Greece: the persistence of political terrorism

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It was 10.25 p.m. on Saturday, 29 June 2002 when the extraordinarily long run of luck of Europe's most elusive terrorist group, the Revolutionary Organization 17 November (17N), finally ran out. A strong blast ripped through the warm evening air near the ticket office of Hellas Flying Dolphins in the port of Piraeus. One man was seriously injured in the face, hands and chest. It seemed that the bomb he was carrying, concocted from alarm clocks, common detonators, 9-volt batteries and dynamite, had gone off prematurely. Port authorities rushed to the scene and the man was taken to the emergency unit of the nearby Tzanneio hospital.

Early reports speculated that the bomber was a member of one of the country's smaller terrorist groups, such as the Revolutionary Cells or Popular Resistance, both of which had been fairly active. But the contents of a rucksack (a .38 handgun and two hand grenades) found near the injured man, soon identified as Savvas Xiros, proved much more tantalizing. Three days later, the chief of police announced that the .38 Smith and Wesson had been identified as the gun stolen from a police officer killed by 17N on Christmas Eve 1984 and was the same weapon subsequently used in the assassinations of a shipowner and a prosecutor as well as in a number of other incidents involving the group. Suddenly, a member of the terrorist organization that had often been referred to as *organossi phantasma*, 'phantom organization', and had acted with impunity for 27 years, was in police custody.

Xiros's arrest marked the beginning of the end for 17N. From his hospital bed, apparently fearing for his life, the icon painter and—as it turned out—senior 17N gunman Xiros gave the prosecutor in charge of the counterterrorism investigation critical information that fuelled a chain reaction of arrests as a result of which the group was dismantled in a matter of weeks.[1] The final nail was knocked into 17N's coffin on 5 September 2002 when the group's leader of operations, Dimitris Koufodinas, gave himself up to the police after two months on the

* The author is grateful to the Leverhulme Trust, the Nuffield Foundation and the British Academy for funding different stages of the research on which this article is based.

1 Xiros's information also led to the discovery of the group's main arsenal in three flats in central Athens. The flats—one of them rented by Xiros himself—contained a number of the 60 anti-tank rockets stolen by 17N from an army base in northern Greece in 1989, the typewriter used to produce the group's early communiqués and 17N's red flag with the trademark five-pointed star, as well as grenades, wigs and posters of Che Guevara, Karl Marx and Aris Velouhiotis, a Greek Second World War resistance fighter. Among the weapons was the G-3 rifle used to kill the group's last victim, the British defence attaché in Athens, Stephen Saunders, who was shot dead in June 2000 as he was driving to work.

International Affairs **89**: 1 (2013) 131–142
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run. Koufodinas pulled up at police headquarters in a taxi at 2.35 p.m., dressed in jeans, a black T-shirt, sunglasses and a jockey cap. 'I am Dimitris Koufodinas and I have come to turn myself in,' he told the startled duty officer. Koufodinas had been on the run since the premature detonation of the bomb Savvas Xiros was carrying on 29 June. Xiros later told counterterrorism officers that he had urged Koufodinas to flee the scene. Koufodinas, who had more than 24 hours to get away before police realized that Xiros was connected to 17N, ran first to one of the group's hideouts in central Athens where, according to Greek counterterrorism sources, he destroyed evidence before going on the run. In December 2003, after a marathon nine-month trial (the longest in modern Greek history) held in a purpose-built courtroom in Athens' largest maximum-security prison, Korydallos, a three-member tribunal convicted 15 members of the group of terrorist activity and several other charges. Dimitris Koufodinas received 13 life sentences and 25 years in jail, and Savvas Xiros six life sentences.

The capture and imprisonment of 17N, however, did not mark the end of the story for political terrorism in Greece. It is probably fair to say that at the time a considerable number of senior officials at the Greek Ministry of Public Order to whom the author of this article spoke seriously entertained the theory that the dismantling of 17N was tantamount to the final elimination of terrorism in Greece, insisting that any remaining small, stubborn splinter groups posed no real security threat. If only it were that simple. But, on the contrary, European experience has repeatedly shown that when a major terrorist organization is broken up, after a period of time a new generation of terrorists emerges. This new generation may lack the operational capabilities and scope of the group they aspire to imitate, but that does not render them any less dangerous. Tellingly, in the Greek context, a new group calling itself Revolutionary Struggle (RS) picked up the baton of violence from 17N before the trial of Koufodinas and Xiros had even come to an end. RS was joined in 2008 by a second anarchist-oriented guerrilla group, the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (CCF), which has gone on to become the most active of Greece's new generation of urban guerrilla groups. It is worth remembering that it was CCF's parcel-bombing campaign in November 2010 that caused a major security scare across Europe, forcing the Greek government to take the unprecedented step of suspending international airmail for 48 hours owing to a barrage of parcel bombs (14 in all), targeting the offices of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy as well as a number of foreign embassies in Greece.

This article argues that Greece has one of the most persistent problems of political terrorism anywhere in Europe. From the mid-1970s to the present, the country's political and socio-economic institutions have been confronted by a rising tide of systematic terrorist violence, perpetrated for the most part by revolutionary guerrilla groups. Even more unpalatable is the fact that there is no sign of any escape route from what has become a permanent fixture of national public life. 17N's dismantling and imprisonment, rather than demoralizing and emasculating the country's armed struggle movement, led instead to the

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emergence of new urban guerrilla groups and the increase and intensification of revolutionary violence. In the context of this analysis, the article places Greek extremism and violence in a broader political and cultural perspective and offers an exposition of what these new militant groups seek to achieve, what motivates their actions and how they compare with their predecessors.

Greek political violence in context

Revolutionary behaviour cannot be studied apart from its socio-political and ideological environment. Revolutionary terrorism in Greece arose from a complex set of political conditions and long-standing cultural influences that drew politically active individuals towards the utopian world of revolutionary protest and violence. These conditions and influences, which provided the foundations upon which extreme left-wing terrorism took firm root in the mid-1970s, require in-depth analysis and consideration within the wider context of the evolution of Greek political culture over the past four decades, especially the years immediately following the collapse of the colonels' dictatorial regime in 1974.

The civil war of 1946–9 between communists and anti-communists cost over 80,000 Greeks their lives and 700,000 their homes. The fanaticism and ferocity of this conflict not only generated a passionate and profound political division within a country already devastated by the ravages of the Second World War and the brutal German occupation but also cast a long shadow over the politics of the 1950s and 1960s. The deep political and social wounds it inflicted upon the national psyche have not yet fully healed even today.

The institutional legacy of the civil war survived, largely, until 1974, through systematic discrimination by the victors (the right) against the vanquished (the left). This discrimination was enforced through what became known as the 'paraconstitution', a draconian set of emergency laws (modelled on US anti-communist legislation) and political control techniques (used extensively in America during the Truman–McCarthy era) aimed at the political and economic exclusion of the Greek left and the consolidation of the anti-communist state.[2] This system was applied by a large police bureaucracy which kept files on every Greek citizen, in which they would underline in red pen critical information about citizens labelled 'communist', 'leftist' or 'sympathizer', and about their relatives. The police files and the certificates of 'civic-mindedness' issued by the police implemented a brand of totalitarianism which involved collective family responsibility and mass political surveillance through police informers, of whom there were more than 60,000 by the early 1960s.[3] Until the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, no one was above suspicion and everyone had to prove their innocence time and again.

Greece's repressive post-civil war socio-political system almost came to an end in 1973. National and international events taking place that year fuelled a belief

[2] See Minas Samatas, 'Greek McCarthyism: a comparative assessment of Greek post-civil war repressive anticommunism and the US Truman–McCarthy era', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 13: 3–4, Fall–Winter 1986, p. 15.

[3] Samatas, 'Greek McCarthyism', p. 35.

International Affairs 89: 1, 2013
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that a direct confrontation with the colonels' military regime was possible. The occupation of the Athens University Law School that March,[4] and of Athens Polytechnic in November, provoked a major crisis for the governing apparatus by igniting what looked like a revolution. Events at the Polytechnic, in particular, became the epicentre of student dissent and served as an effective focus of opposition to the regime. Though it lasted only three days (14–17 November), the revolt not only challenged the military regime but catalysed popular mobilization in many sectors of Greek society. What had begun as a student protest against an authoritarian educational system escalated rapidly into a general political uprising against the military dictatorship.[5] Yet despite much agitation and blood, the November revolt failed to spark a larger conflagration.[6] Although the protest quickly became political, both coherent strategy and strong leadership to take organizational command of the movement were lacking. Nevertheless, November 1973 was clearly an important moment, at which the course of Greek political and social history began to change in a concentrated and intense way.[7] It also marked the beginning of a period of radical communist utopianism and acute political debate on conceptions of class, social structure and revolutionary strategy that gave the far left after 1973 an opportunity to present a fresh, radical and autonomous form of activism. More specifically, the radicalization of November 1973 and the general mood for fundamental change that followed the collapse of the colonels' regime the following year reinforced their confidence and intensified their revolutionary utopianism.

Metapolitefsi, as Greeks call the 1974 transition to multiparty democracy and political modernization, proved to be complex and difficult. The first years of this process were marked by a curious amalgam of continuity and change. The symbols, the rhetoric, even the constitution changed—but without any systematic purge of the bureaucracy or the police apparatus; key sections of the state remained in the hands of the old order. When the first post-1974 government, under Karamanlis, proved unable to deliver the promise of 'irreversible change', the credibility of the new republic was seriously weakened in the eyes of many ordinary Greeks, especially the students whose resistance to the military dictatorship had been instrumental in its destabilization. For those students on the extra-parliamentary left who had believed that *metapolitefsi* would bring about a broader democratic change, the sense of disappointment was even greater. Their disillusionment was to become a major source of instability and active discontent in the years to come, expressed in the form of protest movements, anti-establishment journalism and ultimately political violence.

[4] Stelios Kouloglou and Yiannis Floros, 'I katalipsi tis nomikis—proagellos tou polytechniou' [The occupation of the Athens law school—prelude to the polytechnic], *Anti*, no. 199, 1982, pp. 23–5.

[5] Stavros Lygeros, *Foititiko kinima kai taxiki pali stin Ellada*, tomos 1 [The student movement and class struggle in Greece, vol. 1] (Athens: Ekdotiki Omada Ergassia, 1977), pp. 193–201, 204–209.

[6] See Lygeros, *Foititiko kinima*, pp. 86–98.

[7] See *Eleftherotypia*, special issue on the November 1973 events, 15–16 Nov. 1976.

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The terrorists

Of the 95 named left-wing terroristic signatures which appeared in the first years of *metapolitefsi*, only two were to make a long-term impact: the Revolutionary Popular Struggle (ELA) and the Revolutionary Organization 17 November (17N). ELA, which was the first group to emerge, argued that meaningful revolutionary change needed strategic direction from an armed vanguard of professional revolutionaries, since 'the conflagration that would eventually lead to the overthrow of the capitalist regime' would be 'a long, hard and violent armed struggle'.[8] The group carried out hundreds of non-lethal, low-level bombings aimed at symbolic material targets, ranging from US military and business facilities (such as IBM and American Express) to EC and UN offices and foreign embassies. Rejecting completely the possibility of building socialism from within the existing system, ELA argued that there had been plenty of 'dramatic examples in the past which demonstrate the illusion of power-seizure through peaceful parliamentary transition: the Greek civil war, Allende's Chile, the fascist Greece of 1967 and November 1973—all prove that the only path to the establishment of a dictatorship of a proletariat is the path of popular and revolutionary violence'.[9]

Like ELA, 17N (which took its name from the night of 16–17 November 1973, when riot police backed up with tanks were sent in to put an end to the Athens Polytechnic occupation, causing the deaths of at least 34 students and injuring another 800) viewed *metapolitefsi* as nothing more than a democratic façade: a massive confidence trick on the Greek nation by a political class which sought to legitimate its authority through the deliberate cultivation of fantasies of stability, transparency and pluralism. Both groups feared for the depoliticization of Greek society, distrusted parliamentary democracy and institutional discourse, were dogmatically anti-American, anti-NATO and anti-EC, and made tireless efforts to expose the 'political doublespeak' of the Greek establishment. Operationally, however, 17N bore little resemblance to ELA. 17N's conception of the political environment was one of protest, resistance and aggressive violence. Between 1975 and 2000 the group's *modus operandi* incorporated high-profile assassinations, kneecappings, armed raids, bombings and rocket attacks.[10] 17N saw the application of violence as the most effective way to crystallize public disaffection with the regime and embed itself in mainstream consciousness. In its obsessive attempts to articulate its goals and strategy, 17N ignored the fact that there was little enthusiasm among

[8] ELA manifesto, *Yia tin anaptyxi tou Ellinikou Laikou kai Epanastatikou Kinimatos* [For the development of the Greek Popular and Revolutionary Movement], dated June/July 1978, p. 16.

[9] ELA manifesto, p. 16.

[10] The group appeared for the first time on 23 December 1975, when three unmasked men stalked Richard Welch, the CIA's station chief in Athens, and shot him down at point-blank range in front of his wife and Greek driver. By choosing such a high-profile target, 17N aimed to put itself immediately on the map and establish credibility as a revolutionary group. However, this strategy produced the reverse effect. Because the operation was conducted with high precision and efficiency, the Greek security services dismissed the claim of a previously unknown group calling itself Revolutionary Organization 17 November to have carried it out as the work of cranks. Police officials believed at the time that both extreme left and right were trying to embarrass each other by sending fraudulent communiqués to the media. Without solid leads and given the vicious atmosphere of the period, the police resorted to imposing a ban on publicizing reports in the press 48 hours after the assassination, which only served to exacerbate media speculation.

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the people for the organization's theoretical models of revolution and root-and-branch critique of Greek parliamentary democracy.

Nevertheless, the end of ELA and 17N, when it finally came, did not diminish the attractiveness of prolonged terrorist violence as a tactical, strategic and psycho-political tool. Although from an ideological standpoint the campaigns of both ELA and 17N were a dramatic failure, revolutionary political behaviour remains deeply embedded in the Greek armed struggle movement. Nostalgia and admiration for the revolutionary politics and gravitas of the old generation meant that the new groups, diverse in structure and character, quickly displayed their ability to reproduce the essential ideological characteristics of the post-1974 adversarial militant tradition on the Greek political scene, continually seeking to raise tension and foment an atmosphere of near-insurrection.

A terrorist-producing country?

What can you do as a writer, wondered the Basque scholar Joseba Zulaika, 'when your primary community of family, friends, village, or country produces "terrorists"? Is it your intellectual challenge to define them, diagnose them, condemn them, understand them, exorcise them?'[11] My own primary motivation for writing this article, having researched Greek terrorism and political violence for the past 20 years, came from the deepening realization that the Greek terrorist landscape, in spite of 17N's spectacular demise, remains as enduring, complex and unpredictable as ever. This environment reflects an expanding terrain upon which violent extremist ideas continue to travel with great speed within Greek society, producing socio-cultural enclaves whose commitment to democratic values and practices of representative politics can be characterized as problematic at best.

Campaigns of terrorism are not free-standing social phenomena. They depend on context, on circumstances—historical, political, social and economic—and on how groups and individuals conducting their violent campaigns relate to the societies within which they deploy force. Whether or not one supports politically motivated violence as a tactic, it is important to place the phenomenon in a clear frame of understanding and to attempt to explain why violent revolutionary organizations continue to emerge within certain democratic national settings.

The collapse of Greece's premier terrorist organization, the 17N group, back in the summer of 2002 after a career spanning 27 years was a truly dramatic event, but it was not the watershed in the country's history claimed at the time by the mainstream political and media establishments. The dismantling of 17N and imprisonment of its leaders, far from demoralizing and emasculating the armed struggle movement, has led to the emergence of new urban guerrilla groups and the increase and intensification of revolutionary violence.

As far as Greek terrorism is concerned, stereotypes have continued to dominate much of the understanding of the various political organizations, old and new: their members are treated as politicized criminals and their use of violence as

[11] Joseba Zulaika, *Terrorism: the self-fulfilling prophecy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), p. 10.

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deviant/criminal behaviour, disregarding the country's larger revolutionary culture and the wider political and socio-economic conditions that facilitate it.[12] It should come as little surprise that the trials of 17N and ELA terrorist organizations[13] (which followed the standard rules of procedure in the Greek judicial process for criminal cases) failed to produce complete answers to critical questions,[14] or that many aspects of the cases remained unclear.[15] In the words of a senior Greek judge, who wished to remain anonymous, 'a great opportunity was lost'.[16]

Militants do not come out of nowhere, especially in a country with a complex and turbulent history like Greece.[17] When a terrorist campaign begins, there is a reason for every bombing, every shooting, every rocket attack. In Greece, however, it has always been easier and more politically convenient for successive governments to think of terrorism simply as an unfortunate aberration or a fringe phenomenon, rather than to accept the fact that 'terrorist action is conducted in historical time by subjects who have been shaped and transformed by powerful political consequences'.[18] My research on the new generation of Greek militants confirms that post-17N terrorism derived directly from the presence of ideologies that justified violence.[19] Ideas sustained by extreme left traditions shaped, facilitated and oriented the political actions and strategies of the new groups. The evolution of both RS and the CCF show, in fact, how ideologically motivated political factions broke away from the larger, non-violent movement to which they were linked by modes of argumentation and forms of practice in order to 'become entrepreneurs of violence'.[20] Having rejected the very nature of Greek democracy, these newly emergent radical organizations escalated their demands symbolically, with the elaboration of distinctive frames of revolutionary rhetoric, and operationally, with the promotion of clandestine systematic violence.

Like their predecessors, the new generation of Greek terrorist groups have not used violence in the Clausewitzian sense of warlike pressure, on the basis that 'if our opponent is to be made to comply with our will, we must place him in a situation which is more oppressive to him than the sacrifice which we demand'.[21] The new groups both intoned the claims and revisited the martyrdoms and sacrifices of

[12] See 'Country survey: Greece', *The Economist*, 10 Oct. 2002.

[13] The trial of ELA started two months after the end of the 17N trial, in February 2004.

[14] See '17N: I diki den edose apantisseis' [The 17 trial did not give answers], *Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia,* 30 Nov. 2003.

[15] Six months after the draconian sentences were handed down in the 17N trial, the so-called 'trial of the century', the court produced a 6,600-page document explaining the ruling in exhaustive detail. Described in the ruling as 'the toughest and most murderous of all [domestic] organizations', 17N was seen by the court as a mixture of former anti-junta resistance fighters and dogmatic leftists who saw Greece's post-1974 transition to democracy as a perverse continuation of the colonels' dictatorship.

[16] Author interview, Athens, Sept. 2010. On the 17N trial, see Nikolaos Zairis, *Ta paraleipomena apo ti diki tis EO 17N* [Omissions from the EO 17N trial] (Kalymnos: Drosos, 2009); Costas Botopoulos, *I diki tis megalis dikis* [The trial of the big trial] (Athens: Nefeli, 2004); Michalis Dimitriou, *Enorkos sti diki gia tin 17N* [Juror for the 17N trial] (Athens: Stafylidis, 2004).

[17] See e.g. Richard English, *Armed struggle: the history of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003).

[18] Zulaika, *Terrorism*, p. 109.

[19] See George Kassimeris, *Inside Greek terrorism* (London: Hurst, 2013).

[20] See Donatella Della Porta, *Social movements, political violence, and the state: a comparative analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 195.

[21] Carl von Clausewitz, *On war* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 104.

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their predecessors. Both RS and the CCF presented themselves and their violence in terms of solidarity, continuity and humanity. The groups embraced the belief that 'violence was not merely an instrumental technique for damaging opponents but also the symbolic basis of the community of activists'.[22] At the same time, their determination to link themselves to a broader level of social conflict was demonstrated in the choice of their targets. Both RS[23] and the CCF[24] aimed at symbolic targets, believing that damaging these would humiliate the Greek political establishment, arouse popular protest and create revolutionary impetus. Through lengthy attack communiqués and strategic texts, the new groups elaborated their interpretations of political events and the dimensions of their violent context in an attempt to dramatize the anomalies of the existing system, deny its legitimacy and propound alternative models.

Regressively fixated on the memory of 17N, both groups (RS in particular) saw their violence as a historical extension of 17N's revolutionary grand narrative. Believing that 17N's revolutionary experiment could only be surpassed by a new revolutionary experiment, RS's overriding objective was to 'shape a genuine revolutionary current, equal to the requirements of the age'.[25] In that sense, RS embraced 17N's view of terrorist violence as a legitimate and logical form of expression for those humiliated and ridiculed by the ruthless capitalist mechanisms of power. RS, like all organizations that resort to terrorism, claimed that its cause justified extremism and the use of violence to intervene in Greek public life.

The CCF embraced revolutionary guerrilla warfare but unlike RS did not attempt to fit itself into Greek left-wing political traditions by formulating class-based criticisms of the Greek state. Viewing itself as 'anarcho-revolutionary', the CCF justified its campaign of terrorism with an ideology that largely resembled radical anarcho-communist traditions. 'Striking at the ordinary flow of the system', the CCF's violence was intended to compensate for the coercive character of capitalism and modern mechanisms of dominant political and financial interests. The CCF's membership profile and political behaviour also suggested

[22] See David Moss, 'Politics, violence, writing: the rituals of "armed struggle" in Italy', in David Apter, ed., *The legitimization of violence* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 85.

[23] From its debut bomb attack on Athens' Evelpidon courthouse in September 2003, RS seemed determined to make a bloody splash. Two bombs, timed to explode 15 minutes apart with no advance warning, were designed to kill police responding to the first explosion at the courthouse. In the event, only one policeman was wounded. The attack was timed to coincide with the 17N trial, being held in Korydallos maximum-security prison. The next attack, on 5 May 2004, on a police station in the working-class suburb of Kallithea, involved three bombs and came just three months before the opening of the Athens Olympic Games. The first two bombs exploded within minutes of each other and the third about 30 minutes later, leading police to conclude that the group intended to cause human casualties. The attack inevitably received huge press coverage, prompting security experts and the international media to question openly Greece's capacity to provide adequate security for the first post-9/11 Games.

[24] In its initial phase of activity in 2008–2010, the CCF averaged one arson wave a month, in both Athens and Salonika, often simultaneously. Early attacks focused on symbols rather than human beings as the group seemed reluctant to escalate its military methods and strategy. On 9 June 2010, however, the CCF detonated a bomb outside the Greek parliament in central Athens. Police were able to clear the area after receiving a 15-minute warning ahead of the blast and no one was injured in the attack, but some windows were blown out in the parliament building. The CCF had placed the bomb in a rubbish bin in one of the busiest areas of the Greek capital. Given the fact that parliament was in session at the time, this was the CCF's way of saying that they could strike against one of the most heavily guarded buildings in the country with impunity.

[25] RS attack communiqué, dated 12 March 2009.

International Affairs 89: 1, 2013
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a new generation of militants dissimilar in many respects to the old-fashioned, mission-orientated metropolitan guerrillas of 17N. The personal histories of CCF militants, born into relatively well-off middle-class families, educated in good schools and very young in age, illustrate the complexity and specificity of the ways in which people come to be involved in terrorism.[26] Overall, the CCF's campaign of violence was centrally driven by a rejection of the values of the society in which it lived. As its campaign grew more violent, the group repeatedly endorsed 17N's claim that armed struggle was the only activity which could actually transform conditions. At the same time, the CCF intended to embody the most elevated principles of protest action at what it saw as a critical moment for the Greek anarchist-revolutionary movement.

A central factor in determining the longevity of terrorist political violence lies in the degree of commitment and the beliefs of those involved. One of the reasons why ELA's and 17N's campaigns endured so long, apart from the Greek state's incompetence in diagnosing the problem early on, was the genuine political commitment of the militants involved. Carlos Marighela, the Brazilian Marxist revolutionary and author of the *Minimanual of the urban guerrilla*, contended that it was 'moral superiority' which sustained most armed guerrilla movements, and the Greek terrorist experience confirms this belief.[27] 17N's chief of operations, Dimitris Koufodinas, portrayed the Greek armed revolutionary as someone 'whose life choices are actually made against his personal interests'.[28] A revolutionary, he said, 'if he is true to himself and to his ideas has the obligation to go all the way'.[29] Unlike the Maoist Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) leader, Abimael Guzman, who, after his dramatic arrest in 1992, wrote letters from prison to fellow Sendero activists, urging them to lay down their arms and use non-violent methods, Koufodinas remained committed to violence as a method of achieving social and political change. As long as groups like 17N 'intervened' and 'resisted', Koufodinas told the perplexed president of the court during the trial, it did not matter that there might never be a military victory. For Koufodinas, who since his imprisonment has become an icon of the Greek armed struggle movement, what was—and remained—important was the act of 'resistance'. Echoing this revolutionary brand of politics, Koufodinas's counterpart in ELA and the group's theoretician, Christos Tsigaridas, was confident that in Greece there would 'never be a shortage of armed revolutionary groups'; and the total of 64 organizational acronyms that

[26] Two characteristic cases of CCF membership are those of Gerasimos Tsakalos and Konstantina Karakatsani. Tsakalos, born into a relatively well-off family, was 24 at the time of his arrest in November 2010 in Pangrati after attempting to mail parcel bombs to various embassies. He seemed never to have held a steady job: he and his brother (also a CCF militant) lived by renting out properties inherited from his father, a talented and well-known lyricist. Konstantina 'Nina' Karakatsani, born in 1991, left the family home at the age of 17, which is very early by any standards, let alone Greek standards. Before she became a fugitive in September 2009, she was working as a tattoo designer and was romantically involved with a CCF militant. Incriminated by fingerprints found in a CCF safe house, Karakatsani was eventually arrested in April 2010 and sentenced to 11 years in jail. In April 2012 an appeals court panel approved her conditional release.

[27] See Tom Parker, 'Fighting an Antaean enemy: how democratic states unintentionally sustain terrorist movements they oppose', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19: 2, 2007, p. 172.

[28] Court proceedings, Korydallos prison chambers, 24 July 2003.

[29] Court proceedings, Korydallos prison chambers, 24 July 2003.

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have appeared on the scene since the demise of his own organization back in 1996 shows that his optimism regarding the depth of Greece's revolutionary community was not baseless.[30] To men like Tsigaridas and Koufodinas, it was axiomatic that a revolutionary militant led from the front and always took political responsibility for his actions irrespective of the cost, a view shared by key personalities of the new generation of Greek revolutionaries such as Nikos Maziotis, the fugitive leader of RS.[31] It is a measure of Maziotis's absolute commitment to the cause that neither the decapitation of RS nor the birth of his own son (to his also imprisoned partner) made him reassess his life and choices. In fact, while in prison Maziotis painted a telling picture of the present-day Greek revolutionary militant when he insisted that becoming a father did not 'cancel out' the fact that he was also a member of 'an armed revolutionary organization'. 'As a matter of fact,' he said, 'all our struggles take place so that we can hand over to our children a better world while making certain that we never place ourselves in the difficult position of having to admit to them when they grow up that we did nothing to resist the unfairness of the existing system.'[32] When the Korydallos prison authorities refused Maziotis visiting rights to the maternity hospital where his partner and RS comrade Panagiota Roupa was to give birth to their son, because of 'security concerns', the RS militant went on hunger strike.[33]

One might, as one veteran Greek politician personally affected by terrorism did, dismiss Koufodinas, Tsigaridas and Maziotis as 'victims of romantic fanaticism',[34] pointing to the fringe status of the groups they led and the failure of those groups to affect political order. However, a history of failure is not necessarily a history of insignificance. The extraordinary durability of ELA's and 17N's campaigns, and the subsequent dynamic emergence of a new generation of militant groups, reveal how the 'visibility of terrorism enhances its contagiousness'.[35]

Central to this article is the view that people in liberal democratic societies rarely choose to commit political violence without discourse. Terrorists, in other words, are made, not born. They need, as David Apter once put it, 'to talk themselves into it'.[36] Political choices are rooted in beliefs that are fundamental to society, and a belief in the utility and necessity of violence suggests systemic

[30] Tsigaridas, testimony in court, 21 Oct. 2009.

[31] In June 2012 Maziotis, together with his partner and RS comrade Panagiota Roupa, went missing in the middle of their trial. The couple—who have admitted they are members of the group—were arrested in April 2010 but were released from jail in October 2011 after spending the maximum 18 months in pre-trial detention, a time during which they had claimed to be political prisoners. They had been ordered to appear at a police station in the central Athens area of Exarchia three times a month, but according to police authorities missed their 15 June and 1 July appointments and have not been seen since.

[32] Interview with Maziotis, *To Vima*, 16 Oct. 2011.

[33] In a letter dated 18 July 2010 Maziotis explains in detail the reasons behind his decision to go on hunger strike and calls his yet to be born baby son 'the youngest political prisoner of the Greek "democracy"'. 'The treatment reserved by the Greek state', he wrote, 'for the imprisoned revolutionaries and its political enemies is standard: vengeful actions, sadism, physical and psychological violence, disrespect toward human dignity, indifference for health, for bodily integrity, for human life itself. Because the security of the state and the regime, is above everything else—above life itself and above "human rights".'

[34] Author interview, Athens, 14 June 2011.

[35] Martha Crenshaw, 'Thoughts on relating terrorism to historical contexts', in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in context* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1995), p. 14.

[36] See Apter, ed., *The legitimization of violence*, p. 2.

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collective grievances as well as 'institutional weaknesses and blockages, or normative insufficiencies, injustices, or inequities, i.e. wrongs to be righted'.[37] Put differently, one does not have to be an apologist for Greek terrorism to recognize that many of the grievances of these organizations, old and new—abuse of authority, political corruption, police brutality—have been legitimate, concrete and far from slight.

Each society has its own mental inventory of patterns, symbols and images, formed and preserved over long periods of time. In Greece, politico-ideological currents and principles stemming from mid-1970s radicalism remain alive today in a way that is difficult to imagine in other European countries with comparably developed radical intellectual and political cultures such as Italy or Spain. In Greek political culture, militant opposition and violent direct action against the established socio-political order continue to function as weapons of confrontation and disagreement in the hands of groups frustrated by what they perceive as an unresponsive political system. ELA and 17N were the first political organizations to present themselves in terms of political dissent, moral conviction and armed insurrection. Their successor groups, drawing upon the languages of political revolution and radical utopianism, attempted to replicate what 17N's consistent, intransigent campaign tried and failed to do: to paralyse Greek public life and discredit the establishment.

To this day, Greek national institutions have proved resilient to and able to withstand intense levels of terrorist activity; but it would be a mistake to underestimate the effects persistent violent campaigns can have on political attitudes and behaviour.[38] In early December 2008 a period of rioting, street violence and small-scale terrorism erupted, initially in Athens.[39] What became clear from this episode was the extent to which direct action and other expressions of political hatred were now widely shared across the spectrum of militant and other political organizations and individuals.[40] The riots were not, as many claimed, an uprising or insurrection against the Greek government's neo-liberal economic policies.[41] Many of the measures deemed responsible for the violence had not even taken effect at the time when Athens was burning. Placing a politically convenient emphasis on

[37] Apter, ed., *The legitimization of violence*, p. 7.

[38] See e.g. Jennifer L. Merolla and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, *Democracy at risk: how terrorist attacks affect the public* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), pp. 195–9.

[39] On 6 December 2008, the fatal shooting of a 15-year-old student, Alexis Grigoropoulos, by a policeman in central Athens, unleashed the worst civil violence in decades, which spread like wildfire all over the country and lasted for more than a week. At about 9 p.m. Epaminondas Korkoneas, a special guard seconded to the police, got out of his patrol car in Exarcheia, a run-down central district of Athens known as the home base of anarchists and extreme left-wingers, to confront a group of youths shouting abuse at him and his partner. Soon after the ensuing shooting of Grigoropoulos, police tried in vain to seal the area as hundreds of people had taken to the nearby streets to spread the news about the incident and express their anger against police brutality. A group of anarchists occupied the main building of the Athens Polytechnic and another group of militants the law faculty. The clashes between police and protesters in the Exarcheia area lasted for the rest of the night and all of Sunday. By Monday lunchtime thousands of students, pupils and citizens were out on the streets protesting against the police.

[40] In 2009, for example, there were 450 security-related incidents recorded in Athens alone: significantly more than in each of the previous 20 years (Greek Criminal Intelligence Directorate, Sept. 2010).

[41] See e.g. Spyros Economides and Vassilis Monastiriotis, eds, *The return of street politics: essays on the December riots in Greece* (London: The Hellenic Observatory, LSE, 2009).

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their role masks the long-standing cultural factors and social deformities that lie beneath the violence.

This is not to say that the debt crisis, which continues to cast a dark cloud over the country, has not made matters worse. The signs of severe economic distress, deepening social polarization, uncontrolled immigration, disaffected policing and generalized anomie in the Greek capital in particular are too many and too visible to dismiss.[42] The fault-lines in Greek society are deepening. In May 2012 Greece became the first European country to elect members of a neo-Nazi party, the racist Golden Dawn, to its parliament. Golden Dawn won votes across much of the country, not simply in the inner cities where its supporters stage pogroms against immigrants and do battle with leftist youths and anarchists. What the rise of Golden Dawn confirms, in a country that suffered so much at the hands of the Nazis and its own military junta, is that a divided and broken society now sits alongside the broken economy.[43]

Irrespective of its history and reputation, Greek democracy has not been functioning well. Episodes of dissent, disorder and violence, even terrorism, are part and parcel of every pluralistic political environment; but when terrorist activity becomes part of a nation's daily routine, as it has in Greece, democracy is put at unnecessary risk.

[42] See Nikos Konstandaras, 'Greece: chronic insecurity and despair—welcome to life in a broken state', *Guardian*, 16 June 2012; also Randall Fuller, 'Paralysis in Athens', *New York Times*, 6 June 2012.

[43] See 'Greek elections: the replay deepens the divide', editorial, *Guardian*, 17 June 2012; also Thodoris Georgakopoulos, 'The rise of Golden Dawn is a sign of Greek lawlessness', *Guardian*, 14 June 2012; Kerin Hope, 'Greece grapples with shadow of Golden Dawn', *Financial Times*, 21 Sept. 2012.

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