, and services. This has fostered local support and allowed the Taliban to maintain a foothold even in the face of a robust international coalition.²² These examples demonstrate how popular support can be a critical factor in the survival of terrorist organisations, as it provides them with essential resources and a degree of societal legitimacy, making it more challenging for governments to combat them effectively.

Popular support may indeed have played an important role for the survival of the two organisations, but it should be questioned whether it influenced their counterintelligence methods. The RAF benefited tremendously from popular support: not only for its operations, but also in its counterintelligence. Because of its wide network of supporters across the community, RAF members could find shelter in houses of supporters that were not monitored by its adversary. In rallies organised to support the imprisoned members of the RAF, the organisation was also able to recruit new members and increase its size and tactical capability. For example, Karl-Heinz Dellwo, Stefan Wisniewski, Christian Klar and Susanne Albrecht, all of whom would be involved in major RAF operations, “joined the RAF after having worked in a *Komitee gegen Isolationsfolter* (Committees against Isolation Torture)²³. In the context of the

¹⁹ Blomberg, S.B., Gaibulloev, K. and Sandler, T. (2011) ‘Terrorist group survival: Ideology, tactics, and base of Operations’, *Public Choice*, 149(3–4), pp. 441–463. doi:10.1007/s11127-011-9837-4.

²⁰ Cronin-Furman, K. and Arulthas, M. (2021) *The Tigers abroad: How the LTTE diaspora supports the conflict in Sri Lanka*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43133783> (Accessed: 01 August 2023).

²¹ Sullivan, D. P. (2007). Tinder, Spark, Oxygen, and Fuel: The Mysterious Rise of the Taliban. *Journal of Peace Research*, 44(1), 93–108. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640455>

²² Kaltenthaler, K., Kruglanski, A.W. and Knuppe, A.J. (2022). The Paradox of the Heavy-handed Insurgent: Public Support for the Taliban Among Afghan Pashtuns. *SocArXiv* (January). <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/2fkvt>

²³ van Dongen, T. (2014) *The Science of Fighting Terrorism: The relation between Terrorist actor type and Counterterrorism Effectiveness*. Netherlands: Faculty of The Hague, Leiden University.

RAF, it is evident that individuals sympathetic to the organisation's objectives played a pivotal role in bolstering its counterintelligence initiatives.

In the case of RO17N, popular support -or popular indifference- influenced the commitment of authorities to persecute the group, offering a major advantage to the organisation. Firstly, the public was incredibly suspicious and negatively predisposed against the police forces and a huge stigma existed against *chafiethes* (police informers).²⁴ Automatically, this placed the police at a disadvantage: informers were unlikely to approach the police and witnesses or suspicious neighbours were also unwilling to volunteer information; this was made clear during the trial of RO17N, where only a few witnesses agreed to testify against the organisation.²⁵ The 'Robin Hood' image of the organisation also skewed public perception, as the public was not particularly interested (and thus advocating for) the arrest of the members of RO17N. This popular support also offered a political advantage to any government that was against counter terrorism laws. Governments who drafted stricter counter-terrorism frameworks were branded 'fascists' and their methods were compared to the methods used during the military junta.²⁶ The organisation's eventual demise came about when increased governmental pressure for its arrest met a decrease in the group's relevance in the public sphere. Losing its ability to articulate a clear and compelling ideological or political narrative that resonated with Greek society, RO17N struggled to maintain its existing support but also found itself declining in relevance.

Public support was therefore important for both organisations, as it encouraged their activities and facilitated their counterintelligence efforts. However, it did not necessarily influence their counterintelligence strategy or capability. In the case of the RAF, popular support increased the counterintelligence *capacity* but it did not necessarily alter its strategy. In the case of RO17N, popular support was one of the factors that influenced the capability and commitment of its adversary, but did not play a role in the organisation's counterintelligence strategy. Both groups were careful and placed great importance in counterintelligence, but there is little evidence that their approach to counterintelligence would have been significantly different had they not enjoyed the same amount of popular support.

²⁴ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Europe's last red terrorists: The Revolutionary Organisation 17 November*. London: Hurst & Co., p.165

²⁵ Bossis, M. (2003). The Mysteries of Terrorism and Political Violence in Greece. In: M. van Leeuwen, ed., *Confronting Terrorism: European Experiences, Threat Perceptions and Policies*, 1st ed. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, pp.129-145.

²⁶ Fakitsas, M. (2003). Op. Cit.

5.3 Controlled Territory

Controlled territory, “a space that a terrorist group actively patrols and manages” is a space that can offer significant counterintelligence benefits, allowing an organisation to “communicate, meet face to face, and make connections with supporters and journalists with a degree of freedom not available in hostile, uncontrolled territory”.²⁷ One of its primary advantages is that it offers a physical base for operations, allowing the group to have a fixed geographic location where it can train fighters, stockpile weapons, or establish governance structures. A lack of controlled territory can thus make it more challenging for an organisation to maintain its operational capabilities and plan large-scale attacks. Instead, it forces a terrorist group to rely on clandestine and mobile networks for its activities, making it harder for security forces to target it.

Operating clandestinely across a country, while challenging, provides several benefits for a terrorist organisation. It allows for greater flexibility and adaptability, as members can move between areas without the constraints of holding territory, making it difficult for security forces to predict the group's movements and launch effective counterterrorism operations. Furthermore, the organisation is able to blend into local communities, making it challenging for law enforcement to identify and track its members. Lack of controlled territory also reduces the risk of international intervention and military strikes that often target state-sponsored terrorist groups or those holding territory. Overall, while a lack of controlled territory presents operational challenges, it can also provide certain advantages in terms of flexibility, mobility, and reduced vulnerability to external intervention.

For example, Boko Haram which operates in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, has intermittently controlled certain areas in the northeastern part of Nigeria, but does not maintain permanent territorial control. Boko Haram primarily operates through hit-and-run tactics, guerrilla warfare, and acts of terrorism, avoiding the responsibilities and challenges of governing territory.²⁸ The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), commonly known as the Pakistani

²⁷ Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit, p.14

²⁸ Global Conflict Tracker (no date) *Violent extremism in the Sahel*, Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel> (Accessed: 01 September 2023).

Taliban have not established a permanent territorial entity but instead operate as a loose network of various factions. This decentralised structure allows TTP to conduct attacks across Pakistan and maintain operational flexibility, while avoiding the governance responsibilities associated with holding territory.²⁹ In the United Kingdom, National Action, an organisation which espouses white supremacist and neo-Nazi ideologies does not hold or govern any specific territory within the United Kingdom or Europe³⁰. Instead, it operates clandestinely and seeks to spread its extremist views through recruitment and propaganda efforts. The absence of controlled territory allows National Action to remain a small but highly disruptive organisation; its lack of territorial control is characteristic of far-right extremist groups in Europe, which typically operate as decentralised networks with a focus on activism and propaganda dissemination.³¹

Neither of the two organisations examined in this thesis had access to controlled territory, but both the RAF and RO17N used the nature of operating clandestinely within the population to their advantage. Moreover, neither of the two desired to have any territorial control, thus making it difficult to extrapolate how their counterintelligence methods would have been different had it controlled any territory.

The lack of controlled territory for RO17N meant that the organisation had to be vigilant at all times and extremely strict with its counterintelligence methods. The organisation, however, did operate in a very specific area, something that offered both advantages and disadvantages to it. Almost all of the attacks occurred in the greek city of Athens and most of the assassinations took place on Kifissias avenue “an area of a mere 15x2 kilometres”.³² The advantages of this in terms of counterintelligence include that the members of the organisation were familiar with that area and could thus quickly escape if the operation was successful as well as if the operation failed. Moreover, most of the safe houses of the organisation were in close distances of Kifissias avenue and this allowed members to find refuge there without raising suspicion (See Appendix I). However, limiting the operational area could allow authorities to triangulate the location of the organisation as well as increase its surveillance and

²⁹ Schricker, E. (2017) ‘The search for rebel interdependence: A study of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 54(1), pp. 16–30. doi:10.1177/0022343316668570.

³⁰ Macklin, G. (2018) “Only Bullets will Stop Us!” – The Banning of National Action in Britain’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12(6), pp. 104–122.

³¹ Hammer, D., Gerster, L. and Schwieter, C. (2023) *Inside the Digital Labyrinth: Right-wing extremist strategies of decentralisation on the Internet & Possible Countermeasures*, ISD. Available at: <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/inside-the-digital-labyrinth/> (Accessed: 01 September 2023).

³² Dolnik, A. (2007). Op. Cit.

presence in the areas the organisation usually operated. Had the organisation expanded the territory of its operations it could have prevented authorities from limiting their search for the safe houses and their presence around those areas.

The Red Army Faction's cells operated across cities in West Germany and despite their lack of control of territory, they did have access to a wide network of safehouses across the country in the form of sympathisers' homes. In terms of counterintelligence, this offered the organisation relative advantages in terms of hiding, free communication between its members within the safehouses and support in tactical capabilities. For example, following the kidnapping of Hans Martin Schleyer, the RAF "kidnappers managed to frequently move him from one safehouse to another", allowing for him to be moved across borders to "the Dutch seaside town of Scheveningen and later to Brussels".³³ The organisation's supporters across Europe provided the group with "logistical necessities to include transportation, medical aid, communications equipment and safe housing".³⁴

An organisation which controls territory is therefore faced with both positive and negative consequences. Controlling territory can offer the organisation relative control and policing capabilities, allowing them to act as soon as they detect anything suspicious. It also enables the members of the organisation to communicate with some security as well as easily train its recruits. However, if these areas are known to the group's adversary, they can be targeted directly, and lead to the organisation's loss of control over them as well as the destruction of its safe havens and its resources. Moreover, controlled areas can be monitored and individuals entering and exiting the areas investigated more closely to determine their links with the organisation. As an overarching benefit of not controlling territory, the lack of control over a specific area limits the capacity of an organisation to challenge state authority or disrupt regional stability. This lack of existential threat to the government of the country the group operates in, can limit the commitment and drive of the government to eradicate the group, as was the case with RO17N. Operating clandestinely and moving across areas of the country and its borders can also render the group less vulnerable to surveillance and financial interdiction efforts.

³³ van Dongen, T. (2014) *The Science of Fighting Terrorism: The relation between Terrorist actor type and Counterterrorism Effectiveness*. Netherlands: Faculty of The Hague, Leiden University.

³⁴ Bay, C.N. (1986) *THE RED ARMY FACTION: FOUR GENERATIONS OF TERROR*. dissertation. Faculty of the Defense Intelligence College.

5.4 Resources

Resources, including money, weapons, and other materials, are crucial for the operational viability and longevity of terrorist organisations. These resources serve a multifaceted role, impacting their recruitment efforts, training, logistics, and ultimately influencing their counterintelligence capabilities. The acquisition of financial resources is essential for recruiting and maintaining members, financing operations, and disseminating propaganda and the procurement of weapons and explosives significantly enhances a terrorist organisation's operational capabilities. Funds often come from a variety of sources, including donations, criminal activities such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom, bank robberies and drug trafficking, or state sponsors sympathetic to the group's cause. In terms of counterintelligence, the availability of resources can both strengthen and challenge an organisation's capabilities.

While funding and weapons improve a group's offensive and defensive abilities, they may also create vulnerabilities. For instance, financial transactions can leave traces that counterintelligence agencies can follow, and weapon caches may be discovered or intercepted. The movement of resources, especially large sums of money or weaponry, can attract the attention of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, making it more difficult for the group to remain covert. Examples of organisations that enjoyed high resources are Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, while the FARC and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) had limited access to resources. Al-Qaeda has historically been known for its substantial financial resources, which have come from a variety of sources, including wealthy donors, criminal activities, and state sponsors. These ample resources have enabled the organisation to fund a range of activities, from large-scale international terrorist attacks to propaganda dissemination.³⁵ Additionally, Al-Qaeda has had access to sophisticated weaponry, enhancing its operational capabilities and resilience. Hezbollah also enjoys significant financial and logistical resources, receiving substantial support from Iran, both in terms of funding and weaponry.³⁶ This backing has allowed Hezbollah to develop a well-armed militia and maintain a social services network, making it a highly influential organisation in Lebanon and the wider Middle East.³⁷ FARC has

³⁵ Rabasa, A. *et al.* (2006) 'Al-Qaeda's Finances', in P. Chalk (ed.) *Beyond al-Qaeda: Part 1, The Global Jihadist Movement*. RAND, pp. 57–62.

³⁶ DeVore, M.R. (2012) 'Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship: A Case Study of how State Sponsorship affects Terrorist Group Decision-Making', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 6(4/5), pp. 85–107.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

historically relied on limited resources. Its funding came from sources such as extortion, drug trafficking, and kidnapping.³⁸ These resources, while sufficient for its activities, were significantly more constrained compared to some international terrorist organisations, leading FARC to employ guerrilla tactics and maintain a relatively low profile. The Animal Liberation Front, (ALF), an extremist animal rights group that employs direct action tactics, such as arson, property damage, and intimidation, to advocate for animal liberation also typically lacks the significant financial resources and weaponry commonly associated with larger, more internationally-focused terrorist organisations, despite its operations across Europe and North America. The organisation's operations primarily rely on the dedication of its activists and volunteers, who often conduct small-scale, low-cost acts of sabotage.³⁹ Its limited resources have allowed it to sustain a low-level insurgency without attracting the same level of international attention or counterterrorism efforts as larger, well-funded groups.

The RAF started off with very low resources but quickly improved and expanded their weapons cache. The group's initial weapons were often stolen or bought on the black market. However, as their actions escalated, they sought more sophisticated weaponry and to obtain these, they relied on connections to other militant groups and foreign sources. In the first generation, the RAF primarily relied on a combination of bank robberies and kidnappings for ransom to fund its activities, with the funds generated allowing the group to purchase weapons, maintain safe houses, and finance its propaganda efforts. Robbing police stations and armouries in Germany and beyond, such as breaking into a stone quarry in Belgium to steal a cache of explosives or raiding in a Swiss armoury that yielded over “two-hundred rifles, five-hundred revolvers and four-hundred grenades”, caused significant increases to the organisation's capacity and capability.⁴⁰ The acquisition of a high amount of resources also allowed the RAF to achieve a high level of counterintelligence capabilities.

This initial approach to resource acquisition enabled the RAF to establish itself as a formidable terrorist organisation in West Germany. During its second generation, resource acquisition became more challenging due to increased surveillance and tighter security by the

³⁸ Cook, T. (2011) 'The financial arm of the FARC: A threat finance perspective', *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(1), pp. 19–36. doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.1.2.

³⁹ Loadenthal, M. (2014). Eco-Terrorism? Countering Dominant Narratives of Securitisation: A Critical, Quantitative History of the Earth Liberation Front (1996-2009). *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 8(3), 16–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297171>

⁴⁰ Hamm, M.S. and Van de Voorde, C. (2005) 'Crimes committed by terrorist groups: Theory, research, and prevention', *Trends in Organized Crime*, 9(2), pp. 18–50. doi:10.1007/s12117-005-1023-y.

West German State. To overcome these obstacles, the second generation of the RAF sought assistance from international actors sympathetic to their cause, providing the group with access to weaponry and financial resources. However, this international connection also drew the attention of counterintelligence agencies, leading to arrests and disruptions within the organisation. In the third generation, the group attempted to fund its activities by engaging in bank robberies and arms smuggling but found it increasingly challenging due to a lack of safe havens and the erosion of its support network. Overall, the acquisition of resources by the RAF across its three generations evolved from bank robberies and kidnappings to international connections and, ultimately, to a struggle for resources in the face of increased counterintelligence measures and a dwindling support base.

On the other hand, RO17N -largely because of its lack of international alliances- did not have external resources. The organisation was financed through bank robberies, of which they did eleven in their twenty-seven years of operation, collecting an estimated total of 3.5 million euros, and robberies of arm caches in military bases, a police department and the National War Museum.⁴¹ The organisation used the money acquired from its bank robberies to pay the rent for its safe houses as well as to purchase disguises, rent vans and use cabs to add a further layer of anonymity to their operations. In terms of tactical capability however, the group preferred to use the same two guns for most of its operations.⁴²

It is thus made clear that higher resources do not influence counterintelligence methods *per se*. Even though they can improve the quality of counterintelligence (e.g. the fact that the RAF could afford relatively sophisticated weapons and counterintelligence devices), they do not affect the quantity and rarely affect the type of counterintelligence used. However, resources can be somewhat fundamental in allowing an organisation to shift its counterintelligence methods of a group from basic to adaptive denial (through surveillance of its adversary).

⁴¹ Kassimeris, G. (2001). *Europe's last red terrorists: The Revolutionary Organisation 17 November*. London: Hurst & Co., p.134

⁴² Antoniou, D. (2002). The gun makes "17 November"; a target, 'Το περίστροφο σημάδεύει τη «17 Νοέμβρη»'. *Kathimerini*. (online) Available at: <http://www.kathimerini.gr/123091/article/epikairothta/ellada/to-peristrofo-shmadeyei-th-17-Noemvrh> (Accessed 25 Oct. 2023).

5.6 Adversary Capability

A terrorist group's ability to adapt, innovate, and sustain its operations in the face of determined opposition significantly influences its survival prospects. A strong adversary, such as a well-equipped and intelligence-savvy government or security apparatus, poses a formidable challenge to the group's existence. Countermeasures, crackdowns, and interdiction efforts by such adversaries can disrupt the group's activities and reduce its operational effectiveness, increasing the likelihood of its demise. Groups confronted with powerful adversaries often employ a range of adaptive strategies to survive longer. These may include decentralisation of leadership, adopting low-profile tactics, diversifying funding sources, and establishing international networks to mitigate the impact of localised pressure. Furthermore, they invest in counterintelligence measures, like operational security and compartmentalization, to minimise the risks of infiltration or information leaks. Such adaptive responses are essential for the group's endurance in the face of a formidable adversary.

Conversely, when a terrorist organisation faces a weak or ineffective adversary, its tactical and counterintelligence capabilities tend to be less constrained. A weak adversary may lack the resources, intelligence capabilities, or political will to counter the group effectively. As a result, the terrorist organisation may become emboldened, leading to an increase in high-profile attacks and recruitment efforts. Additionally, the group may become complacent in its counterintelligence practices, leaving vulnerabilities that can be exploited by more capable adversaries should they emerge. Examples of organisations that have adapted to their strong and committed adversaries to ensure operational longevity are Hezbollah and the PIRA. Hezbollah and the institutions it has “been carefully elaborating and readapting” in Lebanon to effectively face its regional allies.⁴³ The PIRA also realised that it needed to change its approach and strategies as it came to understand that the battle against the British was against a formidable enemy. Changing its strategy to a ‘long war’ strategy meant that the focus changed from attempting to win as many battles and assaults as possible, but changing into a strategy that involved ‘applying an entirely different, sometimes antithetical set of tools than those optimised for achieving victory through rapid, decisive action’.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Boko

⁴³ Harb, M. and Leenders, R. (2005) ‘Know thy enemy: Hizbullah, “terrorism” and the politics of perception’, *Third World Quarterly*, 26(1), pp. 173–197. doi:10.1080/0143659042000322973.

⁴⁴ Jackson, B. (2007). Counterinsurgency Intelligence in a 'Long War': The British Experience in Northern Ireland. *Military Review*, (online) January-February 2007, pp.74-85. Available at: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reprints/2007/RAND_RP1247.pdf (Accessed 14 Jul. 2023).

Haram initially faced a relatively weak Nigerian government response.⁴⁵ The group took advantage of governance and security gaps in Nigeria's northeastern regions, which enabled it to expand its influence and recruitment efforts as well as conduct numerous attacks, abductions, before the Nigerian government initiated a more robust counterinsurgency campaign.⁴⁶

In both the case of the RAF and RO17N, adversary capability changed through time. In the case of the RAF, the West German State maintained its capability from the early 1970's, remaining an efficient and powerful force until the late 1990s but increased its efforts and commitment through the decades. Despite its initial rudimentary resources, the West German State was committed to controlling the insurgent organisations in West Germany from the beginning of the student movement in the early 1970s. For that reason, counterintelligence had an incredibly important role as it allowed the organisation to conduct operations with relative certainty of success and avoid operations that were deemed risky or imprudent as well as avoid wasting its resources. In the case of RO17N, adversary capability improved in the 1990's and remained relatively stable until the members of the organisation were arrested and convicted. The difference between the two organisations however was the adaptation of the one and the lack of adaptation in the other. Intelligence proved to be one of the strongest weapons of the West German State when attempting to dismantle the RAF and counterintelligence proved to have equal value for the RAF. For RO17N on the other hand, counterintelligence know-how, capability and effort remained stable throughout the organisation's life which is very likely why the demise of the organisation came when the abilities of its adversary improved.

It is likely that this lack of ambition and capability in part of the Greek authorities allowed RO17N to have a more lax attitude regarding its counterintelligence and operational security. The inefficiency of the police forces became a running joke and the organisation became iconic, coined an *Organosi Phantasma* (phantom organisation) by the Greek media.⁴⁷ This inefficiency can be attributed to several factors. Dolnik argues that RO17N "did not have an ambition to govern" and it did not "seek to develop cadres for the purposes of taking over government posts in the event of a successful revolution".⁴⁸ Moreover, the organisation did not seek support or expressions of solidarity from other organisations internationally with similar

⁴⁵ Igboin, B. O. (2014). Boko Haram Radicalism and National Insecurity: Beyond Normal Politics. *Journal of Religion and Violence*, 2(1), 94–121. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26671418>

⁴⁶ Elden, S. (2014). The geopolitics of Boko Haram and Nigeria's "war on terror." *The Geographical Journal*, 180(4), 414–425. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43870934>

⁴⁷ Dolnik, A. (2007) Op. Cit., p.132

⁴⁸ Ibid.

goals or Soviet-bloc countries⁴⁹. As the organisation was not seeking to impress or motivate the Greek population, it maintained a modest and stable strategy and exhibited ‘a very limited sense of urgency’ and thus ‘had little motivation to invent new, more effective and more eye-catching tactics’.⁵⁰ This lack of ambition to produce spectacular, eye-catching results is likely one of the reasons why the Greek government did not view the organisation as a threat, thus using a minimal amount of resources for its elimination. Another approach argues that the Greek population, its ruling parties and the authorities never found terrorism to be a legitimate concern. Skoularikis, a member of one of Greece’s biggest parties at the time said “[Greece] does not have a serious problem with terrorism ... but with a few sporadic, spectacular terrorist acts ... There is no future for terrorism in Greece because all Greeks are against it ...”.⁵¹ When the organisation started being perceived by the government as a threat whose continued presence could be detrimental for both internal and external politics the efficiency of policing improved significantly. The organisation, however, did not take any steps to improve its counterintelligence or adapt to the improved capacity of its adversary, further illustrating that the elusiveness of the organisation was both because of the authorities’ incompetence but also because of their own unwillingness or inadequacy to adapt to changing external factors.

The two organisations highlight the importance of adapting to improved adversary capabilities in order to ensure their survival. Observing the counterintelligence choices the organisations made, the sophistication and commitment of their adversary seems to have played a fundamental role in why these decisions were made. Organisational structure, the lack of controlled territory, the popular support and the resources the organisations enjoyed played a role in improving the counterintelligence capability of the organisations. However, they only played a small role in why the counterintelligence tactics of the organisations were chosen, as opposed to adversary capability which shaped the methods of the organisations significantly.

The adversary capability of terrorist organisations is a critical factor in determining their survival and counterintelligence strategies. Strong adversaries challenge the group's existence and necessitate adaptive measures, while weak adversaries can foster a false sense of security, potentially weakening the group's tactical and counterintelligence capabilities in the

⁴⁹ Dolnik, A., (2007). Op. Cit., p.134

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Karyotis, G. (2007) Securitization of greek terrorism and arrest of the ‘Revolutionary Organization November 17’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(3), pp. 271–293. doi:10.1177/0010836707079932.

long run. Understanding the dynamics of adversary capability is vital for formulating effective counterterrorism policies and strategies.

5.7 Evaluation and Conclusion

This study sought to explore the counterintelligence strategies of two of the longest-running terrorist organisations in modern Europe, the RAF and RO17N, through the lens of Mobley's framework. The methods and capabilities of the organisations were reviewed and evaluated as methods and as results of external factors, and both case studies examined illustrated that effective or ineffective adaptation will influence whether the group will continue to survive. The findings reveal significant insights into how the five factors - organisational structure, popular support, territorial control, resource availability, and adversary capability- shape counterintelligence strategies and how adversary capability, in particular, stands out as the most influential factor. This section will answer the research questions and assess how the study has fulfilled its key aims.

- (i) *How did the five factors - organisational structure, popular support, territorial control, resource availability, and adversary capability-, as set out in Mobley's framework, shape the counterintelligence strategies of RAF and RO17N?*

Through the application of Mobley's framework, the case studies demonstrate that while each of the five factors exerts some degree of influence over a group's counterintelligence strategies, adversary capability consistently emerges as the dominant force. Organisational structure, particularly the use of compartmentalized cells, provided both groups with a vital method of avoiding detection, acting as a direct counterintelligence strategy rather than merely an influencing factor. Popular support, although different in nature for each group, played an essential role as well, with the RAF benefiting from direct community assistance, while RO17N gained passive protection due to the population's discontent with authorities. Territorial control, while traditionally seen as a significant factor for many groups, offered limited direct influence on RAF and RO17N. Instead, the absence of controlled territory became an unexpected counterintelligence advantage, forcing both groups to adopt mobile and secretive operations. Resource availability, though necessary for more advanced counterintelligence methods, did not independently shape the groups' strategies but rather

enhanced their capacity to refine existing methods. Ultimately, adversary capability was the factor that most directly shaped counterintelligence decisions for both groups. Groups facing stronger adversaries, such as the RAF, were forced to adapt their methods continuously, whereas the RO17N, facing a less capable adversary, relied on rudimentary methods until the state's efforts intensified.

(ii) *Is adversary capability, rather than resource availability, the most critical factor shaping a terrorist group's counterintelligence strategies?*

The findings of this thesis support Mobley's hypothesis that adversary capability is indeed the most critical factor influencing counterintelligence. The comparison between the RAF and RO17N illustrates this point, as the RAF, facing a sophisticated and determined adversary in the West German state, was engaged in a process of "competitive adaptation," where both the group and the state evolved their methods in response to each other. This constant adaptation required the RAF to employ increasingly refined counterintelligence strategies to evade detection. In contrast, RO17N's counterintelligence efforts were significantly less advanced, reflecting the lower capability and commitment of its adversary, the Greek state. The group employed basic methods of counterintelligence, which were sufficient only until the state heightened its focus on capturing them. When the Greek authorities finally increased their efforts and resources, RO17N's outdated methods proved inadequate, leading to the group's swift dismantling. Thus, the evidence clearly suggests that adversary capability, not resource availability, – as posed by Mobley - was the primary driver of counterintelligence sophistication. Resource availability, while important, served mainly to enhance the technical capabilities of an already-established strategy rather than dictate its form.

(iii) *What implications do the counterintelligence strategies of historical groups like RAF and RO17N have for modern counterterrorism policy?*

The implications offered from this study for modern counterterrorism policy are, firstly, the concept of competitive adaptation between terrorist groups and their adversaries should inform how states design counterterrorism measures. Just as stronger state capabilities led to more sophisticated responses from the RAF, modern terrorist groups will likely evolve their counterintelligence methods in response to enhanced counterterrorism tactics. Understanding

this dynamic allows policymakers to anticipate how terrorist groups might adapt to new technologies and strategies, thus helping state actors stay a step ahead in this continuous cycle of adaptation. Moreover, the case of RO17N demonstrates that weak adversary capability can allow terrorist groups to remain undetected for extended periods. However, when the state eventually increases its efforts, terrorist organisations that have not evolved their counterintelligence will be vulnerable to rapid dismantling. Therefore, counterterrorism policy must focus on maintaining consistent pressure on such groups, even when they appear less active or less sophisticated. The study also highlights the importance of addressing the conditions that give rise to passive popular support, as public sentiment can create a permissive environment for terrorist activities, as seen in Greece.

Evaluation of Aims

The aims of this thesis were, firstly, to apply Mobley's framework on the counterintelligence choices of the groups and to offer a structured analysis on how the five factors shaped them. By evaluating each of the factors and the relevant tactical and counterintelligence methods, the findings confirmed that each factor played a role, but adversary capability consistently influenced the groups' decisions more than the others. The second aim of the thesis was to challenge Mobley's theory by analysing whether adversary capability is more critical than resource availability. Through a critical examination of the counterintelligence strategies employed by both organisation, this study has challenged Mobley's emphasis on resource availability, demonstrating that adversary capability is the most decisive factor in shaping terrorist counterintelligence strategies. The comparison between the groups' responses to their respective adversaries reinforces this conclusion, as RO17N's downfall was directly linked to its inability to adapt to the increasing capability of its adversary. Finally, this study aimed to contribute to counterterrorism policy with lessons learned from both the RAF and RO17N. By recognizing how adversary capability drives terrorist innovation, policymakers can design more effective strategies that anticipate and counter such adaptations. The two organisations provide important lessons for modern counterterrorism policy, particularly the importance of understanding the adaptive nature of terrorist counterintelligence. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for consistent state capability to prevent terrorist groups from exploiting weak adversaries, as seen in the case of RO17N.

A terrorist group's organisational structure plays an important role in its survival, and both organisations demonstrated the importance of a tight structure in eluding detection. By splitting the organisation into smaller cells, the groups ensured strategic management and coordination as well as that only fundamental information will be transferred to those in lower hierarchical positions. In both cases, the structure of the group was a counterintelligence method, not a factor that influenced counterintelligence decisions, as many have argued.⁵²

Popular support offered different counterintelligence advantages for each group, but was important nonetheless. The RAF enjoyed a high level of popular support, with sympathetic members of the community offering significant counterintelligence benefits, including the provision of safe houses and resources. The benefits of high popular support also include a larger number and higher quality of potential recruits. On the other hand, the popular support for RO17N was much more passive, thus placing the capturing of the organisation very low on a government's priorities. It should be underlined however, that the support for RO17N was less about the organisation and its activities and more about the distaste of the Greek population toward authorities and the ruling class.

A terrorist group's control of a territory has been argued to be one of the most fundamental factors in influencing a group's counterintelligence. Controlling territory does serve several organisational needs, minimising the cost and effort of communicating with the rest of the organisation, allows for the vetting of recruits and minimises the number of telecommunications that can be intercepted, as volunteers can communicate with each other directly, but in the case of the two organisations lack of controlled territory offered a counterintelligence advantage.

The two cases clearly demonstrate that resources can improve the quality of counterintelligence. The RAF had a large number of financial, weapons and human capital resources, something that increased the quality of its volunteers whilst allowing for a more technologically advanced counterintelligence methodology. RO17N also used the money acquired from its bank robberies to pay the rent for its safe houses as well as purchasing disguises, renting vans and using cabs to add a further layer of anonymity to their operations. A group that wants to increase its resources may also become vulnerable from a

⁵² Mobley, B. (2012). Op. Cit.

counterintelligence point of view. RO17N did not attempt to gain sponsorship from a state or another organisation, which limited its exposure points in contrast to the RAF. Therefore, it is important to try to anticipate how a group will attempt to acquire resources based on previous attempts and thus try to intercept them. Again, resources do not influence counterintelligence *per se*, but rather they ensure higher technical capability and have the potential to allow for the improvement of already established methods, thus improving basic denial and occasionally achieving adaptive denial.

Adversary capability seems to have the biggest impact on the counterintelligence decisions of the two organisations. The RAF, faced with an efficient and committed adversary entered a game of cat-and-mouse with the West German State, in which they both tried to outsmart and outperform each other. This led to increasingly sophisticated choices and methods by both parties, creating what has been called “competitive adaptation”.⁵³ On the other hand, RO17N was operating against an adversary who had little interest in capturing the organisation and attempted to do so with relatively basic methods. This led to an organisation using rudimentary counterintelligence methods that was also not challenged to make improvements or evolve its methodology. Therefore, when their adversary increased its capability and commitment to their arrest, the organisation was dismantled within two years. The vital role that an adversary plays in the evolution and continuous adaptation of a terrorist organisation almost creates a paradox: the more capable the adversary, the more capable the terrorist organisation. Gentry argues that “sovereignties [...] use information to further organizational interests that have global, strategically important consequences – but differ, sometimes significantly, in practice given widely variable intelligence organizations’ goals, activities, and types of desirable knowledge”⁵⁴, which can be used as feedback in the shaping of counterterrorism policy, considering the implications that a strong adversary has on a group’s survival.

Gaining an understanding of terrorist group counterintelligence offers a unique advantage to authorities. As secrecy and trust between the members of a group are fundamental factors of terrorist operations, identifying their potential vulnerabilities can be enormously beneficial. Firstly, an adversary can attempt to disrupt terrorist activity by breeding paranoia

⁵³ Kenney, M. (2008) ‘Organizational learning and Islamic militancy’, *PsycEXTRA Dataset* [Preprint]. doi:10.1037/e550162009-001.

⁵⁴ Gentry, J.A (2015), op.cit.

and mistrust within the operation: reporting a higher number of arrests or announcing that a much larger amount of money was stolen from a bank than what was actually stolen are both ways of instilling suspicion within a group. By enhancing paranoia, the organisation's adversaries can achieve loosening the ties between its members and thus potentially recruit informers more easily or dismantle the group completely.

As groups need to find a balance between ensuring popular support and maintaining secrecy, their publicity exposure is also something that can be exploited. RO17N, in its need to demonstrate its strength and the weakness of the Greek police, issued a communiqué following the Riankour fiasco, in which they presented the events from their perspective. In their attempt to demonstrate their superiority however, they also disclosed a lot of operational and strategic facts, providing authorities with information on their modus operandi. By encouraging the group to believe that their struggle, or the struggle of their leader is unique, the group could be encouraged to give in to its craving for publicity, accidentally releasing sensitive information about the organisation and its activities. However, this method can be dangerous because it can further rationalise a group's conviction that they are fighting for a legitimate cause as well as increase the popular support of the organisation.

Moreover, by closely following and attempting to understand terrorist organisations, general patterns can be identified. By understanding these patterns, it becomes easier to follow and predict the behaviour of terrorist organisations. This thesis confirms Gentry's assessment that "the modest literature on the intelligence operations of violent non-state sovereignties suggests that they primarily employ intelligence to plan physical military (or 'terrorist') attacks and to protect themselves from penetration and attack by government forces".⁵⁵ By analysing the behavioural and counterintelligence patterns of groups through time and across the world, we can map out the most common behaviours as well as discover the outliers, thus increasing our counter terrorist capability. Following an existing framework, an end can be put to the "end practice of relying solely on the expertise of a single individual in trying to understand, explain, and predict the behaviour of a foreign intelligence organization, and instead use that expertise as a way to enrich the analysis with knowledgeable insights".⁵⁶

Future research can thus examine the counterintelligence methods of terrorist groups in different countries, with different ideologies, resources, organisational structures and

⁵⁵ Gentry, J.A. (2015), Op. Cit.

⁵⁶ Varouhakis, M., (2011), Op.Cit.

territorial advantages. This will enable for the understanding of counterintelligence methods, as well as provide further evidence on whether adversary capability can influence the counterintelligence methods or not. Emphasising on this gap in the literature to provide more accurate guidelines in approaching terrorist counterintelligence, there can be “discussion of the ‘how’ or the ‘why’ of insurgent intelligence, simply a rather terse list of the ‘what’”⁵⁷. Moreover, research could also focus on non-terrorist clandestine organisations such as drug or human trafficking groups, in order to examine whether the present findings can be extrapolated to them. By understanding our opponent and determining the factors that affect their behaviour, we can develop the capability to rigorously analyse the data in order to generalise and predict their behaviour. The RAF and RO17N offer only a glimpse of counterintelligence capability of terrorist organisations, but are building blocks to our understanding of how terrorist groups work and a step forward for building effective counter terrorism frameworks.

Despite the historical nature of this thesis, it can inform modern counterintelligence research in several ways. Firstly, leveraging historical counterterrorism research can provide a valuable foundation for understanding and countering modern terrorist groups. Lessons from past counterterrorism efforts, such as those against the PIRA in the United Kingdom or the Red Brigades in Italy, can inform contemporary strategies. The study of these historical cases can also aid in identifying recurring patterns, tactics, and organisational structures that terrorist groups often employ. Zuehlke, defines the function of counterintelligence "as threefold: aggressive, preventive, and defensive".⁵⁸ By examining the successes and failures of past counterterrorism operations, modern security agencies can adapt their methods and policies, leading to more effective responses to current threats, remaining all of the three: aggressive, preventive and defensive.

Secondly, despite the establishment of the digital age, modern terrorist organisations recognize the risks associated with excessive online activity. Trackability and surveillance capabilities have greatly advanced in the digital realm, making it more challenging for these groups to operate solely online. As a result, they often maintain a significant non-digital presence for planning, recruitment, and coordination. For example, Al-Qaeda's leadership used couriers and face-to-face meetings to avoid digital traces, contributing to their longevity despite

⁵⁷ Strachan-Morris, D. (2019), Op.Cit.

⁵⁸ Kalaris, G. and McCoy, L., (1988) Counterintelligence for the 1990s, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 2:2, 179-187

intense international efforts to dismantle the organisation.⁵⁹ The Islamic State (ISIS) also provides a contemporary example of the importance of non-digital operations. While the group utilised social media for recruitment and propaganda, its leadership relied on encrypted messaging applications for secure communication.⁶⁰ To counter this, intelligence agencies needed to infiltrate these offline communication channels and understand the logistics of ISIS's non-digital operations. In some cases, physical surveillance and informants played crucial roles in tracking and neutralising key figures within the organisation, illustrating the significance of real-world intelligence gathering. This underscores the importance of countering not only online propaganda but also using our understanding of the offline networks that sustain these groups.

To combat modern terrorist groups effectively, a holistic approach is necessary, combining historical knowledge, counterintelligence expertise, and a nuanced understanding of the digital and non-digital realms. By building upon historical counterterrorism research, leveraging counterintelligence capabilities, and recognizing the dual nature of terrorist operations in the digital age, security agencies can better address the ever-evolving threat landscape. This integrated approach allows for a more comprehensive response to modern terrorist organisations, ultimately enhancing national and international security efforts. This thesis hopes to provide knowledge and information on the area of counterintelligence and to aid in disrupting, infiltrating and dismantling clandestine groups by understanding the choice and strength of their chosen counterintelligence tactics.

⁵⁹ Committee On Homeland Security (2011) Jihadist Use of Social Media--how To Prevent Terrorism And Preserve Innovation, Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg74647/html/CHRG-112hhrg74647.htm> (Accessed: 01 October 2023).

⁶⁰ Cohen, J. (2023) *Digital counterinsurgency*, *Foreign Affairs*. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/digital-counterinsurgency> (Accessed: 01 October 2023).

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Appendix I

