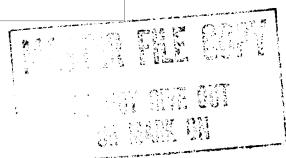


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# Italian Leftist Terrorism: Defeated but Not Destroyed

An Intelligence Assessment



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EUR 83-10242 October 1983

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# Italian Leftist Terrorism: Defeated but Not Destroyed

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by external contractor for the Office of European Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, European Issues Division, EURA,

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	Italian Leftist Terrorism: Defeated but Not Destroyed	25 <b>X</b> 1
Key Judgments Information available as of 30 September 1983 was used in this report.	Italian leftist terrorists have suffered severe setbacks during the past 18 months from which they are unlikely to fully recover. Terrorism has all but ceased and some 1,500 terrorists of the Red Brigades, Prima Linea, and the numerous autonomist groups have been convicted or are awaiting trial. Estimates of the hardcore terrorists still at large range from 80 to no more than 225.	25 <b>X</b> 1
	The success of Italy's battle against leftist terrorism is partly the result of more imaginative tactics by Italian authorities. These include a special unit to coordinate antiterrorist measures, a security service reorganization, and a temporary law permitting plea bargaining that elicited some 300 confessions and leads from suspected terrorists.	25X1
	Government efforts have been complemented by a decline in the quality and ideological commitment of terrorist recruits, by growing terrorist factionalism, and by sheer battle fatigue. The Red Brigades after 1978 became increasingly dependent for new cadres on the far less disciplined autonomous groups that preferred spontaneous protests and violence to the Brigades' elitist and more calculating approach. Since the murder of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978, the Brigades have also been rent by ideological differences between those wanting to emphasize methodical murder and those favoring the autonomists' approach of capitalizing on popular socioeconomic grievances.	25 <b>X</b> 1
	A third factor behind the decline of leftist terrorism is the failure to attract many recruits among mainstream Communists and the growing hostility of most Italians. Many potential supporters who had hoped for swift results did not bargain on a protracted murder campaign.	25 <b>X</b> 1
	<ul> <li>We believe that leftist terrorism has been broken and that it will not be capable any time soon of a sustained offensive resulting in a series of deaths and kidnapings:</li> <li>The terrorists still at large are dispirited and in disarray, judging by the comments of those among their imprisoned cohorts.</li> <li>Italian schools, universities, and radical working-class strongholds are unlikely to provide zealous new recruits in large numbers because of the prevalence of career and job-related concerns and the waning of their revolutionary impulses.</li> <li>Italian police and security services are now in a far better position to monitor and block terrorist moves.</li> </ul>	25X1

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Nonetheless, even in their present weakened state, terrorist groups are likely to retain the ability to conduct eccasional operations against unguarded or unsuspecting lower-level Italian or US targets. Because commando groups of only nine terrorists were able to kidnap Moro and US Gen. James Dozier, terrorists may even target another high-level official. Short of an assassination attempt that might discredit them further, however, they would be hard pressed to emulate the prolonged, high-publicity Moro and Dozier operations because they no longer have the necessary support network. Thus, although the terrorist threat has substantially diminished and it no longer threatens governmental stability, leftist terrorism is likely to persist.

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Italian Leftist Terrorism: Defeated but Not Destroyed

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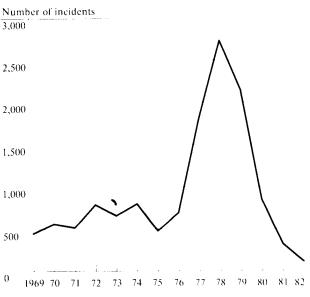
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### Introduction

Leftist terrorists in Italy have suffered severe setbacks during the past 18 months from which they are not likely to recover fully any time soon. As late as December 1981, the Red Brigades were still strong enough to kidnap Gen. James Dozier and to plan equally ambitious operations for the following year. But those plans collapsed with General Dozier's rescue and the arrest of most of his kidnapers. Three of the most important terrorists immediately began to confess, prompting numerous other arrests. By July of last year, then Interior Minister Virginio Rognoni was able to inform the Parliament that over 400 leftist terrorists had been captured since the Dozier kidnaping. Police successes continued throughout 1982 and into 1983, with the smashing of the relatively new Brigades organization in Naples, the "Walter Alasia" column in Milan, and the arrest of many important figures in the Rome organization.

The other leftist terrorist groups, simultaneously rivals and allies of the Red Brigades, suffered as heavily from police action. The largest, Prima Linea, saw the last of its fugitive chiefs arrested by January 1983. The numerous "autonomist" terrorist groups, which served as recruiting grounds for the Red Brigades and Prima Linea, were hit hard even earlier by the police.

# Leftist Terrorism, 1969-82<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Italian statistics on terrorist actions vary considerably. These figures cover all types of terrorist incidents and reporting on the overall period of terrorist actions. Compiled for the Italian Communist Party, they have been considered valid by non-Communist experts. Source: Mauro Gallent, *Rapporto sul Terroriso*, 1981, supplemented by press figures 1981–82.

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terrorism has been limited to a bungled assassination attempt and a holdup attempt last May in Rome by some young amateurs and the murder last June of a Turin magistrate—which some Brigaders disclaim. Another indication that the back of leftist terrorism has been broken is that no terrorism against politicians accompanied the national election last June. (See figure and box.)

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# Terrorism in Society

Although the Red Brigades are the best known terrorist group in Italy, the cumulative effect of leftist terrorism on Italian society cannot be understood by studying the actions of the Red Brigades alone or even by including Prima Linea, the second-largest organization. According to published Italian security service records, 120 persons have been killed in Italy during 1974-83 by some 22 leftist terrorist groups. Of these, only 68 were killed by the Red Brigades and 18 by Prima Linea. One hundred fifty-seven persons were wounded, 78 by the Brigades and 25 by Prima Linea.

The number of extremists once galvanized by the broader movement, however, is estimated by Italian

studies on terrorism to have been some 10,000. The Italian literature shows that semilegal autonomist groups spawned hundreds of clandestine organizations; some 20 of these have been implicated in the murder of individuals. Overall, leftist terrorists committed at least half of the 13,000 violent acts recorded between 1973 and July 1982 according to a report to parliament by then Interior Minister Virginio Rognoni. The cumulative impact of this relentless attack against selected symbols of the state, in our judgment, was as important as the murder of Aldo Moro and the kidnaping of General Dozier in mobilizing the Italian state and the public to battle the terrorists.

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### Anatomy of the Decline

The decline of leftist terrorism is partly the result of improvement in the government's counterterrorist capability,

battle weariness and internal dissension in their ranks also played an important role.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the terrorists never attracted more than a minuscule fraction of the political left away from the reformist Communist Party or won support from the increasingly hostile general public.

## **Improved Counterterrorist Tactics**

The Italian Government initially appeared helpless in the face of Aldo Moro's kidnaping in 1978 and his eventual murder. Two of its three intelligence services—the intelligence arm of the police and the defense intelligence service—were in the middle of sweeping reorganizations brought on by earlier revelations of their meddling in domestic politics. According to US officials in contact with their Italian counterparts, old chiefs had been fired, civilians were transferred to a new military intelligence service, and carabinieri officers were sent to a new civilian service.

Although authorities had scored a few successes against terrorists, no prisoner was willing to implicate his comrades. The difficulty of infiltrating an organization that tested recruits by their willingness to commit murder was further complicated by widespread public suspicion that police informants had earlier been involved in rightwing terrorist actions. Security forces thus had little information, misused what they had, and did not know how to get more.

The government decided temporarily to bypass its intelligence services while they were being reorganized and created a special antiterrorist group under the energetic carabinieri general, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa. Armed with powers to hold suspects longer without a hearing and to tap telephones more freely, and acting rapidly on leads that had been ignored, Dalla Chiesa got results. His first big success was a

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general offensive in April 1979 against autonomist leaders such as Antonio Negri, Oreste Scalzone, and Franco Piperno, who for years had overtly preached "legal" tactics, such as demonstrations that frequently ended in violence, while denying responsibility for the consequences. The government, in our judgment, had been afraid to move against them lest it be accused of acting illegally, but after the Moro affair, both government and police were bolder.

In addition to Dalla Chiesa's effort, the government's chief weapon against leftist terrorism was a new law permitting the reduction of terrorists' sentences by as much as three-fourths if they cooperated with the police. Although the law was actually in effect only in 1981 and 1982, hopes aroused by its consideration may have helped prompt Brigades Turin chief Patrizio Peci in April 1980 to become the first important Brigader to make a full confession. In any case, the enactment of the plea bargaining law was followed by a flood of confessions and new leads.

Moreover, by 1980 the reorganization of the security services had begun to have an impact. The new Central Office for General Investigations and Special Operations (UCIGOS) in the Interior Ministry and its local subunits had become operational. Collaborating with streamlined military and civilian intelligence units, it was able to coordinate investigations throughout the country rapidly and arrest terrorists quickly. While the government's techniques became increasingly proficient. Italian authorities carefully avoided indiscriminate crackdowns that might have evoked sharp criticism from Italy's civil liberties—conscious public. Civil rights continued to be respected, and the extreme left was given no excuse to claim that the state had abandoned due process in favor of tactics practiced against terrorists in states such as Uruguay and Argentina.

### The Internal Weaknesses of Terrorism

Italian security officials readily admit that their own improved efficiency and the growing disrepute of the terrorists are only partly responsible for the waning of leftist terrorism. They note that the confession phenomenon also owes much to the general deterioration in the quality and ideological commitment of Brigade recruits and to the growing factionalism in the movement that made some terrorists eager to implicate their rivals.

**Poorer Recruits.** Despite their growing loss of support among the broader public, Brigades recruiters were able to co-opt new members from other leftwing groups. Analysis of 83 Brigades 25X1 members on police most wanted lists in mid-1982 shows 55 percent were known to have belonged to at least one other extreme leftist organization before joining the Brigades, while 32 percent had belonged to another violent organization. Brigades membership 25X1 eventually became less an initiation into terrorism than a lateral move from a smaller group to a larger and better organized one (see table 1). 25X1 25X1 These new recruits came mostly from the less disciplined and motivated autonomist groups, Although few of the old-guard Brigades leaders talked upon being arrested—after 25X1 Peci confessed in April 1980, no leader cooperated with police until Antonio Savasta began to talk

Ideological Differences. Leftist terrorism was dealt another severe blow when the old dispute between Brigades and autonomists over strategy and tactics found its way into Brigades ranks

following his capture in January 1982—some rank

and filers formerly belonging to autonomist groups did. So have many leaders and followers in the various

autonomist groups. Indeed, the more than 300 confes-

sions secured by police have come in large measure

from them (see table 2; box).

dissidents inside the Roman column, who first opposed Moro's kidnaping and then his murder, pushed in 1979 for a switch to lower-level targets. They argued that the desired worker support would come only if terrorism were visibly related to problems like housing, health services, or wages. After losing the argument, they seceded and subsequently attacked real estate speculators before ending their campaign in a series of squalid robberies that led to their arrest.

Dissent did not end there. In July 1980 L'Espresso reported on a critical note drafted in prison by Brigades founders Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini "against militarism—for which the Organization is all, and the working class only its claque

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Table 1
Age and Terrorist Background of 25 Red Brigades Leaders a

	Born		Prior Autonomous Group Activity	Brigades Activity
Giovanni Senzani	1940	Prominent leader of "movementist" faction Naples Rome columns.		1976-82
Renato Curcio	1941	Founder of Red Brigades.		1969-76
Lauro Azzolini	1943	Member Executive Committee, on Moro kidnap team.		1969-78
Margherita Cagol	1945	Curcio's wife; killed by police 1975.		1969-75
Mario Moretti	1946	Most skillful and long-lasting Brigade leader. Planned Moro kidnaping.		1969-81
Rocco Micaletto	1946	Chief Genoa column, Executive Committee.	+	1973-80
Alberto Franceschini	1947	Close associate Curcio; Brigades ideologist.		1969-76
Valerio Morucci	1949	One of Roman leaders; seceded in 1979.	+	1976-79
Barbara Balzarani	1949	Member of Executive Committee, still at large.	+	1976-
Adriana Faranda	1950	One of Roman leaders; seceded with Morucci in 1979.	+	1976-79
Vittorio Bolognesi	1950	Leading member of Naples column.	+	1980-82
Nicola De Maria	1951	A leader of breakaway Milanese "Alasia Column."	+	1978-82
Mauro Acanfora	1951	Leader of Naples column.	+	1980-82
Prospero Gallinari	1951	Roman column leader 1978-79; the man who killed Moro.		1969-79
Bruno Seghetti	1951	Roman column leader 1979-80.	+	1976-80
Maria Carla Brioschi	Circa 1951	Cofounded Rome column; member of Executive Committee 1978-79.	+	1972-79
Luigi Novelli	1953	Leader of Roman column 1981-82.	+	1976-82
Patrizio Peci	1953	Leader Turin column 1979-80. Made first important confession.	+	1976-80
Roberto Ognibene	1954	Youngest of original Curcio group.		1969-76
Antonio Savasta	1954	Headed Veneto column 1980-82. Kidnaper of General Dozier.	+	1978-82
Raffaele Fiore	1954	Leader Turin column until 1978; went to Naples to build column.	+	1975-80
Luca Nicolotti	1954	A leader in Turin column; sent south to help organize Naples column.	+	1975-79
Emilia Libera	1954	Companion Savasta, prominent Sardinian, Veneto column.	+	1977-82
Franco Bonisoli	1955	Early Brigades recruit, member Executive Committee.	+	1973-78
Pietro Vanzi	1956	Leader in Rome, involved in Dozier kidnaping.	+	1978-83

a These leaders belong to a single political generation. Few were born before the end of World War II. Most participated in the tumults of 1968-69, often as high school students. Fifteen of them were at large in January 1980; 10 in January 1981; nine in January 1982; and one in July 1983.

Table 2
The Most Active Terrorist Organizations, 1977-80

Organization		Crimes Against Life and Property
Azione Rivoluzionaria	(Revolutionary action)	25
Autonomia Operaia	(Workers autonomy)	44
Brigate Rosse	(Red Brigades)	286
Comunisti Combattenti	(Fighting Communists)	10
Formazioni Armate Proletari	(Armed proletarian formations)	13
Guerriglia Comunista	(Communist guerrilla)	10
Lotta Armata per il Comunismo	(Armed struggle for Communism)	35
Nuclei Comunisti Territoriali	(Communist territorial nuclei)	15
Nuclei Armati per il Contropotere Territoriale	(Armed nuclei for territorial counterpower)	15
Nuclei Armati Proletari	(Armed proletarian nuclei)	20
Nuclei Combattenti Comunisti	(Fighting Communist nuclei)	26
Organizazzione Operaia per il Comunismo	(Workers' organization for Communism)	16
Prima Linea	(Front Line)	99
Proletari Comunisti Organizzati	(Organized proletarian Communists)	106
Ronda Proletaria	(Proletarian patrol)	22
Ronde Armate Proletarie	(Armed proletarian patrols)	21
Ronde Proletarie	(Proletarian patrols)	31
Ronde Proletarie di Combattimento	(Fighting proletarian patrols)	28
Squadre Armate Proletarie	(Armed proletarian squads)	28
Squadre Proletarie Combattenti	(Fighting proletarian squads)	23
Unita Combattenti Comunisti	(Fighting Communist units)	28

Source: Mauro Galleni, Rapporto sul Comunismo, 1981.

and reservoir." At about the same time, the "Walter Alasia" column in Milan declared in a communique that it would pursue an independent course and would no longer respect the decisions of the overall Executive Committee and Strategic Directorate. It served notice that it would henceforth concentrate only on targets of potential interest to workers in the

<sup>3</sup> The Red Brigades organization consisted of area "columns" in Turin, Milan, Rome, Naples, and Venice. It was led on a day-to-day basis by a four- to five-man Executive Committee that coordinated the activities of the columns. The Strategic Directorate consisted of 15 to 20 of the top leaders in the various columns who met annually to devise the plan of attack for that year.

Lombardy area.

By 1981 the Brigades were fast splitting into rival groups. The quarrel was effectively dramatized in December 1981 when two different Strategic Directives—supposedly the action plan for the following year—were issued publicly within days of each other. The so-called movementists held that the political party they strove to create was near fruition, and that an elite military movement was no longer needed. The movementists' leader, Professor Giovanni Senzani, proclaimed the formation of a "guerrilla party" uniting the Brigades, members of old autonomist groups,

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# Relations Among Terrorist Groups

For a long time, the relation of the autonomists and Prima Linea with the Red Brigades was poorly understood by police and observers, who assumed all were in tow to the Brigades. The evidence that has accumulated over the past 18 months from the confessions of "repentant" terrorists has clarified the pedigree of the various groups. All arose after the tumult of 1968 and the "hot autumn" of labor strife and wildcat strikes in 1969. All the groups were violence-prone, all assumed that the Italian Communist Party was hopelessly committed to an increasingly revisionist course, and all shared the motto "Don't change the state—fight it!" They disagreed strongly, however, on organization and tactics.

Red Brigades founder Renato Curcio and his cohorts, and to a somewhat lesser extent the leaders of Prima Linea, looked to the example of Mao Tse Tung and to urban guerrillas in South America. They foresaw a long, difficult struggle—perhaps for 40 years, wrote Curcio. In this struggle they thought only a tightly structured, Leninist-type clandestine group of urban guerrillas could survive and conduct the campaign of "armed propaganda"—which would in a later phase win growing support from a proletariat formerly in tow to the PCI. The penultimate phase would be civil war followed, as in the Chinese example, by victory.

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The autonomous groups rejected the Brigades' Leninist model, which they thought too elitist and certain to isolate them from the very masses they sought to influence. They envisaged a struggle on two levels—one overt, in which they would claim the civil rights given them by the bourgeois state while contesting its legitimacy, and a covert level in which they would rely on spontaneous street violence as well as more methodical clandestine activities.

and undefined larger groups presumably now ready for armed revolt. The "militarists" replied by accusing their rivals of adventurism, saying that the Brigades must remain the armed nucleus of a future party.

According to the statements of former Brigaders, the split with its accompanying public polemics weakened the overall combative power of the Brigades. Although the two factions continued to parley with each other, they no longer planned joint operations. Their ideological differences were aggravated by a bitter power struggle and mutual suspicion, all of which persuaded several arrested Brigaders to talk.

### Lack of Public Support

The testimony of former sympathizers shows that as murder followed murder, even those originally not ill disposed toward the terrorists began to ask what justified such tactics. Observers had once calculated that 300,000 to 600,000 persons in Italy had varying degrees of sympathy with the terrorists. Neither the Red Brigades nor autonomists succeeded in mobilizing them. Instead, after the police had arrested some 1,500 active terrorists and another 1,000 had fled the

country, their supporters failed to step forward to replace them.

Part of the terrorist audience, in our judgment, had expected quick and exciting results. They did not bargain for a long murder campaign and began to ask what relation it had to social causes, and what positive measures the terrorists favored. They found no satisfying answer. The long struggle Renato Curcio had written about proved to be unexpectedly long. By 1983 it had lasted 14 years and seemed to be going nowhere.

The extremists who began the terrorist struggle fore-saw in their writings the revisionist policies adopted by the Italian Communist Party in the 1970s and calculated that they would produce widespread revulsion in the working class. Instead, the vast majority of leftists have remained faithful to the PCI. The extremists are thus on notice that their small minority has after long exertion failed to convert the mass of Communists, even though the revisionist policies of the party are now on full display.

Finally, we believe that the terrorist generation was the product not of economic depression but rather of great expectations fostered by the West European—wide "economic miracle" of the 1960s and the related revolutionary spirit that engulfed much of Western Europe's youth and working class. The recent hard economic times and the waning of revolutionary impulses that produced a conservative trend among youth and labor elsewhere in Western Europe during the late 1970s also has affected Italy. At least for now, Italian high schools, universities, and radical working-class strongholds, the former spawning grounds for terrorist militants, are quiet.

### **Remaining Terrorists Taking Stock**

By early 1983 the combined effect of sweeping arrests, ideological dissidence, and the terrorists' growing realization that radicalized workers and students would not rally to them prompted several leading terrorist figures to declare that their campaign was over. "The cycle of revolutionary armed struggle launched in the early 1970s on the wave of vast and radical student and workers' movements is substantially finished," says a document drafted by Renato Curcio.

Other terrorists have taken a similar line. A Prima Linea leader who claimed to speak for his group said at his trial in April 1983 that the armed struggle was "useful" in certain instances in the past, but was "no longer the right means to promote the welfare of the masses." These statements are admissions of defeat, in our judgment, but not declarations of unequivocal surrender. Curcio's full statement makes it clear that he still envisions some sort of militant action that does not exclude violence.

Other imprisoned leaders, such as Mario Moretti, arguably the brightest and most respected of the Brigades chiefs—who organized many of the regional organizations, led the Moro kidnaping, and ruled as first among equals until his arrest in 1981—call for a continued campaign. "The armed struggle is not finished," said Moretti to a reporter who interviewed him in a courtroom. "It will take a qualitative leap, and adopt new forms." A continuing debate thus divides those like Curcio, who seek new forms of struggle that will appeal to the masses, and others such as Moretti, who apparently think their defeat is largely tactical and can be remedied by better organization, more effective clandestineness and a few resounding successes.

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We believe that both the Red Brigades and the autonomists correctly diagnosed each other's weaknesses. Red Brigade clandestineness did isolate the organization from the workers. But the spontaneous tactics of the autonomists were also deficient, and their loose organization created vulnerabilities helpful to the police when the autonomists went underground. Above all, in our view, both were wrong in believing that a combative minority could by "armed propaganda" galvanize an army of partisans into provoking the state to take repressive actions that would trigger civil war.

### Outlook

It is unlikely, in our judgment, that leftist terrorists will be in a position any time soon to mount another sustained assault against Italian institutions. Terrorist groups are likely to remain bedeviled by their internal failings, the government's strengthened counterterrorist capability, and a hostile public. Nevertheless, the quiet that has fallen over the terrorist scene and the figures showing that relatively few terrorists remain at large can be misleading. Terrorism as a mass phenomenon may be finished, but the unwillingness of many terrorists to admit defeat could still produce spectacular violence.

even without further	r
recruitment, we believe there are probably enough	
hardcore terrorists left to engage in limited new	
terrorist activity. The Brigades characteristically us	ed
an attack squad of four or five persons for murder woundings, and only nine persons carried out the	
Moro and Dozier kidnapings. Such small groups, in	
our judgment, could attack unguarded or unsuspect	
ing lower-level Italian or US officials, and they cou	Id
even set their sights again on high-ranking ones.	
To have the most dramatic impact, a renewed terrorist offensive would probably have to take one of the following forms:	
• A prison attack freeing a number of prisoners	

- prison attack, freeing a number of prisoners.
- A kidnaping or murder of a high Italian or US official.
- An attempt to seize a nuclear weapon or an attack designed to foil INF deployment.

An attack against a US military facility in particular would require a level of organization and training the terrorists seldom possessed at their peak, but given luck and daring, even an abortive raid could become a political success for the terrorists and revive their morale.

The cadres for an eventual resurgence of leftist terrorism are not lacking, given the US Embassy in Rome estimate that as many as 225 Brigaders and Prima Linea figures may still be at large in Italy and that hundreds more will eventually have to be freed from prison because their terms have expired or because of lack of evidence to convict them.

Signs that leftist terrorism is recovering would include a successful murder or kidnaping of a guarded, highlevel official, a wave of attacks against lower level targets, or new theoretical proclamations outlining the terrorists' rationale. The election of Antonio Negri, the chief theorist of autonomist terrorism, to Parliament on the Radical Party ticket last June while he was under preventive detention was, in our judgment,

less a harbinger of renewed public sympathy for the terrorist cause than it was a protest against his fouryear pretrial detention.

At least for the next few years, however, leftist terrorism is likely to threaten only selected individuals, and not the stability of the Italian state. Some of the police attention trained on terrorism has already shifted to organized crime and drugs, where the death rates greatly exceed those exacted by terrorism—over 1,000 Mafia or Camorra murders in southern Italy alone in 1982. Although the Red Brigades and other terrorists have written a great deal about politicizing prison populations, statistics suggest that few common criminals were absorbed into Brigades structures. A more important phenomenon, in our judgment, was the degeneration of the autonomist political gangs into almost purely criminal ones, robbing banks under the guise of expropriation of the wealthy.

In the future some criminals might give their actions a light wash of political justification, but a significant number of criminals probably will not be drawn into basically political terrorism. Although some Italian press accounts claim that the Red Brigades in Naples collaborated in 1981-82 with one of the Camorra "families," it is difficult to see what advantage the Camorra or Mafia could find in extensive collaboration with leftist terrorism. These organizations have in common systematic crimes frequently including murder. But the criminals seek private profit, often guaranteed by links with corrupt officials, while the political criminals, by seeking to overthrow the whole system, attract greater police attention and complicate the practice of crime. Terrorist murder is thus likely to exist alongside criminal murder, degrading life in Italian cities but not ripping the basic fabric of society.

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